

5-2018

Expectations and Participation among Drama Students

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2018.edu.18>

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Pryor, Alexander, "Expectations and Participation among Drama Students" (2018). *Graduate Master's Theses, Capstones, and Culminating Projects*. 338.
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2018.edu.18>

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Running head: EXPECTATIONS AND PARTICIPATION AMONG DRAMA
STUDENTS

Expectations and Participation among Drama Students

by

Alexander L. Pryor

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

San Rafael, CA

May 2018

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the department chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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Abstract

Not all students are willing to participate actively in a drama class. Most studies about drama and participation focus on the use of drama in other academic disciplines, and there is a lack of information about students' participation within the drama classroom. This study examines the role that students' experiences and expectations play in their educational outcomes in drama class. Students from two beginning drama classes at a public high school participated in this study. They were introduced to a short unit on social theater and on Augusto Boal's Forum Theater. Throughout this unit students responded to journal prompts addressing their perceived levels of participation in the class, perceived levels of difficulty and enjoyment, and their perceptions of others' opinions about drama. In addition, a series of three focus group interviews was held with students from both of the classes, to explore in greater depth similar questions to the journal prompts. This study found that the experiences and expectations that students bring to a drama class have an impact on their learning outcomes in a drama class, including students' willingness to participate; their willingness to take risks; and the effect of reluctant students on overall class participation. Understanding the expectations that students bring to a drama classroom can help teachers ease students' transitions from classes requiring lower levels of engagement to the active participation required in a drama class.

Keywords: drama, participation, expectations

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Lucko for her guidance on putting this thesis together, as well as Dr. Suresh Appavoo, for his help in finding my research question. Thank you to my classmates who helped me sort out my thinking. Thank you to the students who participated in the study and shared with me their valuable insights. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to Mary and Charlie, who felt, more than anyone else, the time and effort that went into this work. Without their support and patience this would not have been possible.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Not everyone is willing to make a fool of themselves in front of their peers. Unfortunately, looking foolish in public is almost inevitable in a beginning drama class. For some students, this is not an issue. Some students are natural performers who crave attention. Other students, however, want to avoid notice at all costs. The natural performers need no added incentive to get up on stage. They might have been involved in theater before, or have no prior experience, but they are drawn to the stage. With others, it is not so easy. Reluctant students have to be coaxed, enticed, or otherwise coerced to stand up in front of their peers, and no amount of extrinsic motivation is going to overcome their anxiety. In some cases they shut down completely. Simply put, not all students are willing to participate actively in a drama class.

Critical Framework

Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed (TO) forms the theoretical framework for the analysis of the data collected in this study. TO is based on four components. First, the need for complete participation within the theatrical event, including spectators as well as actors. This calls for breaking down the artificial barriers that separate classes and groups, and encourages participation from all sides. Boal calls the participants who are both spectators and actors "spect-actors." Second, TO emphasizes the dialogic nature of communication: that through dialogue, two or more people create a new understanding that could not be achieved by an individual working alone. Third, TO incorporates a critical examination of societal structures and positionality. Boal asserts that people are forced to conform to certain societal norms, and very often those norms teach people to see themselves either as oppressed or as oppressors. This in

turn affects people's view of their opportunities in life and their ability to make changes. The final component of Boal's TO is the orientation towards action and change. The purpose of TO is not just to identify oppression or injustice, but to try to repair it (Boal, 1979/2014).

Statement of Purpose

There are many reasons that students may feel either at home or uncomfortable in a drama class. Research has shown that the classroom environment, which is typically less structured and more social than that of other classes, is particularly attractive to some students. There are so many variables at play in a drama class that the relative experience or inexperience of the instructor can make a significant difference in student engagement. The social nature of the class means that group work figures prominently, which can have both positive and negative effects. (Ryan, 2012; Toivanen, Mikkola, & Ruismäki, 2012; Toivanen, Pyykkö, & Ruismäki, 2011.)

Some students may be drawn to the drama environment, where they find like-minded people and form a community. With that in mind, other students may not feel that they fit into this type of environment, which leads to their disengagement with the course. The lack of structure may be uncomfortable or alienating, and the required level of participation may be more than a student is willing to do. These students may not see the relevance of drama to their lives, and may not share the same interests with those who do, further pushing them away from engagement. (Sobkin, Lykova, & Kolomiets, 2016; Pike, Smart, & Ethington, 2012; Karabanova & Bukhalenkova, 2016.)

Foreign language teachers face similar challenges in terms of overcoming students' fear of failure or making mistakes. To combat this, some have used applied

theater in the classroom, which serves to help minimize anxiety and increase participation. Applied theater involves everyone present at a theatrical event—actor and spectator alike—as a participant. This form of theater is often used to examine social or political conventions and draw attention to inequity. Applied theater is closely related to critical pedagogy, which teaches students to examine and question power relationships that affect their lives, and provides them the tools to challenge those relationships. These approaches have the added benefit of fostering agency and critical thinking in students. (Eddy-U, 2015; Weber, 2017; Bowell & Heap, 2005; O’Neill, 1989; O’Connor & O’Connor, 2009; Schaedler, 2010; Freire, 1970/2017; Halx, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

While numerous studies have focused on the positive impact that theater pedagogy can have on student learning, there is much less information on how to get reluctant students to participate. Researchers have studied the intersection of theater and student engagement, but engagement is not necessarily the same as active participation. Engagement can be an entirely mental process, invisible to the outside observer (Dunn, 2013). Active participation, by definition, requires action as well as engagement. This can be in the form of speaking or physical movement. Students in a drama class are expected to participate more frequently and more actively than in other classes. Most studies about drama focus on the use of drama in other disciplines, and there are few if any studies on how drama students’ expectations of the required level of participation affect their learning outcomes in the drama classroom. To address this gap, this study will explore the experiences and expectations that facilitate or hinder

participation in a beginning drama class and examine what impact the introduction of social theater techniques has on that participation.

Significance of the Study

Exploring the impact of student expectations and attitudes on participation in a beginning drama class stands to benefit current and future students. At this research site, there are approximately equal numbers of Latino students and white students. These demographics are reflected in the populations of the beginning drama classes. However, despite these equal numbers, there is less participation from the Latino students, both in class and in after-school drama activities. Uneven engagement or participation in drama class can become an issue of educational equity when theater (and the benefits thereof) is reserved for wealthier students from the normative culture. While a class or a program may be available or open to anyone, unspoken customs or norms, prescribed behaviors, or feelings of alienation, may make it inaccessible (Freire, 1970/2017). Understanding and changing student expectations towards participation could ultimately make theater and drama more accessible to lower income, immigrant, or students of color, giving them greater means of developing self-confidence and self-efficacy (Freire, 1970/2017). Helping these students find their voices benefits the normative culture students as well, allowing them to examine critically their own roles in the community and society (Freire, 1970/2017).

Understanding the impact of student expectations and experiences upon participation will help academic teachers and drama teachers alike. Academic teachers will benefit from understanding the impact that students' expectations and preconceived notions about a class have on their learning outcomes. Using applied theater

techniques, with their basis in critical pedagogy, in other disciplines could increase student engagement (Halx, 2014), which would be helpful for teachers and students.

Drama teachers will benefit from increased participation among students who are otherwise unwilling participants in drama class. The practice has the potential to transform the class culture and increase interest in drama all around. Pedagogy that increases agency in students, especially minority students, will increase their sense of personal potential and could result in greater achievement (Boal, 1979/2014).

Furthermore, increased retention of minority students in the drama program will help to make drama accessible to the greater campus community, again allowing more students the benefits gained from drama.

Drama differs from other classes in the public nature of class participation. In a drama class, assessment is public, and a student's success or failure is visible to the rest of the class. Although there is greater reliance on less public assessment in academic classes, students still need to speak and participate in class conversations. Increasing participation among drama students will provide other educators with possible strategies for increasing participation in their own classes, thus increasing dialogue and learning outcomes for students.

Summary of Methods

In the first quantitative phase of the study, survey data was collected from beginning drama class students at a public high school to examine students' perceptions of their levels of participation in drama class and in other classes. The students were then introduced to a short unit on social theater. Over the course of this unit, qualitative data, consisting of student journal entries, focus group interviews, and

teacher observations, was collected. In the second quantitative phase, following the unit on social theater, students filled out the same survey to explore changes in students' perception of their levels of participation. In this exploratory follow-up, this study examined how the introduction of social theatre impacted students' participation in a beginning drama class.

Summary of Findings and Implications

This study found that students' expectations and preconceived ideas about drama class impacted student learning outcomes because many students did not understand the necessary level of participation or the required quality of participation to succeed in drama. This disconnect between expectations for participation and the participatory requirements of the class caused reluctant students to withdraw, disengage or become disruptive in class. Additionally, reluctant students' antipathy towards participating and risk-taking in drama took away from other students' appreciation of the class.

This study has implications for classroom practice, school communication, and district-wide programs. The classroom drama teacher will be better served by understanding that not all students know what to expect from a drama class, and so do not understand the level of participation necessary to succeed. Communicating expectations and setting up activities early in the course that are representative of what the class will be like will help acclimate the reluctant students earlier. Keeping the content relevant to the students' lives will also help to increase participation. Providing students, parents, and counselors with clear course descriptions will help ensure that students know what kind of class they are signing up for. This study found that students

with some prior drama experience may be more likely to participate. Creating an outreach program, where high school drama students run an afterschool workshop for middle and elementary schools in the district could increase participation for these younger students when they reach high school.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Many students are placed into beginning drama without choosing the class. While some find that they enjoy the unique aspects of a drama class, others are less comfortable. These students might be shy, uneasy about speaking in front of others, or new to the country with limited English. Motivating these students to participate can be challenging, and some unmotivated students will actively disengage from the class rather than participate. This lack of participation leads to lower grades which can in turn further disengage the student and lead her to believe that drama is not for her.

A number of separate but overlapping factors can impact students' engagement and participation in a drama class. In the next sections of this literature review, I will explain how the classroom climate and environment, including the social aspects of a drama class and group work, are directly related to student engagement. Next I turn to a consideration of how drama students' personalities impact student engagement, followed by a discussion that explores how a student's need for meaningfulness becomes intertwined with the student's choice to engage in the class. Engagement, however, may not be enough to ensure student participation. To gain the true benefits of a drama class, a student must be willing to participate. Thus, the last section of this literature review will consider how social theater, in which students examine and challenge existing power structures in our society, offers a pedagogy that fosters participation in drama class—even for reluctant students.

Classroom Climate and Environment

Research has shown that students perceive the drama class environment—where the instructor is often participating in the activities and there is greater interaction

among students—as being different from that of other, more academic, classes (Ryan, 2012). Drama classes tend to be less structured than others, and social interaction is actively encouraged. The relationship between students and the teacher is less hierarchical and more collaborative. Additionally, a greater amount of participation is expected of drama students. Drama classes differ in other key ways as well. Except for monologues, nearly all of a student’s projects in drama will be group projects. For this reason, the social nature of group work is a significant factor in understanding the workings of a drama class. This can have the very positive effect of students feeling responsible to one another, and wanting to do their best. After all, unlike with a test or a written assessment, student success or failure is much more public in a drama class, as the performance is played in front of everyone. For some, these are positive differences.

The public and social nature of drama sets it apart from other disciplines. Drama classes place different demands on students, as well as offer different rewards, than other academic classes do. Delyse Ryan (2012) studied how non-performance-focused drama students perceived the value of performing and the amount of effort and engagement exhibited by the students in their drama classes. Drama instructors were perceived as being more lively and engaging than lecturers in other subjects, and more on equal footing with their students, even going so far as to “sit on the floor with [the students] and do silly things” (Ryan, 2012, p. 5). One finding indicated that students expected that drama classes would be more lively than classes in other disciplines, and that students perceived that “the type of people who taught drama or were attracted to study drama were also likely to be more outgoing” (Ryan, 2012, p. 5). These students seemed to enjoy the drama classes because they were not like the usual lecture

classes, and participants in the study reported being more engaged and learning more in drama class than in other classes, due to the interactive nature of the discipline.

Another factor that sets a drama class apart from other disciplines is peer pressure. “The fear of letting someone else down” (Ryan, 2012, p. 9), provides incentive for students to achieve. The fact that they have to perform in front of audiences, and that their classmates are depending on them for the group to succeed, are powerful motivators for student achievement. Drama students also perceive the work they do in class as “fun” (Ryan, 2012, p. 8), in spite of the effort they have to put into rehearsals. Some drama students reported a perception among other students that drama classes would be easy, an assumption that the drama students found frustrating (Ryan, 2012). While the exercises and the rehearsal process is fun, the work that drama students do is serious and challenging.

The classroom environment itself affects student engagement, and the teacher’s role in establishing the classroom environment, especially in a drama class, is significant and potentially difficult. Toivanen et al. (2012) studied teacher trainees and the factors that make drama class interaction challenging. Although several factors were identified, the study focused on three of these factors: teachers’ actions, the organization of the educational situation, and the nature of the subject. The researchers found that the teacher, and their level of experience, played a significant role in setting the tone for the class. Things can move very quickly in a drama class, and novice teachers struggled to adapt quickly and creatively to the rapidly changing events in a drama classroom. Lesson structure also impacted classroom interaction. The less structured the lesson, the more challenges that arose. Finding the right rhythm for the

class activities, neither too fast nor too slow, was also a challenge for teachers. Drama teacher's communication style, which included tone, presence, vocal modality, and content, had an impact on the interaction of the group. There were problems when the teacher did not engage with the students, and also when the students did not understand instructions or educational goals.

While this study focused on novice teachers, the role that teacher experience plays could be applied to experience in different situations or with different populations. An experienced teacher may not have worked with certain populations before, which could impact the teacher's ability to engage the students. Additionally, in a class with mixed levels of drama experience and language ability, pacing could be a real issue. Working at a pace that supports English learners could disengage native English speakers, but splitting the class based on language ability could lead to de facto segregation. Any number of these factors could lead to disengagement.

