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## It's Not All Just Child's Play: A Psychological Study on the Potential Benefits of Theater Programming With Children

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IT'S NOT ALL JUST CHILD'S PLAY: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE  
POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THEATER PROGRAMMING WITH CHILDREN

by

Sydney R. Walker

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(Psychology and Theater)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2014

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## **Abstract**

Research suggests there are developmental benefits of theater education. The present study hypothesized that a theater curriculum, utilizing the techniques of Creative Drama and theater games created by Viola Spolin, taught to students at the Stillwater Montessori School to 15 students in grades Kindergarten through Fourth, would contribute to significant increases in children's self-esteem and empathy. Questionnaires assessing children's self-esteem and empathy were administered to children, parents, and teachers prior to and following the theater programming. Results were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA and indicated that generally there were no significant changes in children's self-esteem and empathy. However, for females there were significant decreases in Global Self-Worth and self-esteem. According to teachers, children significantly decreased in their Attention to Others' Feelings. Although responses to the measures did not yield many significant changes in children, there were several observable changes in the children's listening and nonverbal communication skills and their ability to give and receive praise. Individual progressions concerning participation, involvement, self-esteem, and focus were also observed. Positive feedback from students and teachers indicated the theater programming had a beneficial effect.

## **Dedication**

This thesis project is dedicated to Barbara Ann Lovell Walker (Meme Walker) and Carroll William Freeman, Jr. (Grampy Freeman), two of my biggest supporters and inspirations. Thank you for motivating me to “do well in school” and to always remember that no matter what, “it’s a beautiful day.” I love and miss you both dearly.

## Acknowledgement

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## **Introduction**

### **Play and Creative Dramatics**

Play is essential to the development of the child. According to Richard Courtney, “Play is the principle instrument of growth. Without play there can be no normal adult cognitive life; without play, no healthful development of affective life; without play, no full development of the power of will” (as cited in McCaslin, 1984, p. 9). Contemporary interpretations of developmental theory explain that play is emphasized as the key method that children use to form their understanding of the world (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). As Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky stated, “In play, a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior. In play it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (as cited in Play Quotes, 2013). The act of play allows children to think outside of the box and in a capacity that they would not normally be expected to otherwise. Through play, children are able to experiment with their understanding of life and imitate what’s going on in the world around them.

In the present study, participants took part in a curriculum that was designed implementing the techniques of Creative Drama. Creative Drama is a structured form of play that allows children to learn and grow through means of theater. The ideas and objectives behind Creative Dramatics are utilized to help children in the developmental process. Creative Drama is defined by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education as “an improvisational, nonexhibitional, process-centered form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experiences” (Heinig, 1993, p. 4). In Creative Drama, “the leader guides the group to

explore, develop, express and communicate ideas, concepts, and feelings through dramatic enactment” (Heinig, 1993, p. 5). Because Creative Drama requires a collaborative effort, a great deal of social awareness is gained. “As children engage in drama, they must plan together, enact ideas together, and organize their playing space. Effective socialization becomes a high priority, and the rewards of cooperative group behaviors are often clearly demonstrated to even the youngest of children” (Heinig, 1993, p. 11). Participating in drama creates a bond among all of those involved and allows for the group to feel more connected as a whole.

### **Spolin’s Theater Games and Their Effects on Children’s Improved Self-Esteem**

Students in the present study participated in a variety of dramatic exercises including warm up activities to allow the children to get up and moving and ready for the remainder of the lesson. A portion of the warm up activities used in the present theater curriculum provided to the students consisted of theater games designed by Viola Spolin. Spolin is well known for her theater work with youth. In addition to her work with children, Spolin has published several books, including *Improvisation for the Theater*, which has been a best seller since its publication in 1963. Spolin received multiple awards for her work with children and theater as well (Spolin, 1986). Spolin viewed drama as a way to develop relaxation, concentration, trust, imagination, and awareness of one’s self and social world (Landy & Montgomery, 2012).

In 1979, Bradley Bernstein, a psychotherapist and director of theatre in Litchfield, Connecticut, conducted a study on the effectiveness of using Spolin’s theater games in a classroom of educationally handicapped students. In this study, a workshop employing

Spolin's games was presented over a ten-week period, twice a week, in four classes. Sessions were about 45 minutes in length. The study found that throughout the workshop process, the children participating in the study progressed from "unfocused, unintegrated and destructive action to genuine involvement, enjoyment, and creativity" (Bernstein, 1985, p. 220).

When observing one student in particular, researchers reported that the participant changed considerably as a result of the theater programming. Researchers found that the boy had "a new sense of himself" (Bernstein, 1985, p. 223). Researchers included in their observations of the participant, "I'm convinced it's because of these games -- it has been a chance for him to succeed in something, to participate, to enjoy himself, to feel good about himself. You can see it by just looking at him" (Bernstein, 1985, p. 223).

The study showed how theater programming in a classroom setting can contribute to beneficial changes in a child's self-concept and self-presentation. The study suggests that Spolin's games are able to achieve "a direct outcome through indirect means" (Bernstein, 1985, p. 223). The theater games developed by Spolin emphasize the importance of working together as a group and through this process individuals are able to get involved and act in new and creative ways. This enables individual children to connect with their fellow classmates and feel as though they are making important contributions to the group. It also allows children to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment by being able to make contributions to a group effort. They are able to feel rewarded by these means rather than extrinsic rewards or teacher punishments (Bernstein, 1985).

## **Self-Esteem and Theater**

In a study conducted in Israel examining community theater as a means of empowerment, researchers found that there was an impact on the individual as well as the group and community by participating (Boehm & Boehm, 2003). There were especially positive effects concerning self-esteem, expression of inner voice, critical awareness, and collective empowerment. One participant shared, “I bottled up inside of myself a lot of anger and rage against those who oppressed me and I feel guilty that I did nothing. In the theatre, my friends and I are learning that we are not alone with our problems. The fact that there are more women in my situation and that we can speak about everything gives me a lot of power and a better chance to make a change” (Boehm & Boehm, 2003, p. 288).

Participants in the study were led to use dramatic exercises to address and discuss conflicts and confrontations. Through these exercises, participants were instructed to identify similar situations they may have encountered in their lives while expressing how they felt about the situation and acting out these instances. By engaging in these exercises, participants gained a better understanding of how different conflicts are involved in their lives and how they are not alone in the troubles they face (Boehm & Boehm, 2003). One participant shared, “Together we have a feeling of security; we speak aloud so that we hear each other and others hear us as well, and together we find new directions to cope with the difficulties. It is certainly not just a group of speaking and crying; together we have the power to cope with concrete problems, both on and off stage” (Boehm & Boehm, 2003, p. 289). Overall the study found that through drama,

participants were able to find the courage and confidence to express themselves freely. The study also revealed that through drama, participants found a sense of belonging among their peers. Thus, one of the goals of the present study was to examine possible changes in children's self-esteem from before to after their participation in the theater program that incorporated Spolin's theater games and the fundamentals of Creative Dramatics.

### **Empathy and Theater**

Empathy is another useful trait that is learned through involvement in creative drama. As children engage in dramatic role play and begin to act as if they were someone else, they move away from egocentrism and begin to understand how to see life from another person's perspective, which is a crucial part of personal development (Heinig, 1993). Empathy is defined as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another... without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner" (Dow, Leong, Anderson & Wenzel, 2007, p. 1114).

In a study conducted at Virginia Commonwealth University, theater professors taught drama classes to medical students in hopes of improving their clinical empathy. "Clinical empathy is the skill of recognizing a patient's emotional status and responding, in the moment, to the unique needs of the patient and to promote better clinical outcomes" (Dow, Leong, Anderson & Wenzel, 2007, p. 1114). It is important for a medical professional to possess clinical empathy and those that do tend to be more successful than those that do not. Patients have shared that the qualities they find most

important in their doctors are that they be understanding, good listeners, and honest, making clinical empathy a necessary thing. There is a lack of curricula regarding instruction of these skills because physician-educators have not been trained to teach this specific capabilities.

Researchers hypothesized that clinicians interact with their patients in a similar way that actors relate to each other on stage. Clinicians and actors must both perceive their counterparts and act accordingly. They must identify the emotions of those they are interacting with and respond in a way that would make sense and take the other person's feelings into account. This skill is crucial in clinician/patient interactions as well as on stage. Clinicians turned to theater teachers to help guide them in obtaining these skills. According to the researchers, theater professors "teach their learners to react uniquely in each performance with the appropriate vocalization, posture, and verbal and nonverbal expression. As learners then become experts, they develop the subconscious ability, known as deep acting, to use these skills subconsciously" (Dow, Leong, Anderson & Wenzel, 2007, p. 1115). The ability to do these things and be an expert at clinical empathy are related. One physician who had trained in theater expressed that because of his background with acting, he was able to possess better clinical empathy skills (Dow, Leong, Anderson & Wenzel, 2007).

Theater has been used to train business leaders in order to understand the thoughts and feelings of others to help them become more motivated and inspired to reach a desired outcome. Role-playing is a commonly used technique to help teach undergraduate medical students the best ways to interact with patients.

In this study conducted at Virginia Commonwealth University, researchers examined if it was possible for theater professors to instruct Internal Medicine residents to learn the skills needed to have good clinical empathy. Researchers discussed that in order to teach clinical empathy, they required the help of educators who were very knowledgeable about the art of communication and communicating in the moment, which is why they turned to theater professors (Dow, Leong, Anderson & Wenzel, 2007). This study suggested that methods of theater can help medical students to develop better empathy skills. In the present study, the primary investigator sought to examine whether these empathy skills could also be taught to children through theater instruction.

### **Potential Benefits of Participation in Theater**

Participation in drama exercises and games has been proven to bring many psychological, educational, developmental, and sociological benefits to all those involved. The hope for this study was that the children involved reap the benefits that participation in drama is supposed to bring.

By participating in drama and having the ability to identify conflicts, children learn how to face problems head on as well as the process needed to solve problems. They learn how to hypothesize and test possible solutions to their problems, develop alternative ways to approach them if the first way doesn't work, and even redefine problems if they see others arise. Through creative drama, children are urged to evaluate conflicts, process all the information presented, discover and imagine potential resolutions, think creatively, and work together to solve a problem (Heinig, 1993). All of these learned skills will be beneficial in real world situations as well. When faced with a

conflict with a peer, the skills learned while acting out a particular scene can transfer to aid children in figuring out how to react to the issue. Instead of hitting their friend in response to frustration, they may instead express to them why they are frustrated verbally and solve the problem that way. The thinking processes involved in solving dilemmas in theater become helpful when faced with real life problems.

