A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO CRITICAL LEARNING STRATEGIES
IN THE ONTARIO HIGH SCHOOL DRAMATIC ARTS CURRICULUM

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify and apply critical learning strategies to the design of social justice lesson plans for the dramatic arts, followed by reflections upon the process.

The major research question to be answered was “How can we integrate critical learning theories into the curriculum of Ontario high school drama curriculum?” To arrive at the answer to this question, the study addressed four sub-questions: Why is it important to integrate critical learning theories into the curriculum of high school drama classes? Which teaching strategies support critical learning curriculum? What are some examples of past efforts to integrate critical learning theories into the curriculum of high school drama classes? What are some examples of future possibilities for implementing critical learning theories into the curriculum of Ontario high school drama classes? The chosen methodology was narrative inquiry.
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Chapter One

Introduction

What is an educator’s true role and responsibility within the system? With so much emphasis on student success, high achievement, and standardized testing, one might assume the primary responsibility is to ensure academic success. As Cameron (2006) noted: “We are all caught up in striving for excellence, hyper parenting, educational standards, corporate growth, globalization, standards of life, ravaged by the torment to be the best” (p. 1). Despite these overriding concerns, according to many studies (e.g., Brown, 2005; Stake & Hoffman, 2001), teachers are in a good position to make a contribution to the betterment of society by adopting critical learning strategies aimed at influencing awareness, attitudes, and behaviours of students. Teachers have the potential to address serious societal problems such as homelessness, poverty, and elder abuse, as well as issues such as racism, classism, homophobia, and sexism. Recognizing this potential, Bill 157 in Ontario recently mandated educational institutions to address these difficult issues.

Unfortunately, Bill 157 addresses the consequences of discrimination and not preventative measures, and teachers continue to face structural and other constraints such as “mandated curricula, inflexible daily schedules, and imposed test preparation” (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 244). The majority of professional development (PD) days are focused on themes such as literacy, differentiated instruction, and curriculum development. While these topics deserve attention, the question of how to develop analytical and critical thinking skills in our students is equally important (Winner & Hetland, 2007).
A number of different studies have pointed to the need to identify critical learning strategies that could contribute to a credible social justice curriculum. Citing studies such as Ensign (2009), McDonald (2008), North (2008), and Wallace (2000), Cohen et al (2013) confirmed the need to refine and expand social justice education for future educators.

The purpose of this thesis is to identify and apply critical learning strategies to the design of social justice lesson plans for the dramatic arts, followed by reflections upon the process and results. En route to achieving this goal, this chapter examines key terms in the literature, the rationale for applying critical learning strategies to the arts curriculum, critical functions served by dramatic arts curriculum, research questions posed in this study, methodology for answering the questions, limitations of the study, and the structure of the thesis.

**Definition of Terms**

By *critical learning*, I mean that students learn how to think creatively and critically about issues of importance such as racism, classism, poverty, elder abuse, homophobia, and sexism. They begin a journey of enlightenment, discarding stereotypes and negative impressions of those who have been marginalized by the dominant forces in society. In this process, they develop skills related to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Gokhale, 1995). Because critical learning strategies are preventative in nature, they have the potential to offer permanent rather than temporary solutions and to be both culturally sensitive and student-centred.

A related term, often applied in the critical studies literature, is *social justice*. By *social justice*, I mean the creation of an egalitarian society that supports human rights, not just in the courts but in every sphere of life.

The terms *cooperative learning* or *collaborative learning* refer to situations where students work together in groups to accomplish shared academic goals.
The term *lived experiences* refers to the idea of incorporating true life events into our narratives.

**Rationale for Applying Critical Learning Strategies to Arts Curriculum**

The arts hold particular promise when it comes to providing us with opportunities to see the world in a new way, to notice the hidden, to feel what we have not, and to employ creative and innovative ways of thinking (Eisner, 2002). Dewey (1934) states that “the artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works” (p. 50). This idea implies the identification of the artist with both the audience and those involved in the performance of the art form. As audience members, we identify with the artist; and in turn, the artist identifies with us. Thus, we are more receptive to learning from the artist. Willis (1990) says that, “though subordinated and often marginalised, the many strands of the community arts movement continue to carry the torch” (p. 4). Both Rose (1997, 2010) and Cohen-Cruz (1997, 2002) see community art as having social and political roles that extend beyond the idea of product. In 2010, Rose spoke of this “other” community—a community that is “full of life, active and growing naturally” (p.10). Many artists work at the grass roots level for social change, and Rose (1997, 2010) sees opportunities for partnerships between artists and the communities in which they work.

In *An Introduction to Community Art and Activism*, Cohen-Cruz (1997, 2002) agrees that community-based art is as much about the process of bringing people together as it is about the finished product. She says that community implies a shared space and experience, as well as shared goals; and she describes the work of the community artist as the “shaping of information and ideas, images and feelings, for and with a known audience” (2002, p.5).

Community art can take many forms, dependent on the artist’s vision and mandate. One example is the creation of a theatrical piece based on personal interviews with people who have
lived the experience being portrayed. The artistic product becomes powerful by virtue of the collective nature of the project, and the idea of collective creation pulls us away from the notion of the “solitary genius” (Cohen-Cruz, 2002). Similarly, Gablik (1991) discusses the need for society to veer away from the egocentric solitary self and to work towards a social consensus.

When describing a rationale for the inclusion of arts in school curricula, Greene (1978) states: “There are works of art, there are certain works in history, philosophy, and psychology, that were deliberately created to move people to critical awareness, to a sense of moral agency, and to a conscious engagement with the world. As I see it, they ought under rubric of the ‘arts and humanities’ to be central to any curriculum that is constructed today” (p.162).

The Ontario curriculum guide notes that engagement with the arts enables students to “deepen their appreciation of diverse perspectives” (The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 & 10, The Arts: 2010, p. 3). As they come to appreciate the works produced by these diverse others, they also come to respect the cultures and unique identities of those who create the works, including First Nations and francophone Canadians. The resulting awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the multicultural fabric of Canada also engender higher levels of openness and flexibility in how the students approach others. Two of the four ideas underlying the development of the arts curriculum are cultural understanding and making connections—both relevant to the appreciation of and respect for diversity.

Fleming (2006) notes that “successful education is not just about designing a syllabus but is as much about creating a culture” (p. 58), and Gaztambide-Fernández (2007) says that “by incorporating cultural production we can open educational spaces for inner explorations, producing outer representation, and communicating in between the boundaries that encompass
their everyday lives” (p. 2). Acknowledging and building on the connection between the arts and popular culture has particular impact on the lives of inner city youth.

Others argue the importance of the political function of the arts. In talking about art that creates agency, Rose (1997) notes that political art “usually refers to an aesthetic object whose subject matter either directly responds to a controversial public action or is intended to challenge public perception about the status quo” (p. 1). Gablik (1991) also sees art as a means to further political ends. In commenting on Gablik’s work, Davis (2005) says, “For Gablik, communion and social responsibility can . . . be imprinted literally in a piece of art” (p. 11). In other words, art (whether a painting or a theatrical performance) can serve a political function.

Cohen-Cruz (2002) says that the task of the community artist as activist is largely “the building of social capital—the grassroots networks that enable people to move information and ideas to a broader audience, and ultimately to make change happen” (p. 5). She argues that art practitioners apply their talents to conveying the world views of marginalized groups, groups that are often pushed into the corners of society. She says they form these partnerships at the community level. A related concept is “identity politics,” which refers to the sharing of a common identity by misrepresented or marginalized groups. This identity can be based on ethnicity, profession, class, sexual preference, political orientation, or ability (Cohen-Cruz 2002).

**Critical Functions Served by Dramatic Arts Curriculum**

Many believe that educators in the dramatic arts are particularly well-positioned to bring positive social change to education systems through critical learning strategies (Branagan, 2005; Gallagher, 2001; Quinn, 2008). In describing the unique role that can be played by teachers of dramatic arts, Gallagher (2007) states: “The drama classroom is a space unlike others in a typical
high school. It is a space that can be more permissive of the distinctive expressions and contributions of young people, a space in which speaking out of turn is the norm; a space that is the crossroads of students’ performance as “students”—socially positioned by race, class, sexuality, as they are—and as artists, young people improvising performances and identities out of thin air” (p. 6).

In speaking of the role of the drama in the elementary classroom, Cameron (2009) says that “play and drama experiences are not extras to be used as enrichment and rewards for our highest achievers but rather are ‘engagers’” (p. 138). Similarly, Booth and Hachiya (2004) and Booth (2008, 2011) have written extensively about the importance of role-playing, mime, storytelling, and other forms of dramatic arts in giving voice to students at all levels of the curriculum and in critically engaging them in examining issues and reflecting on their learning.

According to authors such as Williams (1983, cited in Franks, 2008), drama is a part of our everyday life. The idea of the “dramatized society,” which Williams described almost 30 years ago, is even more the case now with reality television, news as drama, and war and violence as entertainment (Franks, 2008). Given the pervasiveness of drama in our everyday lives, it seems appropriate to use this same vehicle for changing how we see these events.

Throughout history, dramatic productions have served as a tool to enable large masses to congregate and share information and experiences. Fleming (2006) states that “theatre is the one place where society collects in order to look upon itself as a third-personal other” (p. 61). Theatrical productions allow us to become voyeurs in the lives of others and recognize ourselves as the other. Like other forms of art, theatre can assume a critical function, challenging the status quo and calling for action (Cohen-Cruz, 2002). Teachers in the dramatic arts often ask students to create and assume roles that will allow them to experience and empathize with the feelings of
marginalized groups. Examples include “the mantle/enactment of the expert, writing-in-role, hot-seating, freeze frames, 10-second dramas, donut, silent negotiation, graffiti and conscience alley” (Holland, p. 534). Improvisation is often an integral part of script creation.

According to Siegusmund (1998), imaginative role playing produces a safe zone for experiencing empathy. A process dramatist, Boal says that we develop empathy by wearing the shoes of the other person (Holland, 2009, p. 530). Boal sought to effect change by having people who were oppressed (such as factory workers) re-enact their oppression on stage. Best-known for developing the “theatre of the oppressed,” Boal (1979) encourages students to move from being spectators to spect-actors with agency. In a similar way, Gablik (1991) states that “to see beyond the individual’s perspective is to engage with the world from a participating consciousness rather than an observing one” (p. 177).

Vasudevan and colleagues (2010) apply the term authoring to the strategies first employed by Boal (1979). They speak of the importance of youth having the opportunity to “author” themselves and their own experience, since authoring allows the opportunity for critical learning and self-representation. They say that this level of engagement will result in a much more authentic experience for both the students involved in the creation of a project and the audiences that witness the products of their creative efforts. When these narratives are “well-documented, cross cultural phenomena” (Vasudevan, p. 54), they help people to make sense of their world.

The concept of empathy sometimes appears in conjunction with the term transformative learning. However, critics contest the notion of transformative learning as a by-product of empathy. They say that personal and social transformations are the rule in dramatic arts classrooms, that they do not fall into the class of miracles, and that we sometimes confuse
empathy with pity (Neelands, 2004). Critics also dispute the notion that change comes from outside—that some external force effects the change. Instead, they say, we can only assist the students in identifying the knowledge that already resides within their life experiences.

An example of such an effort to uncover self-knowledge, capable of leading to social change, is a project that took place in Africa. A young girl and several friends created skits pertaining to forced marriage and travelled village to village in Africa to spread awareness and create agency in participants that would allow them to combat this form of oppression. Like many others, this project fell into the traditions established by Boal. In many regards, Boal’s approach was catalytic in illuminating “a political issue in a way that leads to mass mobilization and action” (Cohen-Cruz, 2002, p. 7). These kinds of interventions allow the display of strife and inequities faced by a group and, by so doing, bring awareness to a particular cause.

In a related fashion, classroom teachers in the dramatic arts often ask students to assume roles that will allow them to experience and empathize with the feelings of marginalized groups. Character studies, script writing, writing in role, and role-playing enable students to put themselves in another’s place and develop empathy for “the other.” Holland (2009) describes these kinds of strategies:

Teachers have developed conventions such as improvisation and role-play in ways that can be quickly produced. Examples are the mantle/enactment of the expert, writing-in-role, hot-seating, freeze frames, 10-second dramas, donut, silent negotiation, graffiti and conscience alley. These conventions can be used for a range of purposes, from warming up and familiarization exercises to deep in-role activities. Each involves different complexities of imagination and role taking. (p. 534)
Citing the work of Podlozny (2000), Cameron (2009) says that drama has the most life-changing benefits for children from lower socioeconomic and other disenfranchised groups.

Within classroom settings that employ process drama, students participate in environments where they feel connected and thus personally accountable for their words and behaviours. In one critical learning project that took place in Windsor, Ontario, drama served as a vehicle by which students were empowered to take social action on issues pertaining to diversity (Ruggirello & Matuk, 2006). The Culture Connection project (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2) was founded on the principle that we can only become more sensitive to other cultures when we experience their realities—either directly or in a created environment. The authors of the project see drama as a powerful instrument for offering the opportunity to experience the reality of the “other.” Participants gain insights by role playing and reflecting on what they have learned through the activities:

As learners engage and interact in a nonthreatening environment, they are free to express, explore, and apply problem-solving processes to real life experiences. . . . Drama with intention to promote social transformation therefore challenges participants to actively change situations that are unfair or unjust in a safe fictional setting. In doing so, individuals are more apt to transfer that thinking and action to real-life situations. (p. 37)

Other authors also argue the importance of going beyond self and abandoning the role of observer. Cameron and Bezaire (2007) note: “Play and art . . . are both active. They utilize creativity, thinking, as well as problem-solving abilities. Play and the arts allow the player or artist to use whatever is at hand to construct meaning and to express ideas” (p. 135). In speaking of the importance of engagement, Cameron and Bartel (1998) say that it is a “holistic
relationship” (p. 22). While our motivations for acting may have an external or extrinsic source, our engagement is always internal or intrinsic.

In *The Reenchantment of Art*, Gablik (1991) states, “To see beyond the individual’s perspective is to engage with the world from a participating consciousness rather than an observing one” (p.177). One of the ways of making these connections is to perform before live audiences (Booth, 2005). In a theatre project involving a youth detention centre (the Insight Project), Vasudevan and his colleagues (2010) describe the benefits of the youth performing their finished product in front of multiple audiences. This engagement enables the performers to get to know their audiences and the audiences to get to know the performers.

As suggested above, the dramatic arts curriculum has strong potential to provide a venue for societal awareness and actions. Franks (2008) described his experiences with using anti-oppressive learning strategies in the classroom. At the outbreak of the Gulf War, he employed role plays that required the students to assume the roles of broadcasters at home, reporters in the field, and frightened families in Baghdad whose homes were being bombed. He used these role plays as learning opportunities, which he pursued in follow-up discussions and activities.

These alternative forms of theatre (theatre of the oppressed, urban theatre, feminist theatre, and other forms of theatre aimed at furthering critical learning) may never replace traditional theatre; but the two are likely to find a workable co-existence. As Gablik (1991) states, “Aesthetic art will continue to exist alongside that of the new paradigm, even after the latter has more fully emerged—but with certain limitations, perhaps, in its dominance and relevance” (p. 181).
Obstacles Faced in Implementing Critical Learning Strategies in the Classroom

Despite the benefits of establishing critical learning environments in classrooms, those who wish to implement these teaching strategies face challenges. For example, McGregor (2009) argues that conservative attitudes on the part of administrators and the larger society discourage teachers who are trying to bring critical learning to their classrooms. He says that teachers work within a capitalistic and conservative environment that caters to market forces, and the giving or withholding of economic resources can influence the ability of teachers to implement social justice learning in the classroom.

Agarwal and his colleagues (2010) discuss the challenges encountered when pre-service teachers seek to implement a social justice-based curriculum. They say that the teachers often feel defeated, as if their efforts to address mammoth problems have been inadequate. In another study, Vavrus (2008) speaks of the guilt, shame, and frustration felt by many pre-service teachers faced with the challenge of teaching social justice issues in their classrooms. This concern can be especially true in the case of the arts, where there is often the idea of the “gifted genius.” With so much emphasis placed on aesthetics and skill, the notion of the arts serving alternative functions is often overlooked or dismissed by educators (Clark & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2003). Moreover, when educators have not undergone training in how to implement these kinds of strategies, they may be hesitant to try. Another challenge that can be encountered with critical learning tasks relates to the possibility that some students may resist participating.

Other researchers (e.g., Gilles, 2007; Sharan, 2010; Chamberlin-Quinslik, 2010) discuss the challenges associated with work distribution. Conflicts can sometimes arise due to the perception of others not pulling their weight. At times, the perception is accurate; however, at other times, the students are not contributing as a result of cultural differences. For example, a
Chinese student may not feel comfortable debating or opposing a group member’s point of view due to his or her cultural upbringing.

Teachers who identify with marginalized groups face some additional challenges not confronted by teachers affiliated with the larger culture. For example, Rudoe (2010) details the effects of the school environment on the ability of lesbians to address issues of homophobia and gender inequity. Through interviews with lesbian teachers, Rudoe concludes that they often feel the need to employ protective identity strategies.

**Research Questions**

The major research question to be answered in this thesis is “How can we integrate critical learning theories into the Ontario high school drama curriculum?” To arrive at the answer to the major research question, the study will attempt to answer the following sub-questions: Why is it important to integrate critical learning theories into the curriculum of high school drama classes? Which teaching strategies support a critical learning curriculum? What are some examples of past efforts to integrate critical learning theories into the curriculum of high school drama classes? What are some examples of future possibilities for implementing critical learning theories into the curriculum of Ontario high school drama classes?

**Methodology**

The literature review will assist in responding to the first two research questions. Both the literature review and personal reflections upon my own experiences with the design and implementation of critical learning strategies will enable me to respond to the third and fourth sub-questions. The answer to the major research question will come from insights acquired from answering the four subordinate questions.
In this study, I will be using narrative inquiry as the primary research tool. Narrative inquiry takes us into the domain of storytelling—but not fictitious storytelling. Rather narrative inquiry has to do with what we can learn from the telling, reliving, reimagining, and retelling of our life experiences (Huber et al, 2013). While the practice of narrative inquiry in the social sciences dates from the 1990s, the living, telling, and learning from stories has existed from the earliest known history of humankind (Claudinin & Rosiek, 2007).

As a pedagogical tool, many researchers (e.g., Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Creswell & Ollerenshaw, 2002; Atkinson, 2010; Craig, 2009; Chambers 2003; & Leavy, 2009) argue that narrative inquiry offers benefits to both the narrators (e.g., teachers) and to the readers (e.g., students). It is both a teaching tool and a methodology. We can find examples of applications of this methodology in most areas of education, including the dramatic arts, music, nursing, environmental studies, citizenship, physical education, visual arts, medicine, and others. Chapter 3 will present a more detailed look at the literature on narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry bears some similarities with what Pinar (1975) described as *currere*. *Currere* is a process of regression and reflection upon one’s personal history that facilitates change in the way one views the world. As Kanu and Glor (2006) note: “It is impossible to see the direction of experience without reflecting on what the teacher brings to the experience from their past. To be able to see the direction an experience is heading, the educator must understand his/her own history” (p. 107). This process engages us in four steps or “moments”: the regressive (looking back), the progressive (looking forward), the analytical (seeking understanding), and the synthetical (synthesizing what we have learned in order to apply it to future happenings) (Pinar, 2004). The *currere* method enables the researcher to enrich his or her understanding of and ability to apply the research findings on any given topic. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will reflect upon
what I have learned from this and other life experiences, particularly those pertaining to the
dramatic arts classroom.

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of my study mirror the limitations of narrative inquiry in general. The insights acquired through narrative inquiry involve personal reflections, which can be criticized for lacking objectivity. However, many scholars argue that the personal reflections that result from narrative inquiry can be very valuable, despite their subjective nature. They say that just changing the curriculum is not sufficient—that we must engage in questioning the curriculum, policies, and practices that foster inequities in educational systems (Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Narrative inquiry allows us to achieve this goal because it asks us to explore motivations, background structures, systems, and cause-effect relationships. As the literature review will reveal, lived experience is an important component of a social justice curriculum and the main ingredient in narrative inquiry; the two complement each other.

Narrative inquiries are further criticized for their perceived links to transformative theories. I do not believe, however, that I promote transformative theories in this thesis. Rather I am seeking, in line with critical theories (my chosen framework), to identify learning theories that empower students to make changes within themselves. Although the critical literature often focuses more strongly on external structures and systems that support oppression and privilege than on individual and community agency to combat these injustices (Cohen et al., 2013), critical theorists believe that individuals must act against these influences. My thesis places an emphasis on the latter—how we can encourage agency in our students through critical thinking strategies that support social justice.
Others criticize narrative inquiry for generating naïve and unfounded insights. However, I have been using narrative inquiries in my research and teaching for many years now; so I am hopeful that these experiences will yield interesting data for consideration by others. Also I have diverse lived experiences with the potential to enrich some of these insights.

**Structure of the Study**

Chapter Two will establish a theoretical framework and review the literature on critical learning, with the intent of identifying the importance of critical learning in high school classrooms, some of the most frequently discussed critical learning strategies, and examples of studies in which others have used and implemented these approaches.

Chapter Three will discuss and justify the choice of narrative inquiry as a methodology. The chapter will also describe the history and the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology and how it is applied within the context of my study.

Using narrative inquiry methodology, Chapter Four will present reflective observations on the integration of critical learning strategies into the lesson plan on homelessness. In the spirit of *currere*, the chapter will also discuss earlier life experiences of the author that influenced her commitment to these learning initiatives.

Using narrative inquiry methodology, Chapter Five will explore and reflect upon what happened in a lesson plan on clowning for social change. The chapter will also describe and discuss a dramatic arts activity (Motus O), which motivated some of these applications. As in the earlier narrative, the chapter will include reflections on personal experiences of the author (her *currere*) that influenced the development of this unit.

Chapter Six will offer conclusions and suggest directions for future research.
Chapter Two

A Search to Identify Critical Learning Strategies

As noted in Chapter One, the main research question for this thesis is “How can we integrate critical learning strategies into the Ontario high school drama curriculum?” In order to respond to this major question, this chapter addresses the question “Based on the existing literature, which teaching strategies support critical learning curriculum?”

The underlying theoretical framework for the study is critical learning theories. In line with this philosophical perspective, the study attempted to identify themes in the literature that would suggest the most effective critical learning strategies for dramatic arts classrooms. The following five strategies emerged from this literature review: the importance of lived experience; focusing on diversity, inclusiveness, and culturally sensitive curriculum; cooperative learning environments; community-based partnerships; and partnerships with parents. If valid, these insights should contribute to the development of a social justice curriculum for the Ontario high school drama classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Critical theories offer an obvious framework for identifying critical learning strategies. Foundational theorists in the area of critical studies include philosophers such as Jurgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, and Paulo Freire (Neumann, 1997). Critical theorists see reality manipulated and shaped by cultural, political, and social forces over which the average person has little control. They see unequal and unfair distribution of power and resources in society. According to critical theorists, the unequal distribution of power gives rise to racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism (Broido & Manning, 2002;
Brown & Brown, 2010). Authors such as North (2006) talks about the structures and systemic practices that sustain inequality at a personal and societal level, and Weber (2010) describes how power and privilege contribute to these inequities. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) note the difficulty in identifying and decoding contemporary structures of domination. This ambiguity is partially due to “their hegemonic entrenchment” (p. 9).

Critical theories are concerned with “empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (Fay, 1987, cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 27); and critical research aims to “change the world” and to “help people to change the world for themselves” (Neumann, 1997, p. 74). It is action-oriented, not satisfied with small improvements but seeking big changes. It is also questioning. Rather than just observing that inequities exist in any given situation, the critical theorists ask “why” the inequity exists. Why does such a small percentage of the population control such a large percentage of a country’s financial resources? Why do so many minorities populate our prisons? Why do women make less than men in the workplace? Critical theorists seek to expose deceptive practices, myths, and illusions. They question authority and ask embarrassing questions of the establishment.