The dynamics of the classroom can make a difference in students' feelings of safety and their willingness to take risks (Toivanen, Pyykkö, & Ruismäki, 2011). The groups that form within a drama class contribute to the classroom environment as well. Here again, the role of the teacher is important. Toivanen et al. (2011), studied the effects of group dynamics in a drama class. The authors found that there was a significant difference in classroom dynamics when the teacher created working groups within the class, as opposed to allowing students to put themselves into groups. The authors found that, compared to student-chosen groups, teacher-formed groups resulted in fewer discipline problems, greater cooperation, greater engagement, more time spent on drama activities, and greater inclusion. One of the conclusions of this

study was that the teacher must break established group roles in order to facilitate a more functional group dynamic and thereby increase students' feelings of safety to foster more active participation.

Characteristics of Drama Students

Students themselves play a role in defining the academic drama experience. Not all students are willing to speak, to show vulnerability, or to risk failure in front of their peers. The instructor can reduce or moderate some of that hesitation through the classroom environment or group selection (Toivanen et al., 2011). For the students who are drawn to drama, such moderation is not necessary.

One way to explain the proclivity that some students show towards drama could have to do with their personalities. Pike, Smart, and Ethington (2012) set out to use John Holland's personal-environment theory as a critical framework to investigate the relationship between student learning outcomes and academic environment, and the role that student engagement plays in mediating that relationship. Holland theorized that people are drawn to, and find the most satisfaction in, fields that correspond to their personality types. There they are exposed to people of similar personality types who have also been drawn to the same fields. As a result, the patterns and behaviors that these types share become reinforced. In a previous study of college students and their majors, researchers observed that college students are drawn to majors that fit their personality types (self-selection); their values and behaviors are reinforced within the majors (socialization); and they are more likely to be successful in majors that align with their personality types (congruence). Three of the researchers' findings stand out. First, this study "substantiated the socializing effect of academic environments" (Pike et al.,

2012). University students' behaviors and values will change depending on the academic environment they are part of. Second, the researchers found a direct relationship between academic environments and student engagement. Depending on the type of environment they were in, students reported greater levels of course effort and engagement in the types of learning activities specific to that environment. Third, the researchers found a relationship between student engagement and learning outcomes. A student who is drawn to a particular discipline will become more engaged in that discipline, and they will learn more as a result.

The students who are attracted to a drama class can differ from their non-thespian counterparts. Sobkin, Lykova, and Kolomiets (2016) studied the personality traits of high school age students attending a highly competitive and specialized theater college in Moscow. They compared these traits against a control group of "normal" high schoolers, and found that the theater students were generally more social, braver (defined as more willing to take risks), more empathetic, and more attuned to the approval of others. In addition to these comparisons, they tracked changes in the theater students' personalities over their first two years of theater school. They found that the students' sociability and bravery decreased as their levels of tension and anxiety increased. The authors were quick to point out that these latter two measurements can have positive as well as negative interpretations. Positive views of tension and anxiety include focus, determination, and high motivation, but can also lead to personal dissatisfaction. The authors concluded that these personality traits might be important to theater instructors, keeping in mind that change occurs over the course of actor training.

While this study is focused on highly motivated students in a Russian professional training program, as opposed to American high school drama students, it is still valuable in that it describes some of the psychological traits that characterize a successful drama student. The students who are naturally more social, brave, empathetic, and approval-seeking will be drawn to a class where those aspects of their personalities can shine. Equally important, their interest in the subject will facilitate engagement (Eddy-U, 2015).

As a result of their study of Holland's Theory, Pike et al. suggest that student engagement is linked to a match between personality type and environment (2012). Further, greater exposure to a particular discipline impacts or socializes the student towards that discipline. Students who are already artistic and who thrive in a lower-structured environment will be happier or more satisfied in a drama class than those who prefer explicit, ordered undertakings. The idea that different activities engage different personality types suggests that a variety of approaches might be helpful in facilitating student engagement in a class such as beginning drama, where not all of the students have elected to take the course. Students who are otherwise turned off by the more unstructured elements of the class could be engaged by more conventional academic activities. Engagement, therefore, becomes cyclical. Students who learn more and develop a sense of self-efficacy will likely become more engaged in the class. In contrast, those who do not feel that they are learning may become increasingly disengaged.

This feedback loop, in which drama-oriented students create an environment that is attractive to drama-oriented students, has been used to help students. Programs

have successfully developed structures that support and develop leadership roles among students, which can then help alleviate some of the anxiety that can arise in drama students. Positive youth development is a movement towards promoting healthy interactions and experiences for youth, rather than addressing pathologies. Beare and Belliveau (2007) discuss the benefits and structures of using theater and the play-creating process for positive youth development. They outline a specific play-creating method, which is a collaboration between students and theater facilitators. The methodology of the study was performance inquiry, and the theory was based on social constructivism and the idea that people “understand the world through group consensus” and that social interactions and hierarchies are a part of that understanding.

Beare and Belliveau (2007) studied a model of theater for positive youth development that focused on secondary school students in a performing arts group. They identified five developmental phases that students passed through as part of their involvement with the theater group. These were: inclusion, control, intimacy, empowerment, and vision. Students move through and among these different phases throughout their time in the program, with different avenues for success or failure unique to each phase. Dialogue, both internal (self-reflection) and external (communication), helps the students navigate each phase and support each other. Of particular importance is the need for older students to act as mentors and role models for the younger ones, as the dropout rate and level of potential disengagement is highest in the earlier stages. Students at the different phases will require different levels of support and will engage in different ways. This suggests that differentiation is necessary for engagement. The socializing effect of the older students on the younger ones hearkens

back to Pike et al. (2012), in that the personalities within the environment shape the environment itself, and provides a safety net for the beginning students, who are the most vulnerable and therefore most in need of support.

Creating Meaning

People who practice drama do so, in part, because it provides meaning for their lives. Grammatopoulos and Reynolds (2013) interviewed practitioners of drama at different phases of their lives to explore the different reasons that people are drawn to drama, focusing mainly on their experiences through an existential theoretical framework. They found that practitioners of drama get a great deal of pleasure from the experience, and that practicing drama fills some sort of need in their lives. The needs that are fulfilled vary from individual to individual, and are not always internally consistent. Additionally, many of the people interviewed stated an appreciation for a different set of experiences made possible by drama, ranging from an escape from everyday life, to the feeling that drama was more real than their real lives. The author concluded that this means that the possibilities for self-expression are limited in everyday life, and that participation in drama offers people a “space to express themselves as they would like” (Grammatopoulos and Reynolds, 2013, p. 120).

There is value in understanding what people get out of drama. This could be helpful in understanding what disengaged students may *not* be getting. Much of Grammatopoulos and Reynolds’ study aligns with the ideas of engagement discussed by Julie Dunn (2013). Dunn does not conduct a research project, but rather looks back at a memo she had written ten years earlier. At the time she had been studying student engagement in process drama, and had recorded some thoughts on her observations.

She had come up with a working definition of engagement in process drama, concluding that engagement meant that students would be willing and interested, suspend disbelief, contribute positively, and be able to identify with the characters or situations being presented. Ten years of perspective and research later, Dunn revised her definition of student engagement. She stated that engaged students are active participants “in the co-construction of the dramatic world” (p. 224) without losing their sense of self or of the actual world. In the process, they “create connections to ideas within the drama or beyond it” (p. 224), and through these connections they create meaning.

Dunn’s explanation of engagement, the focus “on the creation of connections and meaning-making” (p. 224), has implications for both engagement and disengagement in the drama classroom. As a part of this drama engagement the students must be able to partially disengage from their own circumstances, which could be a challenge for some. Beginning drama students could be too self-conscious to be able to immerse themselves in the action playing out onstage. Dunn also suggests that engagement may not be visible to the outside observer, and that students may be actively engaged despite their outward appearance or behavior. She also points out that engagement is ephemeral and fleeting, and that at different times, different students may be differently engaged.

Another way to create meaning is to contextualize oneself within one’s community. Charlene Rajendran (2014) articulates a pedagogy that she employs within her beginning acting classes. After a period of working through listening and improvisation, students are assigned the task of choosing two strangers to observe.

Based on the observations, the students go through a process of making choices and assumptions about the individuals and creating characters based on what the students have observed and imagined about the strangers. The students draw from their own knowledge about society, and from their own experiences, to create a short performance piece based on their observations of the strangers. Students use language as it is relevant to their character, so there can be a mix of English and other languages as well. The process is highly structured, and in a relatively short time the beginning actors are able to produce a polished performance piece that is meaningful to them, as it is their creation, based on their own observations of the strangers, and based on their own choices of whom to observe.

Working in this context not only develops performance skills, but also develops observational and critical thinking skills as the students make choices about what aspects of an individual to portray and why. It also provides students the opportunity to learn about themselves in contrast with the 'other.' The key here is "meaningfulness." As with Grammatopoulos and Reynolds (2013), Rajendran's students are using drama to create meaning: to observe the world around them, and to place themselves within that context through the acts of observation, selection, and empathy.

Critical Pedagogy and Applied Theater

Critical literacy teaches students to examine and question power relationships that affect their lives, and provides them the tools to challenge those relationships. It provides students the ability to engage, as well as showing them the necessity of doing so (Freire, 1970/2017; Halx, 2014). Applied theater, which is a non-traditional form of drama, blurs the line between the actor and the audience, involving everyone as a

participant in the theatrical event. This form of theater is often used to examine social or political conventions and draw attention to inequity (O'Connor & O'Connor, 2009). As such, applied theater is a natural vehicle for critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire (1970/2017) begins his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, with a discussion of humanization and dehumanization. He suggests that dehumanization is “the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (p. 44). According to Freire, over time the oppressors (often those who value and/or benefit from the status quo) have devised multiple systems and tools to keep the exploited under control. These can include keeping the oppressed isolated, so that they are never able to see the whole picture of the issues that affect them; presenting themselves as models to the oppressed, so that the oppressed can dream of one day reaching the level of the oppressors; and establishing and reinforcing a superiority over the oppressed, which positions the latter as inherently inferior. As a result of this, the oppressed come to see themselves through the lens of the oppressors, and learn to doubt their own abilities and to accept their lack of freedom. A consequence of this is that the oppressed may become so accustomed to the limitations imposed on them that the thought of freedom and agency may be initially terrifying. However, in order for the oppressed to be truly liberated, they must be the agents of their liberation.

In order to accomplish this, Freire argues, we must move away from the “banking concept” (p. 72) of education. The banking concept states that the teacher’s task is to fill the students’ minds with information. This positions the teacher as the subject and the students as the objects: the teacher acts and the students are acted upon. Instead, according to Freire, we must move to a model in which teacher and student strive

together to create meaning. This necessarily empowers and provides agency to the students. The key to this model, according to Freire, is “problem-posing education” (p. 80) and the use of dialogue. Problem posing education repositions the teacher and students so that they are learning together, using dialogue to create new knowledge.

Critical pedagogy has been shown to engage marginalized populations in school. Halx (2014) provides a rationale for critical pedagogy, explaining that by providing youth with an understanding of the situations in which they live, and providing them with tools to engage with those situations, one can provide students with tools to help them improve their lives. He points out that Latino students in particular have been overlooked by the education system. He further points out that Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the United States, which serves to underscore the need to better serve them in schools. The purpose of Halx’s study was to see if critical pedagogy would have better served Latinos who had not completed high school, or were in credit remediation programs. He wanted to know how the students felt about their education, what they thought or felt about their statuses in society, and how they would feel about learning through critical pedagogy. He explains that critical pedagogy “teaches students the power of learning while they are learning about power relationships in society” (p. 252), and provides a rationale for its use to engage students. Halx conducted one-hour interviews with eight young men and found that these students did not have a comprehensive view of their own social status within the larger society; they believed that the education they had received was adequate; and that they were interested in advancing or getting ahead in society. Halx argues that by

using critical pedagogy one could better provide students with a sense of where they fit into society, and give them the tools to challenge that position.

Challenging positionality is central to Augusto Boal's Forum Theater. Boal is a Brazilian theater director and educator, whose work challenges the existing social power structure and encourages people to recognize and resist the forces that oppress them. In his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal (1979/2014) provides a history of the western theater and argues that Aristotelian tragedy (the foundational model of western drama) is a coercive tool of the bourgeoisie to maintain their lifestyles and positions in society. "... [A]ll the arts, especially theatre—are political. And theatre is the most perfect artistic form of coercion" (p. 39). He is referring to the function of theater to generate empathy, which causes the spectator to connect to the protagonist on the stage, and to learn and adopt that character's values. When the protagonists reflect the values of an oppressive society, theater serves to further that oppression through empathy (p. 115).

Boal proposes a new form of theater, in which everyone becomes involved. Spectators become actors as well, or, 'spect-actors' (Boal & Jackson, 2002, p. xxiii). Boal's new model is called Forum Theatre, and empowers the audience to take on the roles of the performers and, in so doing, change the dialogue and the outcome of the plays, ideally leading to an end of oppression and generating dialogue. The value of this form of theater is that it empowers everyone to participate actively and to have a voice in the performance. Everyone has an active opportunity to make themselves heard and to create meaning, essentially a dialogue on a larger scale. Traditional theater is dependent on the idea that there is an actor and a spectator. Boal sees a connection

between class structure in society and the distinction between audience and performer in the theater. He calls for “the destruction of the barriers created by the ruling classes. First, the barrier between actors and spectators is destroyed: all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformation of society” (Boal, 1979/2014, p. x).

Boal’s Forum Theater (Boal, 1979/2014, Boal & Jackson, 2002, Schaedler, 2010) creates a space in which anyone can participate in the drama. In Forum Theater, the actors present an unresolved conflict, and audience members are invited and encouraged to come on stage and take the role of the protagonist or other character. Within this role they can try to change the drama to come to a more equitable resolution. The idea that theater can be used as a tool for examining social situations has been taken into educational settings in the form of applied or social theater and process drama. One of the goals of this type of theater is to empower the participants and allow them to see, through their actions in the imaginary world of the theater, that they have agency and the ability to change their circumstances in the real world. This is consistent with Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the idea of critical pedagogy:

... [E]very human being, no matter how “ignorant” or submerged in the “culture of silence” he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter [sic], the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it (Freire, 1970/2017, p. 32).