According to the American Alliance for Theater Education, “Participation in creative drama has the potential to develop language and communication abilities, problem solving skills, and creativity; to promote a positive self-concept, social awareness, empathy, a clarification of values and attitudes, and an understanding of the art of theatre” (Heinig, 1993, p. 5). By participating in creative drama, children are able to improve and explore their self-concepts and increase their self-confidence (Heinig, 1993).

The Creative Drama process encourages children to express themselves freely and in turn allows them to explore their creativity. It has been said that “ideas are born from stimulation from within and without, but such stimulation must be grasped, filtered and used” (McCaslin, 1984, p. 28). Through the instruction of Creative Drama, such stimulation is provided to allow the creative process to begin. “Drama requires imagination and inventiveness” (Heinig, 1993). When engaging in Creative Drama, children are asked to think outside the box and create their own reactions to situations. They are encouraged to express themselves in ways that require a great deal of thought and inventiveness. Children must think on their toes and develop reactions and responses to the situation as well as their peers in a creative way. The possibilities are endless in

how they can behave and this allows for the children to be as imaginative as they so desire. This is extremely beneficial because it permits children to be innovative and think for themselves. By providing positive encouragement and feedback for the children throughout the process, they become more confident in their thinking abilities as well and begin to experiment even more with their creativity.

With this developing creativity, a better understanding of one's self arises. According to Clark E. Moustakas, "being creative means continually evolving into one's own unique self -- growing forward, responding to life, fulfilling one's maximum potential" (as cited in Heinig, 1993, p. 9). By receiving positive feedback from the leader of the group, children participating in Creative Drama learn to trust their instincts more and to be more inclined to let their true selves shine. Children who receive positive guidance from the leader of the activities will feel more self value and feel as though what they have to say and do is important, allowing them to extend these feelings into their own personal lives as well.

### **The Present Study**

The present study focused on providing participants with the opportunities to reap these benefits by participating in the activities as much as possible. As writer and director Yasha Frank once said, "Children love to learn but they hate to be taught-so all we have to do is frame our plays in such a way that we never tell them anything but just evolve..." (Graham, 1961, p. 29). The present study intended to guide children to reach their full potential through means of theater.

The current investigation itself also worked toward providing evidence of the importance of theater programming in schools. This project aimed to create a beneficial addition to the elementary school environment by allowing and encouraging the children to reach outside of their comfort zone and to work together as a team to improve their self-concept, empathy, and connection with their peers. The goals of this study were to gain information on the importance of arts curriculum in schools as well as to provide a fun and entertaining way for children to interact with each other and express themselves in a creative way. It was hypothesized that significant increases in the children's self-esteem and empathy would be observed from before to after their participation in the theatre programming.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study was conducted at the Stillwater Montessori School in Old Town, Maine with special permission from the educational director and classroom teachers. Participants included a total of 15 children, 6 males and 9 females, of varying ethnic groups, who were in grades Kindergarten through fourth grade (ages 5-10 years). The group consisted of 7 Kindergarten students and 8 elementary-aged students, consistent with enrollment in the Kindergarten and Elementary classes at the school. Students in these classes participated in the theater programming as part of their school curriculum, but their parents were required to sign the informed consent form for the children to be included in the research aspect of this project. All students invited to be included in the study were given parental consent. An application explaining the project and its goals was

presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the IRB committee provided their approval of the project before its commencement. Parents signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A) prior to the start of the study.

### **Theater Curriculum**

For the present study, the theater curriculum utilized three different versions of the story of The Three Little Pigs. The theater programming occurred every Monday and Friday from January 13, 2014-February 14, 2014 in one-hour sessions that took place at the Stillwater Montessori School.

At the beginning of each session, participants were given three different cards. These cards were used by the children to show how they were feeling at the moment. They were able to choose among “Good,” “Bad,” or “So-So” and were asked to keep their answers private. Children selected one of the three cards and placed it on the floor face down in front of them. The researcher then collected the cards. The primary investigator took notes at the beginning of each session and recorded what card each child chose to express his or her mood.

Each session then began with a theater game encouraging children to think on their feet and work as a team. Each day, there was a different goal to be worked on through the warm up. Warm ups to encourage self-esteem building, teamwork, and empathy were implemented. Fifteen minutes were allotted to warm up activities.

The primary investigator assessed the needs of the group for the day and selected the warm up activities accordingly. If the group seemed to have a lot of energy, the

primary investigator would pick a game that would help them focus. If the group seemed tired, the primary investigator would choose a game that would help liven up the group.

After the first session the researcher learned that the children needed some extra guidance to work on their listening skills so many warm up activities were designed around teaching this skill to make the rest of the skills intended to be taught more attainable. The children worked on being good audience members and communicating with no vocalization but by paying attention to their peers and conversing with movements and gestures.

Warm ups also consisted of a series of tongue twisters intended to get the children focused. The tongue twisters also helped students get used to speaking loudly and clearly. The same tongue twisters were worked on every day to improve the quality of speech.

The next half hour of each session following warm up activities was devoted to working on the final performance that the children presented for their families and peers. The primary investigator began the process by reading one of three books that were used during this process, all based on the story of The Three Little Pigs.

The first story was “The Three Little Pigs” retold and illustrated by Barry Moser. This story was a take on the classic tale with a few slight modifications. The three little pigs were instructed by their mother to go out into the world and seek their fortune. In this story, the pigs buy the classic materials for their houses: straw, sticks, and bricks from men selling such items. The Big Bad Wolf comes and blows down the first two houses and eats the little pigs who had died when their houses were blown down. The wolf was outsmarted by the third little pig, ended up falling down the chimney of the

brick house and into a pot over a fire that the pig had lit and was then eaten for dinner (Moser, 2001).

The second book was “The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs” as told to Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith. This story featured the Big Bad Wolf as the protagonist and narrator explaining his take of the classic Three Little Pigs tale. In this story, the Big Bad Wolf shares that he was on the search for a cup of sugar to continue making his grandmother’s birthday cake. The wolf continues to explain that he also had a cold that day leading to him blowing down all the pigs’ homes. The reason, according to the wolf, that he ate the first two pigs is that he was very hungry and they were already dead so he did not want to let perfectly good food go to waste. At the end, the wolf became very angry when the third pig insulted his grandmother. As a result, he made a scene, exacerbated by his bad cold, and was taken to jail by the police (Scieszka & Smith, 1989).

The third book read to the children was “The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig” by Eugene Trivizas and Helen Oxenbury. This story showcased the Big Bad Pig as the antagonist and the three little wolves as the protagonists. In this version, the three wolves purchased the classic straw, sticks, and brick from a variety of different animals but when these items got blown down by the Big Bad Pig the wolves turned to buying materials of metal, barbed wire and other typically dangerous and protective items. The pig was able to blow through these items with dynamite so the wolves decided to build a house of flowers. When the pig approached he smelled the flowers and began to dance around. The Big Bad Pig turned into a Big Good Pig and they all lived happily ever after (Trivizas & Oxenbury, 1994).

After reading one of the three books to the children, the investigator led a discussion with the children to identify how each character must have been feeling during the story and why they had behaved the way they did. They were also asked to identify the protagonist and antagonist of the story, describing each as the “good guy” or “bad guy” respectively. Children were guided to identify the conflicts of the story, whether or not they were resolved, and if so, how. Participants were then encouraged to act out their own interpretations of the story paying special attention to the emotions and physicality of the characters they were playing. Roles were divided based on participant interest or at the discretion of the primary investigator, and the children rotated playing different characters.

The last fifteen minutes of each one-hour period were devoted to positive reinforcement and a team building activity. In this time, participants were prompted to reflect on the work they had done throughout the day and were encouraged to share positive feedback with their peers. A variety of methods to promote this concept were used. In one instance, students would sit in a circle in a room and go around the circle sharing one nice thing about the person to the left or right. Another way self-esteem was enforced was by having each child stand in the center of the circle and their peers would take turns saying positive things about him or her, specifically in relation to the events of that day’s theater class. Both methods were used throughout the course of the study. After these exercises, the participants were asked to assess their current emotions by choosing one of the three feelings, mentioned earlier. The primary investigator again took note of how many of each card was chosen.

## **Developing the Story**

As described above, there were three versions of The Three Little Pigs story read to the children during the curriculum, each with a different perspective of the classic tale. The children were encouraged to develop their own version of the story. Creative Dramatic techniques do not utilize a script, but rather prompt those involved to create a basic structure for the story to revolve around and then use improvisation to act out the story. During this time children were prompted to consider how each character feels during the story and how this may impact his or her actions and reactions to other characters. The children were led to draw their own conclusions about their characters with some guidance and advice provided from the primary investigator as well as their classmates.

The primary investigator worked with the children to develop a story that included the collective ideas of the class. The children and primary investigator worked together to decide from what perspective the story would occur and who the protagonist and antagonists were. The class was instructed to decide what the conflict of the story was and how they could effectively go about solving it. Exercises practicing these ideas were used in order to improve the children's understanding of how to do so. Children were divided into three groups and given bags with random items. Participants were then asked to create a story with a protagonist, antagonist, conflict, and resolution. Children were given guidance to create a small skit and worked with their group to later perform the skit for their classmates. Next, the children were given a framework to develop their story and were provided a protagonist, antagonist, conflict and resolution and were asked

to create their own skit based on these parameters. The children then performed these skits for their classmates.

The children also participated in a variety of activities emphasizing the importance of using physical movement to demonstrate what types of characters they were playing. They were guided through exercises to portray a specific character without speaking but just moving. The children would perform for their peers, who were then asked to guess what they were pretending to be based on their movements. This helped the children to learn how effective their movements were. Next, the group would discuss a variety of ways the children could act like a certain character and then were encouraged to try for themselves.

The children were encouraged to act out many different characters before they were assigned their own role. An informal audition occurred to determine roles where children were given the opportunity to show the class how they could best display their interpretation of the behaviors of each character. The primary investigator then assigned roles based on how motivated each child was with his or her portrayals of the character. Children were allowed to turn down their role and try for another if they chose to do so.

The final story performed included elements from all three Little Pigs books that had been read to the children. The group liked the line “Go out and seek your fortune” and decided to keep that part in their final story. They also really liked the idea of there being a smart piggy that used his wit to defeat the Big Bad Wolf. The children liked the element of the second book where the big bad wolf needed some sugar for his cake so this was also included in the final play. The group adapted the ending of their story to

feature the part from the third book where the Big Bad Pig smells the flowers from the house and dances around. The children also wanted to include different animals selling the materials to the pigs rather than just people.