Critical theorists consider positivist science to be too “narrow, antidemocratic and non-humanist in its use of reason” (Neumann, 1997, p. 73). The term positivist refers to objective, empirical, and value-free research. Experimental studies, for example, fall into this category. The researcher tries to maintain an appropriate distance from the object of his or her study. The quality of the study is judged on the basis of its ability to be replicated and to reproduce the same results each time. Positivist researchers use terms such as validity, reliability, and generalizability to discuss their findings.
Critical theorists say, on the other hand, that positivist research disregards the social context, defends and supports the status quo, and discourages people from taking strong value positions. Critical researchers explore include themes such as “scientific study of social institutions and their transformations through interpreting the meanings of social life; the historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggles; and a critique of society and the envisioning of new possibilities” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 27).

Critical theories are often used to frame studies that address the issues of marginalized groups. For example, Brown and Brown (2010) rely on critical and sociocultural theories in talking about racial inequities. They say that discussions of these issues have been divorced in textbooks from the societal and political structures that support the inequities. Foucault (cited in Gallagher, 2007) says that even the architecture of schools (hallways, classrooms, offices, and theatre auditoriums) convey who has power and who does not. Extending this idea, Gallagher says that “embedded discourses” (p. 29) on security and electronic surveillance devices give additional power to those in positions of authority (school administrators, the police, and others). She says that we live in a climate of cultivated fear and an era of “zero tolerance” that often targets and criminalizes youth.

Educators who are committed to critical research tell us that teachers should not only talk about social justice, but they should also engage in actions aimed at change. Noted for bringing critical theories into the field of education, Freire (1970, 1996) advances a pedagogy of participation. He first articulated this philosophy of teaching in a classic work called Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), where he argued for “dialogical action” and for educational practices that draw upon the daily experiences of students. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) state that Freire’s
work can be best comprehended as a “problem-posing education rather than as a classroom tool kit for finding classroom solutions” (p. 14).

According to Neumann (1997), Freire considers the aim of studies in education to be “a critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves” (p. 74). Critical inquiry necessitates that people engage in problem-solving. Unlike the traditional view of education that sees teachers as “depositing” knowledge in students, Freire sees students as active beings with the capacity to make the necessary changes in their own lives without relying on others to accomplish these ends for them. So instead of seeking to deposit knowledge in students, teaching strategies should aim to empower learners.

In support of this viewpoint, Cameron and Bezaire (2007) state: “Traditionally, arts education or training has been conceptualized as a transmission of knowledge and expertise, rather than an invitation for a student’s full engagement in creative experience. This traditional view is characterized by a skills-based teaching approach, including repetitive ‘drill and practice’ activities and isolation of specific skills” (pp. 133-134).

Rather than just a deposit or one-way transmission of knowledge, the process should engage both teachers and students in a critical examination of the viewpoints of the other—an examination that will allow the two parties to arrive at a third new perspective. Critical learning philosophies and practices, such as those proposed by Freire, should seek to combat intolerance, misunderstanding of the “other,” and oppressive structures and practices in our schools.

Some educators such as Montano, Lopez-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, and Stillman (2002) and Brown and Brown (2010) combine sociocultural and critical frameworks. As interpreted by Rogoff (2003), sociocultural theory says that people learn best when they are
active participants in the process. Sociocultural theorist Vygotsky (1986) describes learning as “being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment” (p. 287). Sociocultural theory places less emphasis than critical theories, however, on empowerment and more emphasis on the role of culture in society.

**Literature Review**

The previous discussion has identified some foundational concepts on which critical learning theories can be based. The following discussion will identify learning strategies, as revealed in the literature, that researchers associate with these critical approaches.

**Lived Experience**

Advocacy of lived experience as a critical part of a social justice curriculum has gained much currency in recent years. The term *lived experiences* refers to the idea of incorporating true life events into our narratives. These narratives may take the form of scripts, role plays, stories, theatre, or other art forms (Booth, 2001, 2005; Barrs, Barton, & Booth, 2012). When shared, the narratives enable students to build on the collective experience of others (Booth, 2000). While the terminology is new, the idea of experiential learning is an old concept. For example, Kolb (1971, 1984) offered a model of experiential learning that promoted the importance of lived experiences. This learning model for adults involved four steps: concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts, and testing of concepts in new situations. Using the ideas of Kolb as a foundation, Eriksen (2012) put forward a model of “authentic becoming,” aimed at developing our ideal selves. The model asks students to reflect upon an experience from both cognitive and emotional perspectives. To accomplish this goal, the students must “step into an experience and relive it from their own thoughts, feelings, wants, and sensory experiences and
from an imagined inner perspective of another person” (p. 700). It is clear in the Kolb model that the idea of lived experience emerged much sooner than the term.

In expanding upon the concept of reflection, Eriksen (2012) cites the work of Hedberg (2009), who identified a list of possible topics on which students might be asked to reflect. Those topics included course content, self-awareness, and awareness of inequities and power abuse in society. According to Hedberg, the reflections could take place (1) at the individual, group or organizational level; (2) either privately or collectively; and (3) before, during, or following the experience.

The educational literature focuses both on student learning and teaching practices (Reynolds, 1999; Eriksen, 2012). For example, in describing one self-study research project undertaken by members of a graduate level social foundations course, the students explained the importance of lived experience to their personal growth and understanding of social justice:

A willingness to explore and critically reflect on our own experiences was also pivotal in the comprehension of facts and theories to which, initially, we may not have been able to understand. Because of this, we applied and questioned theoretical concepts’ ability to explain, understand, and capture the complexity of lived experience. . . . The focus on lived experience allowed us also to complicate our understanding of privilege theories and explore how theories can also obscure lived experience. (Cohen et al., 2013)

In the social foundation course described in Cohen’s study, the instructors used many different learning tools. The more traditional tools included lectures, assigned readings, guest speakers, and classroom discussions. They also used media such as movies and video clips to engage the students. The focus on lived experiences and reflection came through the writing of
narratives, the recounting of personal experiences, reflections about theories and class readings, autoethnographic accounts, and blogs. (Booth, Petersen, and Jupiter (2009) note that the opportunities for “intertextuality” in teaching are expanded still further with new communication technologies.)

As a result of documenting and sharing their experiences in diverse formats such as the above, the students realized that their earlier zealotry about social justice issues and their prior experiences in social justice classes had often led them to ignore the agency of oppressed groups and communities. They had looked upon them as romanticized victims rather than survivors and fighters: “Before this course . . . we knew how to methodically and effectively unpack perspectives and root them in sexism, homophobia, racism, adultism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression” (p. 267).

Following their shared reflections upon lived experiences, however, the students realized they had been thinking in rigid terms, often arguing in absolutes, especially to the “unconverted.” They had thought in terms of binaries (“us” vs. “them,” “rich” vs. “poor,” “gay” vs. “straight”, and “black” vs. “white”). They had blamed all oppression on those with power and privilege, not acknowledging the extent to which “these systems exist within us as much as they exist around us” (p. 268), a perspective supported by Freire’s writings (1970). They also realized they had assumed a “superficial multiculturalist perspective (e.g., all people are equal; difference is just superficial; just respect everyone” (p. 267) and that we need to better understand how identity interacts with privilege and power. Otherwise we may just shift power from one group to another (e.g., from men to women).

Many authors point to the need to understand the multiplicity and fluidity of our identities and how race, gender, and other characteristics influence each other (e.g., Cohen et al., 2013;
Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Cheek & Briggs, 1982; Gergen, 1991). Dissecting these elements of our identity can lead to piecemeal interpretations of their meaning (Cohen et al., 2013). Instead we need to engage in *intersectional thinking* (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Pearson, 2010)—thinking that acknowledges the influence of multiple aspects of identity on each other. For example, racial, gender, and age identities intersect with each other. In different situations, one will trump the other in importance. Also how people prioritize these aspects of their identities will differ from person to person and over time. For that reason, race, gender, and age are not reliable predictors of attitudes or behaviours. Through our reflections and sharing of lived experiences, however, we can better understand how these individual components of our identities interact. A focus on lived experience can enable us to see how our identities have interacted over time. Lived experience also allows us to see the many layers to issues—their complexity and links to other (often bigger) issues.

In another situation, two university instructors compared perspectives on their teaching of the same graduate course. The course was designed to address social justice issues related to race and privilege. One instructor was White, middle-class, and tenured; the second was mixed race, middle-class, and untenured. Using the framework of lived experiences, they examined “tensions, contradictions and challenges” faced in teaching the course. In commenting on what they had learned and the challenges they had faced with the students, Tilley and Taylor noted:

> Our reflective conversations together made visible the ways in which our different locations influenced what was possible in our classes and how we were both able and unable to negotiate the institution based on our identities, racial and otherwise. In courses teaching about racial inequity and other forms of social injustice, resistance is inevitable precisely because the crucial element of learning in such courses requires discomfort.
They concluded that this discomfort on the part of students was a necessary stage in achieving social change.

Additional discussion of lived experience occurs within the context of the chapter on narrative inquiry, since lived experience is not only a teaching strategy, but also a foundational principle in narrative inquiry.

**Focus on Diversity, Inclusiveness, and Culturally Sensitive Curriculum**

Asher (2005) noted that “multiculturalism breaks silences” and “offers ways of rethinking the oppressive binaries of self and others” (p. 71), and Cohen et al. (2013) says that social justice constructs build on multiculturalism (p. 264). A number of studies have demonstrated the importance of culturally sensitive and inclusive approaches in critical learning strategies. At the heart of these approaches is an appreciation of diversity.

A culture connection project in Windsor, Ontario, illustrates these principles. Aimed at fostering inclusiveness and sensitivity to other cultures (Ruggirello & Matuk, 2006), this project involved participating students in six Windsor-Essex classrooms, who created and discussed artwork and poetry pertaining to their diverse cultures. Afterwards eight project assistants created and performed a 45 minute interactive play based on the material generated by the Grade 3 and Grade 6 students. The larger student bodies in the schools were invited to the performances, where they were asked to react to freeze frames of the performances, suggest solutions to the scenarios, question the actors, and join the play onstage in some instances. A week after the performance, the students in the six lead classrooms participated in a two-hour workshop, where they further explored issues raised in the performance, considered implications for their own lives, designed follow-up plans for social action aimed at promoting awareness, and created and performed fictionalized scenarios based on a problem related to cultural diversity.
Diverse classrooms pose both potential and challenges (Rodriguez, 2013), and projects such as the culture connection are essential if we are to move towards nurturing respect for diversity and away from the colonial roots of art (Chalmers, 1999). Boughton and Mason (1999) state: “We need to learn from those who have been disempowered. Post colonialism is about multiculturalism, about complexity, about living in more than one culture” (p. 182). Dobbs (2000) speaks of the importance of studying not only the artifacts of other cultures, but also the art in order to better understand the cultures. In other words, when the students experience the art work, poetry, and dramatic expressions of students from different cultures, they can better understand and appreciate the cultures of those students.

Beyond ethnicity, other kinds of diversity can include, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. Unfortunately, many administrators and educators place their focus solely on culture and race in addressing multicultural education. This inattention to other forms of diversity helps to perpetuate a climate of intolerance and hate (Asher, 2007). According to hooks (1994), there tends to be a general unease among teachers and administrators in discussing sexuality in particular, and most peer groups in schools see heterosexuality as the ideal (McCready, 2004). For these reasons, as well as the hetero-normative climate that permeates the education system and Western society at large, engaging students in multicultural pedagogy surrounding gender and sexuality is often absent in the school curriculum in Western society.

Illustrating this problem, Rudoe (2010) discusses the effects of school environment on the ability of lesbians to address issues of homophobia and gender inequity. Through interviews with lesbian teachers, the author concludes that lesbian teachers are often in a position of employing protective identity strategies. Sykes (2004) discusses the vulnerability of physical education teachers, in particular, when they attempt to address the problems associated with
homophobia by making their own currere central to the hidden curriculum. Some educators choose to out themselves at their workplace in order to protect their LGBT students. Sykes states that when educators out themselves at their workplace in order to serve as role models for their LGBT students, they incur considerable risk: “They risk being harmed yet again by the words that wound even as they try to protect their students from such harm” (p. 77).

With respect to gender, multicultural education and critical pedagogy offer the opportunity to move beyond the male-female binary. Given the opportunity, students are able to re-think normalized gender roles. Pedagogy with the potential to achieve this end is illustrated in Davies’ (2003) work with children who were tasked with writing narratives that de-normalized gender roles. When discussing the effects of prescribed gender roles on these children, Davis argues that we must address “these patterns of power and powerlessness” with the aim of making them “a part of any group’s understanding as it attempts to move beyond oppressive forms of gender relations” (p. 200). Gender roles are learned behaviors with the potential to be extremely harmful to those who do not adhere to them. As educators, we are in a position to teach our students that these roles are prescribed and not innate in origin.

Another challenge in implementing multicultural education relates to a common tendency to connect culture with ethnic food festivals, arts and craft, and events that celebrate the Western view of culture (Sleeter, 2001; Asher, 2007; Gay, 2003). Dei and Doyle-Wood argue that “it is precisely the dominant conceptualization of ‘multicultural’ that lends itself to the accumulation of oppression and/or repression that is experienced by minoritized students” (p. 161). This narrowing of perspective may be partially due to the lack of available resources and/or the educators’ aversion to putting in the extra planning time (Gay, 2003). As a consequence,
however, this superficial representation contributes to the “othering” and stereotyping of our student populations.

We also need strategies that meet the needs of students with differing ability levels. Studies suggest that mixed ability groups, for example, promote higher success in medium and lower ability students (Gillies 2007). Studies have also found that students are more likely to accept peers when working in mixed ability groups (Slavin and Cooper, 1999; Gillies, 2007; Sharan, 1990). Inclusive learning practices recognize and strive to meet the social, emotional and intellectual needs of those with varying levels of physical and learning ability. An example of a study that looks at these kinds of issues was conducted by Savvidou (2011), who analyzes the narratives of four university lecturers who use storytelling in their teaching of English to students with various learning and physical challenges.

Sleeter and McLaren (2011) state that “critical pedagogy and multicultural education are complementary approaches that enable a sustained criticism of the effects of global capitalism and its implication in the production of race and gender injustices in schools and other institutional settings” (p. 8). By teaching students to be critical thinkers, we can begin to unpack deep-rooted issues of oppression and power. Educators have the opportunity to engage students in a broadening of perspectives and viewpoints. For example, rather than teaching to an ever-changing job market in which there will always be “have’s” and “have not’s,” we need to cultivate more expansive learning in our students (Sleeter, 2005).

Sleeter (2005) observes that we need to make learning a way of life if we are to prepare our students for the future. He argues that the destruction of the planet through war and biological means will create a dire need for citizenry with creative thinking abilities. In the same vein, Sleeter states: “Multicultural education, as well as related progressive movements, have
long envisaged schools as servants of democratic life helping young people cultivate knowledge, intellectual tools, and experience, working across diverse viewpoints and identities to address shared social concerns” (p. 168). The present situation, however, is one that marginalizes and alienates minorities by assuming their assimilation into the mainstream.

Correspondingly, there is a need for reform in citizenship education, which has the potential to result in a greater commitment to democracy and its counterpart equity. Banks (2008) discusses the possibility of creating cosmopolitan students through the teaching of an inclusive citizenship education. She states, “Cosmopolitans view themselves as citizens of the world who will make decisions and take actions in the global interests that will benefit humankind” (p. 134). Critical pedagogy can be a useful tool in engaging students in dialogue and critiques around the issue of citizenship.

Dei and Doyle-Wood (2006) offer hope in advocating the benefits of decolonizing pedagogy. They discuss the need to implement multicultural learning and critical pedagogy, as well as giving voice to minority groups by establishing schools as “open spaces that give opportunities to people from non-traditional backgrounds, from the margins, and from the most disadvantaged segments of our communities to realize their goals and dreams” (p. 154). There is also a need to veer away from traditional Eurocentric curriculum, which normalizes whiteness and heterosexuality.

As educators, it is imperative that we recognise any inherent racism in our own belief structures before hoping to effect change in our students. For example, Lensmire (2008) addresses the need to own up to our own whiteness and prejudices when he states, “At the same time, we, as white people, are probably doomed to repeat ourselves if we do not understand both the wrong turns we made and the paths we abandoned too soon” (p. 314). Along the same lines,
Sleeter and McLaren (1995) discuss the reality that most research in the area of multicultural learning and critical pedagogy is undertaken by the white educated male. We have the capacity to re-write Western pedagogy, and we can begin this process by visiting our past and present mistakes.

Finally, beyond creating inclusive and critical curriculum, multicultural pedagogy must involve the creation of safe spaces (Asher, 2007). If we are to expect students to visit their own prejudices and their own histories and to engage in critical thinking, we must create spaces where they feel comfortable and secure.

**Cooperative Learning**

Sharan (2010) connects culturally sensitive and inclusive learning environments with cooperative ones. She describes the “culturally sensitive cooperative learning classroom” in the following way: “At the core of the culturally sensitive CL classroom is a sense of community, a principle that has always been at the heart of the cooperative classroom. At the foundation of all CL methods are ‘teambuilding’ activities that slowly build up the interpersonal communication and helping skills required for learning together” (p. 200).

A number of studies (e.g., Cooper, 1995; Gokhale, 1995; Totten, Sills, Digby, & Russ, 1991) suggest cooperative learning to be an excellent vehicle for teaching critical thinking in the classroom. As Sharan (2010) noted, “Cooperative learning was born out of great respect for individual differences.” By *cooperative learning* is meant “students working together in small groups to accomplish shared goals” (Gillies, 2007, p. 1). Gokhale (1995) and Bruner (1985) speak of the importance of peer support as the students work toward this shared academic goal. Sharan (2010) and Baker and Clarke (2010) discuss the partnership that can exist between multicultural education and cooperative learning.
When discussing the benefits of assigning students to diverse groups, Gillies (2007) argues that this practice sends “a strong positive message regarding the importance of cross-ethnic interaction” (p. 125). Cross-ethnic groups also lower the possibility that students will conform to others’ points of view rather than developing their own perspectives (Gillies, 2007).

Students engaged in small group work will find themselves interacting with some who hold different philosophies and beliefs than their own. To arrive at shared results in a situation of mixed identities, students must develop negotiation skills. Though this may pose certain challenges, it also provides an excellent opportunity for critical learning. To create diverse cooperative learning groups, educators must have a basic knowledge of the cultures involved (Baker and Clark, 2010). Not all teachers have this knowledge.

Cooperative learning promotes many life skills such as positive interdependence, interpersonal communication skills, accountability, and overall success (Gillies, 2007; Sharan, 2010). One study found that students who participated in cooperative learning projects achieved significantly better scores on critical thinking tests than students who studied on their own (Gokhale, 1995). Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) found that students performed at a higher intellectual level when working collaboratively than when working individually; and Bruner (1985) says that collaborative learning environments produce improved problem-solving strategies as a result of input from multiple people. The students become responsible for their own learning as they work through alternative scenarios to arrive at the best interpretation of a situation. Johnson and Johnson (1986) argue that, in addition to improving higher reasoning processes, collaboration results in greater retention of information for longer periods of time.

Chamberlin-Quinlisk (2011) describes the need for teachers to explore cooperative learning strategies in order to tackle the marginalization and racial stereotyping that often occurs
in interactions between first language students and language learners. Slavin & Cooper (1999) state that because cooperative learning groups encourage positive social interaction among students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, they have great potential to facilitate the building of cross-ethnic friendships and to reduce racial stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice “ (p. 648).

Cooperative learning lends itself easily to the dramatic arts classroom, as students continuously work together towards a shared result; and expanded social circles grow naturally out of these environments. As the students work together towards a common goal, they forge strong ties (Gillies, 2007). Because so much time is spent creating community in the dramatic arts classroom, students also develop empathy and a sense of accountability.

To execute effective cooperative learning, teachers must engage in arduous planning (Gillies, 2007). Effective learning environments do not just happen spontaneously, and students do not acquire critical learning insights simply because they are put in diverse groupings. If instructors want to use the cooperative environment to promote critical learning, they must include material that promotes critical thinking. Teachers involved in the cooperative and critical learning experiences must also be willing to abandon some of their prior views and ways of instructing in order to recognize the identities and incorporate the realities of those they teach.

Jenkins and Jenkins (2010) describe the implementation of cooperative learning strategies in a post-conflict society of Bougainville as a means of teaching peace. The curriculum developed for this society was locally relevant and created in part by the people of Bougainville.

Gillies (2007) states that “when students make an effort to cooperate, they realize that they are accepted by their peers, know that they have contributed to their own and others’ success, and have learned to perceive themselves and others in more realistic and complementary
ways” (p. 79). Johnson and Johnson (1999) argue, “Positive interdependence is the perception that we are linked with others in a way so that we cannot succeed unless they do” (p. 71).

In another experiment, Maltese and Naughter (2010) engaged in a cooperative learning partnership that brought together two secondary schools from the United States and Jordan. The project encouraged the development of literacy skills. More importantly however, the partnership enabled the breaking down of preconceived notions on the part of both sets of students. Racial stereotypes were challenged and students were encouraged to participate in discussions that promoted critical thinking.

Cooperative learning allows students to become more involved in their own acquisition of knowledge. Educators are removed from the role of being the sole sources of knowledge (Sharan, 2010; Aurora, 2010). According to Creswell (2007), the advocacy/participatory approach works well with marginalized groups facing issues like "oppression, domination, alienation, and hegemony” (p. 22).

**Community-Based Partnerships**

Some studies suggest that the extent to which educators connect and form partnerships with outside communities can be highly influential in their ability to support initiatives such as literacy (Booth, 2011), to bring communities together, and to engage students in critical learning.

According to Wilcox (2009), there can be a dichotomy between what happens in the classroom and what happens in the lives of the students. Community partnerships connect these two worlds. Making reference to the concept of public pedagogy, Sandlin, Wright, and Clark (2013) argue that much learning occurs outside the confines of the classroom. By *public pedagogy*, they mean the “various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning that occur beyond the realm of formal educational institutions—including popular culture (i.e.,
movies, television, the Internet, magazines, shopping malls), informal educational institutions and public spaces (i.e., museums, zoos, monuments), dominant discourses (i.e., public policy, neoliberalism, global capitalism), and public intellectualism and social activism (i.e., academics who engage with the public outside of the academy, grassroots organizations, and social movements)” (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010).

These partnerships can take several different forms when it comes to connecting with school populations. First, educators may become involved in coalition-building, where their students collaborate on projects with community groups (Lundy, 2006; Wilcox, 2009). For example, professional writers and artists conducted workshops at a Lawrence Heights school in Toronto (Biruk, 2010). The students went on to write a play on the topic of disability, which was entered in the Sears Fest (a regional theatre festival). The students involved in the project attested to the immense benefit of the project. They indicated that not only was the project fulfilling for them as students, but it also showed the public that they were involved in projects of value and that their environment did not decide their identity. As Biruk stated, “They’ve overcome the bad reputation of their school and their community and done something that people thought they could never do” (p.1). When teachers and school administrators bring the community into the classroom, they contribute to the building of shared values and feelings of involvement in students.

In another situation, students connect with the community through volunteer activities. For example, students from a Connecticut high school volunteered in a program that aimed to feed the hungry. This activity helped the students to develop social action skills and become involved in activism first hand (Willisson, 1994).
Schools are in a position to encourage these kinds of volunteer activities. One way to further school-community ties, for example, is to increase the number of volunteer hours required of students. The Ontario ministry mandates forty hours of student volunteering as a requirement to graduate. Though some dispute the imposition of such legislation, there can be numerous benefits to students volunteering in their communities. Studies suggest that students who volunteer are more likely to “do well in school, graduate, and vote” (Latham, 2003, p.2). Volunteering in high school helps students develop empathy and at times may even lead students to discover a future career path.

Partnerships may also be formed with local businesses. Co-op placements in local businesses can benefit both the business and the student. These co-op placements often result in future job placements for students. The placements give the students much needed experience, insight into various industries, and the opportunity to develop workplace skills. The businesses benefit from the opportunity to mentor students, as well as the opportunity to showcase their industry to an emerging population of future workers (Figgis, 1998). Summer school fairs also allow opportunities for the community to become involved in the school. Schools, businesses, and community members can use this opportunity to forge partnerships and to get to know one another on an informal basis. Willis (1990) says that, “though subordinated and often marginalised, the many strands of the community arts movement continue to carry the torch. They share the continuing concern to democratise the arts and make them more a part of the common experience” (p. 4).

Another strategy for connecting with outside groups involves taking students to forums, conferences, or performances that educate and shed light on social and equity issues (Revilla, 2004) or asking their students to become involved in outside service or activist activities that
connect them with marginalized or disadvantaged populations. Workman Arts in Toronto showcases issues associated with mental illness (Johnston, 2009). Attendance at these performances allows students or the general public to “re-imagine” the negative stereotypes of people with mental challenges.