Forum Theater provides the framework for this act of discovery, by presenting situations of oppression and inviting the audience to participate in changing the story. While the

practice is not without challenges, it provides opportunities for increased participation and engagement, learning through dialogue, expanding students' critical literacy, and forming bonds between the teacher and the students.

Maria Tereza Schaedler (2010) describes her experience using TO techniques in an English for speakers of other languages classroom. In this case, she was working with Brazilian immigrants in a suburb of Boston. Schaedler studied the use of Forum Theater techniques to help her students develop critical literacy skills. She found positive benefits to the practice, including improved social awareness skills, increased agency for the participants, and improved language skills. As part of the study, Schaedler found that students' motivations for studying language was to gain autonomy in society. She found that fear was a significant demotivator in students' trying to speak English, that they were "afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at" (p. 145). Theater techniques increased confidence and made the participants feel relaxed.

One of the benefits that came out of using theater techniques in the classroom is that the students were able to "rehearse their language skills" (p. 145) in situations that would be relevant to them. Much of this aligns with what Mary Eddy-U (2015) found, especially the fear that students have of making mistakes, and the benefits of making the content actually useful to them.

Despite the risks that Schaedler was asking her students to take, they all participated in the Forum Theater. Inherent to TO is the challenge to the status quo and to existing power structures. An episode of Forum Theater focuses on an act of oppression, and empowers the audience to make changes to the play in an attempt to eliminate the oppression. Rather than sit as observers, audience members are

encouraged to come on stage, take over one of the roles, and take action, to become the subjects of the drama. This practice 'subjectifies' (making them the person who acts, rather than the object, or the thing acted upon) the participants, giving them agency to act in their own lives.

Another form of applied theater is process drama. Bowell and Heap (2005) define process drama as "a form of theatre applied within an educational context in which learner, in collaboration with the teacher, create dramas for exploration, expression, and learning" (p. 60). Process drama is generally not scripted, but is more improvisational in nature, although at the same time highly structured. It is not performed for an external audience, but rather involves the participants as both creators and audience. The topics of the drama can encompass nearly any subject, from mathematics to literature.

Process drama is most successful when carefully planned by the teacher. In fact, the teacher is involved on several levels simultaneously, as "playwright, director, and actor, as well as teacher" (p. 60). The teacher takes on a role within the drama, just as the students do, but the teacher must also be attentive to the path that the narrative is taking, must provide the necessary content and context for the experience, and must be attentive to how the entire process is unfolding. It is, as the authors observe, a complex task. However, the authors also point to the potential benefits of learning through process drama. At the same time that the teacher is taking on the aforementioned roles, the students are also working through the process on multiple levels. They learn to initiate and contribute to the narrative; to self-direct within the context of the activity; to work and respond within a fictional reality; and to use the fiction to make meaning in the real world. The teacher-in-role aspect of process drama

allows the teacher and the student to develop the learning together, as partners in an artistic process.

Cecily O'Neill (1989) also sees the value of process drama and of having the instructor participate as teacher-in-role. Dialogue, she feels, is the most valuable interaction that can happen in a classroom. It is through dialogue that new understanding emerges. Dialogue can happen between two or more people, but it can also reflect the "voices in our own mind" (p. 530). In order for students to create dialogue, they must give voice to multiple ideas or points of view:

... [O]ur skill in representing the actions and speech of others, our ability to see the other side of things, to create opposing opinions, to be able to anticipate answer to the questions we ask, are all built on our power to dramatize, to put ourselves in someone else's shoes (p. 530).

Through the use of theater and dialogue, students become active learners. O'Neill finds many similarities between the theater and the classroom, and believes that, in fact, that teaching can be a kind of theater. "Theater metaphors illuminate an idea of teaching which is essentially dialogic, and therefore dynamic, social, demystifying, and open to change" (p. 530).

O'Neill is careful to lay out the difference between strictly performative theater and educational drama. In the former, the audience can be a passive participant, although modern theater practitioners are even trying to move away from such passivity. With the latter, the students in the classroom must be active co-creators of the fictional reality. O'Neill adopts an idea that she attributes to Paulo Freire, saying, "a true

dialogue is always an inquiry” (p. 532). Students engaged in such a dialogue will be actively examining their learnings.

In terms of creating this kind of pedagogy, O’Neill recommends exploring themes that are “essential to the students” (p. 533). This will empower the students to bring their own experience to bear in the classroom, and will provide them with agency and expertise. “When student interest is seen as valid, the result is a high degree of motivation” (p. 534). Providing students with a voice and a forum for articulating their ideas could be a way to motivate them to participate.

O’Neill also introduces the idea of the “liminal servant” (p. 535). She explains the concept of liminality as being a state in which normal social roles and responsibilities are suspended. In this state one becomes free to examine and critique his or her positionality. Utilizing the teacher-in-role method, in which the teacher plays a part in the drama while simultaneously maintaining and coordinating the experience for the whole class, facilitates the liminal experience for the students, allowing them to more critically examine the situation they are acting out. O’Neill cautions, however, that this is a powerful tool, and that being open to actual dialogue means being open to unexpected outcomes. In order to use this pedagogy the teacher must be willing to accept a certain degree of ambiguity and uncertainty. But the result can be authentic classroom dialogue.

Not only does applied theater offer the prospect of increasing engagement in reluctant students, it is also a step away from a pedagogy that is less and less relevant to today’s students. Joan Lazarus (2015) spent ten years studying secondary school theater instructors and their practices. She highlights what she found to be “best

practices” in secondary drama education. She states that all too often, theater programs are stuck in 20th century thinking, being teacher-centric and featuring works that do not resonate with 21st century students or values of diversity. She also points out that in many schools drama is inaccessible except to white, affluent, able-bodied students. In contrast to this problem, she features some insights and suggestions from teachers who are using other tools to engage and support their drama students. Per Lazarus (2015), “three characteristics of best practice in theatre education” are:

- Learner-centered classroom and production work
 - Socially responsible teaching and production practices, and
 - Comprehensive and integrated theatre curriculum and co-curricular activities
- (p. 151).

Additionally, she calls out characteristics of some practices that do not represent quality teaching, including lowered expectations for minority students, lowered expectations for student achievement, verbal-heavy instructional style, lax classroom management, and sarcasm and shame as a way to motivate students (reminiscent of the old slogan: “beatings will continue until morale improves”). Teachers who Lazarus interviewed talked about a “spiritual hunger” and a need to find “meaning” among adolescents, which is consistent with the findings of several authors discussed here (Dunn, 2013, Grammatopoulos & Reynolds, 2013). One thing that is clear from Lazarus’ work is that although a drama class may be learner and activity-focused, there is still room for improvement and for making the content more accessible, especially to English learners.

While the creation of meaning may be a way to engage students, engagement is not always the same as participation. What motivates students to participate can vary. Foreign language classes have used specific types of drama, including applied theater, to foster motivation among students, and some of those techniques could apply to a drama classroom as well.

Foreign language teachers and drama teachers face a similar challenge in getting students to participate. In both types of classes students may feel a lack of confidence in their abilities or may feel that they will be judged or laughed at if they make a mistake. Like drama, much of what happens in a foreign language class is spoken in front of the rest of the class, and the potential for embarrassment is very real.

Mary Eddy-U (2015) studied university students in Macau to learn about their motivations for performing group tasks in their English as a foreign language class. One purpose of her research was to find out if Zoltán Dörnyei's motivational conglomerates would align with students' understandings of their own motivation, to explain what factors needed to be present to positively affect a student's Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Dörnyei (2009) suggested several important antecedents to communicating in one's second language (L2), including: interest, productive learner role, motivational flow, and vision. Eddy-U's research revealed some alignment with Dörnyei's conglomerates. Activities that students saw as helpful or relevant to their learning were motivating to them. Additionally, the choice of partners for group projects also influenced WTC. The study's participants discussed social factors frequently, leading the researcher to conclude that student grouping is essential to success. Students reported that ability to choose their own groups increased their participation, which

contradicts Tiovanen's (2011) findings that teacher-formed groups led to greater engagement. A positive classroom atmosphere encourages participation by increasing students' interest in communicating and by reducing feelings of self-consciousness when they do participate. Not surprisingly, learners are more willing to take risks in a positive, safe environment. Participants also reported "fear of making errors" (p. 50) as a demotivating factor, making them less likely to be willing to communicate.

Eddy-U suggests that in order for group tasks to be successful, instructors should choose tasks that can be engaged in by all students equally, regardless of L2 ability. She also suggests the need for further research in motivating students to participate in group tasks, and on how to address and deal with demotivators. In the type of class where the work the students do is public, motivating factors include interest in the task, perceived effectiveness of it, groupmates, social situation, and feelings of safety.

Drama has been shown to be an effective tool in a foreign language class to increase motivation to participate. Weber (2017) studied the effects of drama pedagogy on anxiety in intermediate German-language students at an American university. She had two sections of the same class, so was able to use one as an experimental group, and one as a control group. She based her study on the work of Erika Piazzoli on anxiety in Italian language students, who found that drama pedagogy is effective in reducing anxiety in foreign language classrooms. Over a four-week unit, in one of her classes, Weber used drama classroom practices, including some from applied theater, such as "hot seating, empathy questions, role-plays, still images, more open scenarios, and a simplified version of forum theater" (Weber, 2017, p. 5). She found that although students' anxiety when speaking could be greater during some of the activities, the

overall anxiety of the class diminished as the unit progressed, as compared with the control group. Weber also found that student engagement increased as a result of the drama pedagogy. She incorporated research from Su-Ja Kang (as cited in Weber, 2017) who found that there are three factors that can influence Willingness to Communicate (WTC): security, excitement, and responsibility. These factors were borne out in Weber's study. She also identified three additional categories that influenced WTC: perceived competence, group dynamics, and miscellaneous factors.

The evidence that drama is anxiety producing in the moment, but lowers anxiety overall, is very helpful. Students who are more comfortable in the class, because they have participated in a drama activity, become more likely to participate in another such activity. Participation leads to more participation. This theme is consistent with what Ryan (2012) found that students who do one drama project tend to want to do more. It must be noted, however, that Weber's study focused on a homogeneous group of language learners, but does not address what happens when dealing with heterogeneous classes, where English learners must practice their L2s in front of native English speakers.

In conclusion, the existing research demonstrates a number of ways to engage students. First, classroom environment and the teacher's pedagogy and personal style can be important factors, as can students' relationships with peers. The experience level of the teacher also affects student engagement. The intensifying effect that occurs when personality types align with environments peopled with similar personality types is common in a theater department. This can have negative consequences, however, when someone from the outside is looking to come into the group. Second, students

engage when they are able to do something that is meaningful to them, and also when they see the point of an activity. Some students come to the class already convinced of the relevancy of drama to their lives, whereas others do not share that sentiment. Third, studies about motivation in the foreign language classes indicate that willingness to communicate, or WTC, is particularly relevant. In speaking a foreign language, the WTC must overcome the student's fear of making a mistake, or speaking in public, or drawing attention to oneself. The same could be true for a drama class. The need to communicate must be there in order for students to step over the line. Finally, non-presentational theater has been shown to be an effective way to increase participation and engagement in foreign language classes, and has the benefit of providing participants with a sense of agency, especially in its practice of empowering the participant.

Engagement is not the same as motivation to participate. Engagement is fleeting, and is not always apparent to the outside observer (Dunn, 2013). Achieving and measuring engagement is important, but engagement alone does not necessarily get students on their feet, participating. None of the studies on engagement in a drama class addressed participation. Participation was addressed, however, in some of the studies in the foreign language classes. There, carefully sequenced drama activities were used as motivators, creating extrinsic incentives for students to use their foreign language skills in order to participate. Information on using similar techniques in a drama class would be valuable.

Despite the presence of research on engagement in drama and the success of drama pedagogy as a motivator in language classes, there is less information available

about the effects of students' attitudes and expectations on their levels of participation.

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to identify the experiences and expectations that facilitate or hinder participation in a beginning drama class, and second, to explore how the introduction of social theatre to a beginning drama class will impact students' participation.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study seeks to examine how students' experiences and expectations affect their willingness to engage and actively participate in a beginning drama class, and to explore a means of increasing participation that has been shown to be successful in other subject areas. Specifically, the study asks, what experiences and expectations affect the active participation of students in a beginning drama class, and how will the introduction of social theater to a beginning drama class affect students' participation and learning outcomes?

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

This study follows an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, in which quantitative data is collected first, followed by the collection of qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). This study focused on student participation, and the initial qualitative survey data collected examined students' broad perceptions of their participation in drama and other classes. Qualitative data, in the forms of journal entries, focus group interviews, and field notes, was used to explain the results of the quantitative data. An additional quantitative phase of the study, consisting of a second survey, was included to explore any changes in students' perceptions of their levels of participation. Following this mixed-methods approach provides the researcher with several data sources, which aid in establishing validity of the study.

This study also follows a humanistic approach to research. The aim of this approach is to remember that the participants in the study are people, and not numbers or data sets. They contribute to the research not as objects who are studied, but as people who act. It is incumbent on the researcher, therefore, to engage in a study that

will somehow benefit the research participants, and to protect and celebrate their humanity (Paris and Winn, 2014). The inspiration for engaging in this study is to make drama more accessible for all students and to increase equity in the classroom and the school. It is not unreasonable to hope that, as a result of taking part in this unit, the students will feel better equipped to participate in other classes and in society.

Research Design

This case study focused on students in two beginning drama classes over one four-week unit, working through some of Augusto Boal's (Boal & Jackson, 2002) Forum Theater exercises and techniques. The research followed the explanatory sequential mixed-methods model, in which quantitative data was collected prior to the qualitative data, which was used to understand the results of the quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). This combination of data sources provides a more complete picture of the issue being researched. In this case, initial survey data was used to examine students' perceptions of the frequency of participation and the difficulty of participating in drama and other classes. Journal entries and focus group interviews were used to examine students' understandings of what it means to participate in drama and in other classes, and to explore reasons that might explain those perceptions and understandings. Data from a survey at the conclusion of the unit was examined to see if there were differences in the perceptions of frequency and difficulty of participating after the conclusion of the unit.