After discussing what key elements the children wanted included in the story, the researcher wrote a script (see Appendix B) for narrators to read and the children to follow to keep them on track for their performance. The importance of listening to what was being read and acting accordingly was emphasized and several lines were given to the actors to say as well. Children were given props and costumes based on the characters they were assigned.

### **The Final Performance**

Due to a snowstorm on the originally scheduled performance date of February 14, 2014, a final performance and showcase was presented during the normal school day on February 24, 2014. This performance for children's families and younger classmates as well as for the researcher's Honors Thesis Committee took place following a one-week long winter break. One final dress rehearsal occurred the same day as the final performance to re-familiarize the play with the students. During the showcase children displayed their own version of The Three Little Pigs story (see Appendix B). For this performance minimal costumes and props were purchased to enhance the experience for the children and their families. The children were asked prior to the researcher purchasing the costume pieces what they believed their characters should be wearing. In addition to showcasing their own play, children chose to demonstrate to their audience several warm up games that they enjoyed playing and the tongue twisters they had practiced during the

process. Participants were presented awards at the end of their performance as a thank you for all their hard work and were allowed to keep their costume pieces.

### **Parental Communication and Psychological Measures**

Prior to the start of the theater programming, a letter of consent (see Appendix A) was distributed to parents of children in kindergarten through fourth grade at the Stillwater Montessori School in addition to two separate questionnaires for parents to complete. These questionnaires were administered online using Qualtrics.

The teachers at the Stillwater Montessori School had suggested sending an email (see Appendix C) to the parents and have them look at study materials this way. The teachers said they have had success with this method in the past and have had parents return forms quickly. Therefore, informed consent forms were emailed to parents to be downloaded, printed, and returned. In addition, hard copies of the Informed Consent were made available at the school if parents preferred to fill out forms this way. The parents were also emailed links to follow to get to the surveys (described below) and complete them online via Qualtrics.

The first survey assessed children's self-esteem from the parent's perspective (see Appendix D). This measure was adapted from "Self-Esteem Rating Scale for Children-Revised" created by Lian-Hwang Chiu (1987). The questionnaire included ten items asking parents to rate their responses to different statements using a scale of "Always," "Frequently," "Occasionally," "Seldom," and "Never." The survey consisted of items such as "Adapts easily to new situations" and "Shows confidence or assurance in actions" (Chiu, 1987). Items were adapted so that questions were asked in a way that

would apply to the parent-child relationship. Questions specific to classroom behavior were omitted from the survey. A total of 6 pretest responses and 7 posttest responses were collected via Qualtrics. Unfortunately, due to limited parental responses, these data could not be used in the final data analysis.

The second questionnaire administered to parents assessed children's level of empathy from the parents' perspective (see Appendix E). This measure was adapted from the "Empathy Questionnaire for Infants and Toddlers" created by Caroline Rieffe (2010). This survey consisted of 20 items in which parents rated their answers selecting from potential answers of "Always," "Frequently," "Occasionally," "Seldom," and "Never." Questions asked about the parents' perception of their child's level of empathy and related to their child's emotion contagion, attention to others' feelings, and prosocial actions. Items included "When other people argue, my child gets upset" and "When I make it clear that I want to do something by myself (e.g., read) my child leaves me alone for a while" (Riffe, 2010). Items were adapted so that questions were asked in a way that would apply to the parent-child relationship. Unfortunately, due to limited parental responses, these data could not be used in the final data analysis.

### **Child Psychological Measures**

Although all children participated in the theater programming as part of their school curriculum, in order for the primary investigator to include the children in the psychological study, the children had to have had parental consent. Within the first week of the theater programming those children with parental consent (100% of the potential sample) were administered two different surveys.

The first questionnaire given to children assessed their perceived self-esteem (see Appendix F). This survey was based on the “Self-Perception Profile for Children-Revised” created by Graziano and Ward (1992). The original survey assesses for self-perception based on global self-worth, scholastic competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and social acceptance. For purposes of this study, items related to athletic competence and physical appearance were omitted from the surveys administered. The revised version of the questionnaires given to students included 24 items that the students rated on a scale of “Yes,” “Sometimes,” and “No.” Statements such as “I am popular with kids my age,” “I often do not like the way I act,” “I feel just as smart as other kids my age,” and “I am usually happy with myself as a person” were included. Questionnaires were scored with answers of “Yes” earning 3 points, “Sometimes” earning 2 points, and “No” earning 1 point. Statements that were phrased negatively such as “I am not happy with the way I do a lot of things” or “I often do not like the way I act” were reverse scored (Graziano & Ward, 1992). Scores for the different categories of self-perception (i.e., global, scholastic, behavioral, and social) were calculated as well as an overall self-perception score. Both pretest and posttest responses were scored in the same way.

The second questionnaire administered to children measured the child’s empathy (see Appendix G). The survey was adapted from Bryant’s (1982) “Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents”. A total of 22 items were included in the survey and students were asked to rate their responses using “Yes,” “Sometimes,” or “No.” Statements included “Seeing a boy who is crying makes me feel like crying” and “I am able to eat all

my cookies even when I see someone looking at me wanting one.” Questionnaires were scored with answers of “Yes” earning 3 points, “Sometimes” earning 2 points, and “No” earning 1 point. Statements that were phrased in a negative manner such as “It’s hard for me to see why someone is upset” or “It’s silly to treat dogs and cats as though they have feelings like people” were reverse scored (Bryant, 1982). Both pretest and posttest responses were scored in the same way.

The primary investigators and teachers assisted the children in reading all questions on the surveys. Children were split up into small groups with an adult present in each to help as children responded to the questions. Dividers were put in place between students to keep answers private and children were told to remain quiet and not discuss their responses. Teachers worked with the students ahead of time in understanding how to accurately answer questions using “Yes, Sometimes, and No” to move the process of filling out the questionnaires along.

### **Teacher Psychological Measures**

Within the first week of the study, questionnaires were also administered to the teachers of the kindergarten and elementary classes. Each student had three questionnaires about them filled out by their teacher. Each child was assigned an identification number that was written on each survey. A post-it note with the child’s name was put on each survey to allow teachers to know which student to fill out the survey about but this note was then removed after completion in order to maintain confidentiality.

The first survey administered to teachers assessed children's self-esteem from the teachers' perspective (see Appendix H). This measure was adapted from "Self-Esteem Rating Scale for Children-Revised" created by Lian-Hwang Chiu (1987). The questionnaire included 12 items asking teachers to rate their responses to different statements using a scale of "Always," "Frequently," "Occasionally," "Seldom," and "Never." The survey consisted of items such as "Hesitates to speak up in class" and "Tends to be chosen by peers for activities." Surveys were scored with "Always" earning a score of 5, "Frequently" earning a score of 4, "Occasionally" earning a score of 3, "Seldom" earning a score of 2, and "Never" earning a score of 1. Items seen as negative such as "Becomes upset by failures (e.g., pouting, whining, withdrawing)" and "Seeks support or reassurance from the teacher" were reverse scored (Chiu, 1987).

The second questionnaire also measured for the teacher's perception of each individual student's self-esteem (see Appendix I). This study adapted the "Self-Evaluation Scale-Teacher Version" created by Bradley T. Edford, Samantha Lowe, and Catherine Y. Chang (2011). Questions pertaining to appearance and family life were left out of the survey administered to teachers. The adapted survey used for this study included 15 items that were rated using a 5-point Likert scale with "Strongly Agree" rated as 1 and "Strongly Disagree" rated as 5. Statements such as "This student feels bored in school" and "This student feels like an important member of the class" were included. Responses were calculated using the number circled for each statement. Positive statements such as "This student likes being active" or "Kids like to be with this student"

were scored inversely to remain consistent with the way all other surveys were scored (Erford, Lowe, & Chang, 2011).

The third questionnaire measured for the teacher's perception of each individual student's level of empathy (see Appendix J). This measure was adapted from the "Empathy Questionnaire for Infants and Toddlers" created by Caroline Rieffe (2010). This survey included 20 items in which teachers rated their answers selecting from potential answers of "Always," "Frequently," "Occasionally," "Seldom," and "Never." Questions asked about the teachers' perception on their individual student's level of empathy and related to their student's emotion contagion, attention to others' feelings, and prosocial actions. Items included "When another child cries, this student tries to comfort them" and "When other children quarrel, this student wants to see what is going on" (Rieffe, 2010). Questions were adapted to be applicable to the teacher-student relationship. Surveys were scored with "Always" earning a score of 5, "Frequently" earning a score of 4, "Occasionally" earning a score of 3, "Seldom" earning a score of 2, and "Never" earning a score of 1. Scores were individually calculated for the subgroups (student's emotion contagion, attention to others' feelings, and prosocial actions) and an overall score was also computed.

The teachers completed these questionnaires in the first week of the theater programming. The same teachers completed questionnaires for the same students at the beginning and end of the study. One teacher (the student's primary teacher) evaluated each student.

### **Post-Test Procedure and Further Data Collection**

Parents, children, and teachers were administered the same surveys at the end of the theater programming to measure for potential changes in the participants' levels of self-esteem and empathy. The second set of questionnaires was administered several days after the final performance following the same procedure as the first set.

The primary investigator also kept a journal throughout the process. This journal included observations of the sessions and made note of participants and how they responded to the theater programming individually and collectively. The primary investigator also made note of conversations and emails exchanged with the students' teachers regarding the theater programming and their observations of the children's behavior and progress.

### **Results**

All posttest and pretest surveys were scored as previously stated and average scores were calculated for all children. Mean scores for the surveys were also computed for gender differences. Scores were tabulated for individual sub-scales within surveys as well. Unfortunately, due to a low participation rate among parents (40% at Time 1 and 47% at Time 2, with only 33% of the parents completing the measures at both time points), parent evaluations of children's self-esteem and empathy could not be analyzed.

#### **Self-Perception Profile for Children**

Children's mean self-perception ratings prior to their theatre programming participation are presented in Table 1, and ratings following participation are shown in Table 2. A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to analyze the statistical

significance of the differences in the mean scores of the pre-testing and post-testing (see Table 3). The repeated measures ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference among the total mean scores overall, however there was a significant decrease found the total score of females  $F(1,8) = 7.143$ ,  $p=0.03$ . There was also a significant decrease found in the sub-scale of Global Self-Worth  $F(1,14) = 4.883$ ,  $p=0.04$ . More specifically there was a significant decrease in scores of this sub-scale found among females  $F(1,8) = 11.256$ ,  $p=0.01$ . Males however did not show a significant difference in Global Self-Worth. All other sub-scales showed no significant difference.