Some educators bring their own experiences as activists into the classroom (Astin, 1993; Ayers, 2001). Ji, Du Bois, and Finnessy (2009) developed and taught a course that encouraged heterosexual students to ally themselves with the LGBT community. To accomplish this aim, the researchers asked heterosexual students to interview members of the LGBT community, give seminars on LGBT topics, and write papers about their experiences.

Educators can encourage their students to go outside the walls of educational institutions to expand awareness of their communities. For example, seeing the problems created for the Arab American and Muslim communities after September 11, 2001, documentary filmmaker and media literacy educator Dahna Abourahme led a month-long video arts project at a summer camp sponsored by Al-Bustan, an Arab American community arts organization (Abu El-Haj, 2009). The first week of the workshop drew heavily on the work of Augusto Boal, the founder of the theatre of the oppressed. The project leaders used theatre exercises, dramatic readings, storytelling, and free writing to explore key issues. Following discussions of “the American dream,” students used puppetry and talk show formats to dramatize the problems associated with this narrative. Finally, the group created a film about personal and national boundaries and about living the American dream as an outsider. In a follow-up project, Abu El-Haj joined a creative team in developing curriculum, based on storytelling, to address issues of race and racism.

Alternatively, educators can bring representatives of advocacy or other community groups into the classroom to work with students within their own environment and context. In
New Zealand, one government-funded community group established an Everyday Theatre, which goes into schools to educate children on child abuse. They engaged the students in process drama activities that allowed the students to explore the motivations, perspectives, and repercussions of child abuse in a protected environment (Holland, 2009). As Franks (2008) noted, “Active, participatory drama in school becomes a way of physically situating people in particular moments, times and specific histories, locating them and working through feelings of anxiety brought about by the realities of a social world in the midst of complex and accelerating change” (p. 31).

Gillian (1997) describes community as a place where a group of people share values. If a community group holds a social justice mandate, for example, these connections can spur personal growth in the students. Some studies suggest that the extent to which educators connect with outside communities can be highly influential in their ability to effect change with their students. Community and school partnerships nurture democratic values and citizenship.

Wilcox (2009) described the benefits of a collaboration involving the Ananyo Dance Theatre (ADT), environmental justice researchers and activists, the College of St. Catherine (CSC), and the 2008 Inclusive Science Conference (ISC). The collaboration brought together a group of women of colour whose backgrounds varied in terms of nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. Based on theories of embodied knowledge, their project incorporated elements of research, teaching, activism, and performance. According to their definition, embodied knowledge implies “lived experiences, cultural performance, and bodily intelligence” (p. 106).

Epstein (2004) discusses such another program where hip hop dancers and martial arts instructors came into a school in Alberta to offer programs to the students. This initiative increased interest in these organizations and ultimately resulted in higher enrollment in their...
community classes. This kind of engagement with outside groups not only benefits the students but also the organizations.

When discussing the particular benefits of community-based partnerships to minority urban students, Schorr observed that schools can become “islands of hope in otherwise devastated neighborhoods” (cited in Bryan, p. 289). He explains that joint efforts by schools and communities provide much needed supports for children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families—supports most often in place for children in middle-class families. Thus, they help children to avoid a “culture of failure” (p. 289). For many children from lower less affluent neighborhoods, these kinds of partnerships may be the only exposure they get to such supports. As Epstein and Sanders (2000) (cited in Bryan, 2005) note: “School-family-community partnerships build social capital or networks of trust that families draw from to help their children succeed” (p. 221).

**Partnerships with Parents**

The 2006 Census demonstrates the rapid pace at which both our families and society at large are changing in Canada. Significant changes in families include an increasing number of single parent families, same-sex families, single father families, common-law couple families, and young adults still living with their parents. The census also shows a steady decrease in family size, and women tend to have children later in life than they did previously. This decline has happened partially as a result of women becoming more involved in the workplace. Increasing numbers of extended family members such as grandparents also share the family home.

The result of such changes has been an extremely diverse student population with varying needs (Rodriguez, 2013). Our school curriculum has not caught up to our ever-changing society;
and, as a result, students are often left feeling disenfranchised and alienated. The shifts in family structure have also meant that many households are run by one parent, who must spend lengthy hours in the workplace in order to make ends meet. Parents do not always have the luxury of being involved and present for their children’s learning needs. This lack of presence has meant a greater responsibility for the school and its role in raising the child. The country has also seen a significant increase in immigrant families. With this increase come other problems posed by language barriers, which can also impede a child’s success and learning potential. However, members of some cultures may believe they are showing respect by entrusting full authority to the school.

Although the ability of parents to participate fully in their children’s school lives has become strained, research confirms that parental involvement can have enormous impact on the overall academic and psychological success of children (Cotton, 1989; *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 & 10, The Arts: 2010*). A study by Mangum (2006), for example, sought to identify whether a correlation exists between student test scores and family and community involvement with the school. The results showed a direct correlation between student success and family-community partnerships within the school. A study in Ohio found increases in attendance in elementary schools that engaged in partnerships with families and their communities (Sheldon, 2007).

According to a document published by the American Federation of Teachers (2010), parental involvement is critical: “By having more contact with parents, teachers learn more about students’ needs and home environment, which is information they can apply toward better meeting those needs. Parents who are involved tend to have a more positive view of teachers,
which results in improved teacher morale” (p. 3). Therefore, if all parties are involved in the partnership benefit, it is likely to sustain itself.

The Ontario guide for the arts also reinforces the importance of connecting with parents. The guide says that, through their engagement, parents will be better equipped to understand curriculum requirements, monitor and support student learning outside the classroom, ask pertinent questions, and interpret teacher comments and evaluations (*The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 & 10, The Arts: 2010*).

When discussing the advantages of partnerships with parents, Epstein (1995) states: “They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. As Epstein (2002) noted: “When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work” (p. 7).

Padak and Rasinski (2010) summarized ways for schools to elicit parental involvement. These strategies included providing fact cards to parents with important information such as school telephone number and teacher’s contact information, creating calendars to send home, creating welcome signs in multiple languages, developing a school handbook, hanging parent friendly signs in the main office, setting up a parent area in the school, displaying student work throughout the school, and asking parents to come into the classroom and share information about their cultural background with the class.

Some schools offer educational programs for parents. Ferlazzo (2011) describes a school in the states that offers a program called Parent University. This program allows parents to be
involved in developing the curriculum that will be taught to their children. Translators are on site in the curriculum planning sessions in order to assure the parents’ full inclusion and participation. Durand argues that it is essential that, in educating children, we recognize parents’ expertise (Durand, 2011). Involving parents in curriculum building will demonstrate that we recognize the vital role they play in their child’s education and success. Many schools have educational opportunities offered at night for parents. Parents who are given such opportunities are then able to better help and care for their children.

The responsibility for parent-school involvement does not lie wholly with the schools. Parents also must take the initiative. The Ontario curriculum guide to the arts suggests, for example, that parents can do their part by attending parent-teacher interviews, participating in workshops, and becoming involved in school council activities (The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 & 10, The Arts: 2010). Parents can show support for their children by attending concerts, theatre productions, and exhibitions of student art. They can make a regular practice of taking their children to community arts and cultural happenings. The events may take place in public art galleries, museums, concert venues, or libraries. Touring theatre companies or artists may bring their productions to local community halls or theatres. These activities can become family events that support not only the child, but also the community.

In commenting on the importance of mutual engagement between school administrators, teachers, and parents, Chavkin (1993) states: “Schools and families need each other, and they need other community resources and support. The complex setting in which children live is like an ecosystem—what happens in one part affects the other parts. The interest of a child will be better served when there are good connections in all the parts of the ecosystem” (p. 205). Until we recognize the correlation between a student’s success and the level of cooperation evident in
school-family-community relations, we will not achieve our mandate of student success. Student success involves supporting students and enabling them to achieve academically, spiritually, and personally. In this context, the old proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” rings true.

Involving parents and families in their child’s education not only helps the child but also empowers the parents or guardians and furthers the interests of the community (Bryan, 2005). In addition, Cohen-Cruz (1997) says that the homophobic parent “whose child blossoms in an art project at the local school taught by a queer artist may begin to question his prejudice” (p. 4).

The above suggestions serve the additional function of promoting inclusivity and creating a welcoming atmosphere for families who hold a minority status and for those in urban lower income areas. The increase in the number of minority families generates a greater need and a responsibility to meet the demands of our changing communities. As noted earlier, the 2006 Canadian Census indicates an increasing rise in immigrants. Outreach strategies such as the use of interpreters and professional development must be in place in order to ensure all parties feel welcomed and included in such partnerships (Gonzalez, 2011). Bryan (2005) noted that good parent-community-school relations are also particularly beneficial to students and families in urban lower income areas. Meaningful relationships among parents, teachers, and the community benefit these students, as well as their communities (Sanders, 2001). Thus, it makes sense to support programs that draw upon the potential of communities and the families who constitute them. Despite lifestyle, language, and other challenges, most parents desire involvement; and when invited, they will participate (Walker et al, 2011).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced a theoretical framework based on critical theories, with an emphasis on the approach of Paul Freire and his predecessor John Dewey, who brought critical
theories into educational sphere. After identifying the theoretical perspectives that guide this thesis, I conducted a literature review aimed at identifying important critical learning strategies for the dramatic arts classroom. The following strategies emerged from that review: the importance of strategies that draw upon lived experience; a focus on diversity, inclusiveness, and culturally sensitive curriculum; cooperative learning environments; community-based partnerships; and partnerships with parents. Chapter 3 will identify and justify a methodology for understanding how these strategies apply in the case of two original lesson plans and one completed project, designed to support a social justice curriculum for the dramatic arts.
Chapter Three

Methodology

The major research question for this thesis is “How can we integrate critical learning theories into the Ontario high school drama curriculum?” The literature review, presented in Chapter 2, identified the following characteristics of critical learning environments: lived experiences; a focus on diversity, inclusiveness, and culturally sensitive curriculum; cooperative learning; community-based partnerships; and partnerships with parents. In this chapter I will identify the methodology to be used in reflecting upon my efforts to design lesson plans that incorporate critical learning strategies. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will apply the methodology to an analysis of two original lesson plans (homelessness and clowning). In addition to offering reflections upon the design of the two lesson plans, I will analyze what happened in a completed unit on clowning, created in cooperation with a theatre group called Motus O.

The methodology that I selected for this study is narrative inquiry—an arts-based research method. I will also bring elements of my own currere into the reflective process. In this chapter I will define narrative inquiry, explore its history, list some of its characteristics, outline my rationale for choosing this method, describe the methods employed in collecting data for these narratives, give examples of studies that have employed this method, describe how this methodology benefited my work, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the method.

Definition of Narrative Inquiry

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) define narrative inquiry as “the study of experience as story, then, as first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” or as “the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 477). Leavy (2009) says that the purpose of narrative
inquiry is to “collaboratively access the participants’ life experiences and engage in a process of storying and restorying in order to reveal multidimensional meanings and present an authentic and compelling rendering of the data” (p. 27). Drawing upon the above definitions, we can say that narrative inquiry is a research method whereby the writer reflects on a past experience and retells that experience in a story/narrative format (Creswell & Ollerenshaw, 2002; Atkinson, 2010; Craig, 2009; Chambers 2003). As a methodology, narrative inquiry requires that the researcher view these personal experiences and events as phenomena to be studied.

**History of Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method**

It is difficult to pinpoint the birth of narrative as a research method. Storytelling and narrative date from our earliest recorded history. Humanity has found ways of documenting history and experience through oral traditions and storytelling, although narrative as a method of inquiry emerged only when the social sciences began to see a decrease in purely positivist approaches to research (Clandinin, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Huber, et al, 2013; Saldana, 2003). Mitchell (1981) discusses the ties between culture and the history of narrative when he states: “To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself” (p.1). Although narrative inquiry as a research tool only gained momentum in the 1960s, the last two decades of the 20th century saw a steady increase in its appearance in scholarly articles and in practice (Creswell & Ollerenshaw, 2002; Atkinson, 2010). The use of the term *narrative inquiry* as a pedagogical tool first appeared in the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1990); subsequently, these researchers were instrumental in securing its acceptance as a credible social science research method.
The trend toward the increasing acceptance of narrative inquiry as a research tool in the social sciences came with an accompanying change in perceptions of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The idea of a fluid relationship between researcher and researched emerged, with the “researched” no longer separated from context. A similar shift occurred with regards to what researchers considered to be data. Along with a growing emphasis on human experience, they began to accept stories as researched data (Huber, et al, 2013).

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) believe that the teacher’s experience should be central in the field of classroom research and that narrative can serve as both research method and phenomenon. The insights acquired through shared stories and perspectives justify the use of narrative both as a tool for thinking about specific experiences and as a methodology (Clandinin, 2006).

The expanded use of narrative inquiry was heavily influenced by the work and philosophy of Dewey (Huber et al., 2013). Narrative inquiry aligned itself with Dewey’s (1938) belief that life is education, and education is life. Experience is fluid and ever changing. (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Commenting on Dewey’s philosophy, Huber and colleagues observed: “For Dewey, education, life, and experience are one and the same . . . and to study life, to study education, is to study experience” (p. 220). For researchers such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Dewey’s ideas offered a theoretical framework for the development of narrative inquiry.

**Characteristics of Narrative Inquiry**

Little consensus exists among researchers as to the specifics of what constitutes narrative inquiry. Nonetheless, many researchers such as Creswell & Ollerenshaw (2002), Clandinin &
Connelly (2000), and Creswell & Ollerenshaw (2002) agree that narrative inquiries generally contain the following elements:

- A first person retells a lived experience (personal or social) with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Through analysis of re-storied events, learning occurs with the individuals involved in the narrative (teachers and students).
- Experiences may be personal (individually experienced) or social (involving interaction with others).
- The retelling of a story uses narrative structure and includes characters, setting, conflict, actions and resolution.
- The stories include characteristics that typically appear in novels (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene).
- Reflective narratives emphasize setting and context; they are rich in detail.
- Acting as narrator, the researcher notes the themes and interpretations that emerge from the stories.
- The themes that emerge from the narration, as well as the descriptions of the stories themselves, constitute the qualitative data.
- The researcher/narrator identifies past, present or future experiences that relate to and contextualize the present narrative.
- As the narrator gains insight into self, his or her personal story becomes woven into the larger narrative.
- Sometimes the analysis occurs within the telling of the story.
As noted in Chapter One, narrative inquiry bears similarities with what Pinar (1975) described as *currere*. The term *currere* refers to a process of going back in time to reflect upon events in one’s personal history. These reflections can enhance the ability to understand the present and to move forward in productive ways in the future. The process of *currere* engages the educational researcher in four steps or “moments”: the regressive (looking back), the progressive (looking forward), the analytical (seeking understanding), and the synthetical (synthesizing what has been learned in order to apply the insights to future happenings) (Pinar, 2004).

**Justification for Choice of Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry falls into the broader category of qualitative research, which focuses on human experiences. Creswell (2007) states that qualitative research is most appropriate when a problem or issue requires an exploratory mind set. I chose this particular qualitative methodology as a research tool for two main reasons. First, narrative inquiry fits well with critical research because it does not separate the research from the researcher. Second, narrative inquiry relies on lived experience, which is both a teaching strategy and a research method. As a teaching strategy, we often find its applications in social justice curriculum.

Neumann explains the first point in more depth: “Critical research tries to eliminate the division between the researcher and those being researched, the distinction between science and everyday life. For example, a critical researcher develops an explanation for housing discrimination. He or she tests the explanation by acting on it and using it to try to change conditions” (p. 78).

According to Creswell, critical approaches allow us to “hear silenced voices” (p. 39) and to identify variables that can be measured in follow-up studies. I hope to identify strategies that
give voice and identity to those in marginalized populations, as well as ones that encourage their peers to acquire empathic skills and to discard the negative stereotypes that influence their interactions with marginalized groups.

I have also chosen narrative inquiry method because of its focus on lived experience: its ability to re-story and embody human experience; the opportunity that it offers for reflection and re-evaluation of teaching practices; its ability to bring together students, schools and universities; and my own interest in sharing personal learning with the broader educational community. Many theorists believe that we lead storied lives, and the only way to make meaning of these stories is to formulate them into narratives and to share them with others. In unpacking the stories, narrative inquiry encourages us to look at multiple perspectives. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) say that we need to have multiple narratives, as well, as multiple groups and identities exist: “We all belong to multiple collectivities and define ourselves accordingly” (p. 11).

Narrative inquiry has shaped both my teaching practice and my scholarly practice, and I have experienced its benefits in past projects. As educators, it is essential that we constantly reflect upon and identify opportunities within the dramatic arts curriculum for critical learning strategies that can contribute to the betterment of society. This reflective process allows us to evaluate our own practices to determine what worked and what did not work. In this way, we can grow as professionals at the same time that our students experience personal growth.

In support of this idea, Chambers (2003) discusses the power of the narrative to enable professional growth in both the narrator and the reader. Lipton and colleagues (2003) explain that “productive reflection derives from generalizing, hypothesizing, applying and synthesizing that . . . that builds professional capacity and self-directed learning’ (p. 59). Through questioning,
rediscovering, and redefining pre-existing perspectives, both narrators and readers gain new understanding and new options for action (Chambers, 2003; Gillespie, 1996).

A pioneer in the field of education, Dewey (1938) promoted the benefits of lived experience. He said that lived experience gives a person access to a deeper understanding of others. Educators are mindful professionals, whose knowledge comes from past experiences. In commenting on Dewey’s philosophy, Craig (2009) adds: “For Dewey, interaction (the personal and the social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (place) were integral to his concept of experience and his developing ideas about practical knowledge” (p. 107). Stories occur within contexts, and their telling or retelling reinstates the context in which events happened. Kanu and Glor (2006) agree that educators must be able to reflect upon and understand their own experiences if they are to learn from the past.

Drawing upon the ideas of Dewey (1938), Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue the appropriateness of narrative inquiry in educational research, since the mandate of education is to construct and reconstruct personal and social stories. They say the narrative has the capacity to bring together students at all levels of education. Students, teachers and researchers assume roles as both storytellers and characters in their own stories and in the stories of others. Through this storytelling, they share life events and experiences. The reflective and holistic nature of narrative inquiry also fits well with the classroom environment (Gillespie, 1996).

Clandinin (2006) argues that narrative inquiry lends itself particularly well to the field of dramatic arts, as drama instructs and entertains through the telling of stories (McCammon, Miller, & Norris, 1999; Clandinin, 2006). In the same way as narrative inquiry, the dramatic arts ask participants to re-story and embrace human experience. In discussing narrative inquiry within the context of the dramatic arts classroom, Zatzman (2006) states that both drama
education and narrative inquiry enable us to comprehend that “identity is situational and narratives of the self are embodied” (p. 111). Just as narrative inquiry gives voice to multiple voices and perspectives, the dramatic arts classroom has the same capacity to bring together a multiplicity of voices.

The need to adopt teaching approaches that allow for the emergence and expression of a multiplicity of voices is particularly pertinent to my teaching space. The diversity of Canada finds representation in my classroom. Ethnic and cultural diversity, diversity of ability, diversity in terms of gender identity and sexuality, as well as socioeconomic diversity, permeate the halls of the urban public high school at which I teach dramatic arts. The youth in my school are from predominantly Tamil, Indian, and Chinese backgrounds. Some blacks, a few whites, and some mixed race students also attend my school, which has between 1300 and 1400 students. The school is located in a suburb of Toronto. The socioeconomic makeup of the community is mixed, with some positioned at the high end of the continuum and others much lower on the spectrum. The students and their parents tend to place a high value on science and mathematics, less emphasis on the arts with the exception of Chinese students, who participate in higher than average numbers in the school’s music program.

In addition to being highly diverse in terms of demographics, many of the students come from families who have immigrated to Canada from countries that are experiencing high levels of conflict and violence. Therefore, their experience in my classroom is informed by their own narratives and personal histories, just as my history informs who I am to them.
Strengths and Weaknesses of the Method

As described earlier, narrative inquiry as a research method offers many benefits. Narrative inquiry has the ability to offer a first-hand account of a lived experience in a contextualized way. Stories provide often rich accounts of the dynamic experiences occurring in the closed classroom space. They offer the opportunity for reflection and re-visitation of current teaching practices, which can greatly benefit teacher, students and the community as a whole (Gillespie, 1996; Atkinson, 2010; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2006) attest to the strength of narrative inquiry on the basis that as humans we lead “storied lives” (p. 45). Narrative gives voice to those whose stories are told. Therefore, both students and teachers acquire voice through these narratives.

Not only does narrative give voice to others, but the stories allow us to see the world from multiple perspectives (Atkinson, 2010). Narratives affect our way of thinking and seeing the world. Dissecting these narratives allows the researcher to uncover the complexity and multi-layered nature of everyday classroom experiences. In the same way, narrators and readers are able to draw multiple meanings from the narratives.

Another strength of the narrative research method resides in its ability to enable researcher and educator to come together to interpret and rethink school experiences (Creswell & Ollerenshaw, 2002). Atkinson (2010) states:

Narrative inquiry in education has been associated with the teacher-knowledge research field, whose interests have been concerned with deepening the understanding of teacher practical knowledge through developing epistemologies, methodologies, and modes of representation for studying and representing teacher’ work, their thinking about it, and how they make meaning of it. (p. 92)
Thus, through its reflective and analytical nature, narrative inquiry has the potential to transform teaching practice (Atkinson, 2010; Huber et al, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Criticisms relate to the fact that narrative inquiry is often associated with transformative practices. As a research tool, some see narrative as too “easy.” Others claim that educators may not fully comprehend the method. They say that the subjectivity of the narrative poses the risk that users may arrive at extremely naive and superficial conclusions (Atkinson 2010). As a consequence, researchers may not recognize or take into account the complex and multi-layered nature of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Another weakness of narrative inquiry, identified by Atkinson (2010), is that the reader may misinterpret the intended meaning of the narrative. Atkinson (2010) goes on to say, however, that this possibility can also be a strength, since the misinterpretation offers the possibility for the emergence of multiple points of view.

When we create narratives, we make choices as to what we include in the retelling of the written experience (MacCamon & Smigiel, 2004). This process of selectivity can sometimes result in fragmented or incomplete renditions of events. There is also the alternative possibility that parts of the narration may be embellished or even invented (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

In a book called The Truth about Stories, Thomas King (2003), a professor at the University of Guelph, wrote that “once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories that you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (p. 10). Another weakness of narratives is that they most often come from the perspective of one person. Ideally, one should include multiple perspectives and voices (Clandinin, 2006). Through collaboration, researchers and participants can negotiate their relationships to lessen the possibility of a gap between the told and reported
narratives. The researcher may need to explain the goal of the inquiry to participants, negotiate the stages of the writing and telling process, and plan opportunities for interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

**Examples of Studies that Used Narrative Inquiry**

This section of the chapter identifies some examples of research studies that have employed narrative inquiry.

Gillespie (1996) explored her experience with using narrative to teach race relations. She highlighted the insights she was able to acquire through both her own self-analysis and others’ feedback. Her narrative related to a specific classroom experience involving racism and curricula.

Moss and colleagues (2008) described a project that involved 20 classroom teachers coming together for a writing project, designed to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between narrative, reflection and professional development. Not only was the act of reflecting on page beneficial to the writer but the community and dialogue that occurred between the teachers involved in the project as a result of the narratives contributed to the learning environment.

Brown & England (2003) described a study undertaken by a teacher in an inner city public high school. Using narrative reflection over an extended period of time, the teacher sought to ensure that a group of high achieving black male youths in the school did not lose their academic status due to environmental factors such as their peers, interactions with teachers and administration, and their own perceptions of self. The data collected included the teachers’ reflections as well as lesson plans, curriculum, and student work. Analysis occurred at the end of
each week, and the end of the project saw the teacher as well as peers and scholars re-examining their practices.