Research site. The study took place in a public high school in California, and the study participants were twenty-six students enrolled in two beginning drama classes. The area in which the school is located is quite affluent, but there is a large immigrant

population, mostly from Central America, living below the poverty line. According to the most recent data on the school population, as compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (2017):

- 45% of the students are white
- 40% of the students are Hispanic
- Nearly 28% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches

The number of students in the first of these classes are not very different from the school's numbers, with about 45% of the class either in English Language Development (ELD) class or having been redesignated as an English speaker, and about 55% of the class native English speakers. This is in contrast to the second beginning drama class, in which 68% of the class is in ELD or has been redesignated, and 32% are native English Speakers. Looking at both classes together shows that 56% of the students are or have been English learners, and 44% have spoken English throughout their academic experience (see Table 1).

Table 1 English proficiency levels in the case study classes.

	Class 1		Class 2		Classes combined	
English Level	# of students	%	# of students	%	# of students	%
ELD	8	27.59%	15	53.57%	23	40.35%
English only	16	55.17%	9	32.14%	25	43.86%
Redesignated	5	17.24%	4	14.29%	9	15.79%
Total	29	100.00%	28	100.00%	57	100.00%

Note 1: Students in English Language Development (ELD) range in levels from 1 to 4. "English only" indicates there is no reference to the student speaking a language other than English at home or in an academic setting. "Redesignated" students began their educations as English learners, and through assessment have been determined to be fluent in English.

Sampling procedure. Students were sent home with permission letters for parents, explaining the purpose of the study and requesting their signature for

permission to participate. Parents were assured that participation in the study would be entirely voluntary, and would have no effect on students' grades. Students who returned signed parent permission letters were asked to sign their own student assent letters. Students in the classes were asked to volunteer to participate in a series of three lunchtime focus groups. Of the students in the classes, nine students agreed to participate in the focus groups.

Data collection procedures. In this mixed-methods study, surveys, journal entries, focus group interviews, and teacher observations were used to explore the effects of student expectations and experiences on their participation in drama class, as well as to examine the impact of social theater techniques on their participation. All students in both classes took part in this unit. Data was collected only about students whose parents consented to their participation in the study.

Since the research was contained within the classroom environment, and took place in conjunction with a unit in the curriculum, the study was not disruptive to the rest of the school. As a result of going through the unit, however, I am hopeful that the students will feel better equipped to participate in other classes and to stand up for themselves. In this sense I hope that the study will be disruptive in the long run.

Because this study used a sequential mixed-methods approach, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was collected through a survey (see Appendix A: Survey Questions). Twenty students completed a five-question survey at the start of the unit about their perceptions of the frequency and difficulty of participating in drama and other classes.

Qualitative data consisted of journal entries, focus group interview responses, and teacher observations. Journal entries were handwritten on forms provided by the researcher, and contained two questions each (see Appendix B: Journal Prompts). Participants were asked to record their journal entries at the end of five classes during the unit. For each journal entry, up to twenty-five students responded to a total of ten journal prompts (two prompts per class) relating to their perceptions of drama class. The journal prompts were spread out over five days in three weeks, and the number of participating students varied from day to day. All students in the classes were asked to respond to the journal prompts, but only those who agreed to participate in the study were counted and analyzed. Journal entry one had twenty-five respondents; entry two had 24 respondents; entry three had 22 respondents; entry four had 25 respondents; and entry five had 24 respondents. At the end of the unit, students retook the initial survey to see if their attitudes towards participation in drama class had changed. Nineteen participants completed and returned this second survey.

Additionally, a total of nine students agreed to participate in a series of three focus group sessions spread out over three weeks, where they were asked to reflect on and respond to questions about their experiences in class and about their motivation to participate (see Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Questions). The first session had nine participants; the second had five, and the third had six. Each focus group was approximately 25 minutes long. These focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The unit of study consisted of various exercises in building trust and community within the classes, followed by exercises in creating an applied theater piece designed to foster participation in others.

To ensure confidentiality, field notes were recorded on a password protected device, and were taken using initials only. All processing of notes occurred off campus. The names of the school and the research participants have been altered in order to protect their privacy. These pseudonyms, as well as any student responses or statements, appear in italics throughout this paper.

Researcher Positionality

I am a teacher at this school, and I chose this site because I wanted to do research that would inform my own practice. Working with my own students provided the most authentic opportunity for me to learn about their motivation. Furthermore, through the process of this research study, in many cases, the relationship between teacher and student was strengthened, which in turn allowed them a greater connection to the school.

When I began my research project, I had spent an entire semester with each of my classes. It was not possible to remove myself from the equation: in the time I had spent with the students, I formed opinions about individuals and groups within each of the classes, and I had general opinions about each of the classes as a whole. I tended to think of my second class as the “better” of the two. While the mix of English learners to native English speakers was about the same as with the other class, the dynamic was completely different. In my second class there was a group of gregarious Spanish speaking boys who were much less hesitant to participate. As a result, the mood of the

class was nearly always very positive. In contrast, in the first class there were a few “tough girls” who did not appear willing to show vulnerability, and often tested the classroom norms, which could bring down the overall energy in the room. Despite these differences, participation in both classes remained low.

Impartiality was not possible. However, each day was a new opportunity to engage with a student. On a typical day, I greeted the students warmly by name as they came into the classroom. With some students, I exchanged handshakes or high-fives as they entered; with others, I asked about their days. I did not bring up previous behavior unless it was particularly positive, or was relevant to a discussion, in which case it was done in private.

My interest in increasing participation was not strictly academic. I stood to gain from a better understanding of student engagement and motivation. It can be a challenge to get adolescents—especially those who are particularly self-conscious—to participate in drama. Working with stubborn or reluctant students can be frustrating, and when working with English learners I have at times felt frustrated, annoyed, and dismayed: mostly with myself for not doing a better job of reaching them. Looking at the lack of diversity in the drama program, compared with that of the campus, I have felt inadequate as a teacher and director. This has had an impact on my job as well. As a teacher of an elective course, I have been in constant need to recruit and advocate for my program, or risk reducing the number of classes I teach. By increasing participation and retention, I hoped to grow my program and be able to teach as many full sections of drama as possible. This would ease anxiety and fatigue, as I would be able to provide

more attention and focus to the drama program, which in turn (I hoped) will make me a more effective teacher and better able to support all of my students.

Data Analysis

Data from the quantitative survey and the qualitative journal entries and focus group questions was analyzed separately. Survey data from both the first and second survey were compiled and analyzed for emergent patterns. Averages of the numbers were compared between the first and second survey. Additionally, the survey data from the focus group students were analyzed a second time, separate from that of the other participants. Journal entries were coded for emergent ideas and themes. Focus group interviews were transcribed and coded for emergent ideas and themes as well. These codes were compared and, where appropriate, consolidated to facilitate the analysis of the data. Colleagues aided in coding the data and identifying emergent themes. The journal entries from the focus group participants were also analyzed a second time, separate from the rest of the class, with the intention of triangulating the data for validity.

Response Bias

Surveys were conducted in class, with all of the students completing the surveys as part of the classroom instruction. Only survey responses from the students who turned in parental permission forms, as well as teen consent forms, were included in the research. Conducting the surveys in class limited the number of nonrespondents. Nearly all surveys came back completed. As a result, survey response bias should have had a negligible effect. It should be noted, however, that focus group participants were effectively self-selected. The nine students who participated in the focus groups were the only ones to agree to do so, possibly because of positive feelings they already had

toward the class. Thus, the more detailed perspectives of students with more negative attitudes towards the class are not represented in this study. Journal entries reflect a range of attitudes.

Descriptive Analysis

Once collected, data was organized into codes to facilitate categorization and analysis. Attention was given to codes that emerged from the data. Among the expected codes were: sharing; self-consciousness; and difficult people. I expected that students would see a drama class as an opportunity to work with one another to create new meaning, as part of the dialogic process. This was borne out in several of the journal entries. Students in the focus groups referred frequently to the need to take chances, or step outside of one's comfort zone. In journal entries, students also referred to bravery, which was associated with risk. Unsurprisingly, students also mentioned self-consciousness, which became a code. This was expected because of the public nature of the class activities and the not-uncommon hesitation people feel about public speaking. Difficult people was also an expected code, and it encompasses people who are combative, non-participatory, or otherwise not helpful. I have been teaching drama long enough to know that in any group there are people who are not willing to work.

Codes that came as a surprise were: signaling; and drama family. A common response to the question of what participation looks like in other classes was "raising your hand," or signaling to the teacher that the student is participating. I did not expect that the students were so conditioned as to see the signal for participation as being more important than any contribution they would bring to the discussion. I was also surprised to find the code, "drama family," as I did not expect that these students would

have already formed that kind of an attachment to drama. I would have expected to find that code among older, more experienced students.

Themes that emerged from the data included student expectations; risk-taking; the following of class norms; active versus passive participation; and interpersonal relationships. Students' expectations of the required participation in drama emerged as a factor that influenced their appreciation of the class. Students also identified risk-taking as a component of the class that had an impact on their participation. Many students revealed that they understand participation in class as a largely passive activity, including following class rules or norms, or participating by signaling their willingness to do so. Finally, a significant theme to emerge was interpersonal relationships. Students reported a preference in forming their own project groups, as opposed to having them chosen by the teacher. Chief among the reasons they provided was the frustration of working with people who were not interested in participating. That said, students in the focus groups later conceded that working with different partners on class exercises (specifically exercises that were not graded) would be beneficial towards their reduction of anxiety and would produce greater educational outcomes.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, data has been triangulated, meaning that different data sources—in this case focus group interviews, classroom observations, and journal entries—were compared to create the emergent themes. Furthermore, the journal entries and survey results of the nine focus group participants were compared against those data points from the other study participants, in order to validate the focus group's experience as representative of the rest of the participants. This study followed

the explanatory sequential mixed-methods model, in which data was collected through various sources, including survey, journal entries, focus group interviews, and researcher observations. This approach increases the validity of the study by providing data from a broad sample of students, as well as allowing for detailed information to come from the study participants. Because I, as the researcher, have been with these students for some time already, there has already been a long-term observation taking place. However, this may be tempered by the “back-yard” effect of already having a relationship with these groups of students. Additionally, I acknowledge that my own biases are present in this work. I cannot escape my own positionality, and I realize that it affects my interpretation of the data. To mitigate these effects, I have asked that the data be peer-debriefed by fellow graduate students currently in the process of analyzing data for their research projects. I have used member-checking, or sharing the results of the research with the students, as another form of ensuring validity. The students’ responses are included in the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

Students at *Vista del Monte High School* are able to choose from a variety of electives, including studio art, yearbook, graphic design, engineering, photography, and music. They are also able to choose drama. A variety of factors go into choice of elective. Some students choose their electives based on their interests, while others are placed into electives because of a lack of space in their first-choice classes, or because of schedule conflicts, or because of late arrival to the school district. Still others make choices according to how much effort they believe will be required for success.

Students' expectations and preconceived ideas about drama impact student learning outcomes in the class. In the findings presented below, I first demonstrate how a lack of understanding about the necessary level of participation or the required quality of participation to succeed in drama leads to dissatisfaction with the class. This disconnect between expectations for participation and the participatory requirements of the class causes reluctant students to withdraw, disengage or become disruptive in class. Next, I illustrate how students' perceptions of peer judgement inhibit their participation in drama class, specifically when students are in the process of learning English as a second language. Not all students, however, feel inhibited by their peer audience, as shown by student responses shared during the focus groups. Additionally, the findings from this study indicate that students understand that creation in a drama class is a dialogic process, which is dependent on participation from all group members. Many students expressed frustration at the lack of participation among their classmates, which negatively impacted the class as a whole. Finally, the findings from this study

indicate that the unit on Forum Theater did have a positive effect on student participation.

In Other Classes I Participate by Raising My Hand

Participating in a drama class is different than participating in a more traditional one. Study participants indicated that they understood participating in general to entail following the class norms. This included raising hands, speaking when spoken to, and following the rules. Many perceived participation in drama class as being different. Students understood that drama is inherently more active, and involves working with others to a much greater extent. For some this is positive, but not for others. Participants in the focus group suggested that some students signed up for drama or were placed into the class thinking that because there was no homework, drama would be an “easy A.” Upon realizing that the class would be more demanding, and in ways they had not anticipated, these students might have changed their minds about the class being easy. Students suggested that participating in drama depends largely on individual students’ interest in drama. If a student was not interested, they would not participate beyond the minimum they felt necessary to obtain the grade they wanted. Additionally, participants in the focus group indicated that part of their interest in the class came from prior exposure to drama, whether through school or family interests.

Janice was a first-year student, a Spanish speaker who has been “redesignated,” meaning she has been tested and deemed fluent in English. In drama class, she generally stayed on task and followed directions, but rarely, if ever, volunteered. Her statement about participation, “*In other classes I participate by raising my hand,*” represents the overwhelming response by the beginning drama students, when asked

what participation in other classes looks like. But what does it mean to participate? The beginning drama students were accustomed to thinking of participation as more symbolic than active. Most of them were also first year students. They had learned that participation in a class largely involved following the classroom norms and obeying the teacher. In their journal entries, the students were very clear in their understanding of this expectation. "*I do the work asked of me,*" said *Daniel*. "*You do the work and pay attention,*" said *Amy*. "*Going up to the board if the teacher asks you to,*" said *Bella*. *Christopher* actually listed some of the classroom rules in his response to the question, including "*no earbuds*" as an example of participation, and *Virginia's* response included "*looking interested when presenting.*" These examples represented a passive approach to education. While the students may have been engaged and paying attention, their understanding of participation was that they must obey the rules and behave accordingly. These students have accepted that their role in participating in class is to signal their willingness to contribute and to follow directions, or, in the latter case, to feign interest.

A few of the students reported taking a more active role in their education. *Walter* included "*using your teacher as a tool to learn*" and "*listening and processing what is taught,*" showing active involvement in his learning, and implying that there was work beyond signaling taking place. Others students' journal entries included "volunteering" and "sharing," and a few brought up "explaining" and "group discussions" as evidence of their participation. These responses signified a greater level of activity and agency in the students' approaches to their learning. These latter students were also the more active participants in their drama classes.