### Index Empathy for Children

Mean scores of the children's empathy ratings were calculated for both before (see Table 1) and after (see Table 2) the theater programming. A repeated measures ANOVA found no significant difference among the children's self-reported empathy scores (see Table 3).

**Table 1**

#### Child Measures at Time 1

	Self-Perception (Child) Global Self-worth	Self-Perception (Child) Scholastic Competence	Self-Perception (Child) Behavioral Conduct	Self-Perception (Child) Social Acceptance	Self-Perception (Child) Total	Empathy (Child)
<b>Total Average</b> n=15	15.40 (sd=2.063)	14.73 (sd=2.404)	14.93 (sd=2.987)	13.00 (sd=2.000)	58.07 (sd=6.573)	42.27 (sd=10.389)
<b>Male Average</b> n=6	15.67 (sd=1.862)	15.00 (sd=2.098)	14.83 (sd=3.601)	13.33 (sd=1.751)	58.83 (sd=6.585)	37.83 (sd=14.456)
<b>Female Average</b> n=9	15.22 (sd=2.279)	14.56 (sd=2.698)	15.00 (sd=2.739)	12.78 (sd=2.224)	57.65 (sd=6.912)	45.22 (sd=5.805)

**Table 2**  
**Child Measures at Time 2**

	Self-Perception (Child) Global Self-worth	Self-Perception (Child) Scholastic Competence	Self-Perception (Child) Behavioral Conduct	Self-Perception (Child) Social Acceptance	Self-Perception (Child) Total	Empathy (Children)
<b>Total Average n=15</b>	14.33 (sd=2.554)	14.20 (sd=1.971)	14.27 (sd=2.685)	12.40 (sd=2.640)	55.20 (sd=7.984)	45.07 (sd=5.738)
<b>Male Average n=6</b>	14.833 (sd=2.137)	14.83 (sd=1.835)	14.17 (sd=2.137)	12.83 (sd=2.401)	56.67 (sd=6.976)	45.67 (sd=6.743)
<b>Female Average n=9</b>	14.00 (sd=2.872)	13.78 (sd=2.048)	14.33 (sd=3.122)	12.11 (sd=2.892)	54.22 (sd=8.857)	44.67 (sd=5.362)

**Table 3**  
**Mean Differences and *p* Values of Child Measures**

	Self- Perception (Child) Global Self-worth	Self- Perception (Child) Scholastic Competence	Self- Perception (Child) Behavioral Conduct	Self- Perception (Child) Social Acceptance	Self- Perception (Child) Total	Empathy (Child)
<b>Mean Difference (Total)</b>	-1.067	-0.533	-0.667	-0.600	-2.867	2.800
<b>Mean Difference (Male)</b>	-0.833	-0.167	-0.667	-0.500	-2.167	7.833
<b>Mean Difference (Female)</b>	-1.222	-0.778	-0.667	-0.667	-3.333	-0.556
<b>p Value (Total)</b>	<b>0.044</b>	0.413	0.380	0.120	0.072	0.348
<b>p Value (Male)</b>	0.497	0.886	0.638	0.456	0.548	0.252
<b>p Value (Female)</b>	<b>0.010</b>	0.357	0.486	0.195	<b>0.028</b>	0.817

### **Self-Esteem Rating Scale of Children for Teachers**

Mean scores were calculated for the Self-Esteem Rating Scale of Children for Teachers for both pretest (see Table 4) and posttest (see Table 5) surveys. A repeated measures ANOVA conducted to analyze the data found that there was not a statistically significant difference between mean scores from Time 1 to Time 2 overall and in either gender (see Table 8).

### **Self-Evaluation Scale of Children for Teachers**

A repeated measures ANOVA (see Table 8) indicated that, according to teacher ratings, there were no statistically significant differences in children's self-evaluations from before (see Table 4) to after (see Table 5) children's participation in the theatre programming.

### **Self-Esteem Overall**

Results from both surveys measuring self-esteem from the teacher's perspective were added together to create an overall self-esteem score. Mean scores were calculated for surveys taken before (see Table 4) and after (see Table 5) the children's participation in the theater programming. A repeated measures ANOVA (see Table 8) concluded that there was no significant difference in the two mean scores.

### **Empathy Questionnaire for Teachers**

Average scores were computed for the empathy questionnaires administered to teachers for both pretest (see Table 6) and posttest (see Table 7) measures. Mean scores for each sub-scale within the empathy questionnaire were also calculated. A repeated measures ANOVA determined there was no significant change in the overall score as seen

in Table 8. There was however a significant decrease in scores under the sub-scale of Attention to Others' feelings of all children  $F(1,14) = 5.382, p=0.03$ . All other sub-scales showed no significant differences.

**Table 4**

**Teacher Self-Esteem Measures at Time 1**

	Self-Esteem (Teacher)	Self-Evaluation (Teacher)	Self-Esteem Overall (Teacher)
<b>Total Average</b> n=15	43.73 (sd=9.169)	64.53 (sd=8.741)	108.27 (sd=17.536)
<b>Male Average</b> n=6	37.83 (sd=9.704)	58.33 (sd=10.013)	96.17 (sd=19.129)
<b>Female Average</b> n=9	47.67 (sd=6.690)	68.67 (sd=4.796)	116.33 (sd=11.147)

**Table 5**

**Teacher Self- Esteem Measures at Time 2**

	Self-Esteem (Teacher)	Self-Evaluation (Teacher)	Self-Esteem Overall (Teacher)
<b>Total Average</b> n=15	42.80 (sd=7.939)	62.33 (sd=8.558)	105.13 (sd=15.707)
<b>Male Average</b> n=6	37.17 (sd=7.305)	55.67 (sd=8.430)	92.83 (sd=14.400)
<b>Female Average</b> n=9	46.56 (sd=6.106)	66.78 (sd=5.310)	113.33 (sd=10.630)

**Table 6**  
**Teacher Empathy Measures at Time 1**

	<b>Empathy (Teacher) Emotion Contagion</b>	<b>Empathy (Teacher) Attention to Others' Feelings</b>	<b>Empathy (Teacher) Prosocial Actions</b>	<b>Empathy (Teacher) Total</b>
<b>Total Average n=15</b>	13.67 (sd=2.469)	25.33 (sd=3.658)	13.80 (sd=3.783)	52.80 (sd=6.710)
<b>Male Average n=6</b>	13.00 (sd=2.683)	25.83 (sd=3.545)	10.83 (sd=3.869)	49.67 (8.238)
<b>Female Average n=9</b>	14.11 (sd=2.369)	25.00 (sd=3.905)	15.78 (sd=2.167)	54.89 (sd=4.910)

**Table 7**  
**Teacher Empathy Measures at Time 2**

	<b>Empathy (Teacher) Emotion Contagion</b>	<b>Empathy (Teacher) Attention to Others' Feelings</b>	<b>Empathy (Teacher) Prosocial Actions</b>	<b>Empathy (Teacher) Total</b>
<b>Total Average n=15</b>	13.87 (sd=1.685)	23.80 (sd=3.745)	14.13 (sd=3.502)	51.80 (sd=7.193)
<b>Male Average n=6</b>	14.00 (sd=1.897)	23.83 (sd=4.834)	11.50 (sd=4.037)	49.33 (sd=10.520)
<b>Female Average n=9</b>	13.78 (sd=1.641)	23.78 (sd=3.153)	15.89 (sd=1.616)	53.44 (sd=3.712)

**Table 8**  
**Mean Differences and *p* Values of Teacher Measures**

	Self-Esteem (Teacher)	Self-Evaluation (Teacher)	Self-Esteem Overall (Teacher)	Empathy (Teacher) Emotion Contagion	Empathy (Teacher) Attention to Others' Feelings	Empathy (Teacher) Prosocial Actions	Empathy (Teacher) Total
Mean Difference (Total)	-0.930	-2.200	-3.133	0.200	-1.533	0.333	-1.000
Mean Difference (Male)	-0.667	-2.667	-3.333	1.000	-2.000	0.667	-0.333
Mean Difference (Female)	-1.111	-1.889	-3.000	-0.333	-1.222	0.111	-1.444
p Value (Total)	0.382	0.072	0.093	0.742	<b>0.036</b>	0.503	0.367
p Value (Male)	0.780	0.249	0.428	0.229	0.167	0.543	0.859
p Value (Female)	0.295	0.214	0.097	0.705	0.155	0.824	0.334

### Daily Current Mood Evaluations

Responses were recorded for the daily card activity indicating each child's current mood. Because a different number of students were in attendance each day or because some students refused to participate, percentages of how many students answered for each category were made.

On average, 64.95% of students responded that they were feeling "Good" prior to the day's session (see Table 9). This decreased by a total of 16.51% with only an average of 48.44% of students choosing a "Good" card following daily sessions (see Table 10).

Prior to daily sessions an average of 17.63% of the students responded with a “So-So” card (see Table 9). Following daily sessions an average of 35.28% of students answered “So-So” (see Table 10), showing an increase of 17.65%

An average of 16.50% of students answered with a “Bad” card before daily sessions (see Table 9). An average of 16.32% of students provided a response of “Bad” after daily sessions (see Table 10) showing a decrease of 0.18%.

**Table 9**

**Daily Current Mood Evaluations Prior to Session**

<b>Pre-Session</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Good</b>	64.95%
<b>So-So</b>	17.63%
<b>Bad</b>	16.50%

**Table 10**

**Daily Current Mood Evaluations Following Session**

<b>Post-Session</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Good</b>	48.44%
<b>So-So</b>	35.28%
<b>Bad</b>	16.32%

## **Discussion**

The current study presented a theater curriculum to participants utilizing the fundamentals of Creative Dramatics as well as the theater games created by Viola Spolin (1986). Consistent with previous research, the study hypothesized that there would be a significant increase in self-esteem and empathy among participants as a result of their involvement in the theater programming. However, according to the results collected from questionnaires administered to students and teachers preceding and following the theater programming, there were very few overall significant changes.

Results indicated that there were significant decreases in the sub-scale of Global Self-Worth according to children's self-perception profile, specifically among females. There was also a significant decrease found in female scores concerning self-esteem reported by children. In addition, there was a significant decrease in scores in the sub-scale of Attention to Others' Feelings on the teachers' survey measuring for the children's empathy. There are several factors that could have affected these negative changes, as well as the other inconclusive results.

Despite the fact that statistically significant changes were not found in the majority of the survey data, there were many observable improvements in behavior and emotions that took place among the children participating in the theater programming.