In another study, Vavrus (2009) described how the narrative inquiry method assisted pre-service teachers. He said that, prior to use of the method, many of the teachers felt “guilt, shame, and anger” (p. 389). To overcome the challenges, Vavrus (2009) asked the teachers to create a personal narrative that explored their own lives in terms of issues such as “sexuality, gender identification, sexual orientation, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and most importantly their teacher identity formation” (p. 7). He hoped this introspection would help them to understand the effects of their lived histories on their teaching practices. His results showed that the pre-service teachers who took part in the study were subsequently more prepared to address these issues in their own classrooms. He concluded: “This self knowledge . . . strengthened their resolve to maintain a transformative teacher identity that is more inclusive than they previously had held” (p.7). An earlier doctoral study by Finnessy (2006) explored the challenges faced by three heterosexual male English teachers who taught sexual minority curriculum. Like Vavrus, Finnessy studied the lived experiences of these men.

Smith (2012) also reported on the implementation of narrative-based learning approaches with a group of beginning teachers and their mentors at eight educational institutions. One product of this study was a provincial resource kit for beginning teachers. This resource documented the narratives and learning experienced by the project participants and their mentors. Latta and Kim (2011) used narrative inquiry to chronicle the stories of some practicing teachers as they confronted inconsistencies between graduate level curriculum theory and their actual classroom experiences. Blair (2013) described the learning journey of a young woman named Chelsea, who had just completed her second year of teaching in a music program.
Together, the two women revisited the artifacts of Chelsea’s undergraduate career (both coursework and practicum) as reflected in “journals, online forum posts, videotapes of her own teaching, [and] written reflections of her teaching” (p. 39). They also looked at some of Chelsea’s online blogs.

The following describes some of the learning from this journey, which took Chelsea from “then” to “now”:

Chelsea’s process of storying her narrative—her thoughts and feelings as expressed in written journals and blogs—helped to shape her teacher persona. For Chelsea, the writing of narratives became a safe place to name the experience and, in the naming, she began to call herself a music teacher. She used the narrative space between self and future teacher-self to explore her evolving sense of self, reveal weaknesses and a lack of confidence. . . . As Chelsea found ways to expand beyond her teaching bubble, to see classrooms as places where real children live and learn, she lost her insecure non-teacher self and found a self that could fully be present to the learners in her classroom. For Chelsea, being (outwardly) present to her learners paradoxically reconnected her (inwardly) to herself as someone who is dynamically engaged with musical learners. (pp. 47-48)

**Data Collection**

To collect information for my reflective narratives, I went to sources such as diaries from my younger years, journals in which I had talked about my teaching experiences, notes taken in classroom settings, contributions to online forums, and observation of activities undertaken by my students. I also looked back at journal entries written at the time I was in teachers college as a means of comparing my current teaching practice to past practices. I also used my students’
journal entries as a means of assessing the impact of implementing the critical learning strategies.

The discussions related to student journals will involve general observations about patterns of response. I will not identify or refer to specific comments from those journals; nor will I refer to individuals in the discussion. When taking notes, writing journal entries, and writing my reflective narratives, I will not use names in any circumstances but will identify those in question by using the terms student or students.

The use of narrative inquiry as a methodology also lends itself well to my own history as a writer. Storytelling comes naturally to me as an artist and a drama teacher. I have authored several publications and have found that narratives have the distinct ability to illustrate, with high efficiency, a descriptive and vivid picture of the learning that is taking place in the dramatic arts classroom.

**Conclusion**

We should not treat stories lightly as they both carry and inspire significant obligations and responsibilities. Since they are at the heart of how we attach meaning to our experiences, we must care for them. Indeed, Huber and colleagues (2013) agree with Ross (2008), who says that “storytelling is about survival” (p. 65). Despite some perceived weaknesses, narrative inquiry method offers rich possibilities for furthering the efforts of teachers who want to implement critical learning strategies in the classroom. This method is particularly appropriate to the dramatic arts classroom; and for the purposes of this study, its strengths outweigh its weaknesses.
Chapter Four

Reflective Narrative for Homelessness Unit

Rewind two years to a scene in my senior drama class at my high school. It’s a Friday morning, second period, almost the end of the week. As the students prepare to leave the room, they find the following prompt on the board: “Write a journal entry describing everything you know about homelessness. Due Monday.” The students quickly scribble down the topic, stuff the assignment in their backpacks and make their way out of the classroom.

What did I hope to explore with my students with this assignment? A starting point for what would become a candid, six-week journey in critical learning and social justice? Whatever my hopes, on the following Monday, the students would begin to create a piece of what has come to be called collective creation. Whereas most forms of theatre involve actors after someone has written the script, collective creations involve actors from the very start. The actors help to develop the script. Actors, directors, designers, and writers work as a team to create the show. A collective creation can begin with an idea that comes from one of the following: a poem, a painting or picture, a song, a newspaper article, an historical event, or a current social issue. Once the team of artists agrees to undertake the project, they may research the topic on the web or in libraries, conduct interviews to learn more about the subject, record their ideas in journal entries, and try out their ideas in improvisations.

Collective creations address the needs and concerns of their communities. One of the earliest collective productions in Canada was The Farm Show, which told the stories of the residents of Clinton, Ontario. After interviewing the residents of Clinton, the actors planned scenes and activities that represented the everyday lives of the townspeople. The stories were
simple, with personal meanings for those who would view the production. In the years following
*The Farm Show*, Canada spawned a rich history of collective creation, and many Canadian
theatre companies contributed greatly to the development of this new art form.

Inspired by the way in which collective creations involve actors in all aspects of the
production from its conception to the final performance, I decided to use this idea with my class.
In this case, my students would explore a topic rarely discussed in the classroom and largely
ignored by society as a whole—homelessness.

Homelessness is not strictly an absolute lack of shelter (though this is its most obvious
manifestation), but rather an extreme form of poverty characterized by instability of housing,
inadequacy of income, and the need for health-care and social supports. If we define
homelessness in this way, then according to the Homeless Hub ([www.homelesshub.ca](http://www.homelesshub.ca)), between
157,000 and 300,000 Canadians experience absolute homelessness at any given moment.
Approximately 3.5 million Canadians live in poverty, at risk of homelessness.

In planning this unit, it occurred to me that some of my students may themselves have
been impacted by homelessness in some way. If this was the case, then there might be
sensitivities in exploring this topic. Nonetheless, as always, I try to infuse critical learning and
issues of social justice into my curriculum, no matter the challenges.

For me, as a teacher, the starting point had been a series of lessons I was commissioned to
create for the Homeless Hub, a web-based research library and information centre on
homelessness. As a topic, homelessness can provide educators and students with many
opportunities to learn, reflect and take action on an important issue that affects every community.
The task of creating this curriculum, however, was no small feat. It was essential that I not only
create curriculum that was in-depth and research-based, but I also needed to ensure that my
curriculum was inclusive. I wanted the students to feel they were represented in the curriculum. In addition, it was vital that I look at each lesson through an equity lens. Did the curriculum allow different voices to emerge? Would the work allow the students empathize with those who are facing issues such as homelessness? This was essential for any critical learning to occur.

This project would involve not only the creation of these lesson plans, but also a culminating show. I was creating the lesson plans to be accessible to educators across Canada. These lessons would be available for the educator interested in teaching about this important issue and possibly also to those who have taught units on homelessness in the past. The lesson plans would allow teachers in different areas of the curriculum to introduce an arts related approach to the topic. What was even more exciting to me was that I was asked to pilot these lesson plans and create a show with my students, which would serve as the launch event for the homelesshub website.

Before embarking on this journey with my students, I realized that I first needed to look at my own biases around the issue of homelessness. Let’s face it, we all bring our own histories and prejudices into any conversation or lesson. Some of my own experiences with people who were homeless had not been positive. At one point in my life I was close to someone who encountered a period of homelessness due to substance abuse issues. Though on a rational level I understood that it was a disease, I could not process the problem in the same way on an emotional level. I saw the person as weak and irresponsible—unable to take control of his own life. One thing I learned from this experience is that homelessness affects not only the person who is living the experience, but also those around them who care about that person. My own experiences no doubt affected how I viewed people who are homeless. I needed to unpack my own history before I could ask my students to do the same.
After recognizing these biases, I tried to think back on my own life to find other experiences that could lend understanding. Even though I was never homeless myself, I remember that we didn’t have a lot of money when we first moved to Canada. My parents were just out of graduate school, and they were paying off large debts. Even though my father had a full-time job, sometimes my parents had to look for loose change in the car to have enough to buy milk or bread. I also remember stories about my parents’ “hippy” summer when my sister was born in Arizona—how they didn’t have any baby furniture in a small rented apartment and they made a bed for her in a dresser drawer. I also remember my dad talking about growing up in a one-room apartment over a fish and chips shop in Airdrie, Scotland. His father was a master carpenter, but workmen often went for months during the year without employment. Having grown up in a status-conscious society where birth counted more than effort or intelligence, my dad felt strongly on social justice issues. Later, when we moved from Windsor to Ottawa, we lived in a small trailer for the summer months while we looked for an affordable residence. Sometimes my parents parked the trailer at shopping plazas at night in order to avoid driving so far from camp grounds. I remember how upset my sister and I felt—to be living in a parking lot! It didn’t seem to bother our parents who had just come out the 60s, but we felt so embarrassed and humiliated.

Thinking back on other experiences that could lend understanding, I also thought about my six years of modeling. I moved from country to country and apartment to apartment during those years. Although I always had some place to which I could return in-between jobs (my home in Canada or my agent’s loft in Soho), I still felt rootless and often lonely in those days. The other girls, with whom I shared residences, felt the same. Some girls filled the void through
going out and partying every night, others (including myself) through dating and ongoing relationships. I’m not sure these alternatives filled the need to feel anchored.

Planning for the homelessness unit, I asked myself whether my former personal experiences, distant memories of my parents’ financial worries, and my years of modeling constituted understanding on my part. Would my own lived experience come to play in how I created and delivered the curriculum to the students? And were my circumstances really comparable to their lived experiences? After all, our circumstances were temporary and never as extreme as those experienced by people who are unemployed, without skills, or unable to work for reasons of physical or mental health. We always knew there were alternatives.

I was aware of some of the causes of homelessness. I knew that many people experiencing homeless suffered from substance abuse issues and that unemployment and poverty contributed to this serious issue. I was also aware that a significant number of homeless youth are LGBTQ. Overall, I knew that homelessness is a complex issue, and I anticipated some tough questions coming my way from students. Was I equipped to answer them? I wasn’t sure.

In looking at my options for a homelessness unit, I realized that I couldn’t expect a lot of help from the professional development sessions that I had attended in past years. Social issues such as racism and religious diversity make a reasonably regular appearance in those sessions, but concerns such as homelessness and homophobia generate less enthusiasm among Canadian educators. My superiors were and are supportive of me to a certain extent; however, almost none address the enormous problem that we have with homophobia. The administration often seems to be more concerned with the students wearing hats in the halls than they are with homophobic slurs in the halls and classrooms. Contemporary slang such as “hobo,” “That’s so gay,” and “no homo,” heard in school corridors across Canada, attests to the lack of awareness in our students.
In addition, students have shared stories of other teachers telling gay jokes in their classes. On one occasion, three male teachers put on a performance, dressing up in drag for a student assembly. I called attention to the fact that this exhibition was wrong and potentially harmful to transgendered students who might be sitting in the audience, and thankfully they pulled it from the second assembly. This example shows, however, that there is a lack of awareness and a critical need for these issues to be addressed. Belonging to the LGBT community myself, I realized that much of the problem lies not with intention, but with lack of education. Students use these kinds of terms without thinking. They don’t realize their impact on peers who have lived with homophobia, racism, homelessness or other stigmas attached to being out of the mainstream.

In trying to decide how to approach the topic of homelessness, I asked myself, “Why do educators avoid these topics?” We can attribute some of the problem to a discomfort with addressing the issues or concerns. However, based on conversations with teachers, I believe that many educators simply do not know how to broach the topics. They do not have the lived experiences or tools to teach about subjects like homelessness. In addition, teachers have many other pressures that can undermine our ability to educate students on social justice issues. As educators, we have a unique opportunity to engage students in becoming agents of change—to develop caring citizens who will go out into the larger society and insist on equality where before there was inequity and stigma. But with so much pressure to contribute to the achievement of academic excellence and the production of high-level scores on standardized tests, we are sometimes tempted to push our role as agents of change into the shadows.

I was fortunate enough to be in programs at York and the University of Toronto that educate students on the impact of our choices as teachers, and I did not want this kind of
sidelining of equity issues to define my experience as a teacher. As I worked on the little covered issue of homelessness, I hoped that the lessons would help to create the necessary awareness and motivation for others to teach about an important social concern. Was I being presumptuous? I wasn’t sure.

On the Monday following the journal assignment, I raised the topic of the upcoming unit with my students. The responses I received were mixed: “Why homelessness?” “What is there to say about homelessness?” “How does this relate to us?” While the students were eager to create and perform a show for the public, they were less enthusiastic about the theme. “How can we possibly create an entire show around the topic of homelessness?” Even my most politically and socially conscious students had limited sensitivity to, and understanding of, the issues concerning homelessness.

Common misconceptions among my students regarding the plight of homeless people were that they had reached that state as a consequence of their own decisions, they did not want anything better for themselves, and they were a nuisance. My students were candid in their opinions and held nothing back; at the same time, however, they were open and ready to learn.

As I did my own homework, I realized that the causes of homelessness are complex and multiple; and understanding the factors that lead to homelessness is not easy, considering the heterogeneity of the Canadian population and the fact that there are many pathways to homelessness. A slide into homelessness can be the result of a number of economic and social factors that impact an individual or family at a personal level. No one chooses to be homeless and it can happen to anyone—from a teenager escaping an abusive home to a senior citizen on a fixed income who cannot cover a rent or tax increase to a child whose parents suddenly become
unemployed. I realized that the students needed a crash course in learning more about the causes of homelessness before they could address the topic in a meaningful way.

In most cases, it is the intersection of structural factors (the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the decrease in the supply of affordable housing, the decrease in services, supports and social assistance, plus discrimination and racism) with personal histories and individual characteristics (catastrophic events, loss of employment, family breakup, onset of mental and/or other debilitating illnesses, substance abuse by an individual or family members, a history of physical, sexual or emotional abuse and involvement in the child welfare system) that lead to homelessness.

Our journey in the classroom began with each student asking a question about homelessness that they hoped to answer by the end of the unit. Their questions were then compiled into a worksheet with their own questions forming the basis for researching the unit. A computer lab was booked, and the students went to the Homeless Hub website to embark on their journey of discovery.

I was encouraged to see that the students became instantly engaged by what they found. In fact, they continued talking about homelessness and their research even after the bell excused them. What had begun as a three-week unit expanded into a six-week process. There was simply too much to explore, too much to discover and too much to say. In the days that followed, I also allowed opportunities for those students who had experienced—or knew someone who had experienced—homelessness to recount their lived experiences in a safe manner.

Once the research component was completed, the students were charged with more traditional dramatic-arts assignments based on their findings. Over the next few weeks, they created scenes depicting homelessness that were based on well-known fairy tales. They also
wrote journal entries in the voices of oppressed characters. After reading an article about a homeless youth arrested for shoplifting, they created scenes based on the thread of events that could have led to this arrest.

For the final assignment, I asked the students to create vignettes informed by their own research, with the goal of producing a theatrical piece for public consumption. For this task, I established cooperative learning groups. I always have some concerns when using cooperative learning strategies because you never know how the students will interact—whether they will be productive or unproductive, whether they will get along or be antagonistic. Nonetheless, a few years ago I implemented collaborative or cooperative learning as a critical tool in my own dramatic arts classroom as a means of sensitizing my students to some issues that threatened to escalate into violence.

Although I had not witnessed any racism in my own classroom, I was told that the situation had grown tense between two racial groups in my school. For example, incidents occurring outside of school hours had involved racial slurs and threats of physical retribution. I was aware of the situation; however, to that point, I had not witnessed any racism. The situation changed when I had to miss school one day and left the students to watch “Million Dollar Baby.” I generally use this film as a means of discussing gender and class roles in society. Upon my return to work, I was informed that a fight, involving a number of my students, had broken out. One group was comparing the other to some of the characters in the film, which incited the other group to lash out by throwing racist and classist slurs based on stereotypes. The entire situation had got out of hand; and, upon my return, I was forced to abandon my planned unit in order to tackle the more immediate issue. I decided to do so using cooperative learning groups; and I
witnessed the positive potential in cooperative learning strategies when I implemented my new unit on racism and prejudice.

For this assignment, I put my students into mixed groupings and gave them some actual scenarios that had occurred in various North American high schools. The content of my racism unit was based on factual incidents that had occurred to students in similar circumstances and with demographics similar to those of my students. The scenarios involved incidents in which racism, xenophobia, classism, homophobia, and ableism had manifested in the school environments; and the students had to take the perspective of the oppressed. I assigned various written and performance tasks that would culminate in the creation and performance of a scene. I took care in grouping the students to ensure a mix of ability, gender identities, culture, and race. In the case of my dramatic arts class, it was essential that I encourage full participation. For this reason, I formed groups with mixed abilities.

I also had to decide whether to group the students with their friends or put them into groups with the students with whom they were experiencing conflict. Friendship groupings are not always ideal, as learning can become sidetracked by socialization and peer pressure. Also friendship groups can deter students from the task and highjack their ability to empathize with the issues at hand. Eventually, I decided to avoid friendship groups, as my principal concern was to enable the highest level of critical learning. The only way we can hope to create acceptance of our individual differences is to expose ourselves and our students to them.

To maximize the benefits of cooperative learning in this situation, I put an enormous amount of time into establishing ground rules of respect and conveying my expectations of how the students should handle conflict. In creating the scenes, the students were forced to communicate their points of view to one another in a diplomatic and respectful manner.
I also put a considerable amount of time into the development of the unit. In the dramatic arts classroom, exercises aimed at building trust play a critical role in creating a safe environment. Students need to feel comfortable contributing to their groups. For that reason, I also incorporated trust exercises into the unit plan. In assessing the results of my efforts, I saw that students acquired the ability to see one another’s strengths by engaging in cooperative learning and, as a result, began to see past some of their prior stereotyped views.

My earlier successes with cooperative group learning led me to use the same approach with the homelessness project, and I asked the students to form groups of three to five individuals. Then the students decided on group roles. They chose one director, a lead writer, co-writers, and a designer. The students were all performers as well. The students were accountable for the contributions they made to the scenes; however, I found that they were all so engaged in the process that this characteristic of cooperative learning was a given rather than an instruction that needed to be stressed. This group work proved to be productive and rich in results. The scenes that were created were then brought to the larger group and work-shopped further. With careful cutting and pasting, the scenes were strung together to create a provocative and honest portrait of teen homelessness—its causes and its effects. The resulting product, *Street Stories*, was ready for opening night, when it lived up to its goal of raising awareness through public performance. Although the resulting play focused heavily on the causes of teen homelessness, the students also looked at some of the effects on individuals. The final product imagines the experiences of five very different teenagers, who through no fault of their own become homeless due to eviction, physical abuse, teen pregnancy, trouble in the foster-care system and homophobia.
Scholars from the Homeless Hub came into the classroom on two different occasions to provide feedback and engage in dialogue with the students. This collaboration and partnership between my students and York University provided the students with additional perspectives on their work. They were able to rethink and re-adapt some of their scenes. Journalists from two prominent newspapers also came into the classroom and interviewed the students. These interviews were exciting to the students and made them aware of the relevance and importance of the work they were creating. As a result of these newspaper articles, the community had an opportunity to gain insight into the issues, to learn more about our school and our dramatic arts program, and to acquire new perspectives on how teens view issues.

The play has been performed a number of times to date, but two of the performances stand out. At both the launch event for the Homeless Hub’s education resources and the Sears Drama Festival, more than a few audience members left discreetly wiping away tears, while many others spoke of its resounding impact. While acknowledging the quality of the performance, the adjudicator at the drama festival made a few recommendations. She noted that instead of trying to portray five different stories, we should have considered doing one or two in more depth. She said that including the five stories meant that the depictions became somewhat two-dimensional in nature. I saw her argument, as I had wrestled with this dilemma myself. I had asked myself, “What is more important: process or product? In the end, however, I had decided that I was most committed to engaging the students in critical thinking and having them explore as many causes of homelessness as possible. Had I sacrificed the product? Perhaps, to some extent. We did not move on in the festival as a result of these choices, but the adjudicator noted that she was moved and impressed with the subject and the nature of our production.
In the final analysis, the reaction of the adjudicator was less important to me than the impact of the play on audiences and my students. Street Stories was a success. This production brought together school, community, university, and parents. As I sat in the audience at the launch of our first show, I was astonished and grateful to see the partnerships the show had created. And rarely have I had the opportunity to see my students so immersed and engaged in a project, especially one that involved such a heavy research component.

At the completion of the show, one student commented on what she had learned about homelessness. She related her learning to the example of someone applying for a job. She said that getting a job is relatively easy for someone with a home and a computer. However, it is much more difficult for someone who is homeless. First, you need a resumé. Where do you get the resources to type and print it? How would you dress for an interview if you are homeless, with only jeans, running shoes, and a t-shirt that hasn’t been washed in a week? In that moment, I saw my student connecting “other” to self, as well as applying critical thinking skills to a situation not covered in our theatre production.

This exercise was, in many regards, a manifestation of popular political theatre as advocated by Brazilian director Augusto Boal. Political theatre often engages people at the community level. This kind of community art can be found in many different settings, including churches, schools, community centres, prisons, and even daycare centres. One kind of political theatre is agitprop. Agitprop theatre has, as one of its mandates, to incite and enlist the help of the audience in correcting some social injustice. Though our production was not agitprop theatre in every sense of the term, one of its ultimate goals was to have audience members address and reject prejudices they may have harboured.
I also see similarities between our production on homelessness and Boal’s theatre of the oppressed, in that our production hoped to give voice to those who have no voice in the system. If someone is not listed on any voting registration roster, they have no representation in our political system. In my undergraduate theatre program at Concordia, I studied Boal extensively. The chance to apply his theories brought my earlier learning to life for me. What had once been delivered to me in lecture form, I was now able to transmit to my own classroom. Even though I did not receive teacher training at Concordia, my courses often raised social justice issues; and after getting my undergraduate degree, I authored a play that was presented in Toronto at the Lower Ossington Theatre. The play involved issues such as classism, racism, and homelessness. It was performed by a group of children who had lived experiences with many of the challenges depicted in the performance. In many regards, these early educational experiences shaped my desire to transmit the same commitment to social justice to my students.

Like other critical theorists, Freire believed strongly in the importance of educating our students to think critically about and to act on societal issues, and he tended to dismiss the validity of information distributed by capitalist sources. Freire’s educational philosophy fit perfectly with what I was trying to explore with my students—in terms of both the homelessness and other lesson units. My students had initially relied on the misinformation given to them by the mainstream media and other sometimes unreliable sources. Who could blame them? Living in the digital culture and being bombarded with stereotypical portrayals of homelessness, we are all affected to some degree by these misconceptions.

In the end, however, my students became aware of the truths surrounding the issue of homelessness, and they expressed a commitment to becoming part of the solution. One student noted that when she was first introduced to the assignment, she was excited about getting to do
the show but thought, “Why homelessness? What’s the story, I don’t get it!” That’s another lesson they learned: there is always a story to be told. Very rarely are things exactly the way they seem.

Although the curtain has fallen on the unit and my students now find themselves in different classrooms, the impact continues to echo in the halls of my school. Walking to the staff lounge one day, following the conclusion of the unit, I paused to overhear one of my former students correcting a friend who had used the word *hobo*. She informed her friend that *hobo*, when used to refer to people who are homeless, is an offensive term. Upon completion of the unit, the students were asked to write an essay exploring the changes (if any) in their opinions and perceptions of people who are homeless. Whereas the students’ initial responses had been typical of popular thinking about people who are homeless (for example, they’re “too lazy” to get jobs), their later expressions took into account the difficulties involved in overcoming life circumstances. I found that the use of narrative inquiry in getting the students to relive their experiences with writing and producing this show helped them to consolidate their thinking on the issue and to reflect upon what they had learned.

This unit incorporated the following critical learning strategies: lived experiences; a focus on diversity, inclusiveness, and cultural sensitivity; cooperative learning; community-based partnerships, and partnerships with parents. In terms of lived experiences, I brought my own life experiences into the discussion of homelessness, as well as noting the limitations on teachers and students without lived experiences. I also questioned whether my experiences were sufficiently representative of the experiences of people who are homeless. In terms of diversity and inclusiveness, I discussed my experiences with addressing racially sensitive and multicultural situations, as well as the importance of recognizing diversity in our students. I also
made use of cooperative learning strategies when I placed the class in small groups with mixed ability levels and different philosophies and orientations. The homelessness initiative involved partnerships with—and outreach to—many community groups and parents. We also presented the play in different locations and venues in order to reach a maximum number of people.