Students did, however, perceive that drama class requires a different quality of participation. When asked about participation in drama class specifically, the responses were more varied. Some respondents listed following the classroom norms, as above, or raising their hands, but there was a greater emphasis on active participation. A number of students actually described participation in drama using the words “active” or “actively.” “*Actively sharing ideas,*” said *Walter*. “*Actively playing games,*” said *Ashley*. Students also saw participation in drama as including “contributing” to the activities or to the group and “going up on stage” or “getting up in front of the class.” While the students included the word “volunteering” in their descriptions of participation in other classes, it was more prevalent in the description of drama class.

Additionally, students revealed an understanding that in drama, participation also meant working with other people. *Diego*, an English learner, wrote, “*I think that all it’s good because we work together [sic].*” *Daniel* echoed this sentiment, and added a statement about attitude: “*Students have a positive attitude and encourage others to succeed.*” One would hope that students would describe all of their classes this way, but these statements do show how a drama class can be different from other classes. Participation in drama does not mean just being responsible for oneself and for one’s own work, but being part of a larger dynamic with shifting variables and personalities to negotiate.

The focus group interviews provided insight into the ways that students reacted to the different qualities of participation required in a drama class. In the following excerpt, taken from the second focus group meeting, the participants suggested that the

level of participation reflected students' reasons for enrolling in the class in the first place:

Elizabeth: There's a lot of people who are just there to fill up a class, and they don't like, actually try to get involved or participate in the class and so it makes it harder, like with the final projects it made it harder.

Bella: Or they're like not very friendly.

Pryor: What do you think is up with that? The people who aren't doing anything...?

Virginia: They really - they don't care as much.

Christopher: Probably they're like, I'd rather be in like art or some other elective than be here.

Bella: Like at the beginning of the year I remember some of them like, asking like, can we switch out for a different class? But, um, I think the way the classes were this year was that the classes were, once you were in like, a class for a certain amount of time, then you couldn't really get out of it.

Elizabeth: Um, I think, I don't know... but, a lot of people kinda thought it would be kind of like an easier class to do.

Christopher: Yeah.

Elizabeth: Like it was more of an "easy A" than other electives like art and stuff that you need to do, and so when it shows that it actually does take effort to get a good grade in the class they were not happy and they just didn't want to participate as much.

Denise: Yeah I think they just use it as like a credit for their art because it counts for like a performing art so they just use it to get full credit to graduate.

Pryor: Why is there this perception that this would be an “easy A”?

Denise: Well, because it’s not like any regular curriculum where it’s like you have like one answer and if you get that wrong then you don’t get the points or you don’t do this, and there’s not really that much homework or anything.

Elizabeth: And also that like most of the curriculum is doing drama exercises and plays and like games and stuff and they just thought it would be easy.

The focus group participants suggested that one of the reasons that some students took drama in the first place was to avoid work. They were not drawn to the class because of any particular interest in drama, but because they assumed that the class was easy and that there was no homework. As *Bella* said, by the time that a student realized that a class would be more challenging than initially thought, the window for dropping the class may have closed.

Students also may not have recognized the learning that was taking place. In some ways, a drama class is as much about skill as it is about content. Many of the activities that students do are designed to ease their inhibitions and acclimate them to working with others and to behaving naturally in front of an audience. *Denise* said, “*Um, well I know a few people that um, don’t like drama and they always say like, oh, I hate everything about drama, it’s so boring, we don’t learn anything.*” Students who see themselves, as Freire would say, as receptacles to be filled (Freire, 1970/2017), will have trouble recognizing the educational opportunity they are missing out on by their unwillingness to participate, and will therefore not see its value.

Students who had already decided that they like drama, or who expected that participation was part of the class, had a much more positive outlook than those who were unprepared for the demands of the class. According to *Alexa* in the first focus group interview:

I feel like in order for it, like, participating in class to be easier, it's kind of just based on if you actually like drama class. Like, if you really like it it's going to be pretty easy, because you want to be there, and you want to get up and do stuff; but if you're... like, you were only taking drama because it's just one of the electives and you didn't know what to pick, then it's going to make it harder, because it's like, you didn't necessarily want to be there anyway. But you know you have to participate to get a grade so it, like, makes it harder for some people.

The students who were interested in drama willingly participated because for them, the activities were enjoyable. Activities were not to be endured, but enjoyed. However, those who were not interested in the class for its own sake were motivated to participate only by the reward of a passing grade. Given the level of participation that students said they were accustomed to in their other classes, the requirements of a drama class could have come as a shock to those who were not prepared for them.

How do the students come to be interested in drama? Most of the students in the focus group revealed that they had some positive, prior connection to the art form. Two students became involved because their parents had been involved in drama when they were in high school, and encouraged their kids' participation. *Luis*, a first-year student, had a sister who was a drama teacher, and he took the class on her recommendation. *Christopher* became interested in drama through a community outreach program put on

at his middle school by a local theater company. *Manuel* just liked to act. Even *Virginia*, who had no prior experience, said she thought it sounded like fun. All of these students were active participants in the class. Coming to the class with a set of positive expectations helped them accept the demands of the class, and allowed them to thrive.

Even Though There's Nothing Wrong, People Still Judge

Study participants identified risk-taking as another aspect of drama class that has an impact on participation. High school students are acutely aware of the opinions of others (even if their perceptions are not always accurate), and can be self-conscious to the point that they are not willing to risk failure. They worry about the effect that their actions would have on others' opinions of them, which can stifle their willingness to participate. This self-consciousness is present even in the students who are generally confident and participate regularly, but it is especially burdensome for the students who already feel marginalized. English learners often feel self-conscious speaking English in front of native speakers, and asking them to perform in their second language is sometimes more than they are confident doing.

Forum Theater demands complete participation from everyone in attendance at a theatrical event. In order to participate, everyone in the room must feel that they are able to do so, despite any anxiety they might have about speaking. Another aspect of participation in a drama class, therefore, involves a certain level of risk-taking, even for people who want to be in the class. Students must speak, move, and think under the watchful gazes of their peers. Some students understood that risk-taking is inherent in drama. *Joan* described participation in drama as, "... *when we as students do activities*

and put effort into the activities that are out of our comfort zone.” However, working outside of one’s comfort zone can produce anxiety.

To combat this anxiety and acclimate students to the practice of performing in public, most classes started with some sort of a warm-up. Warm-ups typically took the form of all of the students, and the teacher as well, standing in a circle. There was usually some sort of vocalization and action, and an exchange signaling who should go next (sometimes in order, sometimes not). As a result, participants had to focus and pay attention, which served to help them change gears from a typical class to one that required greater participation. Warm-ups were often silly, involving nonsense words or onomatopoeic sounds, and they moved quickly. Many students included “warm-ups” or “games” among the parts of drama class they enjoyed the most.

Not all students enjoyed the warm-ups, however. Among a few students, even participating in these silly activities was too much for them. *Amy* was one of these students. She was tough and aggressive, and did not take criticism from anyone. When a student in her project group suggested that she had been ignoring the group to socialize, she verbally attacked him, calling him names and accusing him of lying. Since the beginning of the school year she was unwilling to do more than the bare minimum for nearly any activity. Most of the time, whenever the teacher’s focus was not directly on her, she would stop participating in any activity and either talk with friends or sit by herself. Her participation in warm-ups was consistent with these observations, taken from field notes:

Started the class with the Tiger/Tree exercise. All students are on their feet, walking around. Each person chooses another student to be their “tiger” and

must keep as far away from them as possible. No one knows if they are a tiger or whose tiger they are, unless they discover it through observation. After a round of this, students designate—again without telling them—another student to be a tree, who they must keep between themselves and the tiger. The exercise created some interesting dynamics, and students were moving well, but not everyone was participating. Noticed that *Amy* was not participating. Instead she was standing, talking to another student. Talked to her, she claimed she was too tired to do the activity. Throughout the rest of the day saw particular resistance from *Amy*... she was much more interested in talking with *Mindy* and others than in participating. Reminded her that in a drama class you get out what you put in. No effect on *Amy*, some effect on *Mindy*, who disengaged from *Amy* and started working.

This episode is indicative of most interactions with *Amy*. She made the smallest amount of effort, and embraced none of the spirit of the exercise. When confronted, either with kindness or with exasperation, she claimed that she was doing what was asked of her, or that she was tired, or that she was shy. Her minimal effort was also reflected in her journal entries, which were so short as to be of no value. It is the opinion of this researcher that her lack of participation did not stem from her fatigue or disinterest, but from her fear of trying and failing. That by not trying, she did not risk looking foolish.

In spite of the overall positivity generated by the warm-ups, students still got nervous performing in front of their peers. They were acutely aware of the attitudes and opinions of the other students, and in some cases held themselves to a higher standard of performance. The journal entries reflected these attitudes. *Janice* wrote, “*The hard*

part of drama class is doing something wrong.” Joan’s journal entry said, “*The fact that I feel that I would do something wrong in participating and people would get annoyed, mad, ect. [sic].*” Virginia’s journal entry, which leads off this chapter, “*Even though there’s nothing wrong, people still judge,*” encapsulates the contradiction between what the students knew intellectually, and how they felt. They have been told that mistakes are part of the learning process, that there are no consequences for saying something out of context or silly, or for doing something unexpected. However, they felt differently.

Intellectually students understood that mistakes are necessary for learning, but emotionally they were still bound to the opinions of their peers. This was a difficult bond to break. Even students who were frequent participants felt some anxiety when performing. *Daniel*, a first-year student, was a regular performer in middle school and auditioned for two high school plays and was cast in one. He regularly volunteered for demonstrations and improvised activities, and took advantage of the weekly after-school improv class offered by the drama department. He wrote, “*In my experience, I find it harder to perform in front of an audience, although I have experience, and it’s not too hard.*” *Bridget*, another first-year student who sometimes volunteered to perform, felt anxious about talking in front of an audience, but also felt that she needed to excel. In her journal entry, she explained that, “*Improv is also hard because I feel pressured to come up with something good....*” For *Bridget*, simply participating was not enough: she needed to meet her own standards for performance. Students who were not willing to take those risks, or who signed up for drama not realizing what would be asked of them, had a harder time participating.

For some this self-consciousness was overpowering. As part of the unit on social theater, students were asked to choose a time in their lives in which they felt they had been treated unfairly, and to create a play about that experience. A group of young men, all English learners, had been working together. None of them had ever been very expressive on stage or in rehearsal, even when speaking in their primary languages. This anecdote, taken from field notes, took place on a day when the class was still generating content:

Lots of sitting around and planning, but all eventually got to their feet. Working with the [young men], they finally put something together and acted it out. All of them! There was about a minute where there was complete engagement from that whole group! They had been going over a story about being a fresh arrival from [another country] and not knowing anyone. I coached them through. *Miguel* was alone. *Jesus* went up to him and introduced himself. They started talking and *Jesus* said something in Spanish and *Miguel* lit up. "You speak Spanish?" They were able to turn that scene into a party with introductions and fictional identities for all of the guys. It was the most I have ever seen from any in that group.

By acting out a common experience in their primary languages, these students were able to overcome their self-consciousness long enough to generate a story. They repeated and reviewed it several times in rehearsal, and were able to perform it fairly consistently. When it came time to present it to the class, however, all energy, enthusiasm, and focus disappeared. In rehearsal, these students had been engaged and interested, and had managed to face the audience and speak loudly enough to be

heard. In performance they were reduced to giggling adolescents, standing with their backs to the audience, nearly inaudible.

The great tragedy here was that not only were these students unable to tell their story, but the rest of the class was unable to hear it. All of the students would have benefitted from experiencing the reality that these young men had intended to present, but because the actors were not able to overcome their self-consciousness, that opportunity was lost.

For English learners, speaking publicly in their second language constitutes a risk in itself (Schaedler, 2010). Some of the English learners in the class were hesitant about performing in front of their native English speaking peers. Several of the Spanish speaking students related this problem in their journal entries, listing “speaking English” as the most challenging aspect of drama class for them. *Isabella* stated that “*Acting, but without speaking* [translated from Spanish],” was a part of the class that was easy for her. During the previous semester, the students worked in small, heterogeneous language groups to write and perform bilingual plays. In the first focus group interview, *Bella*, a native English speaker, related her own experience:

Bella: Uh, speaking in another language was also one of the difficult parts of the final because like... uh... [pause]

Pryor: Because you were speaking Spanish?

Bella: Yeah. And I'm not too familiar with Spanish. So. In English if I forgot my lines I could just ad-lib it, but in Spanish, I can't ad-lib it.

For inexperienced performers, acting in a foreign language was a tremendous challenge and an enormous risk, especially if they felt self-conscious about their language

abilities, or about their identities as English learners in an English-speaking environment.

They're Not Going to Understand Us

The desire to communicate and be understood emerged as a theme, especially among English learners. Many of the students expressed an urge to speak and to contribute. Some students felt that this was a challenge, especially given the self-consciousness they experienced speaking English in front of native speakers. This created tension for these students: wanting to express themselves but feeling unable to do so.

Luis was a first-year student from Central America. His sister was a drama teacher, and he was a regular participant in the class. When allowed to choose his partners, he and his friends frequently worked together on projects, creating fantastic, acrobatic images. People became furniture and set pieces, and they carried and held one another in creative ways to tell their stories. His English was good, but he hesitated to speak in class. When asked if he would be able to participate more if he could speak in Spanish, he replied, "*Yeah, but almost everybody speaks English and if we speak Spanish they're not going to understand us.*"

Luis' statement touches on the dilemma faced by English learners in an English-speaking classroom. Apprehension about their ability to speak English was one of the factors that inhibited some students' expression. Even though students had the option to perform and do exercises in Spanish, they realized that their messages would not be received by the normative culture students—English speakers—if they did. This placed them in an awkward position: perform in a language in which they could express

themselves fully but not be understood by many of their classmates, or present in their second language, realizing that they may not have possessed the vocabulary to convey their ideas to their own satisfaction.

Honestly, Like, No One Really Cares If You Mess Up

Study participants who felt more comfortable participating attributed that feeling in part to a positive connection with the class. This connection was achieved through repeated experiences performing for one another. Sharing an experience as a class created a bond which led to greater comfort and familiarity, reducing the anxiety that performers felt. This confidence extended beyond the drama classroom, with students reporting greater ease of participation in other classes as well. Those students who did not participate, however, did not experience this reduction in anxiety, which, in turn, diminished the likelihood that they would participate in the future.