### **Psychological Measure Administration**

At the beginning of the programming it was clear that getting the group to focus on a common goal and listen as a whole was going to be a major challenge to conquer. On the first day of the session, a consensus was made amongst myself and the teachers of

the Kindergarten and Elementary classes that we would allow the children to get accustomed to me as a teacher and as a presence in the classroom before asking them to complete the first of the surveys. The pretest surveys were administered during the second and third sessions. The tests were administered on different days at Time 1 as a way to get the students to provide honest answers and not rush through the questionnaires just to be done with them.

The Self-Perception Profile for Children (see Appendix F) was administered during the second session and the children were very excited to help their new teacher out with her “homework.” Some children had a difficult time understanding how to answer a negative statement and understanding that answering “No” to a question such as “I do not like the way I am living my life” meant that they did actually like the way they were living their life. The older children seemed to understand this, but the younger children had a more difficult time with this concept. This may have had an effect on the final scores of the children.

The Index of Empathy for Children (see Appendix G) was administered during the third session and the children were equally excited to complete this questionnaire. Some of the younger children attempted to answer the surveys on their own without fully understanding the questions, which may have had an impact on the final scores. An attempt was made to deal with this challenge by having the younger children sit around a larger table and have teachers read each question and answer to the group. Individual assistance was also given to the older children that asked for help in reading the questions.

Both surveys were administered to the children on the Friday after the final performance. At this point the “homework” the children were helping me out with had lost its novelty and the children seemed to finish both surveys much quicker than before. This could have had an effect on the final scores.

### **Daily Mood Assessment**

The daily check in activity that required participants to pick one of three cards, “Good,” “So-So,” or “Bad” to represent their current mood found a reverse effect than expected. On average, results showed the majority of children had chosen the “Good” card at the beginning of each day’s session (see Table 9). Although the average percentage of students who chose “Good” at the end of each session was still the highest, it decreased by about 16.5% (see Table 10).

There are several possible contributing factors to this change in answers. Quite frequently, the children were very excited about what they were going to do that day during the theater session and expressed this to me while they were selecting their card at the beginning of the session. Often by the end of the daily sessions the children were disappointed that it was time for me to leave, which meant that they had to go back to doing academic schoolwork. This may have been a factor in their reports of less positive mood at the end of the sessions.

In the first several sessions I witnessed some of the children become upset toward the end of the session because their peers would be talking over them or we ran out of time for them to have a chance to participate in a certain activity in the way they wanted.

This frustration may also have contributed to their more negative end-of-session responses.

Another observation I had during the mood assessment at the beginning and end of each session was that despite encouraging the students to give honest and private responses, some children would choose an answer of “Bad” just to create a reaction from their peers or myself. There were also times when a couple members of the 15-person class would collaborate when it was time to select which card to put down. Although the teachers and I would discourage this, it was often difficult to fully prevent the children from discussing what cards they were about to choose. Oftentimes children would change their responses if they learned their peers were answering in a different way. For this reason, the method of placing the cards face down was chosen, but with such a large group it was difficult to completely maintain privacy and discourage collaboration during this activity.

The timing of the sessions and the current mood evaluation activity may have also played a factor in what cards the children chose. Our theater sessions were scheduled to follow the children’s daily recess so the children were often in a good mood prior to the each day’s session. For this reason, it may have skewed the children’s responses. At the end of the sessions, some children expressed that they were not looking forward to going back to doing schoolwork after being able to have their recess and then theater class. This may have had an impact on the decreased percentage of “Good” cards selected.

## **Listening Skills and Non-Verbal Communication**

Observations of the children made on the first day took note of them being very rambunctious and difficult to wrangle. Many of the children were competing for attention among their peers and other children were very submissive to those that were more eager. During the first several sessions it took a lot of effort to keep the attention of all the children and it was a challenge to keep them all quiet. For this reason I decided to put a lot of focus on what it meant to be a good audience member and the importance of listening in theater throughout the sessions.

We did a lot of exercises that emphasized good communication skills through being quiet and watching what your partner is doing. The children participated in “The Mirror Game,” which allowed them to lead movement with a partner as well as focus and follow their partner’s gestures. Exercises revolving around physicality as a means of communication rather than verbal communication also allowed the children to focus on their listening skills as well as understanding what a person was trying to say with their movements and emotions. As the weeks progressed, the children were much better at identifying the emotions and characters of their peers. Children’s ability to portray characters in a way that was comprehensible for others also improved.

With each session, we formed an “audience” section and “stage” section of the play space. The students worked on their ability to recognize when it was okay to be loud on the “stage” and when good listening skills were necessary in the “audience.” At first the majority of the children had a very difficult time remaining quiet and focused throughout the sessions, and multiple reminders to be still and attentive needed to be

made. By the time of the final performance, the children did an amazing job at watching their peers while they performed on stage. They also showed great improvements in listening to their peers and making sure to give them a chance to have their moment to shine, something the children had had difficulty with at first.

When working on the script for the final performance the children had an extremely tough time focusing on what the narrators were saying and how they were supposed to be acting in response to their words. The children were talking over each other while performing their roles and were not listening to what the others were saying or picking up on their cues as to how they were feeling. By the time the play was performed for the parents, the children were remarkable at sitting in the “audience” and knowing exactly when it was their turn to get up and act on the “stage.” The children began to understand that while it was important for them to show off and play their role, it was also important to let other members of their class shine. I made sure to allow each child to have his or her own shining moment within the play so that he or she could display the skills that had been learned and the role he or she had been working hard on to portray.

Overall, the environment in the classroom went from very silly and boisterous to a much more attentive one in which the children were still able to have fun. The children’s ability to listen to their peers and allow each other their own turn was greatly improved. The children were much more willing to share the spotlight with each other and work as a team rather than a group of individuals. The teachers were very impressed with the children’s progression in these aspects as was I.

### **Team-Building and the Group Dynamic**

Although very few statistical analyses indicated significant changes in children's levels of self-esteem and empathy, and the significant changes that were found were actually in the unexpected, negative direction, I believe there were clear improvements made among the class as a whole as well as individually. Children that were normally very outspoken learned to let their peers have a chance to shine, and those that were typically more subdued and withdrawn took advantage of the opportunity to live in the limelight.

The children also learned how to compromise. Many students wanted the same roles as others and were very willing to let their friends play certain characters over them, something that they had struggled with at the beginning of the study.

A very rewarding aspect of the study was to witness the relationships of the students grow and the team dynamic improve as the process unfolded. At first the children would act as a large group of individuals, looking for a laugh from their peers or approval from myself or their classroom teachers. By the end of the process the children really worked together to make sure that they were allowing every member of the class to have a chance to perform their own character and to speak. This indicates that their level of empathy towards each other improved.

One goal of the programming was to help the students understand how to create a story with an antagonist and a protagonist, as well as a conflict and resolution. During this exercise it was clear that there were many leaders among the group, along with some children that were more subdued and took the direction they were given from the other

more outspoken children. In the final performance, there were definitely clear leaders among the group, but they did not overpower the rest of the group as they had done before. The children that had been more subdued at the beginning of the study also appeared to be much more assertive.

### **Giving and Receiving Praise**

The self-esteem boosting exercises at the end of every session proved to be very beneficial to the group dynamic. We did two varieties of this exercise. In one instance we would sit in a circle and each child would have to say something nice about the child to his or her right or left depending on the day. We also made an alteration several days in which each child would stand in the middle of the circle and the children on the outside would raise their hands for an opportunity to say something kind about the chosen child.

At the beginning of the theater programming children had a challenging time coming up with positive and original comments to say about their peers, particularly to those that they were not necessarily close friends with. The most common compliments I heard among the students was that the other children were their “best friends” or they would repeat something a previous child had said to another student. As the process went on their positive comments became more unique and individualized. Students became much more capable of providing their peers with positive feedback. It was very rewarding to observe the enhanced joy in some children that were not accustomed to receiving praise from their fellow classmates. The teachers commented to me on several occasions that they enjoyed seeing particular children participate in this activity because they had previously witnessed it to be a challenging task for them to give positive

feedback. They also shared their delight in seeing some children that were not used to receiving encouragement from their peers be able to do so in this format. There were several children in particular that I observed gain smiles on their face and a changed mood after hearing the positive comments their classmates had to say about them.

Through these exercises I believe the children not only gained some confidence and a stronger feeling of social acceptance, but also were able to understand the importance of providing positive support to their peers.

### **Individual Progression: Participation and Involvement**

In addition to observable changes among the group as a whole as a result of the theater programming, there were several even more distinct individual changes that were observed by both myself and the children's primary classroom teacher.

At the start of the theater programming, one child in particular chose to not participate in the sessions at all. For a total of two sessions the student did not want to even enter the room in which the sessions were taking place. During the third session, the child decided to join the rest of his classmates but was very hesitant in doing so. The student did not want to participate, and when he was called on to contribute he would bury his head in his lap or turn away. The child tended to cling on to his primary teacher during the length of the first several sessions he attended.

When the final self-esteem boosting exercises took place at the closing of each day's session, the child refused to contribute any positive comments to his peers and would put his head on the floor if anyone tried to say something kind to him. While the

child still had difficulty sharing praise with his peers throughout the majority of the study, he did accept the positive comments to himself as the theater programming progressed.

This student also refused to participate in the card activity to choose which of the three “Good,” “So-So,” or “Bad” cards depicted his current mood during the first several sessions he attended. As time went on, the student would willingly participate in the mood assessment at the beginning of the session, but after the daily session would abstain from choosing a card. Eventually, at the end of the study the child willingly participated in the assessments at both the beginning and end of the session.

Throughout the sessions, the child showed drastic improvement. The child began to participate more in class activities and even made contributions to the good of the group. The child became much more outspoken among his peers and even volunteered to play the role of “Baby Pig.” Because of my understanding of this student’s hesitations and cautious personality, I did not originally make the role of “Baby Pig” one that required the child to be on stage for an extended period of time but did still allow him to be involved in the action of the play. It was my understanding that the child wanted to participate, however he was still hesitant in doing so. Therefore, I allowed for the student to be given a role that would not require much of him but would still give him an opportunity to display what he had learned throughout the process. The student seemed very excited to have received the chance to play the “Baby Pig,” something he had expressed in previous sessions. Unfortunately, however, as that day’s session continued the child seemed to withdraw again like he had in previous days.

I was very pleasantly surprised when I received an email a couple days later from the child's teacher explaining to me a conversation that she and the student had had regarding this topic. After receiving this email I understood why the child withdrew during the session. I learned that he was not doing this because he was shy or did not want to participate. In fact, it was actually the opposite.