After concluding the unit on homelessness, I asked my students to revisit their experiences and to reflect in written form upon what they had learned. In this way, I incorporated the narrative method into my teaching. This method is both a teaching and a research tool. The small and large group discussions that took place throughout the time that the students were working on the homelessness unit, the research and writing of the production, the performance, and the final reflective narratives enabled the students to see the many different layers of the problem and to draw multiple meanings from the data. That is one of the main strengths of narrative inquiry.

Based on my own experiences with narrative inquiry, I believe that my classroom experience with implementing lesson plans on homelessness give additional support to the value of the critical learning strategies that appear in the literature.
Chapter Five

Reflective Narrative for Clowning Unit

I have incorporated clowning into my curriculum for a number of years, and I have always put a heavy emphasis in my classes on issues of social justice and critical thinking. For the past four years I have been involved in Board anti-bullying planning committees, as well as leading workshops to combat racism and prejudice as a whole. Beyond my classroom experience, I was involved in theatre equity projects in my community. While studying theatre at Concordia University, I was involved in a community theatrical production dealing with issues of race, gender equality and homophobia. In a Toronto project, I adapted and designed a play that involved children from the community, who for the most part were facing challenges due to their family’s socioeconomic situation; however, the play also explored issues beyond classism. So I decided to marry the two concepts—clowning and social justice—in creating a unit on “Clowning for Change.” An additional motivation for this unit came from a recent experience with producing a clowning show, which was funded by the Trillium Foundation. I would like to begin this discussion by revisiting that project.

Several years ago, I was approached by a professional dance theatre company with a proposal to collaborate on a piece of theatre. The collaboration would involve their company, my senior class, and a centre for people living with physical disabilities. Immediately I jumped at the opportunity, as I have worked with this company with excellent results in the past. Motus O has strong community ties. Not only do they perform professional shows around the world, but they are also actively involved at a grass roots level with the Markham/Stouffville community.
I had had Motus O representatives in my class as guest artists over the previous five years and seen the benefits of their work first hand. Recognizing the importance of consistency in visitations of guest artists, I ensured that Motus O representatives came into my classroom on a sufficiently frequent and regular basis that the students felt their commitment. While most guest artists appear in the classroom for one or two days at best, Motus O had worked with my students on various projects over an extended period of time. So the partnership was a natural and comfortable one for me and for my students.

The dance company typically performs physical theatre with little to no preplanned text. In the case of this proposed show, the theme suggested to me was the following: “If you were to wake up one morning, and could no longer talk, how would you communicate?” The dancers suggested that I use Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* as a starting point with students. *Metamorphosis* tells the story of an average man who lives with his parents and works a typical nine to five job. This man leads an extremely routine life, waking up at the same time every day and clocking in and out of work at precisely the same hour every day. One morning the man wakes up to discover he has turned into a bug. This revelation creates upheaval in his home and also in his workplace. His parents and boss reject him and he struggles to find a way to communicate now that he has lost the ability to speak. Some people believe that Kafka was gay and that this story was a metaphor for his lifelong struggle to hide his sexual identity.

*Metamorphosis* was an interesting starting point in any case, due to its abstract nature and its ability to elicit critical thought. There could be many interpretations and interesting conversations generated from this piece of literature. The idea in terms of the Motus O production was to have students think critically about what it is like to live in a body with
restrictions. On a theatrical level, we hoped to have students move beyond the binaries of text and speech and to have them explore the power of movement.

The planned steps in the process were to brainstorm with students, have the students write scripts, choose one of the most interesting scripts, workshop the script as a class, and create a production using the script. Although we had come up with a theme, we decided that we were not bound to it, and as a result, the culminating performance was quite different from what we had originally anticipated.

Another important partner in the collaborative effort was a community centre for people living with severe physical disabilities. The dance company had been working with this organization for a few years, and they indicated that one of the patients at the facility had expressed an interest in visiting my high school class. Although the woman in question had Parkinson’s disease, which seriously limits mobility, she had previously created a spectacular live performance with one of the Motus O dancers. As part of the preparation of the production, she wanted to speak with my class about her life and her challenges.

When I informed the students about her upcoming visit, they were both excited and nervous. I have to admit, I shared their feelings. This was a wonderful opportunity for my students and for me to gain insight and perspective on the topic that we were about to study. I was nervous, however, about having someone share such an intimate part of their life experience with a group of strangers. I wondered how I would have felt in her shoes. Over the previous couple of years, I had led staff professional development sessions on the topic of homophobia in the classroom. On one occasion, I had spoken about my own experience as a member of the LGBT community. In that situation, the questions from my peers were not pre-thought or screened in any way. A couple of the questions were raw and offensive to me. I don’t believe
that they were meant to be offensive, but the consequence was that the person asking the question, myself, and perhaps others in the meeting felt bad. In fact, I felt extremely vulnerable and targeted.

How could I ensure that my guest did not feel vulnerable or objectified? How was I to ensure that she felt safe and valued? I wanted my classroom to be a safe environment for the speaker, as well as the students, who could learn from each other. I decided to do my best to prepare my students in advance of the speaking occasion. I asked them to generate questions ahead of time, and I reviewed and gave feedback on the questions. By having the students reflect on their questions and share them with a mediator (myself), I was able to provide some safety to both the speaker and the class.

I believe strongly in the value of community partnerships such as the ones with Motus O and the centre for disabilities. Just as collaboration is important for students, I believe it is equally important to educators. As I am alone in my department, these collaborations that I pursue with outside artists are vital to my teaching practice and to my spiritual being as well. For this reason, I have extended my search for partnerships into various social justice areas. On one occasion, I brought representatives of Youthline, an outreach organization for LGBT youth, into my school to speak with students. On other occasions, I have gone out into the community to raise awareness on social justice issues. For example, I take a group of students every year to the Young Leader’s Forum, an event hosted by the Canadian Centre for Diversity. This forum addresses issues of inequity and stigma. The Centre urges students to share their experiences and to take action to redress these issues.

Sometimes I make presentations on related topics. For example, I developed and led a workshop on Tourette’s syndrome at the National CEC conference in November 2009. This
workshop was open to educators, administrators and parents. Issues pertaining to Tourette’s syndrome are a subject close to my heart, as my son was diagnosed with mild Tourette’s as a child. This diagnosis impacted his and my life for a long time and presented many challenges, as well as many humorous and joyful moments.

In planning for the Motus O speaker, I also thought about my own discomfort with speaking before large and unfamiliar audiences. The conference on Tourette’s syndrome was one such event. As I took my place at the front of the lecture hall, my nerves set in. I scanned the room and asked my audience to indicate their level of knowledge on the topic of Tourette’s. To my chagrin, the entire audience appeared to be experts in the field! I had no reason to worry, however, because everyone was extremely respectful, and we ended up sharing stories and learning from each other. We all had our own areas of expertise.

Prior to the arrival of the guest speaker, the students viewed the dance film that she had created with the dance company. Afterwards, I broke the students into small cooperative learning groups to discuss the film. The students discussed themes addressed in the film, feelings that it had evoked, and associations with their own lived experiences. Following the viewing and discussion of the film, the guest speaker arrived and spoke with my students. One of the Motus O dancers accompanied her, which created an additional richness to the discussion. He was able to express what it was like to interpret her story through dance. His presence also created an extra sense of safety and warmth, as he had been a part of the fabric of my department for years and the students knew him well.

The visit went well; my students were clearly moved, as was the guest artist. The discussion was engaging and humorous, awkward and tense, all at once. The students understood that they were not meant to use this woman’s experience in their stories, but rather to use it as
inspiration. We would not see our guest speaker again until the opening of our show; however, her story and strength inspired us collectively.

It was time to begin the process of script writing. As a class, we discussed some reasons why people may feel silenced. The ideas came at me rapidly as I wrote all ideas feverishly on the board. I asked students to consider how the reasons for silencing might vary according to cultural locations, ability, gender, sexual identity, and class; however, the students did not need this prompting, they were already there. I asked the students to get into small cooperative learning groups (2-5 people). I put the students into the cooperative learning groups in order to generate deeper discussions and ideas. I ensured that each group had a strong writer. One person was to serve as scribe, and the others would provide ideas. I reminded students that they were to create a script that involved at least one character who could not communicate through words. The students needed to decide on a specific reason why this or these characters could not speak. I indicated to students that they may wish to choose one of the reasons written on the board.

Each student or group was to create a detailed outline of their proposed script. Students could decide whether they wanted to create the outlines individually or collectively. I allowed four class periods for creation of the outlines, and on the fifth day I turned the classroom into a coffee house. The lights were dimmed; the chairs were placed in a circle; there was coffee, tea, and hot chocolate. The sound of soft jazz music came from the stereo. It is astonishing what a change in lighting can do to a group of people. Our coffee house was the venue for the sharing of our story outlines. The energy in the room was tangible. I like to believe that this energy came partially from the fact that the students came prepared and had really thought about their outlines on a deeper critical level—but who knows, it could have also been the coffee and sugar packed donuts! The sharing went extremely well. There was intense listening, questioning, and
feedback. All of my students had created some kind of outline, some more detailed than others, but everyone arrived with a piece of paper in hand.

I asked the class to choose their three favorite scripts. The dance company and I selected the final script to be used. The student who wrote the chosen outline worked with the dancer and me to flesh out the script in a more detailed manner. I was thrilled! The script involved a group of manufactured clowns who lived in a cookie cutter society. The characters had a “Pleasantville” feel to them, and they were clearly not acting on their own will. The final script was informed by the class as a whole, as well as Motus O and myself. The protagonist in the play was different. He was born with an upside-down heart. He did not fit the mold. As a class, we decided that he would wear pink so that he did not conform to gender roles.

The show went through approximately eight drafts before the final one was complete. I asked myself whether the agenda was mine or theirs when I suggested that ideas be examined through various equity lenses. For me, this is always a fine balancing act, encouraging the students to be inclusive without promoting my own agenda. As teachers how can we not bring our own stories into the classroom? And is my agenda not geared towards inclusivity? How should I determine which issue has more focus in my curriculum when I do not have time to cover them all? I continue to struggle with these choices and decisions.

As a young person in school, I would have benefited from this type of project. Although I went to a creative arts school as a teenager, my years as an elementary student were ridden with teasing. I was often made to feel as if I didn’t belong. An Anglophone in a French school, I was teased endlessly for my English accent. As a shy child and teenager, I was often excluded from social groups. As a queer teacher in a heteronormative environment, I still often feel excluded. I have come to see that most people were teased or bullied at some point in their life, but the topic
was little discussed in my youth. Now as a teacher, I had an opportunity to make a difference for other people.

So we were to put on a social justice based clown show. It was a story of not fitting in, a story of conformity and nonconformity, of love and hate and death. My collaborator (Motus O) returned and started piecing together the choreography. This was truly a unique experience for all involved. Although I have experience directing, I have little experience with dance. How to get across to an audience these difficult themes without words and text? It turns out it was easy to do, and beyond that, the students walked away with an understanding of what it is to be silenced and oppressed.

The show was to be performed at a local theatre as an opening act for the dance company’s own professional show. The students were anxious to perform in a professional theatre. In the past, I have had some difficulty with parental attendance at our school productions. So I made a point of reaching out to the students’ parents, which ultimately resulted in a good family turnout at the show. The importance of parental engagement and support cannot be underestimated.

I have many vivid memories of my parents sitting in the bleachers at my ringette and soccer games as a child, coffee in hand smiling, though most of the time I was flat on my back on the ice or looking distracted in the back field. (Sports were never my strength, although my parents encouraged every known activity—dance, horseback riding, downhill skiing, figure skating, bicycling, cross-country skiing, ringette, soccer, swimming, and more.) When I was a child, my brother (eight years older than me) was involved in figure skating. At one point, he moved five hours from our home in order to be a part of a strong program with Olympic coaches.
Though we had little income at the time, we would drive every weekend to Toronto to see my brother. We were also there for his competitions and shows.

As a parent, I have held these experiences in mind as I navigate my own children’s extracurricular events. As a teacher, I also keep these memories in mind, knowing how much it means to the students to have their parents and guardians present at their events. Most parents would like to be present and involved in their child’s activities; however, it is not always possible. Many of the families of my student population have younger children for whom they must care. Some parents and guardians work in the evenings, and others do not have transportation to events. For that reason, I tried to offer alternatives to parents. I asked for student volunteers to provide childcare during the show. We performed one show during the school day, as an alternative to the evening show; and we invited families to this performance. I informed the students to let me know if any of their families had issues with bus fare. I believe these factors may have contributed to a higher turnout. In addition, the students were extremely proud of their production, and they probably conveyed this enthusiasm to their families and friends. The parents and guardians also contributed to the production by providing some of the props and small costume pieces. Although there is always room for improvement, I believe that as a class we were successful in engaging parents, guardians and families in our production.

The show was written up in a local newspaper, which created a buzz at both the school and in the community. Following the show, many audience members made comments regarding the depth of the show and the artistic maturity of its performers. The guest speaker who had come into the class at the beginning of the process was in the audience, and she indicated her enjoyment in seeing the product on stage. She had tears in her eyes, and though I can attest to
why, I hope in some small part that she felt as though she was a part of the show. It was truly a collaborative effort that involved school, community, and guest artists.

Because the show came from the students, it was about them; it was their story. At the same time, it was everyone’s story—a story about being different. The students had to think critically about what it means to be marginalized and set aside by society. The process also had me reflecting on my own practice and my motivation and intentions when creating and delivering curriculum. Those who saw the show relayed numerous interpretations of theme and story. This was the beauty of doing the show as a movement piece, like an intricate poem, this story had multiple interpretations to the various audience members and even to those who were a part of it. Some audience members saw issues of power and control. One audience member relayed to one of the actors that the show brought back memories of their own struggle as a young person. Another approached my lead actor in tears and recounted a recent experience involving a family member being bullied. Thus, the show inspired memories, provoked thought and created conversations.

After doing the Motus O project, I realized that my students could have benefited more from a history of clowning perspective and its purposes in society. Many students have very narrow views of clown. Typically if you mention clowning to students, they sigh and mention their dislike or fear of birthday clowns. Stephen King-inspired movies often come up in the conversation, as well as stories about clowns haunting them in their dreams. My approach would be very different—clowning for social change. That meant that I needed to go beyond these superficial characterizations and teach my students the deeper meaning of clowning.

Another area for improvement related to the development of the clown characters. Although the collaborative effort with Motus O was extremely successful, some of the characters
in the clowning show lacked depth and technique. Since they were supposed to be cookie-cutter clowns, one could argue that their lack of depth was justified; however, arguments could also be made to the contrary.

As seen in my literature review, researchers often identify the following learning strategies as instrumental to critical learning in the classroom: lived experiences; a focus on diversity, inclusiveness, and culturally sensitive curriculum; cooperative learning; community-based partnerships; and partnerships with parents. Upon completion of the Motus O show, I looked back at my literature review to identify areas where I had successfully (or potentially less successfully) implemented these strategies. Using these categories, I will point to lessons learned from that experience, which I subsequently integrated into my clowning for change unit.

As described earlier, I used cooperative learning in the playwriting portion of the Motus O project. The students were able to work together, sharing ideas to come up with story ideas. Looking back at the project, I realize that cooperative learning would have also benefited the students in developing their clown characters. Students also tend to feel safer sharing in small groups, and groups often produce more ideas from multiple perspectives than individuals generate. Cooperative learning allows opportunities for students to discuss and think critically. In the case of the Motus O project, I wanted the students to come to their own idea of what it means to be oppressed.

Another characteristic of successful cooperative learning is that students become accountable for their work. In the first lesson of the clowning unit, I suggest placing the students in small groups and assigning a specific role to each student within that group. This task assignment will assure accountability. In fact, the stations in the first lesson involve the students working in small cooperative learning groups. In lesson 2 the students are asked to create a
costume piece for their clown character; and although the students build their costumes individually, the groups work together to make the presentations. This cooperative learning environment helped the students to develop communication skills, which they brought into the larger group discussion. I also noted the students were developing positive interdependent skills, all the while allowing them to work efficiently on their own. When I looked back at the Motus O show, I realized how much the students fed off each other and how this interactivity contributed to the development of their clown characters. It is important that, when studying clown, the students understand how to create three-dimensional characters with depth.

The community-based partnerships were instrumental to the success of the Motus O project. Our work with the dance company, the guest speaker from the centre for people living with disabilities, the venues for the presentations, and the newspaper made the work that much more meaningful. I wanted to ensure in my clowning lessons that the same opportunities would present themselves. The clowning for change lessons leave much room for partnerships. In fact, when I taught this unit to my students last semester, I invited a guest visual artist to work with the students on the costume portion of the lessons. With the assistance of the visual artist, the students were able to learn a felting technique and how to build clown hats. This partnership was a rich experience for the students, not only in terms of the expertise they acquired but also because the guest artist brought a new perspective to the classroom.

Even though my clowning plans rely heavily on video formats to introduce the students to the concept and practice of clown therapy, teachers can supplement these in-class activities with visits to a hospital or senior centre, where they perform in clown as a means of therapy. Alternatively, the teachers can take the students to a community performance. Through these activities, the students would acquire a richer volunteer experience, and the community would be
able to witness the value of the work the students are doing. Additional opportunities for outside involvement come with the culminating social justice clown scenes in the unit. The teachers can bring the community into the school for a performance or take the students into the community to perform the scenes.

Although community partnerships are extremely valuable in creating a critical learning environment, some cautions must be observed. Outside groups may have their own (and sometimes conflicting) mandate or set of beliefs. This can be an issue if the school has a different set of beliefs or priorities. On one occasion, my school was involved in a partnership with the local police. The partnership was created to address bullying that was happening in a number of schools in the region. The police force wanted to focus on physical violence and drugs, whereas our school saw the need to address other forms of bullying such as racism and homophobia. This difference in perspective hindered the collaborative process.

Also we need to be certain that the opportunities created are ones that can benefit the students in the long-term. Changes in leadership, limited funds and resources, or setting the goals and outcomes too high can lead to frustration. For example, one-time exposure to the benefits of a funded activity can result in unrealistic expectations for similar benefits in the future and resulting disappointments. The priorities, service offerings, or resources of partners can also change over time.

At other times, there can be a deterioration of relationships among partners. In one case, an antique store loaned furniture to a secondary school theatre group. In working on the set, one of the students spilled paint on an antique loveseat. Needless to say, the shop owner was upset. A theft or act of violence, blamed on a student from a particular school community, can create a
feeling of negativity or fear toward all of the students from that school—not just the one student involved in the incident.

Finally, in partnerships as in all other activities, we need to be careful that no one has the attitude that “we are going to help children who are not capable of helping themselves.” Not only does this mentality categorize these children as “other,” but it does not recognize that the underachievement of children may have nothing to do with their innate capabilities. Rather all parties in a partnership need to think in terms of “we are going to help children to achieve their full potential.” In short, in order for community partnerships to be effective and beneficial to both parties, there needs to be clear and appropriate communication at all points in the process.

As discussed in my narrative, I was able to come up with some strategies in the Motus O project that enabled parents, guardians, and families to attend one of our performances. Looking back at this experience, I asked myself what I needed to include in my lesson plans in order to engage parents and guardians at all stages of the process. As noted in my literature review, parental involvement is an important factor in creating a critical learning environment. When parents are involved in the child’s education, the child has a better chance of success. Parent-teacher interactions give teachers a deeper understanding of the child, and consequently, they are better able to adapt their teaching or curriculum to fit the specific needs of that child. The curriculum that I designed for the clowning unit allows opportunities to get the parent involved in the process and not just the product of the unit. The teacher can invite the parents or guardians or family members into the classroom to act as volunteers. The costume-building lesson in particular could benefit from such involvement, and there could be excellent opportunities for the volunteers to give input on what their child is creating. For example, the lesson asks the student to create a hat, based on a few of their childhood characteristics. Consulting with a parent or
family member could give the child insights into their early behaviours at the same that the interaction creates parent involvement.

Another strategy that can help to create a critical learning environment is ensuring that the classroom space is diverse, inclusive and culturally sensitive. The Motus O project reflected these characteristics, and I wanted to ensure that my clowing unit did the same. I was able to create curriculum that demonstrates the endless possibilities for clowing to serve as an agent of change. The lesson plans ask the students to study the history of clowns and to learn about the many different types of clowns, beyond the stereotypical ones. The students are asked to look at clowns from different parts of the world, from the Aboriginal clowns found in legends to the court jesters of Chinese royalty.

It is important that the students see themselves represented in the curriculum that is delivered to them. The unit also calls for the inclusion of material on clown status and power, and it blends ideas from the theatre of the oppressed with clown status. The curriculum I created asks students to explore how status informs costume design.

In conclusion, the curriculum I created was meant to re-invent the clown in my students’ minds and to illustrate its ability to create change. I tested the curriculum out on a grade nine class last semester with satisfying results. The students viewed video clips that showed the multiple roles of clowns in society, clown therapy, krump clowns, clowns involved in movements, and public interruptions. They also engaged in forum theatre in clown, which served later as a basis for the clown characters that they assumed in their culminating scenes. Extremely successful, this unit showed strong potential for conveying critical learning concepts.

Theatre has the innate ability to move the viewer, and it is my belief that the primary purpose of theatre is to make the audience “feel.” Drama has the ability to do the same for
students, their parents, teachers, and people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and occupations. As educators, I believe it is our duty to make this drama meaningful and to engage the students in critical thinking. We must push ourselves, as well, to continue to grow and expand our own ways of thinking and viewing the world. This project did that for me.
Chapter Six

Conclusions and Implications

This thesis has been about choices—choices that educators make about what to teach their students. Do we teach them how to get ahead in life? Make the best grades in school? Succeed in their careers? Certainly, we try to achieve these goals. However, other goals are equally important. We have a unique opportunity as educators to contribute to the building of a more just and equitable society—a society that respects all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, ability, or other characteristics. For that reason, I have attempted in this study to identify classroom strategies that can assist educators (including myself) in making choices that combine learning with understanding, high marks with good citizenship, and success with fair treatment of others who also have the right to these benefits.

In this final chapter of the thesis, I would like to review what has been accomplished in this work—the questions and the knowledge gained. I will mention possibilities for other studies that could be conducted on similar or the same topic.

A Backward Look at the Purpose and Rationale for the Study

The purpose of this thesis was to identify and apply critical learning strategies to the design of social justice lesson plans for the dramatic arts. Reflections upon the process and the results would allow me to gain further insights with which to assess and learn from these efforts. In the process of achieving this goal, I looked at the rationale for applying critical learning strategies to the arts curriculum and critical functions served by the dramatic arts curriculum. Then I sought to identify the most promising strategies with potential to contribute to a social
justice curriculum in the dramatic arts. When we refer to critical learning, we are talking about learning that encourages creative and critical thinking about social issues of importance such as racism, classism, poverty, elder abuse, homophobia, and sexism. These strategies offer long-term, not short-term, solutions to some of the ills that affect society and the prejudices that contribute to conflict and wars.

The arts hold particular promise for addressing many of the social ills because they encourage people to see the world through different lenses—to question, and where necessary, to challenge the status quo. For that reason, it is often the artist who is often most feared by those in positions of authority. When authoritarian rulers come into power, they often enforce strict rules of censorship. They close theatres, shut down radio and television stations, limit access to the internet, forbid exhibitions by visual artists and musicians, and confiscate the works of writers. Artists have the power to call policies and people into question; so they pose a threat to those who seek to control the direction of change.

The dramatic arts classroom offers particular potential to contribute to a social justice curriculum because it asks students to imagine and create new worlds. Dramatic productions enable students to relive experiences, to imagine new ones, and to empathize with the feelings of marginalized groups in society. Through improvisation, character studies, storytelling, script writing, writing in role, and role-playing, students acquire the perspective of “others.” Thus, this study has aimed to research and learn more about how to best incorporate social justice strategies into the dramatic arts curriculum. More specifically, the major research question in this thesis was “How can we integrate critical learning theories into the Ontario high school drama curriculum?” To arrive at the answer to the major research question, the study attempted to answer the following sub-questions: Why is it important to integrate critical learning theories
into the curriculum of high school drama classes? Which teaching strategies support critical learning curriculum? What are some examples of past efforts to integrate critical learning theories into the curriculum of high school drama classes? What are some examples of future possibilities for implementing critical learning theories into the Ontario high school drama curriculum? The study adopted a critical theories framework.