Risk-taking is essential to drama, whether in class or in a professional theater. Without the willingness to take a risk, drama cannot happen. No one would go on stage. The audience would sit waiting for someone to come out and say something, which would never happen. It is the risk that makes drama possible. What is it that allows students to feel safe enough to take that risk in class?

The students in the focus group suggested that there was a mutuality of trust and respect at work that allowed them to feel comfortable performing in front of their peers. In the first focus group interview, *Christopher* suggested that, “... *knowing that everybody, when you go up, you know who everybody is, and you have some type of connection with them.*” *Denise* added, “*Knowing that everyone else has to do the same thing, so it’s not just you alone having to do this.*” Finally, *Alexa* pointed out that a drama

class is about performing and presenting, whereas in other classes, presentations are much fewer and farther between. In a drama class, one becomes habituated to performing:

If you had to like raise your hand or like, do a presentation in a different class, it's kind of like harder to do that because you're not... It's kind of like a one time thing that you're not doing all the time in that class. But in drama class, like, the people that you're doing it with have to do it all the time every day with you too, so you get used to the people that are there, and you get used to like presenting in front of them so it becomes more like, I don't know, it feels more comfortable I guess (Alexa, Focus Group Interview One).

Unlike in other classes, drama students were provided the opportunity to present nearly every day. This repetition facilitated habituation. The students who were able to accept the associated risks quickly became more comfortable in front of an audience. They began to realize that the consequences for mistakes were minimal. In the second focus group interview, *Virginia* pointed out that, "... no one really cares if you mess up." That confidence extended beyond the drama class. *Virginia* added, "Because now in my other classes I like, participate a lot more than I used to like, last year, and I don't feel awkward saying stuff that might be wrong." Those who were not able to risk embarrassment—for whatever reason—did not reap the benefits that drama can provide, both inside and outside the drama classroom. *Denise* summed it up:

I didn't like raise my hand a lot in class because I didn't think I knew the answer even though I knew it was right. I always had... in the back of my head, oh... it's

probably wrong. And now, it's like, if it's wrong, then it's wrong, so I raise my hand anyway.

Through drama, *Denise* came to feel comfortable taking risks in drama as well as in other classes, allowing her to participate more fully and to be able to enter into dialogue with her teachers and classmates.

It Can Be Hard to Share Responsibilities and Merge Ideas

Several study participants mentioned the dialogic aspect of drama class as being an important part of the class. They used words and phrases like “sharing,” “communicating,” “working together,” and “contributing.” They understood that a large portion of the class was dedicated to creating and presenting as a group, which was dependent on contributions from all group members. Most of the negative reports about the class focused on the students who did not participate. This was captured by the code “difficult people,” and included the people who, for whatever reason, refused to participate, contribute, or engage with the rest of the class.

The frustration with “difficult people” was explicitly stated in both focus group interviews and journal entries. Some of the more active participants in the class also stated that they did not enjoy working in groups when the groups were selected by the teacher, and not by themselves. Several of the students felt that they had to carry the weight for the entire group, and referred to the responsibility as a “burden” they did not appreciate. A challenge that resulted from a lack of participation and the frustration that it generated was a negative perception of the beginning drama class. While quite a few participants stated that they enjoyed the class, several saw beginning drama as a trial to endure on the way to taking advanced drama, which was a class where nearly all

students participated. Consequently, the latter had the reputation of being an enjoyable class.

A third component of Boal's Forum Theater (1979/2014) is the dialogic nature of communication, in which individuals share their thoughts and understandings to create meaning and to generate ideas that could not be created by the individual alone. For dialogue to be possible, people must be able and, significantly, willing to communicate. Students who will not participate cannot be part of the conversation. This was a great source of frustration for the students who were trying to contribute. When asked about challenges in the class, or about what they enjoyed the least, one of the chief complaints was effectively, "having to work with someone who doesn't want to participate." *Daniel*, when asked what aspects of drama class he found challenging, wrote, *"I find it difficult to work in groups because it can be hard to share responsibilities and merge ideas. It is especially difficult when there are group members that have a bad attitude or don't say anything or don't do anything, or are too selfish, etc."* Daniel's desire to "merge ideas" is representative of the dialogic process. He realized that for dialogue to take place, all students must participate. Reluctant students who would not participate in that process were the source of his frustration.

Students' reluctance to participate also affected group dynamics. For some projects, students selected their own group partners. For others, the teacher formed the groups. Very often, when given a choice, students chose to work with their friends, which could have detrimental effects on their productivity, as well as perpetuating self-segregation in the class. However, *Ashley* made an argument for allowing students to select their own partners. *"I really haven't had very good experiences with groups that*

are assigned to us because not everyone is invested.” Ashley suggested that, given the choice, students who were “invested” in the class would choose to work together.

Presumably, the students who were not invested would form their own groups, and would be responsible for their own actions and the resulting grades.

Students in the focus group also felt that they should be able to choose their own groups for projects, but they also acknowledged the value of working with people they don't know as well. Alexa suggested that working with different partners actually helped to build confidence. Referring to working in groups, she said,

... if you're just doing it with a group of friends then like you feel too comfortable so then you're not really going to do anything. But if you're in a small group of people and it's not like, people you're necessarily going to go to be in a group with ... then it gives you more practice. But it's still not in front of everyone so it makes it easier and then like in the future it will be easier to present and stuff.

Based on this statement, the other focus group participants agreed that working with different partners for short exercises was beneficial, because it built up confidence and camaraderie. They felt that in graded projects, however, they should be able to choose partners whom they felt would match their levels of participation.

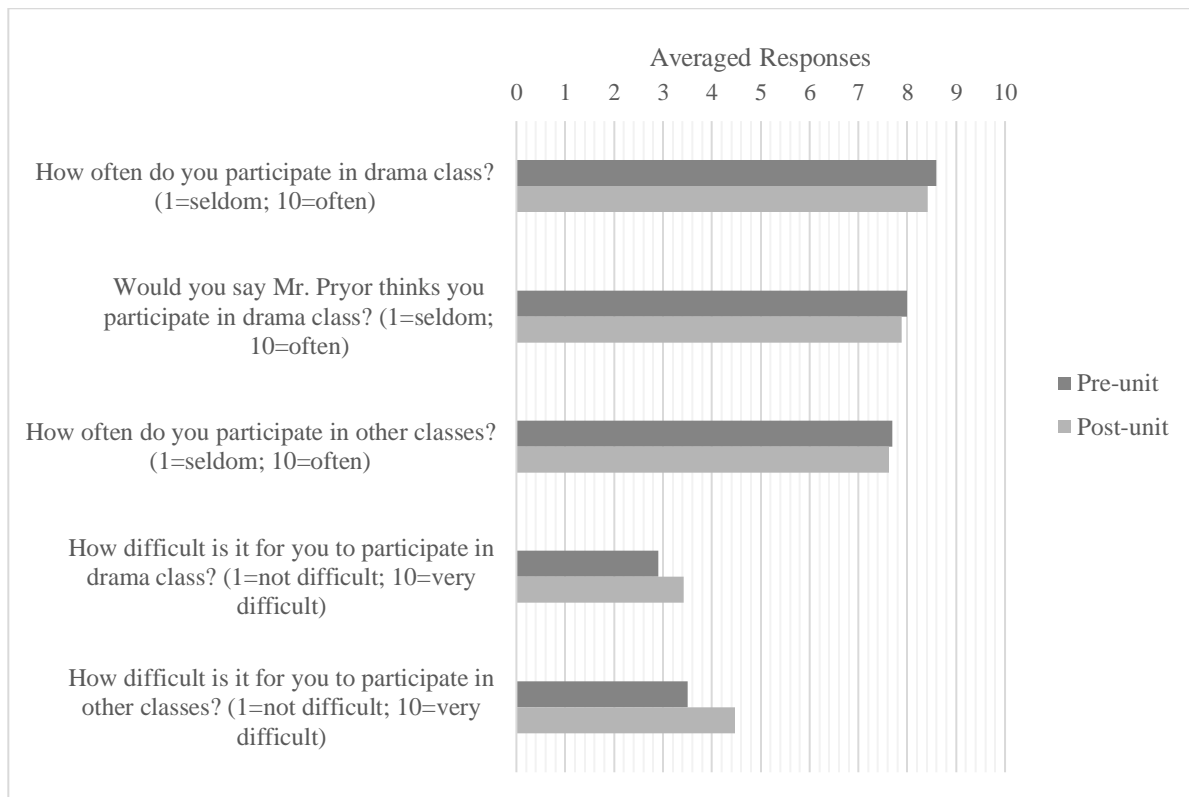
The issue with group dynamics and the nature of dialogue and participation also impacted the way that the class was perceived. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it was not uncommon for students with no interest in drama to be placed into the class. Many of these students did not participate, which affected the dynamic of the class. *“I hear a lot of people to skip out on drama 1 because no one actually tries in the first year. But I've heard that advanced drama is a ton of fun,”* reported Walter. Ashley

was aware of this as well. “*Other students say beginning drama is okay but advanced drama is better because everyone wants to be there.*” The students who continue with drama in school do so voluntarily, and have a clear expectation of what the class will demand. However, in order to get there, they must pass beginning drama. But if students who are genuinely interested in beginning drama are driven away by the students who do not want to participate, then it could lead to a situation in which the students who like drama do not take it, and the students who do not like drama are placed into the class.

Social Theater and Student Participation

The ancillary purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a unit on social theater on student participation. Students were provided with a short survey at the start and end of the unit to gauge their perceived levels of participation in drama as opposed to other classes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Student survey responses: all participants



On average, the student survey responses showed that the unit on social theater diminished students' levels of self-perceived participation, and made it more difficult for them to participate in both drama and other classes. (It should be noted that the differences in the student responses were small, and that the responses usable for this study were few.) The negative effect of social theater, however, was not borne out by observations made during the study.

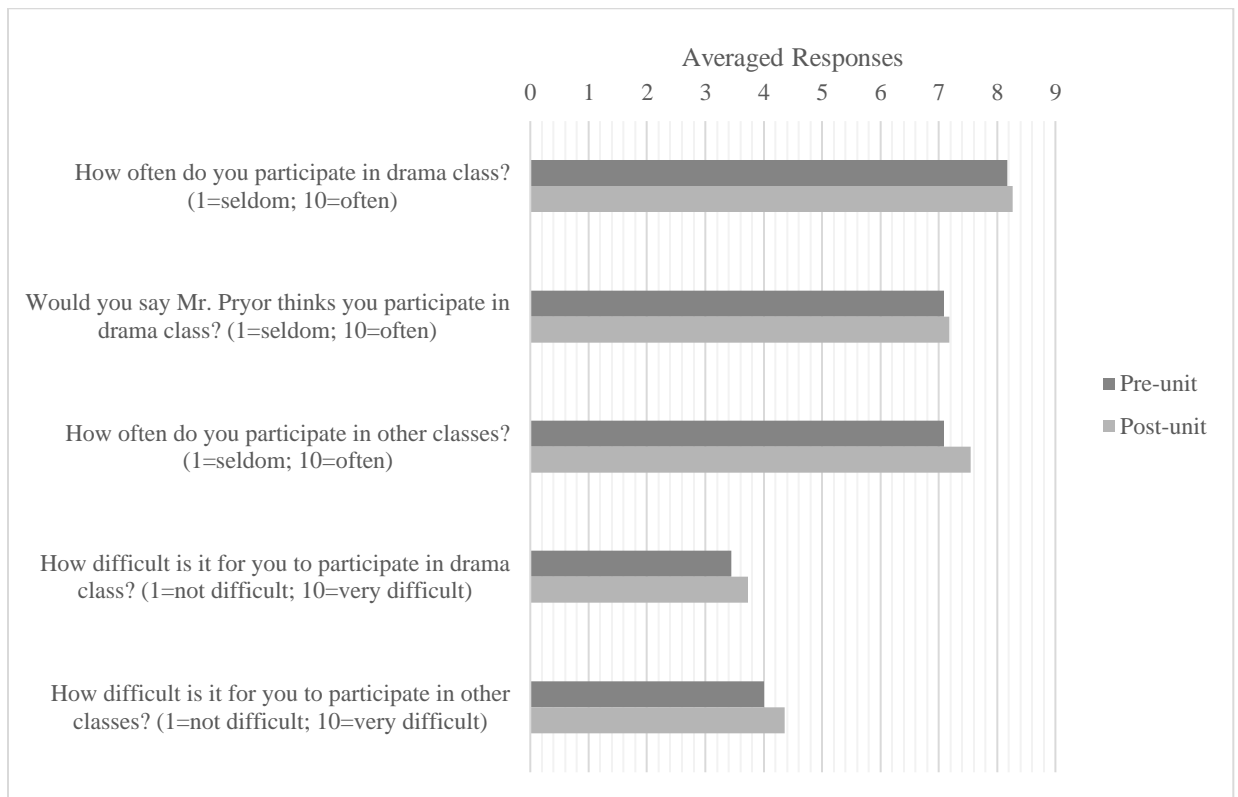
The social theater unit included several steps, culminating in a Forum Theater performance. During the unit, as documented in field notes, a number of students who did not regularly participate in class were much more involved and vocal. *Amy*, who rarely participated, even in warm-ups, was leaning in, listening and sharing with her small group when they were in a circle, sharing their own stories of being treated

unfairly. She engaged in conversation with give and take, which was an unusual level of engagement for her in this class. The group of Central American boys, who typically needed prodding and hand-holding, created and acted out a powerful story in rehearsal. This was the first time that they appeared natural or comfortable in performance, even if it was just a rehearsal. *Clara*, a student who had considered dropping the class at the start of the year because of stage fright, became an active volunteer in several of the Forum Theater performances. She had almost never volunteered before this unit.

Despite the results of the two surveys, participation and agency appears to have increased as a result of this unit, at least among some of the students. The incorporation of social theater was not, however, enough to create a lasting change in the some of the more non-participatory students.