The child's teacher wrote to me: "Hi Sydney, I just wanted to share with you a conversation I had with [the child previously discussed] after theater on Friday. Remember how excited he was then how sad, disappointed or whatever on Friday? I asked him what was wrong as he seemed excited to be the baby pig. He shared with me he thought the baby pig would stay on stage with the other pigs the whole time and was sad when he wasn't up on stage. He is very smart. He chose a part he figured he would not have to say anything, but still be able to be on stage. A safe part he could not mess up on, but still share the limelight. So I would like you to consider the possibility of the baby pig traveling with the other pigs through the play. Or maybe not so he does not get his way and make the plans. Anyway, just wanted to share this so you could think it through yourself. It may be best to leave it or you can play it by ear depending on what [said child] responds like tomorrow. It blows me away sometimes what kids are thinking and why they make their choice!! Have a great evening! SEE YOU TOMORROW!"

The following session, I made a change in the way we had been staging the play so that this child was able to remain on stage for the duration of the performance. Because of his hesitation in the beginning of the programming, I wanted to honor the

student's request to be able to participate more. The child did an excellent job with portraying his role and remaining focused on the action taking place.

During conversations with the child's teacher we discussed our observations of this child and how his willingness to participate throughout the process greatly improved. The teacher expressed her joy in seeing the student interact with his peers and really become an important member of the group. Throughout the course of the theater programming, the overall demeanor of the child went from hesitant, disengaged, and reluctant, to being very involved, eager, and somewhat outspoken. In fact, during the course of the last couple sessions, I actually had to remind the student to take turns speaking because he was being too talkative - a substantial contrast to the beginning of the theater programming when I had difficulty getting the child to speak at all. It is very likely that this child found a way to express himself through this theater programming and felt more comfortable doing so with his peers as a result of his involvement.

#### **Individual Progression: Self-Esteem and Focus**

There was a drastic change observed in another child throughout the process as well. This child was very disruptive during the first several sessions throwing tantrums and getting upset with himself, his peers, and even myself. The student would cling to either his primary teacher or a particular fellow student and would not want to participate otherwise. This student would also become very easily upset when things didn't seem to be going exactly as he had planned, resulting in him putting his head on the floor and screaming. This behavior proved to be obstreperous among the group and upset the group dynamic during sessions.

As the theater programming continued, the child appeared to be much more involved in the class and overall a much more pleasant member of the class. The child began to contribute more to the group and volunteer more for group activities. A transformation occurred in the child throughout the process. While the child before seemed withdrawn and easily agitated, by the end he appeared much more engaged and happier overall. At the beginning of the study I observed the child very frequently choosing a “Bad” card during the daily current mood activity for both pre-session and post-session responses. As time went on, the child began to choose “Good” at the beginning and end of every day, much more consistently and even made a habit of telling me he had done so with a huge smile on his face.

When it came time to cast roles for the final performance, we held an audition of sorts to allow the children to show off what they had learned throughout the programming and their new-found abilities to portray a variety of characters. This student auditioned for and was assigned one of the larger roles in the play because of his skill in showing the emotions that the character would possess. As we rehearsed for the final performance the child remained extremely focused and took direction very well. He listened to my requests that he face the audience and utilized my instruction to be louder. From the first run-through of the play to the final performance this child showed great improvement. At the final performance this child did an incredible job focusing on what his peers were doing. When it was time for him to stand up and say his lines he was able to remember them with great ease. It was evident that the child had gained a sense of pride and accomplishment in what he was doing and began to let his humorous

personality shine among the group. He started to make comical remarks throughout the sessions and it was clear that he began to enjoy the process more and more as it continued.

When comparing the results of the child's self-reported psychological measures on the Self-Perception Profile for Children (see Appendix F) the child showed a 1-point decrease in his global self-worth, a 5-point increase in his self-perceived scholastic competence, a 1-point increase in his self-perceived behavioral conduct score, and his self-perceived social acceptance score remained the same. This child's overall self-perception score increased by a total of 5 points at the end of the theater programming. I overheard the child speaking to his teacher when taking the Self-Perception Profile for Children after the theater programming had taken place. He commented when answering the question "I would like to have a lot more friends" and that he was choosing "No" because he already had too many friends. The student's individual results also found a self-reported increase of 2 points in his scores on the Index of Empathy for Children after the completion of the theater programming (see Appendix G).

During conversations with the child's teacher, she explained to me that she had seen a remarkable transformation within this child. In the previous semester, this child had extremely low self-esteem and often made very derogatory comments directed at himself indicating that he had a very low perception of self-worth. The teacher informed me that he had come leaps and bounds in the several previous months and she believed the theater programming had made an impact on this improvement. The teacher

expressed to me that she was very impressed with his performance during the play and his level of focus and concentration.

From my own observations I was able to witness this child come out of his shell and trust himself more. At the beginning of the study he clung on to another classmate for support and reassurance and rarely volunteered for any activity or rejected an invitation to participate, but by the end of the programming the child proved to be much more independent and would very willingly get involved in every exercise.

### **Positive Feedback**

Multiple conversations were had with the children's classroom teachers. During these conversations, the teachers expressed their gratitude for having such a positive contribution to their everyday school curriculum. One teacher expressed her disappointment in the program ending because it made a great addition to their Monday and Friday afternoons. Another teacher shared her enjoyment of the children having the opportunity to express themselves in ways that they are not typically used to and having the ability to try something new.

One teacher expressed, "The final performance of her play with the children was an excellent example of how well she could engage students of various abilities and ages into a cohesive group that worked well together and participated 100%. Sydney instilled in the students a sense of confidence in themselves that was so much stronger than they exhibited in the first session, especially for two students who were reluctant to participate at first to fully participating by the performance!"

In thank you cards written by the students who had participated in the study, I received many positive comments including those stating, “Thank you for doing this play with us. We liked it a lot. We will miss you,” and “I had a lot of fun doing the play! You are the best teacher ever!” Another card from two of the children read “Thank you for coming in every Monday and Friday to play fun games with us. It has been a really fun time with you! You have been one of the best teachers I’ve met! The Three Little Pigs play was also really fun!” From this feedback it is evident that the theater programming had a positive impact on the children.

### **Conclusion**

Although the data collected from the psychological measures administered to students and teachers did not indicate any distinguishable improvements in the children’s self-esteem or empathy, there were a great deal of observable differences found. Overall the children’s listening skills significantly improved. While this may have had something do with the children becoming more familiar with me as their teacher and realizing that I was not going to let them be rowdy, it also had to do with the fact that the children were learning the skills necessary to be good audience members and to maintain focus and discipline while engaging in our fun activities.

The group dynamic also changed. At the beginning of the programming, it was clear that there were two different classes coming together to participate in the study. The older children tended to dominate and try to outshine the younger students while the younger students had the tendency to be more withdrawn and hold back from participating. As the sessions progressed, the two classes formed a much more cohesive

group and it was clear the children had integrated into one giant unit. The outspoken children became a little more subdued so as to allow the others ample opportunity to shine, and the more hesitant children displayed a higher level of confidence in themselves and their actions.

Individual differences in children were observed that also indicated the theater programming did have many benefits. Difficult, reserved, and disruptive children transformed a great deal to make them excellent contributing members of the group. These individual children were able to become more comfortable with their peers, themselves, as well as me to portray the characters they were assigned in a very productive and impressive way.

It is possible that significant statistical differences may have been found if the study had been conducted over a longer period of time. In just the brief time of several weeks, there was not a substantial enough duration of time to truly let the children develop as a result of the theater curriculum.

In addition, the small sample size may have played a role in the statistically insignificant findings of the study. With just 15 participants, the opportunity to detect significant change in children's responses to the measures was very limited. The age range of the individuals may have also played a role in the insignificant findings. Perhaps having a group of people within a year or so in age of each other would have proven to be more beneficial for finding more significant results.

The time of year may have contributed to the slight decrease in some of the scores among the students. During the winter months, children are unable to play outside for

extended periods of time and are forced to remain in close quarters with their peers, which can cause tension among students to occur. This was observed on occasion among the students especially on days when it was too cold to play outside. It is possible children had less patience for each other because of their close proximity causing a significant decrease in the teacher's scores concerning their students' empathy related to Attention to Other's feelings.

Also, because of the time of year, it is possible that Seasonal Affective Disorder, defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "an illness that makes people feel sad and tired during the winter because there is less light during the day" (Seasonal affective disorder, 2014) may have made a contribution to the declination of the children's Global Self-Worth scores and in the female's overall self-esteem scores.

Future studies should perhaps take an entire year's worth of instruction of the theater curriculum with the children allowing for more time for growth and development of the theater program. Using a larger sample size in future studies would also be beneficial allowing for a wider range of data. Having a larger sample size, however, would have made instructing the theater curriculum much more difficult. If a larger sample size is used in future study, it may be helpful to include several additional researchers/instructors. A larger facility in which to teach the theater curriculum would be helpful with a larger sample size. Alternatively, many small groups within one school or across several schools could participate in the theatre programming as a way to increase the overall sample size for research purposes. Finding a way to individually administer the surveys may also be advantageous. Ensuring that the children understand each item

on the survey as well as preventing collaboration on the questionnaires would be very helpful in correcting for possible inconsistent data. An alternative method to administer a daily mood evaluation may be useful to implement in future studies especially if using a larger sample size. The method used in the current study was difficult to monitor to guarantee honest and private responses.

Overall, the theater programming taught to the students in grades Kindergarten through Fourth Grade at the Stillwater Montessori School in Old Town, Maine proved to be beneficial to all those involved and make a positive contribution to the school's everyday curriculum. Positive feedback from both the children and their teachers as well as observations made throughout the process indicate that teaching the students the fundamental principles involved in the theater arts provides a great deal of benefits to the individuals involved and the class as a whole. This project proved to be a very rewarding and memorable experience for not only the students and teachers, but also for myself. I am so very grateful to have had the opportunity to engage in such a venture. My hope is that through this study, I have shown that theater is in fact not just child's play, but rather a very beneficial factor to the development of the child.

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## Appendix A

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You and your child are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Sydney Walker, an undergraduate student at the University of Maine. Ms. Walker is a Psychology major with a concentration in Development with a double major in Theater. This research project is being conducted for Ms. Walker's Honors Thesis. The faculty sponsor for the project is Dr. Cynthia Erdley, a professor in the Psychology Department at the University of Maine. The purpose of the research project is to measure and study the potential benefits of theater programming with children in a school setting, specifically regarding self-esteem and empathy. All children will be participating in the theater curriculum presented by Ms. Walker as part of their normal school day. Classes will begin on January 13, 2014 and conclude with a performance for families on February 14, 2014. Classes will take place twice a week for one hour each. We are asking permission for your child to participate in the research aspect of this study, described below.