**Identification of Critical Learning Strategies**

An extensive search of the literature identified five recurrent themes in the writings of critical learning advocates and theorists. Those themes were the importance of lived experience; a focus on diversity, inclusiveness, and culturally sensitive curriculum; the value of cooperative learning; the importance of community-based partnerships; and the value of parental partnerships. I will comment briefly on each of these learning strategies and will suggest how my research and experiences as a teacher further knowledge with respect to these strategies.

When we include lived experience in a curriculum, we ask students and teachers to revisit life events that help them to interpret their findings on a particular subject. The method that best facilitates this task is narrative inquiry, which asks narrators to share their stories with others and to reflect upon their meanings. The reflections can take place at the individual, group or organizational level; either privately or collectively; and before, during, or following the experience. With narrative inquiry, it is important to take multiple perspectives into account.

A second theme that emerged in the literature was the necessity to recognize, respect, and value diversity and inclusiveness. As Canada grows increasingly multicultural and as we welcome growing numbers of new immigrants into our country, we need to ensure that our curriculum is culturally sensitive. We also need to ensure, however, that we think in broader terms than just ethnicity and race when we think of multicultural curriculum. Our inclusiveness
strategies must also address issues related to classism, gender, biases related to sexual orientation, and the marginalization of people who may be challenged in areas such as ability. Multicultural education should also offer the opportunity to think beyond the traditional gender roles. Unfortunately, ethnicity and race are often top of mind when administrators plan for multicultural education. Further aggravating the situation, the attention given to race and culture is frequently superficial and inadequate, resulting in the “othering” of the same minority groups that they seek to empower. Teachers often feel ill-equipped or personally at risk to address these complex issues, and our textbooks are mostly void of content that discusses these inequities.

Cooperative learning goes hand-in-hand with multicultural education because students have an opportunity to interact with people holding beliefs and philosophies that may not always conform to their own, having different ability levels, and representing diverse groups in society. With cooperative learning, students work together in small groups to achieve collective goals. To succeed in group tasks, they must get along others and learn how to negotiate differences. In the process, many students build strong friendships that bridge the differences between diverse groups. The consequence is greater empathy and reduced stereotyping, bias, and discrimination.

A fourth theme that permeated the literature argued the importance of community-based partnerships. Community partnerships connect what happens in the classroom with what happens outside the classroom and enable a better understanding of the diverse groups that make up a community. These partnerships can take different forms when it comes to connecting with school populations. Sometimes students collaborate on projects with community groups. At other times, they connect with the community through volunteering. Co-op placements also connect students with community businesses. Forums, conferences, and performances that address social and equity issues provide an additional strategy for connecting with communities. Some educators
bring their own experiences as activists into the classroom, or they bring representatives of advocacy groups into the classroom to work with students. Another option is to encourage students to go outside the school boundaries to gain increased awareness of their communities. These kinds of partnerships are believed to be particularly valuable to minority urban students, who may not have the know-how or means to access community resources.

The fifth and final theme relates to partnerships with parents. Research confirms that parental engagement can have a significant impact on the academic performance and psychological health of children. These partnerships serve purposes, however, beyond just ensuring academic success. They also allow new immigrant families to be integrated into the community, to connect with other parents, and to become aware of the values that are being promoted in the school environment. Many immigrants feel as if they do not fit into the system when they first arrive. These partnerships help them to feel valued at the same time that they contribute to the educational success and psychological adjustment of their children. When parents attend dramatic or other performances that promote equity issues, they have an opportunity to broaden their perspectives on these issues. Exposure is the key to reaching a point that we can accept individual differences and still feel connected to our collective values. As with community-based partnerships in general, parent-school partnerships are particularly beneficial to families and schools in urban lower income areas.

Despite the many benefits of community and parent involvement in education, obstacles can appear when we try to build parent-school relations. Society no longer looks the way it did fifty years ago. Many families are composed of single parents. Many parents are compelled to work multiple jobs in order to make ends meet. The cost of living is rising; however, wages are not similarly on the increase. Families do not always have the time or the linguistic skills to be
involved in their child’s education. These are just a few of the many challenges in building parent-teacher-school partnerships.

Reflections on What I Learned and What I Have Contributed

Prior to attending graduate school, I had implemented elements of critical learning into my teaching at different points in time, and I had engaged in outside projects aimed at creating greater awareness of social justice issues. Without conscious intent, I had also integrated some of my own life experiences or currere into my curriculum planning and teaching. In the spirit of narrative inquiry, I will share one such experience.

Teacher’s college was an illuminating and rewarding experience for me. While I had always considered myself to be equitable in terms of my interactions with others and committed to social justice, my program at York brought to light many hidden issues about both the education system and society at large. So upon graduation, I felt confident and prepared to interview with the school boards in my region. My first interview with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) proved to be the positive experience I had anticipated. As expected, I was asked about my commitment to equity and how that commitment would manifest in my classroom. Based on this interview, I believed this component of my mandate was a priority, and I was eager to acquire a classroom of my own and contribute to a system that welcomed and encouraged multicultural and critical learning.

Shortly after my interview with the TDSB, I was asked to interview for a position in a secondary school in the York region. Again I went into the interview, ready to showcase my knowledge and background in equity and critical learning. However, when I was asked question after question about my knowledge of learning styles, literacy, and topics related to the pragmatics of managing a classroom, with no reference to my teaching philosophy, I quickly
came to see that equity and multicultural and critical learning were not a high priority on the agenda of these administrators. In later years I interviewed for a third position, also in the York district, which supported the same story line.

Like me, many teachers come out of education programs with a strong commitment to implementing equity strategies. However, my own currere or experience in the education system in Toronto illustrates the challenges we face as teachers when we try to implement equity in a system with other priorities. I am no longer a novice. I have been teaching in the Ontario system for seven years; and yet I still experience many of the same challenges that I faced when I entered the teaching profession. Teachers’ colleges prepare educators to begin a process focused on building a more inclusive curriculum, one that will teach students to think critically about what they are learning and that will introduce them to voices historically hidden and unheard. The hiring of these educators is based, at least partially, on their expressed willingness to contribute to a more inclusive and critical learning environment. Too often, however, their attention is diverted from their original mandate because the learning agendas within their lived educational spaces differ from what they learned in school.

Despite a respectable orientation to critical thinking in my undergraduate studies and at teachers’ college, I had not explored critical learning strategies in the same depth that I have explored them in this study. Nor had I looked seriously at the effects of these strategies on both myself as an educator and my students. This thesis project has helped me to better identify and understand the theories behind critical learning strategies, as well as possibilities for applying them in concrete situations. On an intuitive level, I had known the importance of concepts such as lived experience, but I had never put a label on them. Until we can name something, however, we cannot really talk about it; and we cannot design classroom strategies if we cannot name an
idea. This project has given me a vocabulary for talking about and implementing critical learning strategies into my dramatic arts curriculum and a means to share these strategies with others. Sometimes I mentor teacher candidates; at other times, I give lectures on critical strategies to teachers and outside groups. This research project has helped me to put my ideas into words and to transmit what I have learned to others in a more efficient and effective way. My literature review also served the purpose of pulling together a range of insights acquired over many years by pioneers and respected scholars in the field. Although many academic articles have appeared on the five critical learning strategies referenced in my study, I did not see any other articles that pulled together these five strategies in a unified way. I believe my thesis made a contribution in that regard.

After undertaking the literature review, which identified five important critical learning strategies, I realized that I had relied on all five in designing and carrying out the Motus O project. In reflecting later on the strategies, I realized their impact on the success of this project. I had used cooperative learning strategies in all three cases. The students had engaged in collective creations that forced them to think outside the box and to empathize with groups outside their comfort zones such as the homeless and people with disabilities. I had designed for and engineered partnerships with dancers, people from a centre for people with disabilities, the Homeless Hub, students, parents, administrators, members of the community, journalists, and business people who promoted their products and services in our programs.

Through exercises such as script writing, acting, journaling, and reflective narratives, the students had the opportunity to assume the lived perspective of others. They also had the opportunity to reflect on and share what they had learned. An important component of narrative inquiry is the sharing of stories. The students had ample opportunity to share their own stories
and to listen respectfully to the stories of others. In most cases, in the spirit of narrative inquiry, we were able to pull multiple meanings out of the stories. When implementing one of the strategies with my dramatic arts class, I was forced to look into some of the underlying issues that caused a conflict, and some of these shared learnings became the basis for the scenes developed by the students. Other learnings simply helped me develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of my students. Narrative inquiry tells us that not only students, but also their instructors, should benefit from the use of this method.

The Motus O project had focused specifically on clowning for change, a social justice theme. The activities encouraged *culturally sensitive learning with a focus on appreciation of diversity and inclusiveness*. The students came to understand that physical limitations in some areas do not define our abilities in other areas. They also became more comfortable in interacting with people with diverse abilities. In line with critical theories, I have learned over time that students must internalize the lessons. You cannot force tolerance and acceptance on students. Rather the students arrived at that understanding through an active learning process. They began to work through their own prejudices as a result of their ability to think critically and engage in cooperative learning. Nonetheless, I have tried to establish ground rules and expectations for all interactions that take place inside and outside my classroom, and my lesson plans reflect these values.

In conclusion, it is clear, when I look back on the Motus O project, that I had understood the importance of all five critical learning strategies identified in this study. I had integrated the strategies into my own teaching practices. Nonetheless, if asked to convey my knowledge to someone else, I would have found it difficult. I had no vocabulary to use in talking about these
ideas—either to other teachers or to students. And, after all, our major mission as teachers is to transmit the knowledge that we acquire to others.

**Recommendations for Further Studies**

This research project has led me to think about some interesting possibilities for further studies in the area of critical learning and the high school dramatic arts curriculum. For example, the Ontario government has been giving a great deal of funding and attention in recent months to teen mental health issues, and I have seen a steady rise in students dealing with these issues over the past couple of years. The reported increase in numbers could be due to more media attention, the slow de-stigmatization of the problem, greater targeting of resources to deal with issues of this nature, or greater momentum in the problem itself. Regardless of the reasons, more focus needs to be put on creating awareness of mental health concerns. As discussed in this thesis, the dramatic arts are well positioned to explore difficult issues. Therefore, an interesting study could be to look at implementing the critical learning strategies, identified in this study, with a group of students. Through creating a devised theatre piece on the topic of teen mental health, the students could learn more about this societal issue in its many complexities, better understand and empathize with those who are coping with mental health issues, and share their acquired knowledge and understanding with others. Another possibility along the same lines would be to approach the Center for Mental Health in Toronto (CAMH) and propose a partnership in working with one of their youth groups. This field work could provide a basis for a research project.

A second possible extension of this research project could involve looking at the impact of social support systems such as those identified in my literature review (family, community, and school administration) on career choices of dramatic arts students. One classroom could be
situated in a school that focuses on social justice issues (e.g., City View Public School, which is with the TDSB); the other school could be an inner city public school without a specific focus on social justice. Students from both environments would be surveyed at the end of their high school careers as to their choice of higher level studies or jobs and whether they have integrated any social justice focus into these life choices. The students surveyed in the social justice school would not be students of the dramatic arts. The students surveyed in the school with a more general focus would come from the dramatic arts program. The surveys could also look at planned volunteer activities or other indicators of commitment to social justice issues.

On the surface, it would appear that students in social justice schools would have a distinct advantage over dramatic arts students in other programs when it comes to social support systems. Parents have to make a request for their children to attend social justice schools; thus, they would have a greater than average interest in such issues. The children would probably be exposed to discussions of these issues in their home, as well as their schools. Within the schools themselves, the teachers and administrators would be promoting social justice issues throughout the curriculum. They would also, in all likelihood, be partnering with non-profit, activist, and other community groups to raise awareness and educate their students on a wide range of concerns. Therefore, the students would have greater exposure than dramatic arts students in schools without a social justice focus. Thus, one would expect the social justice students to be much more likely to choose university and college programs, jobs, and volunteer activities with a social justice focus. If no significant differences emerge, however, it could speak to (1) the failure of the social justice schools to achieve their objectives, (2) the success of dramatic arts programs with fewer resources and more limited time to give to critical studies, or (3) the interest of some dramatic arts students in pursuing an acting career that is focused more on entertainment
than social issues. The study would have to be designed to identify which of the cases applied to the findings.

A third possibility for further study would be to look at the impact of educational environments and support systems (administrative or otherwise) on teachers. In this project, I would bring together a community of teachers, who then engage in the co-creation of a piece of theatre based on restrictions and barriers they have personally experienced within educational settings. This production would be designed to make use of the critical learning strategies identified in my thesis, especially lived experience. I am presently involved in a project with a dance company, where two other storytellers and I will recount our experiences with death and dying. The dancers will be “playing back” our stories through movement and dance. I envision that a research project on oppressive practices within educational settings could also marry critical learning strategies with drama/dance therapy.

**Concluding Comments**

Many obstacles will present themselves when we attempt to embed critical pedagogy in the classroom, but it is vital that we continue the effort. For inspiration, we can look to Freire (1970), who states, “The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice” (p. 126). In this way, we can begin the process of addressing deep-rooted issues of oppression and power. Freire goes further to explain that the task of a true leader is not to bring salvation to those who are oppressed, but to empower them by bringing to them awareness of their present situation.

Critical learning strategies allow an opportunity for our students to acquire knowledge and a wider perspective on the world that will enable them to contribute positively and equitably
to society—to become cosmopolitans who take pride in their individual histories and cultures at the same time they are accepting of those with different histories and cultures.

In concluding this thesis, I would like to quote Robert Kennedy, former Attorney General of the United States and brother of former U.S. President John Kennedy. In researching this paper, I ran across a quotation that is inscribed on the tombstone of Robert Kennedy (former Attorney General of the U.S. and brother of U.S. President John Kennedy). The quotation, which comes from one of Kennedy’s speeches, says: “It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.” I have written this thesis in the hope that I can contribute one such tiny ripple to the currents of change.

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Appendix A

Walk a Day in My Shoes:

Lesson Plans for Understanding Homelessness through Drama

Context

This unit takes students on a journey towards understanding an issue that affects Canadians on a daily basis. Through both process drama and performance, students are given the opportunity to put themselves in someone else’s shoes. How better to develop empathy than to live that experience! Drama has a powerful ability to do just that.

This unit will challenge preconceived notions, educate and inspire students to take a stand. This unit will also give the students an opportunity to create their own awareness pieces; they can then bring these pieces out to the community in order to create a ripple effect. It is imperative that students be given the opportunity to create meaningful work; homelessness is a topic that needs to be explored and allows such an opportunity.

Summary

Working with images, texts, scenarios, and personal association, students will improvise, prepare and create an important body of work around an issue that has been unaddressed for too long. The culminating task in this unit allows for a performance opportunity. The culminating performance could be developed into a full show, or it could simply culminate in an in class performance.

Curriculum Expectations

I have not identified curriculum expectations in this unit as it is meant to cater to multiple grades and regions across Canada.

Getting Ready to Teach Homelessness

This curriculum unit has been designed for high school drama teachers, but the exercises can easily be modified for use in middle schools. The lessons can accommodate multiple grades and curriculum expectations.

Unit Guiding Questions

What does it mean to be homeless?
Who is affected by homelessness?
Who is most affected by homelessness?
What are the causes of homelessness?
What are some of the misconceptions about homeless people?
Why should we be concerned about homelessness?
What, if any, are the solutions to ending homelessness?
What are some of the challenges faced by people who are homeless?

**Terminology**

Homelessness
Poverty
Oppression
Tableau
Writing in Role
Cause and Effect
Empathy
Couch Surfing
Unemployment
Minimum Wage
Poverty Line
Stereotypes

**Lesson Plan Title:** *Relocation- Lesson 1*

**Theme and General Goals:**

Introduction to unit. Introduction to social issue: homelessness. Students will explore what “home” means to them, what defines their personal space, and what it would mean to have that space taken away. This introductory lesson will serve as a hook to pull students into the topic through in-role dramatization.

**Readiness**

Intro: Have students bring in at least 5-10 personal items from their home/bedroom. Inform students that the items they bring should represent what “home” means to them. The items should hold significance for them, whether it is a blanket that represents warmth or a framed picture of their first pet. Items should not hold much monetary value. Things such as combs, pictures, or their favorite pair of socks or toothbrush would be best. (This will ensure that students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds will not feel uncomfortable.) Tell students that they will be recreating their bedroom (can be another room in their house). To ensure that they bring the requested items to class, let students know that they will be asked to create a scene within this space.

**Minds On**

20 min. > Whole Class/ Pairs

- Put on some background music (instrumental).
- Have students pair up and create a combined “home” space.
· Tell students they can use chairs, desks, drama blocks, and anything else they can find in the space.
· Tell students they have 15 minutes to create their space, instruct them to make it as detailed as possible and to use their imagination in creating it.
· Inform them that they may need to explain their choices (this will create discussion between the two students and attachment to the choices they make).
· When the students are finished creating their spaces, instruct them that upon your signal (beat of drum/ or whistle), you will need them to freeze in place and follow the next instructions precisely.
· Give a signal and tell the students that you will count down from five, they will have five seconds to take everything they can and relocate to another space in the room. It must be as far as possible from the original location.
· They can only make one trip, and thus must take only what they can grab in one trip.
· Begin countdown.
· Once the five seconds are up, have students freeze.
· Instruct students to stay frozen.
· They are to remain silent.
    Tell the students that you will walk around the space and, when tapped on the shoulder, they are to say one word that describes something they were feeling as they were asked to dismantle their space and relocate without warning or time.

10 min > Whole Class
· Have students come together and sit in a circle.
· Ask students what this scenario may resemble in the world around them.
· Discuss with class what they think it may feel like to be evicted from your home, or even a space that you do not own but have occupied.

20 min > Small Cooperative Groups
· Have students go into groups of 3-4.
· Have them brainstorm in their groups several different reasons why someone might leave their place of shelter.
· For ELL students or students with special needs, you may want to write several on board (example: losing one’s job, police officer moving someone from park due to neighborhood complaints, no room left in shelter).
· Have students create at least three tableaux (frozen pictures), using their bodies as people and/or objects that depict the three scenarios.
· Inform students that they will have 20 minutes to prepare their tableaux.

15 min > Small Cooperative Groups/ Whole Class
· One at a time, students will present their tableaux – other groups will try to decipher what they believe is happening in the others’ images.

10 min > Whole Class
Have class discuss, then gather their belongings.
Assign the journal entry.
Hand out a Post-it to each student.
Tell the students to write one question that they have about homelessness on Post-it.
Ask the students to stick Post-it on Bristol board as they exit the classroom.
Gather all these questions and type them onto a single sheet, leaving space for answers underneath.
Next class, you should hand question sheets out and inform students that they will need to research and find the answer to their individual questions.
Inform students that you will choose 3 students randomly per day to post their answers.
Tell the students that they are to use the www.homelesshub.ca as their main source for research.

Accommodations:

Scenarios displayed on chart paper or board. Journal Prompt: What surprised you most about today’s drama class? Discuss feelings that you experienced during lesson. What do you know about “Homelessness”? What would you want to know about it?

Required Materials:
- 5-10 personal objects brought from home
- Chairs, blocks, desks, and props found in drama room (or classroom)
- Drum/whistle
- Music/ cd player
- Post-its
- Bristol board
- Tape

Homework:

Have students write a journal entry reflecting on the day’s drama lesson. Prompt: How did it feel to abandon your created space? How did your group go about creating your tableaux? What did you notice about other groups tableaux? What was the most challenging aspect of the drama work today?

Assessment for Learning: Discussion, Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Exit Cards, Journal

Assessment as Learning: Discussion/Reflection

Lesson Plan Title: Image Based Theatre- Lesson 2
Theme and General Goals:

The purpose of this lesson is for students to create scenes using images as prompts. These images and scenes will be an opportunity to open dialogue around the reasons why homelessness exists and how it affects all involved.

Readiness

Part 1

- Place images (Appendix 1) face up on the floor, ensuring that they are spaced apart.
- Dim lights (if possible) and put on some background music.

Minds On

10 min > Whole Class

- Instruct the students to walk about the room, examining all the photographs carefully.
- Once students have explored all the images, tell them to choose one image that speaks most to them or that they are most curious about.
- Tell the students to stand in front of the image that they have chosen.
- Try to ensure that there are at least a few students at each image.
- Instruct students that they have 5 minutes to sit in a circle with image. Students must pass image around circle, and one at a time, tell group what the image reminds them of. Does it conjure a memory from their own experience or remind them or something they have seen?

20 min > Small Groups

- Tell the students that they are to create a sequence of three tableaux (frozen images using their bodies as people and/or objects) in their groups. The image should inspire a scene; the scene will be represented by the three frozen images: a beginning, middle, and an ending.
- The scene needs to be around the issue of homelessness.
- Students must establish the (5 W’s) Who, What, When, Where, and Why of the scene before creating the tableaux.
- Tell the students that they will have 15 minutes to prepare their tableaux.
- Students must rehearse tableaux in order to ensure smooth transitions.
- Tableaux should be done in silence (background music will enhance dramatic effect).
- The following is an example of a three-image scene based on a group’s photo: Image: Exterior of a school. Who: Teen, Mother, and Principal, What: Parent trying to register their child for school, When: September, Where: Principal’s office, Why (conflict): Teen and mother do not have an address, which is a requirement for school
enrollment.

10 min > Whole Class/ Small Groups

- When the time is up, inform students of order they will be presenting in front of the class.
- Students are to perform one after the other. Inform students to be ready to begin, as soon as the previous group does their last tableau.

Part 2- Now that students have created a shell, instruct them to return to their groups to flesh out their scene. They are now to incorporate dialogue. It is important that the scene begins with the first position that was taken in their first tableau. The scene should also end with the last image created. Though it is important that the students explore solutions to issues such as these, they should be encouraged to portray the situation with honesty. Scenes should not have “magical” endings. In the case of the example, the principal should not “invite the mother and child to move into his second apartment, conveniently free at the moment.” Ideally, the students will be developing empathy for the character in the scene, rather than trying to resolve big issues.

- The students should be given the remainder of the period to work on their scene.
- They should perform next period.
- When all groups have performed, there should be a class discussion around scenes and issues explored within the scenes.

Accommodations:

Mixed groups. The sample scenario could be given to a group if struggling.

Required Materials:

Images (see Lesson 2 Appendix) Journals to write their 5 W’s Music player

Homework:

Journal: Reflect on what you learned through creating this scene. What did you learn about yourself? What did you discover about your character?
As an alternative, students can draw a picture or write a poem to address homework questions.

Assessment for Learning: Discussion, Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Journal or Picture

Assessment as Learning: Discussion/Reflection

Assessment of Learning: Checklist
Lesson Plan Title: *Feeling Lost - Lesson 3*

Theme and General Goals:

In this lesson students will take an experience from their own life and apply the feelings they had at that time, in order to empathize with people who have no home. This task will contribute to their culminating task, when they will be asked to create a scene in character.

Readiness

Intro 5 min > Whole Class

Have 3 or 4 students post the answers to their Post-It note question while other students copy onto their lesson sheet (see lesson 1).

20 min

- Hand out worksheets.
- Have students fill them out.
- On the top portion of sheet, they are to write whatever comes to mind; they must simply complete the sentences.
- On the bottom portion of sheet, students must recall an experience in their own life where they felt homesick.
- Have them describe it in as much detail as possible, using the lines provided.

Minds On

Part 1-20 min > Whole Class/ Small Groups

- Have the students walk around the space.
- There should be some quiet reflective music on in the background.
- Tell the students to focus on themselves and at the beat of the drum, to freeze.
- Once frozen, ask the students to continue walking, while reading aloud their completed sentences.
- Freeze- and instruct students that you will walk around and, when you tap one of them on the shoulder, they should say a sentence of their choosing aloud.
- At times you may want to tap the same student more than one time in a row; this will create an interesting and dramatic effect.
- On third freeze, instruct students to join three or four other students who are closest to them.
- In those groups, students will have five minutes to create a series a five tableaux, one for each of the lines that individuals just read aloud.
- After students have prepared, have them present one after the other. They should have 4 lines and four tableaux if their group consists of four people.

Part 2- 30 min > Small Group
In those same groups, students are to sit in a circle and one at a time, read their stories from their worksheets to one another.