Triangulating the data from the focus groups, journal entries, and field notes showed that the focus group participants' responses and behaviors were consistent with the rest of the study participants, which helps to validate this study. In comparing the focus group members' survey responses, however, there was a difference between theirs and those of the rest of the participants. After removing the focus group members' survey responses from the second survey, there was a minor increase in perceived levels of participation from the pre-unit survey to the post-unit survey, as well as a slight increase in perceived levels of difficulty in participating both in drama and other classes. (see Figure 2).

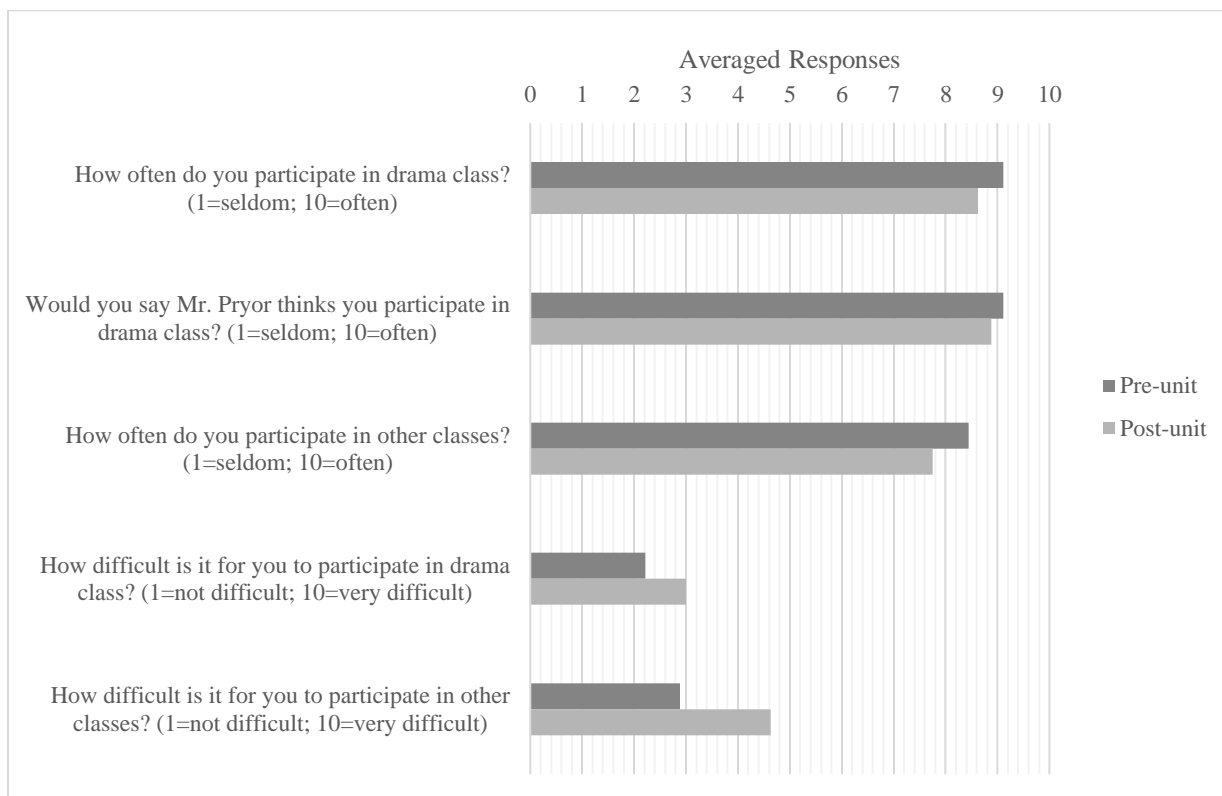
Figure 2. Student survey responses: non-focus group members



The increases in perceived levels of participation were small, but were more in keeping with the field note observations noting the increase in participation among the students.

The change among the focus group members, however, was more dramatic. Among these nine students there was a small decrease in the perception of their own participation in drama and other classes, and a substantial increase in their perceptions of the level of difficulty in participating in both drama and other classes (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Student survey responses: focus group members



The focus group students' perceived levels of difficulty participating in drama and in other class rose 35% and 60%, respectively, over the course of this unit. Two possible explanations occur for this change. One possibility is that by participating in the focus group, these students became more critical of what it meant to really participate. By analyzing how others participated (or not) and engage in a class, they became more conscious of their own levels of participation, and adjusted their responses to fit their new understandings. A second possible explanation is perhaps more prosaic: that because of participating in the focus group interviews, they were simply more inclined to try to provide a more thoughtful response than the first time they took the survey. There may not necessarily have been a change in their perception, but instead in the care that

they took in completing the task. In either case, the focus group experience appears to have had an effect on their perceptions of participation.

In order to further determine the accuracy of the findings of this study, I used member checking (Creswell, 2014). I presented a brief, oral summary—in both English and Spanish—of the findings to each of the beginning drama classes studied. I asked the students to let me know if they agreed with my interpretations of the findings, and to let me know if they had questions or additional insight. The students in both classes agreed with the findings as presented. They also provided additional insight to a few of the points:

1. To the finding that student expectations of the class affect their enjoyment of it, they added that in many respects, drama class is a “simple class.” They explicitly stated that each student is in charge of his or her self, and that each person gets out what they put in, meaning that those who do not participate do not reap any gains.
2. The students tempered the finding that confidence in drama leads to greater participation in other classes, saying that “it depends on who else is in the class.” Specific variables mentioned by the students included “crushes” or other people of interest. In other words, while drama may build confidence in students, there are circumstances in which they will still be nervous speaking in front of others.
3. They agreed with my observation about the increased levels of participation during the social theater unit, despite their post unit survey responses. Students added that they, too, noticed an increase in peoples’ participation throughout the

unit, and felt that it was a good technique to get people thinking. They were sure to let me know, however, that they felt that the pace of the unit was too slow.

These responses affirmed the findings of this study. The students recognized the relationship between participation and learning outcomes, as evidenced by their statement about getting out what one puts in. The clarification about the importance of social factors on one's willingness to participate in a class does not invalidate the findings, but instead points to the importance of social pressures in teens' lives. Finally, the classes' observations of the increase in participation, despite the survey results, coincided with my own observations.

The expectations students brought with them for a drama class had a significant impact on not only their educational outcomes, but on the educational outcomes of their classmates as well. Students who came ready to learn and participate stood to benefit the most from the class, as they would increase their skills through participation. These students recognized that taking risks and working outside of their comfort zones was part of learning, and would accept some discomfort as part of their growth. Students who saw drama class as a forum for creative expression and the dialogic process took advantage of the opportunities presented and benefited from the experience, often choosing to continue with drama in the future. Oftentimes, however, students were placed in a drama class without a clear understanding of what to expect or of what would be expected of them. This lack of understanding about the necessary level of participation and risk-taking resulted in negative consequences for the entire class. Students unwilling to participate not only frustrated their peers and inhibited their learning outcomes, but also discouraged students from taking drama in the first place.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

Success in a drama class depends largely on one's participation, and this study found that students' expectations of what it means to participate affects their learning outcomes. Participation in drama is different than in other classes, requiring a greater degree of mental and physical engagement and activity (Ryan, 2012). In order to be successful, each student must take an active role in the class: taking part in the activities; going on stage; speaking and communicating. The students who participated more also tended to have more of an interest in the class. Some students suggested that this interest stemmed from prior exposure to drama, either through family, theater workshops, or drama classes. Many of these students intentionally chose drama as an elective, knowing that they would be put in situations where they would have to perform. Students who participated regularly gained self-confidence, both through the shared experience of working with their classmates, and through repetition of the tasks. This self-confidence carried through to other aspects of their lives (Freire, 1970/2017). Several students reported that they found themselves more willing to speak up or to participate in class discussions in other academic classes.

Not all students elected to take drama, however, and some struggled to meet the level of participation required from such a class. For some of these students, self-consciousness and fear of failure were inhibitors to participation. This could be especially true for English learners who were particularly uncomfortable speaking English in front of native speakers. They feared the embarrassment that would come from making a mistake (Schaedler, 2010). Other students were afraid to let go of their present circumstances and carefully-constructed identities, preventing them from

engaging with the world of the drama (Dunn, 2013). Adding to this situation, English learners could be frustrated when they wanted to communicate but did not feel they had the language skills to express themselves comfortably and confidently. Finally, the lack of participation from some students was frustrating for others who wanted to take the class. There was less give and take, and students felt they had to carry the load for the non-participants. By this measure, reduced student participation impacted the entire class.

Comparison of Findings to the Literature

This study's findings are consistent with prior research about students' expectations of the characteristics of a drama class, especially the idea that drama class is 'easy.' Delyse Ryan (2012) had found that students expected that drama classes would be more lively than those in other disciplines. This was seen as a benefit for students seeking a change from their usual lecture-style classes. At the same time, non-drama students seemed to perceive drama classes as being easy, a belief that frustrated the drama students. Ryan's observations are consistent with the findings of this study. Students expected that drama class will be fun and lively, but many did not see it as 'work.' These students found that the level of participation expected of them was greater than they had anticipated, and as a result participated less willingly. The drama students, however, who took the class expecting that it would be lively and fun, but also challenging, did more of the work in group projects and were frustrated by the lack of participation from the students expecting an easy 'A'.

Another reason that students might not have actively participated has to do with self-consciousness and engagement. Julie Dunn (2013) wrote about engagement

among drama students. Part of her view of engagement had to do with students being able to partially disengage from their own circumstances in order to more fully engage with the drama they are creating. This could prove challenging for students who are too self-conscious to feel safe immersing themselves in a drama environment. This behavior was evident in this study. *Amy*, the student who was unwilling to look foolish by taking part in any activity, and the boys from Central America, who could not perform in front of the rest of the class, are examples of this inability to disengage. As a result of being caught up in their own circumstances and unwilling to let go of their identities, these students were not able to participate fully in the class activities.

Drama students' fear of making mistakes and being laughed aligns with what Maria Tereza Schaedler (2010) found in her studies of language learners. Schaedler pointed out that fear was a demotivator for students learning English, and that using theater techniques helped to mitigate that fear. A key to this practice was making the language relevant to the students. Schaedler used theater to replicate real-world situations in the language class, providing students the opportunity to practice their English and making the subject more applicable to them. Participants in this study were able to use the Forum Theater exercises to experiment with different ways to handle social situations, which changed the way they were seeing the work on the stage. Many of the students found that they had something to contribute to the Forum Theater pieces as they played out, largely because the pieces sprang from the real-world experiences of the students, making them relatable. This also harkens back to Cecily O'Neill's (1989) idea of exploring themes that are "essential to the students" (p. 533), which provides them with agency and motivation.

This agency and motivation is further supported by Augusto Boal (1979/2014). Boal's Theater of the Oppressed model is designed to empower people to speak up for themselves by gaining confidence through theater. The students who participated in this study reported gains in self-confidence, both in drama class and in other classes, as a result of participating in drama. Although participating in a unit about Boal's Forum Theater did not substantially change student attitudes towards participation, the students reported that they noticed an increase in participation from the entire class. This is in keeping with the goal of universal participation among the spectators and the actors.

A component of Forum Theater (Boal, 1979/2014) is a critical examination of societal structures and positionality. People are forced to conform to certain norms, which leads them to see themselves as oppressed or as oppressors. This in turn affects their view of their opportunities in life and their ability to make changes. The students who viewed class participation as following established norms were not yet in a position to critically examine their worlds. In seeing their contribution to the class as "following the rules," they denied their own agency and ability to act in the classroom environment. They were passive recipients of knowledge.

Freire's idea of the 'banking approach' to education, that the education system views students as vessels to be filled, was also borne out in this study by the students' reported understanding of what it means to participate in class. Many students see participation as indicating a willingness to participate, e.g., raising their hands. "Receive, memorize, and repeat" (Freire, 1970/2017, p. 72) are the steps that students take in the banking approach, and it is clear that the students in this study thought of participation

in this way, at least on some level. Following the classroom rules and norms is important, and raising one's hand is part of those norms, but few students went beyond the idea of signaling willingness to explain how they would contribute after being called on.

One of the findings that stands out as unrepresented in the literature is the connection between prior exposure to drama and interest in the art form. During one of the focus group interviews, most of the participants in the group indicated that they had been somehow positively exposed to drama before joining the class. Some had parents or family members who had encouraged the participants to take drama; others had taken a drama class before; and another had been part of a theater workshop at his middle school. All of these were positive experiences that stoked an interest in drama.

This study also highlights one of the challenges facing English learners in an English-dominant environment. The statement from *Luis* about not wanting to perform his scenes in Spanish, because the English speakers in the audience would not understand him, reveals the dilemma he faced at school. On the one hand, he wanted to be understood by the English speakers, including students and teachers; while on the other, he was not yet confident speaking English in front of English speakers. He was not able to express himself in English as well as he could in Spanish, which was not only frustrating for him, but sometimes prevented him from trying. This understanding provides a new lens for working with the immigrant population in the school. Realizing that in some cases a student's hesitation springs not from an unwillingness to try, but from a fear of not living up to their own standards of communication, can change the approach to working with the student.

Implications

The results of this study provide opportunities for the drama teacher to adjust some of the practices in their classroom, and in the larger community as well. Realizing that not all students come to a beginning drama class with any interest or prior experience in theater allows the classroom teacher to provide them with that first exposure. Additionally, a program that afforded younger students more opportunities to participate in drama activities could result in greater interest and participation at the early high school level.

Acknowledging the different levels of experience in the class would also make the drama program more equitable. As an enrichment or after school activity, drama may not be offered at some of the less affluent schools. In two of the three middle schools that feed into *Vista del Monte High*, drama was not offered as a class. Children's community theater opportunities exist, but those can require a fee to participate. The students who are not exposed to drama at a younger age, therefore, risk missing out on an opportunity to gain the confidence and other skills that participation in drama imparts.

One way to make the class more inclusive of a variety of perspectives would be to utilize the assets in the room: namely, the students who do have experience in drama. Encouraging them to share their stories with the other students could help shift the expectations for the class right from the start. Additionally, recognizing that Western theater experience is not the only valid or valued form of theater could help students see drama as something that is relevant to their lives as well. Starting the class with an assignment to bring in a non-traditional example of 'theater' could help open students'

minds to the possibilities and opportunities the class provides. This would have the dual effect of providing each student with agency as they are empowered to define drama for themselves, as well as making them think critically as they make decisions about their definition of drama.