#### **What Will You and Your Child Be Asked to Do?**

-If you choose to allow your child to participate in this research project, prior to the start of the study, you will be asked to fill out two questionnaires regarding your child. The first will be concerning self-esteem and the second will focus on empathy. These questionnaires should take no longer than ten minutes to complete. Some example questions you will be asked to rate include "When my child sees other people laughing, he/she starts laughing too" and "Seeks attention by displaying inappropriate behavior". If you agree to participate in this study, Ms. Walker will send you the link to the two questionnaires.

-Your child's teacher will also be asked to fill out three questionnaires about your child regarding your child's self-esteem and empathy.

-If given permission, your child will also be asked to complete two questionnaires regarding his or her own self-esteem and empathy. Your child will be read the script included at the end of this form to gain their assent prior to completing the questionnaires. Your child will be asked to rate these items on a "Yes, Sometimes, No" scale. Some example questions include, "It makes me sad to see a girl who can't find anyone to play with." and "I am usually happy with myself as a person." Your child will be provided with assistance from Ms. Walker and teachers to assure he or she understands the questions being asked. It should take your child no more than twenty minutes to complete the questionnaires.

-While participating in the theater curriculum, your child will be asked to display one of three cards (Good, Bad, or So-So) to describe his or her current mood at the beginning and end of each session.

-Ms. Walker will also keep a journal documenting her observations of the class including your child and how they interact within the theater programming collectively and individually.

-Your child will be invited to participate in a final performance date on February 14<sup>th</sup>. You and your child's family will be invited to attend. Ms. Walker will also be inviting her own family as well as her Honors Thesis Committee to attend the final performance. Given your consent, the final performance will be video taped for personal and academic uses by Ms. Walker, but will not be shared using any social media or other public forum.

-At the end of the theater programming after the final performance, you and your child, as well as his or her teacher, will be asked to fill out the self-esteem and empathy questionnaires again.

### **Risks**

-You or your child may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer and may stop at any time. Your child will also be informed that he or she may do the same.

### **Potential Benefits**

-Completing the questionnaires will provide no direct benefit for you or your child. However, the theater curriculum your child will be participating in will utilize the techniques of Creative Drama, which has been proven to provide many beneficial factors to those involved including enhanced self-esteem, empathy, social awareness, problem solving skills, creativity, and an understanding of the world. By participating in the theater program, it is the hope of Ms. Walker that your child will benefit in these ways.

-Ms. Walker also hopes that the study itself will provide beneficial information about the importance of arts programming in schools.

## **Compensation**

-Your child will receive small awards as positive reinforcement throughout the study. These awards will be minimal (e.g., a pencil, a sticker, a certificate). All children participating in the theater programming will receive awards regardless of whether or not they participate in the research portion of this project.

## **Confidentiality**

-Questionnaires will be distributed to parents, teachers, and children with identification numbers already written on them. Your child will have his or her own ID number. Sticky notes with your child's name will be put onto each survey to avoid confusion among those filling them out, but will then be removed after completion. If you choose to complete the questionnaire online an ID number will be sent to you. A key disclosing which ID number goes with which child will be stored in a separate location from the questionnaires on Ms. Walker's personal computer and a special software will be used to ensure extra security. This key will be destroyed in May, 2014.

-The journal kept by Ms. Walker will use each child's ID number to protect privacy.

-Video and photography of the final performance may be taken as a source of documentation and reference and will only be used for personal and academic purposes by the primary investigator. Video and photographs will not be posted online or distributed through any public forum.

-Data will be stored in a secured location in Ms. Walker's dorm room to which only she will have access. Video of the performance will be kept indefinitely. Data will be destroyed after completion of the study in May 2014.

-Any data published will not disclose any personal information or identification of your child of any kind.

## **Voluntary**

-The theater curriculum will take place as part of your child's normal school day. Participation in the research aspect of the project is voluntary. If you and your child choose to take part in this study, you may stop completing the questionnaires at any time. You and your child may also skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

## Contact

-If you have any questions or concerns about the study please feel free to contact the primary investigator, Sydney Walker. She can be reached by phone at 207-595-0944, by email at [sydney.walker@umit.maine.edu](mailto:sydney.walker@umit.maine.edu), or by mail at 102 Androscoggin Hall, Orono, Maine 04469.

-You may also reach the faculty advisor of this study, Professor Erdley, at 207-581-2040. Professor Erdley's address is 368 Little Hall, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469. Her email address is [cynthia.erdley@umit.maine.edu](mailto:cynthia.erdley@umit.maine.edu).

-If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Jones, Assistant to the University of Maine's Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, at 207-581-1498 (or e-mail [gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu](mailto:gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu)).

## Signature

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information and agree to participate and allow your child to participate in research study. You will receive a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Assent Script that Will Be Read to Your Child

*"Hi, my name is Sydney and I'm really excited to be teaching theater to all of you. I go to school too and teaching you these things is something I'm doing for class. I was wondering if you would you be willing to help me with some of my homework and answer some questions about yourself before we begin our fun activities? You will answer these questions using paper and pencil, and it should take about 20 minutes. I've already asked*

*your parents and they said that it was okay. Just know, that there are no right or wrong answers and that you can skip any questions you don't want to answer. I will be here to help you as well as your teachers if you have any questions."*

**Video Taping/Photography Permission**

Your signature below allows for your child to be video taped or photographed during the process and at the final performance by Ms. Walker. Video and photographs will only be used for personal and academic purposes by Ms. Walker and will not be posted or shared through any form of social media or public forum.

---

Signature

---

Date

## Appendix B

# The Three Little Pigs

Written by Sydney Walker with the help of the Kindergarten and  
Elementary Classes at the Stillwater Montessori School

**Narrator 1:** Once upon a time there lived a family of pigs in a teeny weeny house. There was a Mama Pig, a Daddy Pig, a Baby Pig, and three little piggy siblings.

**Narrator 2:** The oldest pig was very smart and loved to read and learn.

(Oldest pig introduces his/herself)

**Narrator 1:** The middle piggy loved to play sports.

(Middle piggy introduces his/herself)

**Narrator 2:** And the younger pig loved to dress up and wear fancy clothes.

(Younger piggy introduces him/herself)

**Narrator 1:** One morning the Pig family was eating breakfast when the Mama Pig said to her children...

**Mama Pig:** You are all getting too old and you eat too much. I think it's time you left our home to go build your own house. It's time for you to set out into the world and seek your fortune.

**Narrator 2:** The Mama Pig was sad to see her children go, but happy that they would be having new adventures. The three little pigs were also scared and excited and they packed their things and got ready to go out into the world.

**Narrator 1:** The pigs decided they needed materials to build a house so they stopped to buy straw from a lion that was selling it on the side of the road. The three little pigs started building their house of straw.

**Narrator 2:** Meanwhile there was a wolf who was busy making a birthday cake for his dear old grandmother who was turning 92. The wolf was busy baking when he realized that he was out of sugar. So he kissed his dear Grandma wolf goodbye and set out to find some sugar.

**Narrator 1:** As he was walking on the road the wolf saw the three little pigs building their house of straw. The wolf had always been a bully. He was known by the town as the Big Bad Wolf. He decided he was going to tease the three

little pigs so he walked towards their house of straw. The three little pigs became very frightened and ran into the house and slammed the door. The Big Bad Wolf laughed and knocked saying...

**Big Bad Wolf:** Little pigs, little pigs, let me come in!

**Narrator 2:** And the pigs squealed...

**Three Pigs:** No! Not by the hairs on our chinny chin chins!

**Big Bad Wolf:** Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!

**Narrator 2:** And he did! The pigs ran away squealing before the wolf could play any more pranks on them. The pigs were sad because their house of straw had been blown away so easily so they decided they were going to buy stronger materials this time.

**Narrator 1:** As they were walking down the road, they spied a turtle selling bundles of twigs and sticks so they bought several bundles from him and began to build their new house.

**Narrator 2:** The Big Bad Wolf was very sneaky and watched the pigs as they built their house and when they were finished he jumped out to scare them!

**Narrator 1:** The pigs all squealed and ran into their new house slamming the door so the wolf knocked and said...

**Big Bad Wolf:** Little pigs, little pigs, let me come in!

**Narrator 2:** And the pigs squealed...

**Three Pigs:** No! Not by the hairs on our chinny chin chins!

**Big Bad Wolf:** Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!

**Narrator 1:** And he did! And again the pigs ran away squealing, this time determined to find something stronger to build their house of.

**Narrator 2:** The pigs ran past a flamingo that was selling bricks. The smart piggy noticed how heavy the bricks were and realized that it would be very difficult for the wolf to blow down such a sturdy house. So the three little pigs bought all of the flamingo's bricks and began to build their new house.

**Narrator 1:** The Big Bad Wolf began searching for the pigs, and began sniffing around for them. The scent led him to their new yard where the pigs were

playing. The sporty piggy was exercising, the smart pig was reading, and the girly piggy was dancing.

**Narrator 2:** Just then they all spied the Big Bad Wolf and ran into the house. This time they were not very afraid though because they realized how sturdy their house was. The Big Bad Wolf laughed and knocked on the door saying

**Big Bad Wolf:** Little pigs, little pigs, let me come in!

**Narrator 2:** And the pigs said...

**Three Pigs:** No! Not by the hairs on our chinny chin chins!

**Big Bad Wolf:** Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!

**Narrator 1:** So he huffed and he puffed, and he puffed and he huffed, but the Big Bad Wolf could not blow the house down! The Big Bad Wolf began to get angry and stomped away determined to find another way to knock their house down.

**Girly Pig:** Oh no! He's going to come back!

**Sporty Pig:** He's going to find a way to destroy our house again!

**Narrator 2:** Just then a pair of monkeys came walking by with bundles of flowers.

**Smart Piggy:** I have an idea!

**Narrator 1:** The three little pigs bought all the flowers the monkeys had and began to put them all over their house and planting them in their garden while the monkeys helped. The lion, turtle, and flamingo also came to help. They all saw the wolf on his way so they ran into the house to wait for him.

**Narrator 2:** The wolf started to walk towards the house stretching and ready to blow the brick house down this time, but as he he got closer he began to smell all the beautiful flowers.

**Narrator 1:** One little known fact is the wolves love the smell of flowers and so the wolf became very happy. The Big Bad Wolf began to dance around and start singing. The Big Bad Wolf turned into a Big Friendly Wolf and all the animals in the house started laughing and ran outside to join him.