- Students must now choose one story per group.
- They will dramatize this story through the use of choral chanting and tableau.
- Encourage the students to say the lines in different ways, different levels of volume, with a narrator at times, stretching the words, and with added sound effects.
- What should be stressed is that there is variety, in order to make it more interesting.
- Inform students that there need not be a different tableau for every line, but rather a change at different significant moments in the story.
- Give students the rest of the period to prepare.
- Tell students that they are to present their piece next period.
- They are to find a piece of instrumental music that suits the piece.
- They will be performing with this piece of music.

Accommodations:

Mixed groupings Students can write their personal story point form, rather than in a paragraph format

Required Materials:

CD player, music, worksheets, drum

Homework:

Students are to reflect on the lesson in their journals Journal prompt: How might your experience compare to that of someone who is permanently without a home? Reflect.

Assessment for Learning: Discussion, Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Journal, Worksheet

Assessment as Learning: Discussion/Reflection, Worksheet

Lesson Plan Title: News Story Theatre – Lesson 4

Theme and General Goals:

In this lesson, students will create dramatic pieces based on an actual news story. Students will be expected to fill in the missing blanks and create the information that is not said in the news story. Students are to do “in role” enactments, as well as scene creation.

Readiness
Intro 5 min > Whole Class
Have 3 students post their findings to their Post-It Note research questions (see lesson 1)

Minds On

Part 1: 25 min > Whole Class

- Have the students sit down and close their eyes.
- Read aloud the attached news story.
- Ask the students what the facts of this story are (what do we know for sure).
- Write the facts on the board as they come up with them.
- Ask students what they don’t know, but would like to know, such as: Why did the boy steal the games? What was he planning to do with them? Why was he kicked out of his home?
- List these questions on the other side of the board.
- Ask students who they think might know the answers to some of these questions (apart from the boy himself). List their findings.
- Ask for 5 or 6 volunteers who will play these people.
- Take the volunteer students aside and assign them 5 of the characters that are listed on the board.
- Possible characters may include: the arresting police officer, the store owner, the boy’s social worker, his best friend, his teacher, or his sibling.
- Once characters are assigned, inform the volunteers that they are to come into the classroom and sit on the chairs that are placed in front of the class.
- Inform the volunteers that the students will ask them questions and while you want them to reveal to them what your character knows about the situation, they should not reveal everything right away, but rather it should be a gradual discovery.
- Have the students come back into class and sit down.
- Introduce the characters to the class and tell them that they are here to bring light to the situation with the boy.
- Perhaps you can start off the questioning by asking one of the actors what the boy’s name (fictional) is.

Part 2 - Short scene 40 mins > Small Groups

- Have students go into small groups (3-4).
- Ask the students to now take the knowledge they have acquired about the boy’s situation and create a short scene that happened immediately before the incident in the store.
- The scene could address why the boy was stealing, could involve him leaving home, or perhaps a struggle he had while trying to get through school.
- The goal of the scene is that it should relate directly to why the boy found himself in this situation in the first place.
- The students should acquire an understanding of how specific circumstances lead to
specific outcomes.
· Have students perform their scenes in front of the class.

Accommodations:

If necessary, students may be given scene suggestions
Mixed groupings

Required Materials:

News story Journals

Homework:

Have students find on the net a news story that relates to homeless youth Tell them to print it and keep it in their journals since they will need it for their culminating task.

Assessment for Learning: Discussion, Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Journal

Assessment as Learning: Discussion/Reflection

Lesson Plan Title: Writing in Role - Lesson 5

Theme and General Goals:

In this lesson, students will put themselves in the shoes of a character who is facing challenging situations due to homelessness. Student will explore the issue through means of writing in role.

Readiness

Intro 5 mins > Whole Class

· Choose three students to post the answers to their Post-It Note questions
· Have other students copy answers
· Discuss (see lesson 1)

Minds On

70 mins > Individual

· Read through the handout with students.
· Students are to choose one scenario from the handout.
· Students are to write a letter in the voice of that character.
· Students may use one of the topic prompts, or in the case of students who are more advanced, they may formulate their own.
· Assign length based on grade and skill level.
· Hand out the checklist and scenarios sheet for the assignment.
· The students should refer to checklist for “Writing in Role” expectations.
· Show the students an exemplar of level 4 writing in role as well as level 1 or 2, in order for them to understand the difference between in depth character analysis and writing that is just skimming the surface.
· These two examples could be shown on an overhead or alternatively photocopied and passed out to students in groups.
· Ask the students to identify the differences in the two letters.

Accommodations:

Students will be given prompts for writing topics. Students may type on computer rather than handwriting in journal. Class time may be used for this assignment.

Required Materials:

Journals, pen or pencil, handouts

Homework:

This should be finished as homework for next lesson. Tell students that they will need it completed in order to do next step.

Assessment for Learning: Discussion, Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Journal or Picture

Assessment as Learning: Discussion/Reflection, Peer Feedback

Assessment of Learning: Checklist

Lesson Plan Title: Fairy Tales for Change- Lesson 6

Theme and General Goals:

In this lesson, students will use well known fairy tales as a means of exploring homelessness.

Step By Step Procedures:

Readiness
5 mins > Whole Class

- Choose three students to post the answers to their Post-It Note questions.
- Have the other students copy answers the answers.
- Discuss. (see lesson 1.)
- Put the students into groups of 4-5 people. Hand each group a piece of chart paper and some markers Ask students to brainstorm all the fairy tales they know. Have students choose a group representative to read their list aloud. Tell students to add any to their sheet that they did not have themselves.

Minds On > Small Group

50 mins

- Tell the students that they are to choose one of those fairy tales and incorporate homelessness into the story.
- Read students the example that is on the handout.
- Tell the students that the scene should have a clear beginning, middle, end, and a conflict/climax.
- If needed, students may be given a topic (see handout).
- Students are to write a script that will need to be memorized and handed in.
- Students will need a few periods to work on this assignment.
- Hand out the checklist.

Accommodations:

Scenes may be given to students (see handout) Mixed level groupings

Required Materials:

Handouts: Chart paper markers tape

Homework:

Type script to hand in. Journal prompt: What did I learn through this assignment? What did my group do particularly well? What might I change if I were to do it again? How might our scene relate to the real world?

Assessment for Learning: Brainstorm: Discussion, Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Journal

Assessment as Learning: Discussion/Reflection
Lesson Plan Title: Short Prepared Improvisation Scene - Lesson 7

Theme and General Goals:

In this lesson students will go into groups of three and choose one of the scenarios from last lesson. Students are to flesh out this scenario creating a scene. Students may choose to create the scene that is given, or to use it merely as a prompt. If used as a prompt, students may choose to portray this character by displaying a significant moment in his or her life, a moment that led them to this point.

Readiness

5 mins > Whole Class

- Choose three students to post the answers to their Post-it Note questions.
- Have the other students copy the answers.
- Discuss (see lesson 1).

Minds On > Whole Class

Warm-up - Hours of The Day

15 mins

- Put on instrumental music in the background to create mood.
- Tell the students to find a spot in the room and to lie down with their eyes closed.
- If the room does not permit, students may be seated comfortably in a chair with their eyes closed.
- Now tell the students to think back to their in role writing task they completed in their journals.
- Guide students through an abandon of their own personas, and ask them to imagine they are now the character that they wrote about.
- Tell the students that you will walk them through that character’s day, and on any given hour, they are to perform the actions that that character would perform at that time of day.
- Start at 5:00 AM, tell students it’s 5:00 AM and asking them where their character would be, what would the character be doing? Are they still sleeping? If so, where Are they warm? If not show us how it would feel not to be warm. Then call out 6:00 AM and so on. At 9:00 AM, are they eating breakfast? Are they at school? If not, where are they?
- Take the students through a cycle of an entire 24 hours.
- It is important that this activity be done without interacting with the other students around them.
- This activity will enable students to walk through an entire day in someone else’s shoes and allow them to understand the daily challenges other people face.
- When finished, take a few minutes to discuss their experience.

Part 1:

15 mins > Small Group

- Put the students into groups of 3.
- Ask the students to take out the “Writing in Role” handouts that were given to them the previous day.
- Tell the students to choose one of the scenarios, it may be the same one they used to write their letter, or it may be a new one that they wish to explore.
- The groups must now create a scene, inspired by their chosen scenario.
- The scene must have a clear beginning, middle and end.
- The scene may not have a magical outcome and must be explored in a sincere and honest manner.
- Tell the students that their scene needs to be at least 4 minutes in length.
- Tell the students that in the planning stage, they must establish the 5 W’s.
- Have them write these 5 W’s in their journals. Students will have fifteen minutes to create their scene.
- Explain to students that while they have fifteen minutes to prepare the general structure, they may improvise the scene as well.

30 mins > Whole Class

- Have groups perform one at a time.
- Allow feedback and discussion.

25 mins > Whole Class

- Ask the students if they know the meaning of “Hot Seating”.
- Inform them that “Hot Seating” is when you are put on the spot and asked questions.
- Ask for a volunteer to come to the front of class and sit in the “Hot Seat”.
- Tell the students that as soon as they sit down, they are to become the character from the scene they just performed (the main character).
- Ask the students questions pertaining to their character and have them answer on the spot.
- Inform the students that there are no wrong answers.
- If a student is playing the character that cannot go to prom, you may want to ask questions such as “Why? “How does that make you feel?” “How long have you had to live in a motel?” “What is your best memory from your past?”
· Ask several questions first so that students can get a sense of what type of questions to ask and then allow students in class to ask questions as well.
· Inform the students that this exercise allows them to learn more about their characters.
· Once this student has explored his or her character, have students get into pairs and “hot seat” one another.

Accommodations:

· Establish mixed groups.
· Post some suggested questions on the board such as:
  What is your name?
  How old are you?
  How long have you been homeless?
  How does this make you feel?
  What obstacles do you face on a daily basis?
  Do you have many friends?
  What do you wish to become later in life?

Required Materials:

Journals Handout CD player Music

Homework:


Assessment for Learning: Discussion, Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Journal

Assessment as Learning: Discussion/Reflection

Lesson Plan Title: Homelessness, a Dramatic Anthology- Lesson 8- culminating task

Theme and General Goals:

In this culminating task, students will use techniques learned throughout the unit, in order to explore the social issue of homelessness. They will create a piece that will educate on the issues surrounding homelessness.

Readiness

Intro 5 mins
Choose three students to post the answers to their post-it note questions.
Have the other students copy the answers.
Discuss (see lesson 1)

Minds On

Several periods > Small Group

- Give the students the handout explaining the assignment.
- Put students into groups of 4 to 5.
- Students will create a dramatic montage using various methods learned throughout the unit.
- Students must use at least four methods learned throughout the unit (tableau, monologue, and short scenes based on news articles and images).
- Students will use the sources provided as well as find some of their own sources.
- Students will create a piece that is ten minutes in length.
- This dramatic anthology will be the culminating task of the unit.
- The anthology could also be performed for audiences (school, feeder schools, or in the community) in order to educate about homelessness.
- Students will need several periods to work on putting this dramatic piece together.
- Encourage students to use music and lighting (if possible).
- Students should write an outline of their performance in their journals and use this outline as a launching point
- Students should use any available sets, props, or costume pieces (this is not essential however).

Accommodations:

Mixed groupings Students may use some of written examples given out throughout the unit For more advanced students, this piece could be a full length show that is created over the span of a few weeks

Required Materials:

All material accumulated through the unit: handouts, music, CD player, props, set pieces (if available)

Homework:

Journal: Reflect on this unit. What have you learned? Did you have any assumptions about homelessness that were challenged through this process? How did expressing yourself through dramatic means increase your awareness of the issue being explored?
Culminating Task

In groups of 4 to 5, students will create a dramatic montage using techniques explored throughout this unit. The montage will be related to homelessness. You will use your journal, “In Role Writing,” newspaper articles, images, and any other information that you have been given or found throughout this unit. Your piece may be a series of vignettes, or it may be one continuous piece that incorporates the different techniques. For example, you may create a ten minute play which contains monologues and actors who create the backdrop of various scenes by using their bodies as tableaux. You may choose to write a monologue based on your “In Role Writing” character, or you may base the monologue on one of the other scenarios that you have not explored. In your montage/dramatic piece, you must include at least four of the following dramatic forms:

- Tableaux
- Monologue
- Prepared scene based on a photo
- Scene based on a news article
- Scene based on a fairy tale, fable or legend

Assessment for Learning: Discussion, Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Journal

Assessment as Learning: Discussion/Reflection, Peer Feedback

Assessment of Learning: Checklist
Appendix B

Dramatic Arts: Clowning for Change

Unit Overview

Context
This unit, designed for grade 9 classes in Dramatic Arts, explores the history of clowning, clowning techniques, and social justice through clowning. Students explore the role of the role of the clown in various cultures past and present. Through costume making, clowning technique and character building exercises, students will work towards finding and developing their own personal clown. Students will then discover the power of the clown and how this art form can affect social change. Status exercises, forum theatre and role play will bring students towards a culminating scene that will fuse clown and social justice.

Summary
Students study the history of clowning, as well as its function in society. Through improvisation, costume design and creation, forum theatre, and scene creation, students will create and perform a clown scene that deals with issues of power and oppression.

Unit Guiding Questions

What was the role of the clown in past times?
Who were some famous clowns?
Who are some modern day clowns?
What are the principles of clowning?
How do I find my personal clown?
How can I apply the principles of clowning?
How can costume inform character?
What purpose does the clown play in society past and present?
How does clown relate to issues of status and power?
How can clowning effect social change?
Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment for Learning
Lesson 1: Discussion, Venn, Observation, Active Participation, Exit Cards
Lesson 2: Discussion, Student Planning Worksheet, Teacher Circulation, Active Participation
Lesson 3: Teacher Observation, Active Participation, Discussion
Lesson 4: Active Participation, Discussion, Self and Peer Evaluation/Journal

Assessment as Learning
Lesson 1: Venn Diagram
Lesson 2: Discussion/Reflecting
Lesson 3: Peer Assessment
Lesson 4: Discussion/Reflection

Assessment of Learning
Lesson 1: Journal Assignment, Rubric
Lesson 2: Checklist, Rubric, Journal
Lesson 3: Discussion/Reflection
Lesson 4: Assignment/Checklist, Journal/Rubric, Teacher Observation

Lessons

Lesson 1 - The History of Clowning
Students explore clowning in various cultures past and present, as well as the clown’s role in society. Students learn about some of the most notable clowns. Exploration of clown is done through tableau, analysis of video clips, soundscape, worksheets, and discussion. At the end of the lesson, students will present soundscapes and tableaux to the class.

Lesson 2 - Finding Your Inner Clown Through Costume
Students design and build a clown hat based on the characteristics of their personal clown. Students explore how costume can inform character by applying their chosen characteristics to the design and construction of their hat. Students present their hat to the class through both an oral presentation and a performance.

Lesson 3 - The Principles of Clowning
Students are taught the principles of clowning and implement them through various performance exercises. Students learn about status and issues of power through clowning. Students delve deeper into the development of their personal clown.

Lesson 4 - Forum Theatre: Social Justice Through Clowning
Students role play in clown, exploring status and power. Forum Theatre and the master servant relationship will be tackled in this lesson. As a culminating assignment, students will pair up and
choose from a list of possible scenarios. Students are to create a clown scene that addresses issues of social class and status while applying all of the principles of clowning.

End Lesson Overview

Lesson 1 - Clowning: Past and Present

Lesson Overview

Estimated Time: 75 minutes (1 period)

Drama/ADA101/Grade 9/Open: This lesson introduces students to the history of clowns and explores the role of the clown in various cultures. Students are given the opportunity to identify clowns in present day culture. Students are also given the opportunity to see clown as an agent of social change.

Curriculum Expectations

Drama

Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing

B2.1. Connections Beyond the Classroom

- Identify and explain the various purposes that drama serves or has served in diverse communities and cultures from the past to the present (e.g., to provide entertainment; to highlight or interpret religious or ethical beliefs, as in ancient Greece or in Aboriginal cultures; to celebrate or commemorate key traditions or historical events of a culture or country).

C2.1 Contexts and Influences

A. Describe the origins and development of various drama forms, elements, conventions, and techniques.

C2.2

- Describe ways in which contemporary dramas show the influence of social trends.

Learning Goals

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
· Examine their preconceptions of clowning and the function it serves in society
· Identify the various types of clowns in different cultures, past and present.
· Identify clowns in present popular culture.
· Understand the role of the clown in various cultures and geographical locations.
· Use tableaux to represent different clowns
· Create a soundscape to represent the four historical types of clown

**Instructional Components and Context**

**Readiness**

Students should have an understanding of how to create a tableau using levels, facial expression, point of focus, and smooth transitions. Ask students to define *tableau* and to list the most important elements in creating an interesting tableau. Students should have the ability to work in groups. Students should have an understanding of how to create a soundscape ([http://dramaresource.com/strategies/soundscape](http://dramaresource.com/strategies/soundscape)). Students can connect their prior knowledge of clowns to the information they will explore in this lesson.

Prepare for the exercise by completing the following tasks. Project an image of a clown on the board. Alternatively, you may choose to print an image and post on the board. Ideally the clown image you display should be a picture of a stereotypical birthday clown. Print the 4 attached BLM’s. Place the four BLM’s in four different locations in the classroom. Place an envelope at station one with the answer sheet to the clown handout. Cue up the following video links at station #3 (video or computer station). Also place chart paper and markers at station #3. Place any instruments or objects you may have at station #4

**Terminology**

Yu Sze
Clown
Jester
Trickster
Nanabush
Harlequin
Fool
Buffoon
Bouffon
Wesackechak
Auguste
Master
Servant
Zanni
Commedia Dell’ arte
Cirque Du Soleil
Coyote

**Materials**
BLM#1 - Clowns handout
Chart paper and markers
Video projector or computer
Objects for soundscape (pots, spoons, instruments)
Envelope
Pens or pencils

**Lesson Plan**

**Minds On**

**Small Group > Venn Diagram**
Project an image of a clown on the board. Ask students to go to the board and to write a word that comes to mind when they see the image.

- Ask students to form groups of 3 to create and complete a Venn diagram.
- Distribute a piece of chart paper to each group.
- Instruct students in each of the groups to choose one person to scribe, a second person to present his or her ideas to the class, and a third person to create a colourful heading for the Venn diagram.
- Ask students to draw two overlapping circles on their chart paper.
- Above the left circle, students are to write *Clowns*; and above the circle on the right, *Stand-Up Comedians*.
- Give students five minutes to fill in their Venn diagram by following the next two steps.
- First, ask the students to write the similarities between the clowns and stand-up comedians in the overlapping center of the diagram.
- Second, ask the students to write all the things that make clowns different from stand-up comedians in the parts of the Venn diagram labeled *Clowns* or *Stand-Up Comedians*.
- Now, ask students to write at least two questions they have about clowns. What do
they not know about clowns and clowning?

When finished, students share four or five of their ideas with the larger group.

**Connections**

**Connections:**

**Differentiation:** Allow students to choose their own group roles. Give students the option of representing their ideas through images, single words, through song, or verbally.

**Assessment as learning:** Students will assess their knowledge through the use of the Venn Diagram

**Assessment for Learning:** The teacher will use the discussion to determine the initial knowledge levels of the students. Reviewing the work that appears in the Venn diagram will allow the instructor to determine the gaps in knowledge. Students will use the Venn diagram and discussion to access prior knowledge on clowns and clowning.

**Action!**

**Small Group> 4 Station Rotation**

Divide students into four groups. Give students approximately 15 minutes at each station. Blow a whistle or beat a drum to indicate times for station changes. Some ideas for video links follow:

Charlie Chaplin- The Lion’s Cage:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79i84xYelZI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79i84xYelZI)

Steve Urkel- Modern TV Clown 1990’s

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTeOcVelYi0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTeOcVelYi0)

Mr. Bean- Modern Day Clown:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh_g-ZZ6WA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh_g-ZZ6WA)

Patch Adams Trailer- Clown Therapy:
Flashmob- Escape and Celebrate:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZqGA11dvYE

“Rize” Documentary- The Ability to Empower and Uplift:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rct5fLmilks&feature=youtu.be

At station 1, the students should match terms with their definitions (see BLM #1). Students should spend 10 minutes filling in the term sheet and 5 minutes correcting their sheets with the answer sheet in the envelope.

At station 2, the students should create tableaus using four terms found in station 1. Write the list of terms found in station 1 on a large piece of chart paper and place at station #2. If students begin the process at station #2, they should create the tableaus based on their interpretations of the word since they will not yet have learned the actual definitions.

At station #3, the students should watch You Tube clips that portray various types of clowning. Some of these clips show clowning as a tool for change. Ask students to record their interpretations of these clips in two columns with the following headings:

Column 1: What makes these characters/actors into clowns?

Column 2: What are some of the purposes of clowning?

At station #4, students should read a chart depicting characteristics of the four principal types of clowns. Students must then create a soundscape/soundtrack representing each type of clown. You will want to have a brief discussion of the terms hobo, bum, and tramp--one of the four kinds of clowns. Some guiding questions might be “Why was this clown referred to as a “hobo”? Why was this clown dressed in tattered clothing?” “What was the social/financial context that gave rise to this kind of clown?” “How and why might this term be offensive in today’s society”?

Connections
Connections: Students will be making connections between their clown’s inner characteristics and costume design choices.

Description: In this activity, you will ask students to choose a different group leader for each of the four stations. If groups are large (6-8 students), you can ask the groups to choose two leaders per station in order to ensure that each student has an opportunity to take the role of group leader. Prior to starting the rotation, you should give a brief description of each of the four stations and explain how the rotation will work. Then you ask group leaders to choose a beginning station that best suits their learning styles.

Assessment for Learning: Circulate during four corners activity and assess discussions and rehearsals of tableaux and soundscapes. Assess information given in initial brainstorming activity and Venn diagram. Collect exit post its at the end of class.

Assessment of learning: See tableau assessment tool at:

Consolidation

Individual > Exit Cards
Hand out a post it note to each student. Then write the following sentences on the white board:
“Something interesting that I learned about clowns today was that ____________ ”. “One thing I learned today that has changed my perceptions about clowning is ____________.” “One thing I would like to know more about is ____________.”. Ask students to take a minute to finish the sentences and to post it on the board on the way out of class. Advise the students that they will share their tableaux and soundscapes with the whole group at the next class period. If time is limited, students could just share “highlights.”

Connections

Connections: Give the students 15 minutes at the start of the next period to practice their tableaux and soundscapes before presenting to the class. Ask students to bring in an old hat of any kind. Some possibilities are: a birthday hat, a baseball hat, a party hat, a beanie, a winter hat, a chef hat, or anything else they can find. Advise students that these hats will not cut, and glued and manipulated and will not be returned in the same condition. Ask students to bring in any other items that could be used to create a clown hat (springs, pom poms, fabric, yarn).

Differentiation: You may choose to allow students to state their exit sentence verbally, to write a single word that describes their findings, or to draw an image that comes to them based on what they learned about clowning.
Assessment for Learning: Teacher will determine any gaps in learning based on exit cards written by students.

End Lesson 1

Lesson 2 - Finding Your Inner Clown Through Costume

Lesson Overview

Estimated Time:

Drama/ADA1O1/Grade 9/Open: In this lesson students will learn about costume design and construction, as well as learning how design choices can inform character. Students will begin to develop their inner clown by establishing character traits linked to their childhood self.

Curriculum Expectations

Drama

Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing

A2. Elements and Conventions

· A2.2: Use a variety of conventions to develop character and shape the action in ensemble drama presentations

A3. Presentation Techniques and Technologies

· A3.3 Use a variety of technological tools to communicate or enhance specific aspects of drama works (e.g., lighting, sound, props, set, costumes)

Learning Goals

At the end of this lesson, students will understand:

· The connection between costume and character
· How to design and build a costume piece
· How to begin to develop their personal clowns
· How to create a clown based on characteristics from their childhood
· How to begin to physicalize their clown through gesture

Instructional Components and Context
**Readiness**

Ask students to bring materials to use in constructing their clown hat. Students should bring some sort of hat (e.g. baseball cap, winter hat, santa hat, birthday hat, or other) they can use as a base for constructing a clown hat. Students should also bring any other materials that could be used in building the clown hat (e.g., pompoms, fabric, buttons, pipe cleaners, or other supplies).