Another way to empower the students would be to provide them with leadership responsibilities, as presented by Beare and Belliveau (2007). Encouraging enthusiastic students to take on leadership roles might provide inspiration for some of the more reluctant students to take on more responsibilities later in the class. For group projects, each group could be assigned a student leader, thus ensuring that no group would be composed entirely of reluctant students.

One of the benefits of practicing drama is the connection one makes to the people one is working with. The focus group students indicated that one of the factors that built camaraderie within the class was the shared experience of having to perform on stage. Deliberately creating a series of smaller challenges earlier in the year could help mitigate the risk-aversion tendencies of some of the students, while at the same time fostering friendship and teamwork among everyone in the class. Performing these exercises in a line or in a circle, where it is evident that it is a person's turn, rather than relying on students to volunteer to participate early on, could help reluctant students in two ways: first, to understand the expectations of the class, and second, to begin to build that camaraderie earlier.

Success in drama requires risk-taking, and sometimes risks do not result in success. Creating a ritual to celebrate risk and stepping out of one's comfort zone might change the students' attitudes towards failure. There is a theater exercise in which the

students are asked to perform increasingly difficult tasks, which inevitably results in someone making a mistake. Whenever someone makes a mistake, they throw their arms up towards the ceiling and in a loud, cheerful voice shout, "I failed!" The rest of the class then applauds and cheers, and everyone goes back to their tasks. One hears "I failed!" frequently throughout the exercise and occasionally throughout the rest of the class. Doing this exercise early in the school year, incorporating that celebration of risk, and continuing to practice that celebration throughout the year, normalizes the experience of failure, and reframes it as a part of the learning process.

Part of the success of the Forum Theater unit had to do with the relevancy of the subject matter to the students. This could be addressed in early exercises in which students bring in their own examples of theater. Reviewing the course curriculum and looking for opportunities for students to inject their own circumstances and situations into the existing exercises might help keep the subject matter relevant to the students.

At the school level, expectations of what to expect in a beginning drama class need to be clearer in order for the drama program to attract and retain interested students. Based on the feedback from the study participants, there is danger of a negative spiral. Currently, as more students are placed into the class who do not want to be there, they discourage other students who care about drama from taking the class. This in turn creates more space in the class, increasing the likelihood that disinterested students will be placed in drama simply because there is room. If these were the only factors, taken to the absurd conclusion, it would create a situation in which people who truly like drama do not take the class, because it is full of people who do not want to be there. While this conclusion is extreme and unlikely, it is illustrative of the central

challenge to the program. This indicates the need for better education for students, parents, and counselors on what to expect from a drama class. This education could come in the form of better course descriptions, discussions with the academic counselors, and class visits from current drama students to promote the different courses.

This study's findings highlight the potential benefit of having an intradistrict program to expose younger students to drama. Creating theater opportunities for younger students, especially those at schools without drama programs, would have the long-term effect of increasing interest and participation in drama. These students would be able to take advantage of the benefits that a drama class provides, thereby beginning to address the issue of equity. This could be a program run by students from the high school drama classes, who could offer a series of after school workshops to the middle schools that do not have drama programs.

Limitations of the Study

While this study collected data from a variety of students, the perspectives of some of the students are underrepresented. Participation in the study was dependent on students having their parents sign and return consent forms. Those who were not interested in participating may not have gotten these consent forms signed. Additionally, although the journal entries were completed by all of the students in both classes, those students who were more interested in participating likely provided more complete information than those who were not interested in the class. Furthermore, the students who participated in the focus group were self-selected: they agreed to come in at lunch to participate further in the study, and were among the students who participated the

most in class. The students who were disengaged or not interested may not have returned the consent forms, may not have provided much information on their journal entries, and did not participate in the focus groups. Therefore, their perspectives were underrepresented, and would provide valuable information about how to better engage them.

Additionally, because these students' perspectives were not represented in the study, it is unclear whether or not prior exposure to drama had an impact on their interest in the class. With additional time, this study would benefit from the inclusion of the perspectives of other teachers regarding individual students' participation, to compare their behavior in drama with their behavior in those other classes. It would be useful to know if the students who were disengaged in drama were also disengaged in other classes, or, if not, which classes were engaging to them. This data could be used to learn what specifically was turning students off from drama.

The findings of this study were specific to this research site. *Vista del Monte High School* had seen a sudden, large increase in immigrants from Central America, and these students had specific language and academic needs that were not necessarily supported on all levels site-wide. Many of the students joined the school midway through the year, and in some cases had not attended school in several years. Additionally, the community, city, and county in which the school was located were generally affluent, and there was a broad range in the socio-economic statuses of the students at the school.

Despite efforts to remain objective, there is the possibility of confirmation bias in this study. The students in the focus group indicated a frustration with those students

who do not participate, and I must acknowledge personal frustration with the situation as well. It is possible that I am more inclined to see as 'true' the perspectives of the students who participate in class and in the focus groups. This is another reason that having more input from the non-participating students would be valuable.

Directions for Future Research

More research into the perspectives of the non-participating students would be beneficial. Learning directly from these students about what makes them want to participate or not, what prior exposure they have had to drama and the effect of that exposure on their attitudes and expectations, and how they perform in other classes would provide more information on how best to meet their needs. Additionally, getting the perspectives of students who choose to continue with drama, as well as that of those who choose not to continue, would be helpful in learning how to create a class in which more students can be successful. These students' experiences might shed a different light on the nature of expectations and participation.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

In order to succeed in a beginning drama class, students must be willing to take risks and step out of their comfort zones. Performance, and presenting one's work to the rest of the students, is part of the fundamental nature of the class. Some students are drawn to drama because of the sense of fellowship they derive from this type of experience, while others find the class difficult and uncomfortable. In a public high school, where drama is offered as an elective, some students choose to take the class knowing what to expect, whereas others do not know what to anticipate or are placed into the class by necessity. Students' expectations of the level of participation required to succeed in the class shape their experiences, and there is a lack of information on how their expectations affect their learning outcomes in the drama classroom.

This study explored the effect that students' expectations of what it means to participate had on their learning outcomes. Students in two public high school beginning drama classes completed short surveys as well as a series of journal entries about their perceptions of participation in the class. Additionally, a group of nine students participated in a series of three focus group interviews to further explore their thoughts on participation and student expectations. During the course of this study both classes participated in a unit on Social Theater, and at the conclusion of the unit students re-took the initial survey to see if there were changes to their perceptions of their participation that resulted from their taking part in the unit.

The Social Theater unit consisted primarily of exercises from Augusto Boal's book, *Theatre Games for Actors and Non-actors*, which were based on Boal's techniques from teaching Theater of the Oppressed (TO). TO is a form of theater

designed to eliminate any distance between an actor and a member of the audience, with the intention of using a theatrical experience as a catalyst for dialogue and change. In this unit, students focused on one aspect of TO: Forum Theater, and a Forum Theater presentation was the culminating activity for the unit.

This study found that students' prior experiences and expectations about a drama class do have an impact on their learning outcomes, especially with regards to their levels of participation. Students expecting an easy class, where they can succeed without putting in much effort or taking any chances, tend to find that the class is more challenging than they realized. Students who rise to this challenge are able to reap the benefits of greater confidence and sense of self-efficacy. Those who are not willing to step out of their comfort zones tend to find the class difficult and do not enjoy the experience. The sooner students embrace the risk-taking in the class, the more opportunities they have to develop their confidence, which can lead to greater self-confidence in other aspects of their lives.

There is a perception among some students at this school—students who have not taken a drama class—that, perhaps because of a lack of traditional homework, the beginning drama class is not difficult: an 'easy A.' While it is true that the academic workload is less than with some other classes, the practice of the subject matter is challenging. The level of participation required to be successful in a drama class is different from what is necessary for some other classes. In drama, students must be active, they must memorize and deliver lines in front of the rest of the class, and they must work well with a variety of different partners. Complicating this issue, this study found that students' understanding of what it means to participate in school is mostly

passive. When asked about the nature of participation in drama and other classes, study participants reported that they participate by raising their hands, or otherwise following classroom rules. Given this already low level of participation and engagement, a drama class is that much more demanding.

In contrast, some of the students who had prior experience with drama reported greater satisfaction with the class, and were more likely to participate in the activities. They recognized the value of the classroom exercises, as opposed to some of the students who did not recognize that learning was taking place.

Self-consciousness is another factor that influences student participation, regardless of one's expectations or appreciation for the class. A variety of students, from those with theater experience who participated regularly, to those with minimal experience who rarely participated at all, reported that they were aware of other students' opinions and judgement when they performed. The students who liked the class and performing in general were able to overcome this self-consciousness, because the enjoyment from the activity was greater than the discomfort they felt. Furthermore, by facing and overcoming their nerves, they gained confidence in their abilities to succeed in challenging situations, which carried over into other aspects of their lives. For other students, however, the self-consciousness was overpowering, and they were not able to step out of their comfort zones. This can be especially challenging for English learners, who wish to communicate, but who feel uncomfortable speaking English in front of native English speakers. These students are in a challenging position: they have ideas that they want to communicate to their English-speaking peers, but they feel that their language levels are inadequate to express those ideas. They can speak

Spanish with confidence, but then they will not be understood by the people they want to communicate with. Even in a supportive environment, this hinders their participation.

Students who choose not to participate in a drama class have a negative effect on the class as a whole, driving down participation even among the students who signed up for and enjoy the class. In many classes, the amount of engagement and participation among other students may not have a significant impact on any one student's learning outcomes. In a drama class, which depends on the activity of all of the students, this is detrimental. When active, engaged students were grouped with their less enthusiastic counterparts, the students who were interested in the project felt that they bore the burden of doing the work for the rest of the group, or risked failure. When students were allowed to choose their own groups, the participatory students gravitated towards each other, leaving the less-participatory students to work together, often resulting in those groups not reaching their goals due to lack of effort. Neither situation led to student satisfaction.

The Forum Theater project did lead to an increase in participation in both classes, which was noted in field observations, as well as by the students in the classes. This may have been in part because the subjects of the plays were generated by the students themselves, making them more accessible and immediate to their peers. Dialogue within the groups was a factor in all phases of the project, which may also have helped encourage participation.

This study suggests several changes of practice that could be made at the classroom, school, and district levels. Drama teachers should realize that not all of the students in the class chose drama as their elective, and that some might not want to be

there. Explaining what participation means in a drama class, and how it might differ from students' previous experiences, from the very first day of class will help students understand the class expectations. Additionally, encouraging the students who have been somehow involved in theater to share their love of the art form with their fellow students could help get the latter more excited about the class. Starting the class with activities and exercises that draw on the students' experiences will help make it more immediately relevant to them, and will help promote buy-in among the more reluctant students. Activities to create a 'safe-space' environment where students feel they can take risks and trust one another will also lead to increased participation.

At the school level, better communication between the teacher and the academic counselors will help students understand what they are getting into when they sign up for drama. Inviting the counselors to see a typical class will help them convey the class expectations to students who might not realize the level of participation required from a drama class. It will also allow the counselors to encourage students who would particularly benefit from the opportunity to gain confidence to sign up for drama.

The finding that high school students who had been previously exposed to drama were more willing to participate, thus being better able reach their learning goals, suggests an opportunity for outreach. High school drama students could put together after-school drama workshops for students at the elementary and middle schools in the district. This would provide the older students with practice teaching and directing, and would expose the younger students to drama, increasing the likelihood that they would want to continue with it in high school.

The finding from this study that continues to resonate is the student response to the question, “what does participation in other classes look like?” The number of responses that stated that in order to participate, all a student had to do was to raise their hand, or otherwise follow the rules of the classroom, is enlightening. It is no wonder that some students struggle to get up on their feet and actively engage in a drama class, if they have been socialized to participate only symbolically in other classes. Woody Allen is credited with the line, “Showing up is 80% of life” (Braudy, 1977, p. 83). This idea exemplifies these students’ expectations towards their education. To participate actively, students must do more than just signal a willingness to speak. They must question, listen, respond, react, and contribute. These are the demands of a drama class, and are skills that drama students practice, if they are willing and able to participate.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Please circle the number that applies to you for each question:

1. How often do you participate in drama class?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Almost never Every day

2. Would you say Mr. Pryor thinks you participate in drama class?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Almost never Every day

3. How often do you participate in other classes?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Almost never Every day

4. How difficult is it for you to participate in drama class?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Almost never Every day

5. How difficult is it for you to participate in other classes?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Almost never Every day

Appendix B: Journal Prompts

1. What does participation in drama class look like?
2. How do you participate in other classes?
3. What parts of drama class are hard for you?
4. What parts of drama class are easy for you?
5. What parts of drama class do you enjoy the most?
6. What parts of drama class do you enjoy the least?
7. What do you tell your friends about drama class?
8. What do other students say about drama class?
9. What do you think of other students who participate in drama class?
10. Would you recommend this class to a friend?

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What does participation in drama class look like?
2. How do you participate in other classes?
3. How would you describe the feeling of the class?
4. What parts of drama class are hard for you?
5. What parts of drama class are easy for you?
6. Would you recommend this class to a friend?
7. What parts of drama class do you enjoy the most?
8. What parts of drama class do you enjoy the least?
9. What do you think of other students who participate in drama class?
10. What do you tell your friends about drama class?
11. What do other students say about drama class?

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

December 19, 2017

Alexander Pryor
50 Acacia Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94901

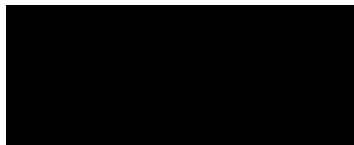
Dear Alexander:

I have reviewed your proposal entitled Motivational Factors Among Beginning Drama Students submitted to the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP Application, #10632). I am approving it as having met the requirements for minimizing risk and protecting the rights of the participants in your research.

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,



Randall Hall, Ph.D.
Chair, IRBPHP

Cc: Jennifer Lucko