**Narrator 2:** The Mama Pig, Daddy Pig, Baby, Pig, and Grandma Wolf heard all the commotion and came to join in on the fun.

**Whole cast:** And they all lived happily ever after!

## Appendix C

Hello!

My name is Sydney Walker and I'm a senior in the Honors College at the University of Maine majoring in Psychology with a concentration in Development and double majoring in Theater. I am currently working on my Honors Thesis and I would love to tell you about the exciting project I have been developing with some help from your child's teacher!

Starting January 13, I will be coming into your child's classroom twice a week to do one hour sessions with your child's class. For these sessions I will be teaching a theater curriculum based on the techniques of Creative Drama. During these sessions your child will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of theater games. They will also have the chance to create their own dramatic performance while discussing different thematic elements including conflict resolution, point of view, and how to effectively portray a character. They will also participate in activities encouraging your child and their peers to provide positive feedback for each other.

As this is part of a research project I will be conducting a psychological study on the impact that this theater curriculum has on your child's levels of self-esteem and empathy. With your consent, you and your child, as well as his or her teacher, will be asked to fill out questionnaires concerning these issues at the beginning and end of the study.

I am attaching a copy of the informed consent form requiring your signature in order for your child to participate in the psychological study part of my project. If you choose to participate in the study, I would greatly appreciate it if you could print this out, read it through, sign it, and send it to school with your child. Hard copies of this form will also be provided at your child's school for your convenience.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding the project.

Thank you so much! I look forward to working with your child!

Sydney Walker

## Appendix D

## Self-Esteem Rating Scale of Children for Parents/Guardians-Revised

1. Tends to dominate or bully other children.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

2. Adapts easily to new situations or new tasks.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

3. Becomes upset by failures (e.g., pouting, whining, withdrawing).

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

4. Becomes upset when being criticized or scolded (e.g., pouting, whining, withdrawing).

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

5. Seeks support or reassurance from adults.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

6. Gets along with peers.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

7. Seeks attention by displaying inappropriate behavior.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

8. Shows confidence or assurance in actions.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

9. Gives in to others easily.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

10. Keeps calm in stressful situations.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

## Appendix E

## Empathy Questionnaire for Parents

1. When another person cries, my child gets upset too.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

2. When I make clear that I want some peace and quiet, my child tries not to bother me.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

3. When my child sees other people laughing, he/she starts laughing too.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

4. My child also needs to be comforted when another person is in pain.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

5. When another person starts to cry, my child tries to comfort him/her.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

6. When an adult gets angry with another person, my child watches attentively.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

7. When another person makes a bad fall, shortly after my child pretends to fall too.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

8. When another person gets upset, my child tries to cheer him/her up.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

9. My child looks up when another person laughs.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

10. When another person is upset, my child needs to be comforted too.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

11. When I make it clear that I want to do something by myself (e.g., read) my child leaves me alone for a while.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

12. When adults laugh, my child tries to get near them.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

13. When another person gets frightened, my child freezes or starts to cry.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

14. When two people are quarreling, my child tries to stop them.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

15. My child looks up when another person cries.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

16. When other people argue, my child gets upset.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

17. When another person gets frightened, my child tries to help him/her.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

18. When another person is angry, my child stops his own play to watch.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

19. When another person cries, my child looks away.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

20. When other people quarrel, my child wants to see what is going on.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

## Appendix F

## Self-Perception Profile for Children-Revised

1. I am often unhappy with myself

Yes            Sometimes            No

2. I feel that I am very good at my schoolwork

Yes            Sometimes            No

3. I often do not like the way I act.

Yes            Sometimes            No

4. I find it hard to make friends.

Yes            Sometimes            No

5. I don't like the way I am living my life.

Yes            Sometimes            No

6. I feel like I am just as smart as other kids my age.

Yes            Sometimes            No

7. I usually do the right thing.

Yes            Sometimes            No

8. I have a lot of friends.

Yes            Sometimes            No

9. I am usually happy with myself as a person.

Yes            Sometimes            No

10. I am pretty slow in finishing my homework.

Yes            Sometimes            No

11. I usually act the way I know that I am supposed to.

Yes            Sometimes            No

12. I would like to have a lot more friends.

Yes            Sometimes            No

13. I like the kind of person I am.

Yes            Sometimes            No

14. I often forget what I learn.

Yes            Sometimes            No

15. I usually get in trouble because of the things that I do.

Yes            Sometimes            No

16. I am always doing things with a lot of other kids.

Yes            Sometimes            No

17. I am very happy being the way I am.

Yes            Sometimes            No

18. I do very well with my classwork.

Yes            Sometimes            No

19. I do things I know I should not do.

Yes            Sometimes            No

20. I wish that more kids liked me.

Yes            Sometimes            No

21. I am not happy with the way I do a lot of things.

Yes            Sometimes            No

22. I have trouble doing my schoolwork.

Yes            Sometimes            No

23. I behave myself very well.

Yes            Sometimes            No

24. I am popular with kids my age.

Yes            Sometimes            No

## Appendix G

## Index of Empathy for Children - Revised

1. It makes me sad to see a girl who can't find anyone to play with

Yes            Sometimes            No

2. People who kiss and hug in public are silly.

Yes            Sometimes            No

3. Boys who cry because they are happy are silly

Yes            Sometimes            No

4. I really like to watch people open presents, even when I don't get a present myself.

Yes            Sometimes            No

5. Seeing a boy who is crying makes me feel like crying.

Yes            Sometimes            No

6. I get upset when I see a girl being hurt.

Yes            Sometimes            No

7. Even when I don't know why someone is laughing, I laugh too.

Yes            Sometimes            No

8. Sometimes I cry when I watch TV.

Yes            Sometimes            No

9. Girls who cry because they are happy are silly.

Yes            Sometimes            No

10. It's hard for me to see why someone is upset.

Yes            Sometimes            No

11. I get upset when I see an animal being hurt.

Yes            Sometimes            No

12. It makes me sad to see a boy who can't find anyone to play with.

Yes            Sometimes            No

13. Some songs make me so sad I feel like crying.

Yes            Sometimes            No

14. I get upset when I see a boy being hurt.

Yes            Sometimes            No

15. Grown-ups sometimes cry, even when they have nothing to be sad about.

Yes            Sometimes            No

16. It's silly to treat dogs and cats as though they have feelings like people.

Yes            Sometimes            No

17. I get mad when I see a classmate pretending to need help from the teacher all the time.

Yes            Sometimes            No

18. Kids who have no friends probably don't want any.

Yes            Sometimes            No

19. Seeing a girl who is crying makes me feel like crying.

Yes            Sometimes            No

20. I think it is funny that some people cry while watching a sad movie or while reading a sad book.

Yes            Sometimes            No

21. I am able to eat all my cookies even when I see someone looking at me wanting one.

Yes            Sometimes            No

22. I don't feel upset when I see a classmate being punished by a teacher for not obeying the school rules.

Yes            Sometimes            No

## Appendix H

## Self-Esteem Rating Scale of Children for Teachers-Revised

1. Hesitates to speak up in class

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

2. Tends to dominate or bully other children.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

3. Adapts easily to new situations or new tasks.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

4. Becomes upset by failures (e.g., pouting, whining, withdrawing).

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

5. Tends to be chosen by peers for activities.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

6. Becomes upset when being criticized or scolded (e.g., pouting, whining, withdrawing).

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

7. Seeks support or reassurance from the teacher.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

8. Gets along with peers.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

9. Seeks attention by displaying inappropriate behavior.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

10. Shows confidence or assurance in actions.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

11. Gives in to others easily.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

12. Keeps calm in stressful situations.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

## Appendix I

## Self-Evaluation Scale of Children for Teachers - Revised

1. This student likes school.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

Strongly Disagree

5

2. Kids follow a lot of this student's good ideas.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

Strongly Disagree

5

3. This student is slow at finishing work.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

Strongly Disagree

5

4. This student is popular with other kids.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

Strongly Disagree

5

5. This student's schoolwork is the best he/she can do.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

Strongly Disagree

5

6. This student is well liked.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

Strongly Disagree

5

7. This student feels discouraged in school.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

Strongly Disagree

5

8. This student is a good friend to other students.

Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree

5

9. This student likes being active.

Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree

5

10. This student feels bored in school.

Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree

5

11. Kids tease this student a lot.

Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree

5

12. This student learns new things easily.

Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree

5

13. This student likes to be called on in class.

Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree

5

14. Kids like to be with this student.

Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree

5

15. This student feels like an important member of the class.

Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree

5

## Appendix J

## Empathy Questionnaire for Teachers

1. When another child cries, this student gets upset too.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

2. When this student sees other children laughing, he/she starts laughing too.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

3. This student also needs to be comforted when another child is in pain.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

4. When another child starts to cry, this student tries to comfort him/her.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

5. When an adult gets angry with another child, this student watches attentively.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

6. When another child makes a bad fall, shortly after this student pretends to fall too.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

7. When another child gets upset, this student tries to cheer him/her up.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

8. This student looks up when another child laughs.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

9. When another child is upset, this student needs to be comforted too.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

10. When adults laugh, this student tries to get near them.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

11. When another child gets frightened, this student freezes or starts to cry.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

12. When two children are quarreling, this student tries to stop them.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

13. This student looks up when another child cries.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

14. When other children argue, this student gets upset.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

15. When another child gets frightened, this student tries to help him/her.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

16. When another child is angry, this student stops his own play to watch.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

17. When another child cries, this student looks away.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

18. When other children quarrel, this student wants to see what is going on.

Always      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom      Never

### **Author's Biography**

Sydney Rebecca Walker, the daughter of Eric and Anne, grew up in Naples, Maine with two younger siblings, Emma and Paul, and started performing at the age of three. Her passions for performing dance, theater, and music as well as her experiences with the benefits of being involved in the performing arts and her love of working with children were the inspirations behind this project.

Sydney Walker graduated cum laude from the University of Maine in May 2014 with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology with a concentration in Development and a Theater double major with an Honors College distinction. During her time at UMaine, Sydney was a member of the Dance Team, University Singers, Maine Masque, Alpha Psi Omega, the National Theater Honors Society, and Psi Chi, the National Psychology Honors Society. She also performed in and held technical positions for numerous theatrical productions at UMaine. During her time at UMaine, Sydney worked as a Resident Assistant for first year students as well as a Technical Crew Supervisor at the Collins Center for the Arts.

Following graduation, Sydney accepted a teaching position at The New England Center for Children, a leader in autism research and education, in Southborough, Massachusetts while pursuing a Master's Degree in Severe Special Education from Simmons College.