As homework, ask students to go to the following link: [http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/design/costume.html](http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/design/costume.html) to read about the functions of costume and costume design. If you prefer, you could begin a class session by showing the video referenced in this link, which you would follow with a discussion of the ideas.

Set up the space for the construction of the hat. Put all materials in a shared area. If using a glue gun, remind students to be careful not to burn themselves.

**Terminology**

Prop
Costume Design
Character trait

**Materials**

LCD projector or computer
Music player
Pen or Pencils
Glue
Glue gun
Needle and thread
Scissors
Fabric
Buttons
Springs
Felt
Any other costume-making materials
Clown noses
BLM#2- Costume Worksheet
BLM#3- checklist for costume piece

**Lesson Plan**
Minds On

Whole Class > Think, Pair, Share

Ask students to take two minutes to discuss the following ideas with their neighbours: Who is responsible for creating a character’s costume? What are some of the tasks that must be carried out from the time that someone requests a costume until the actor puts on the costume? What does the costume designer need to know about any character in a play in order to design a costume? How do they acquire this knowledge?

Bring the discussion back to the larger group and encourage the students to share their ideas. Play the following video clip for the class asking them to think about the questions that were just discussed:

Cirque Du Soleil Costume Design- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59hKA3bhjIY

Now take students to the following Arts Alive website and explore the section on “The Secret Life of Costumes”. Ask students to take turns reading the information on the website aloud.


Ask the class to reflect on the two videos:

What did the costume designer in the “Cirque Du Soleil” video take into account when designing the frog costumes?

Do you think she would think about the same things when designing for the clowns in the show?

What other things might she have to consider if designing for the clowns?

Connections

Connections: Advise the students that they will share their tableaux and soundscapes with the whole group at the next class period.

Differentiation: Provide students with ample time to go over the information on the arts alive website. Show visual images of costume design and costume-building techniques to those who need the visuals. If available, book a computer lab and let the students explore the website on their own.
**Assessment as Learning:** During the whole class discussion, students will assess their knowledge of costume making and design.

**Assessment for Learning:** The teacher assesses the depth of the students knowledge of costume design and building through the whole class discussion.

**Action!**

**Whole Class> Fictional Clown Costume Creation**

Distribute costume worksheet to students (BLM# 2). Go over the handout with students in detail. When going over handout, create an example with students on the whiteboard. Ask class to come up with four fictional personal clown characteristics. Write these characteristics on the board. Now ask students to help you create a hat sketch based on the chosen characteristics. Draw the sketch on the board as the students describe it.

**Individual> Personal Clown Costume Creation**

The Clown Costume Worksheet asks students to list at least 4 personal characteristics from their childhood. These characteristics may be character traits such as loud and fast, or they might be things that were characteristic of them such as they loved mermaids or they were afraid of water. Based on their chosen characteristics, students will now create a sketch of a hat that is inspired by those traits. For example the student who loved mermaids might sketch a fish tail hat. Students should also choose a clown name that is inspired by their characteristics. Give the students 30 minutes to come up with their characteristics and their hat sketch. They should write their clown name, traits, and sketch on the worksheet and show it to you before they proceed with the construction of their hat.

Students will now begin building their hat. Inform students that their hat should be largely inspired by their hat sketch and their clown’s characteristics. Students may need 2-3 periods to complete their hat.

**Pair/Small Group> Artist Statement: Presentation of Personal Clown**

Once hats are complete, have students prepare a presentation of their clown and their clown hat. Tell students this presentation will be their artist statement. Students need to introduce their clown by presenting, clown’s name, character traits, and clown hat. Students should also
describe the journey from costume design to completion of costume. Some points they may address are:

*What were my initial ideas for my hat design?*
*How did I go about building my hat?*
*What challenges did I face in building my hat?*
*How does my hat embody my personal clown’s character traits?*

Students should prepare this artist statement on their costume worksheet in the allocated space. Inform students that they will be evaluated on their presentation using BLM #3.

**Whole Class> Red Nose Walk**

Once students have all presented their hats, ask them to put them on. Hand out a clown nose to each student. Explain to students that the clown nose is considered to be the *world’s smallest mask* and that when they have it on, they have the ability to assume a new identity; in this case their identity is their inner childhood clown. Explain to students that they should never put their nose on in front of the audience, this would break the illusion of the mask. Inform students that when they are wearing the nose, they can only communicate through gesture, sound (noises) and gibberish.

Put on some background music. Instruct students to start walking around the room. Students should focus only on themselves at this point and pretend they are alone in the room. Ask students to think about their four chosen characteristics and to come up with a physical gesture based on those characteristics. For example, the student who loves mermaids might puff out their cheeks as though they are a fish, and the student who chose *shy* might clench their hands and lower their eyes to the ground. Instruct students to keep walking with their chosen gesture. Have students amplify their gesture by asking them to exaggerate their movement based on a scale from 1-10. Have students explore this movement for ten minutes.

**Small Groups**

Students will now form groups of 3-4. Give students 5 minutes to prepare a physical presentation of their clowns and their clowns hats. Students should prepare and present this piece in clown, therefore, they can only communicate as a group using gesture, sound (noises) and gibberish. Students need to create an entrance, a group pose, and an exit.
Once students have prepared their piece, put some music on and have groups present one at a time.

**Connections**

**Connections:** Connections to costume design description on Arts Alive website. Connection to class discussion at the start of the period.

**Differentiation:** Cooperative learning. Students could design in pairs. Group costume pieces could be larger/exaggerated.

**Assessment for Learning:** Collect student costume worksheet (BLM# 2) to use as information on student’s process work. Teacher will circulate and check the costume planning worksheet before allowing the student to begin the building process.

**Assessment of learning:** Assess students on the construction and design of their hat using BLM#3. Assess students on the presentation (communication) of their design also using BLM#3.

**Consolidation**

**Individual > Journal Entry**

Homework- Students are to write a journal entry as homework.

**Prompts:** *Describe one other clown’s performance that you liked.*

*What was it about the student’s clown that inspired you?*

*What steps might you take to improve your own clown?*

**Connections**

**Connections:** Students will use this costume piece (hat) to build their clown character in the next lesson. Students will connect their learning in this lesson to the information they read on the Arts Alive website. The costume section on the Arts Alive is rich in information. A whole period could be spent exploring and doing the activities in “The Secret Life of Costumes” section.

**Description:** For the building portion of the assignment, students may partner up and help one another if they are struggling. For oral presentation of their hat, students may choose to film their presentation and show video recording to class in lieu of live presentation.
Assessment as learning: Assess journal entry by using journal rubric. A rubric can be found here:

End Lesson 2

Lesson 3 - The Principles of Clowning

Lesson Overview

Estimated Time:
Drama/ADA1O1/Grade 9/Open: In this lesson students will learn about the principles of clowning. Teacher will guide students through various improvisations and movement exercises using the principles of clowning.

Curriculum Expectations

Drama

Creating and Presenting

A1 The Creative Process
   · A1.2 select and use appropriate forms to suit specific purposes in drama works

A3 Presentation Techniques and Technologies
   · A3.1 identify and use a variety of techniques or methods for establishing a rapport between performer and audience

Learning Goals

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

· Identify the principles of clowning
· Apply to principles of clowning to their personal clown
· Physically personify their clown through movement, gesture, and role play

Instructional Components and Context
Readiness
Students need to know what status is. Students will need to review their handout describing the four types of clowns.

Terminology
Status
Principles of Clown
Wax Museum

Materials
Music
Music Player
Clown Hats
Clown Noses

Lesson Plan
Minds On

Whole Class> Review of Clowning Principles
Distribute BLM#4. Go over the handout with the students. Ensure that students know what all the terms on the handout mean. Some principles of clowning are:

· That clowns exist in the present,
· They are not concerned with the past or future are spontaneous
· Are fascinated and enthusiastic about everything
· Feel things honestly and do not hide their emotions
· Are physical and expressive
· Break the fourth wall by engaging with the audience
· Always have a purpose on stage, clowns are never there to “make people laugh” but are often humorous through their failed efforts to achieve their scene goal.

Clowning is said to be the art of failure.
· React to all situations honestly and sincerely

Whole Class> Freeze Dance
Ask the class to put on their clown noses and clown hats. Ask students to think about their clown walks and gestures they came up with last lesson. Have students begin to move around the room using their gesture.

Turn music on and tell students that one of the principles of clowning is enthusiasm and the clown’s ability to be in the present. Inform students that when you pause the music, they are to freeze. If they move, they are out. Inform students that another principle of clowning is that clowns do not censor their emotions. Begin freeze dance. Remind students that they should be playing the game as their clown with enthusiasm and uncensored emotional responses. When students are called out of the game because they move, guide their reactions by asking them questions such as “Oh dear, Splash, you moved! How does that make you feel”.

**Whole Class> Wax Museum**

Now, tell students that they will play Wax Museum.
- Ask for a volunteer to be the museum guard.
- The other students will be the wax statues.
- Students should pair up and form their statues with their partners.
- Ask students to spread out and to take a frozen position.
- Instruct the guard to walk around the museum.
- When the guard has his/her back turned, the statues should come to life but if the guard sees the statues move, they are out.
- Now, explain to students that historically clowning explores issues of status.
- Remind students of the White Face Clown and how he enjoys bossing the Auguste clown around.
- Give students a theme for their wax statues that explore status such as “King and Peasant” or “Big Boss and Employee” or “Bully and Weakling”.
- Instruct students to get back into their pairs
- Student should take the shape of the one of the two words given to them.
- Remind students that they should be playing this game as their clown and not themselves.
- Clowns are playful and spontaneous and say yes to everything, students should keep these principles in mind as they play.

When game is finished, have students take their noses off and discuss what they noticed through taking the different status shapes. For example:
What level were they on when they were a high status?
What did their clown feel when they took the shape of a lower status?

Connections
Connections: These warm up games allow students to explore the principles of clown actively. By giving themes related to status such as master/servant or boss/employee students can begin to explore clown status.

Differentiation: When students are called out in the “Wax Museum” activity, have them help come up with different status shapes.

Assessment as learning: Students are observing and assessing one another’s application of status.

Assessment for Learning: Teacher should use observation to assess students understanding of the principles they are exploring through the warm up games. Students will actively participate in exercises.

Assessment as Learning: Students will examine their understanding of status through the class discussion at the end of the warm-ups.

Action!
Whole Class > Status Role Play
Play a variety of music. Ask students to start moving around the class as their clown. Instruct students to use their clown gesture as they move and to think about their clown’s status. Instruct students to implement their clown’s status into the way they move. For example, if their clown has a low status, would they be walking with their head held high or would they lower their eyes and avoid eye contact? Ask students to notice how other students are walking and to note who they believe is a high status and who is a low status.

Remind students that clowns are fascinated by and enthusiastic about everything. Clowns see everything as though for the first time. As students are walking around the space, instruct them to identify one object in the room. This object could be a pencil, the floor, a chair, or anything they see. Ask students to go over to this object and discover it as though they are seeing it for the first time. Instruct students to ask their object to dance (this should be done non verbally or using gibberish). Students should now dance with their object. Encourage students to be creative. How
would they dance with a wall as opposed to a pencil? Remind students that clowns say yes to everything. Play a piece of music such as:

*Tango Roxanne: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ic4PQtnwJw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ic4PQtnwJw)*

Once students have danced with their object for a couple of minutes, tell students their object has told them they are leaving them forever. Encourage truthful emotional responses and remind students that clowns never censor their emotions. Give the students the following prompts:

*Your object is leaving you...beg your object not to go!*  
*How do you feel about parting with your object?*  
*Remember who your clown is- how does that affect how you interact with your object?*  
*Say farewell to your object and leave. Do you leave reluctantly? Do you leave willingly because you have seen someone else’s object? Do you not leave at all?*

If some students do not let go of their objects because their character will not part with it, ask one of the students who seem to be a lower status to go and retrieve the object from the clown. If the lower status clown is unsuccessful, ask one of the higher status clowns to do the same thing.

**Pairs > Engaging The Audience and Entrances and Exits**

Remind students that another principle of clowning is the clown’s engagement with the audience. Clowns break the fourth wall and are there for the audience. Students should bring the audience into their world, their feelings. Ask students to walk around the class once again implementing their clown statuses. Students should keep walking until they find another clown who seems to have a status on the opposing end to theirs. Students should do this non verbally and pick up cues from their peer’s body language and sounds. Once students have found a partner, instruct them to prepare an entrance and an exit in character. Students are to come on stage, connect with the audience, take three deep breaths, and exit. Remind students that their status would affect how they enter and behave on stage. Do they enter reluctantly because they are low status? Do they rush on with confidence because they are high status? Remind students to implement their clown gesture as well. Students should prepare their piece without using language. Inform students that the preparation of their piece is as telling as the actual performance of it. Remind students that while they are rehearsing this piece, they should keep in mind their statuses. Give students the following prompts:

*Who is making the decisions in the creation of your piece?*  
*How does this make you feel?*
How are you communicating your ideas?
Remember to stay in character at all times!

Choose two strong students to model the following example:

*Your clown is painfully shy and very low status and the other clown is high status, your piece might look something like this (write this example on the board or give it verbally):*

**Clown A (high status):** Clown A bounces onto the stage and rushes to be as close as possible to the audience. Clown A scans the audiences and makes eye contact with them. Clown A takes three deep breaths and looks back as though expecting someone to come. Clown A walks up stage and looks around. Clown A comes back downstage and gestures to the audience his/her impatience. Clown A communicates to the audience that Clown B is missing.

**Clown B (low status):** Clown B is peeking out from the the curtains (or block, chair, bookcase). Clown B is very scared. Clown B makes eye contact with the audience but quickly averts his/her eyes. Clown A notices clown B and stomps over to Clown B and demands that he/she comes to the front of the stage to meet audience. Clown B refuses, Clown A grabs Clown A and pulls him/her to the front. Once both clowns are in front of the audience, Clown A looks to the audience with a smug and confident air asking for their admiration and approval. Clown B looks up with reluctance but eventually keeps his/her eye contact with the audience, takes three deep breaths, smiles shyly, and quickly runs off stage. Clown A turns and runs after Clown B.

Give students 10 minutes to prepare their piece. Now, have pairs go up one at a time and present their piece. Remind students to connect with the audience at all times. Tell students that this connection should not be in the form of a wave but rather something sincere.

**Whole Class> Entrance and Exit Presentations and Feedback**

As pairs are presenting their pieces, if they are not engaging with the audience, have the audience shout out “Look at me”. After each piece, ask the audience whether or not they felt included in the piece. If they did not feel included or engaged, ask the audience to suggest ways the pair could improve their piece.

**Connections**

*Connections:* Students are applying principles of clowning that have been discussed previously in the unit/lesson. As an extension, once students understand the principle of engaging the
audience, students could add to the entrance, exit scene. Students could establish a place and conflict that they would add in to their scene.

**Description:** Teacher can pre-formulate scenarios for students who are having difficulty. Teacher can give additional steps to students who are mastering the exercise.

**Assessment as learning:** Students are assessing each other’s learning through their verbal analysis of their peers scenes.

**Assessment for Learning:** Teacher observation: Observe students during warm ups. Observe students as they prepare their scenes. Are the students applying the principles of clowning to their rehearsal? Are students in character when preparing their scene?

**Consolidation**

**Small Group> Interview**

Students are to reflect on the lesson. Ask students to form groups of 3. Students should choose 1 interviewer, 1 interviewee and one recorder. The interviewer will interview the interviewee asking the following questions while the recorder takes down the interviewee’s responses on the provided handout. The handout (BLM#5) provides students with the following interview questions:

*What did you learn about status today?*
*What is your clown’s status and how did you physicalize your status?*
*Were you able to recognize other people’s statuses? Why or why not?*
*If you were a lower status than your peer, how did this feel? Have you felt this way before? How and when?*
*What did you learn about the principles of clowning?*
*In which ways did you apply those principles today?*

The recorder may choose to record the interview in point form notes. Inform the students that the recorder will be sharing highlights of their interview with the class.

**Connections**

**Connections:** Students are connecting their performance work with their learning of principles of clowning and status work. Students will be applying all the skills and techniques learned in this lesson to their culminating task in the next lesson.
Description: Students may choose to answer their journal questions orally. Students may choose to partner up and interview one another using their journal questions. They should video record their interviews in order for you to assess them.

Assessment of learning: Use journal rubric given in previous lesson to assess learning.

End Lesson 3

Lesson 4 - Forum Theatre: Social Justice Through Clowing

Lesson Overview

Estimated Time:

Drama/ADA1O/Grade 9/Open: In this lesson students will explore forum theatre and status in their clown characters. At the end of the lesson, students will be given a culminating task. Their culminating task will have them prepare a clown scene in pairs that revolves around status and issues of power. These scenarios will be drawn from a hat.

Curriculum Expectations

Drama

Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing

Creating and Presenting

A1. The Creative Process

· A1.3 Use role play to explore, develop, and represent themes, ideas, characters, feelings, and beliefs in producing drama works

Reflecting, Responding, and Analyzing

B1. The Critical Analysis Process

· B1.1 Use the critical analysis process before and during drama projects to identify and assess individual roles and responsibilities in producing drama works

Learning Goals.
At the end of this lesson, students will be able to
· Apply status and forum theatre to clowning
· Work collaboratively a clown scene in pairs
· Create a perform a script using a provided outline

Instructional Components and Context

Readiness

This builds on learning from previous lesson. Students need to have the ability to work collaboratively in pairs. Students should have an understanding of Forum Theatre. Students should also have the knowledge and ability to improvise short scenes. See the following link for a description of Forum Theatre: http://code.on.ca/content/forum-theatre. See the following resources on the topic of Forum Theatre:

Set up performing space with a couple of chairs and a block or two. Cut out the numbers 1-10 and place them in an envelope.

Terminology

Forum Theatre
Augusto Boal
Status
Oppression
Power
Improv
“C’est magique”

Materials

Chairs
Blocks
Envelope
Numbers
Scissors
Paper
Pen
Music Player
Lesson Plan

Minds On

Whole Class> Forum Theatre

Write the following definition on the board. Ask students to discuss the definition with the person sitting next to them.

“A convention in which students collaboratively explore options or possible outcomes in order to shape a dramatic scene. A dramatic situation is improvised by a small group while the rest of the class observes. All students participate in creating the scene “through discussion, by stopping the scene to make suggestions, or by taking over a role. The objective is to create an authentic scene that fits the dramatic context and is satisfying to the whole group”.

Explain to students that Forum Theatre was a theatre convention developed by Brazilian Theatre practitioner Augusto Boal in order to enable those who are being oppressed to change their circumstances. Explain to students that with high status comes power and that many people choose to misuse their power. Ask students to think back to the first lesson in the unit and to consider the ways in which the different clowns in the clips (flashmob, Rize, and Patch Adams) were able to use their power to create change.

Key Questions for Discussion:

What is Forum Theatre?
What does it mean to be “oppressed”?
Can you think of situations in the past where you have felt oppressed by someone with a higher status?
Have you ever been in a situation where you felt oppressed and only thought of a way you could have given yourself more power after the fact?
Have you ever seen/participated in this type of theatre?
Why might it be interesting to see and participate in?
What might be challenging about it?
How might it relate to the issue of status we have been discussing?
Connections

Connections: Students will need this information to engage in Forum Theatre in the next portion of this lesson. Students will use this information to build this culminating scenes.

Differentiation: Allow students to discuss in pairs prior to whole class discussion. Give students the option of forming groups and answering the question through tableaux or movement.

Assessment as learning: Students can reflect on their own understanding of Forum Theatre and oppression. Students can then connect these terms to their own experiences. Classroom needs to be a safe place for this type of sharing. Allow students the option of “passing” on this activity.

Assessment for Learning: Assess students’ knowledge of terms through whole class discussion.

Action!

Pairs, Whole Class> Clown Status

Have students put their clown noses and hats on. Students should choose a partner. Have a pair of students come to the front of the class; each chooses a number out of the envelope. This number will be their status. Number one is the lowest status and number ten is the highest. All numbers in between are on a scale from lowest status to highest status. Instruct students to keep their status number secret. Ask the class for a location and two characters such as a movie theatre, a food concession person, and a movie patron. Ask the pair to improvise a short scene keeping in mind their status and their personal clowns. Call “scene” after a minute or so and ask the class to guess what status number each performer was, based on their performance. If the class has a difficult time guessing what the status was, ask them to identify ways in which the performers could have made their status clearer. The improvised scenes should be done through gesture and sound and without verbal language. You may choose to have all pairs go through this exercise or a just a few pairs who volunteer.

Small Group> Pair Share

Ask students to find a partner in the class. Give students five minutes to take turns discussing a time in their life where they may have felt oppressed. They may also discuss a scenario that is not personal to them but a situation where someone may feel oppressed. Give students a few
examples that may apply to their life experience such as, “when I was working my first job my boss would often ask me to work overtime for free, I felt I had to say yes in order to keep my job”. Another example might be a time in the students lives where they were being bullied by a peer. Inform students that they may be sharing this with the whole class and therefore they should only share memories that feels safe and that they are willing to share with the larger group. Students may choose to use an example that is not personal to them but rather one they have witnessed or seen in the media.

**Whole Class> Forum Theatre**

Now, ask for a pair to volunteer to improvise one of their memories in front of the class. Instruct the pair to play the scene as their clown characters. The students should apply all of the principles of clowning. Remind students not to censor their emotions, to express themselves physically rather than verbally, to be in the present, and to connect with the audience. Students should not speak but may use sounds and/or gibberish. The students who are performing their scenario in front of the class should try to depict the memory as accurately as possible, but with heightened emotions and physicality. Have the students perform their scene once uninterrupted. Ask the rest of the class to identify the moment where the felt the oppressed clown lost their power. Now ask the pair to perform their scene again. Tell the class that at any point in the scene they may call “Freeze” and stop the scene in its tracks. Once they have frozen the scene, they should go in (as their clown), replace the oppressed, and create a new ending. They should create an ending that gives power back to the oppressed. Remind students that in Forum Theatre it is important that solutions be feasible. If the new solution seems impossible, the class should act as the “Joker” and call out “Stop, c’est magique!”.

Once someone else has found a new solution to a student’s past oppression, ask the student to share their feelings on seeing their memory replayed. Ask student/s how it felt to see their double regain power and control in a difficult situation.

**Connections:** Students will be connecting this learning with their culminating task. In order to create clown scenes that are laced with social justice, students must first learn about power, oppression, and the ability for clowns (theatre) to act as agents of change.

**Description:** Students who do not want to actively engage in the scene may act as the “Joker”. Give students who do not engage in the performance of the scene the option of writing out their new ending in a journal.
**Assessment for Learning:** Circulate around the classroom during paired discussions. Assess students’ comprehension of clowning and forum theatre through their improvisations. Teacher should side coach if students are having difficulties.

**Consolidation**

**Pairs> Culminating Clown Scenes**

Distribute culminating task handouts BLM#6. Go through culminating task with students. Students will need to find a partner. In pairs, students will choose one of the suggested scenarios. Once students have chosen a scenario, they will work on creating a clown scene that applies all of the principles of clowning, as well as exploring an issue of power and status abuse of power. Instruct students to create scenes with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Scenes should have a clear conflict as well as a realistic resolution. This scene should be a minimum of 3 minutes and a maximum of four minutes long. Remind students that one of the characteristics of clowning is the art of failure and that in their scenes the oppressed clown should try several times to overcome their oppressor before they succeed. Remind students that though their subject matter may be serious, their clowns should still be naive and playful. Students may need several periods to work on their scene. Have students workshop their scene once in front of the class before their final performance. Inform students that they must wear their hats for the final performance. They should also create a costume that works with their scene. Students must choose a piece of music to play during their scene.

**Individual>Journal**

Once final scenes have been performed, give the students the following journal prompt:

*Reflect back on your culminating clown scene. Describe the process towards creating your scene. Did you and your partner encounter any obstacles along the way? How did you come to a consensus on ideas? Did your final performance go as planned? What would you do differently if you were to do this scene again? Think about another group’s performance that you really enjoyed. What about it did you like?*

Assess the journal using the following rubric


**Connections**
Connections: Students will use all of the techniques learned in the unit to create their final scenes. Students will need to know how to create an appropriate set and costume for their scene. Once scenes are performed, they could be seamed together to create a show.

Description: You may choose to allow students to create their own scenario for culminating task. Allow mixed groups for support. Provide more side coaching for groups who are having difficulty.

Assessment of learning: Assess culminating scenes using checklist BLM#7

End Lesson 4