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THEATRE FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: A DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR COLLABORATIVE PLAY-CREATING

By David Beare and George Belliveau (Canada)

Abstract

This article examines a collaborative play-creating process for positive youth development. This process is essentially a complex series of interactions between students and theatre facilitators who negotiate and work towards a shared vision, which is to create an original play. By creating a carefully planned collective play, theatre opens possibilities for positive youth development. The authors theorise a developmental model of collaborative play-creating and its impact on youth. The research examines the nature of student experiences, and the meaning and learning that emerge for participants within such a process. The conceptualisation and research are grounded from literature in the fields of theatre education and counselling psychology. Nine key themes emerged during the research, and these support the theoretical model of theatre for positive youth development.

Résumé

Cet article examine une méthode collaborative de 'play-building' conçue pour le développement positif des jeunes. Cette méthode est surtout définie par une série complexe d'interactions entre les étudiants et les animateurs du théâtre qui négocient et travaillent ensemble vers une vision commune, en vue de créer une pièce originale. En créant une pièce collective minutieusement planifiée, le théâtre ouvre des chances de développement positif aux jeunes. Les auteurs proposent une théorie pour un modèle développemental de méthode collaborative de 'play- building' et de son impact sur les jeunes. Les résultats examinent la nature des expériences des étudiants, la signification et les acquis qui résultent de cette méthode pour les participants. La conceptualisation et la recherche se basent à partir de la littérature dans les domaines de l'éducation théâtrale et de la psychologie. Neuf thèmes principaux émergent au cours du travail de recherche. Ces thèmes soutiennent le Modèle de théâtre pour le développement positif des jeunes.

Resumen

Este artículo examina el proceso de la creación de juegos colaborativos para el desarrollo positivo del joven. Este proceso es esencialmente una serie compleja de interacciones entre los estudiantes y los facilitadores del teatro quienes negocian y trabajan hacia una visión compartida, la cual es la de crear una obra original. Mediante la creación de una obra cuidadosamente planificada en forma colectiva, el teatro abre las posibilidades para el desarrollo positivo del joven. Los autores ofrecen una teoría sobre el modelo de desarrollo de la creación de juegos colaborativos y su impacto en el joven. La investigación examina la naturaleza de las experiencias del estudiante, y el significado y el aprendizaje que surgen para los participantes dentro de dicho proceso. La conceptualización y la investigación se basan en la literatura dentro de los campos del teatro de la educación y la consejería psicológica. Nueve temas claves surgieron durante la investigación y estos apoyan el modelo teórico del teatro para el desarrollo positivo del joven.

Authors' biographies

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David Beare est un étudiant en doctorat en éducation théâtrale à l'université *University of British Columbia*, un enseignant en art théâtral et un conseiller. Ses travaux de recherche se concentrent sur le théâtre en tant que médium vers le développement positif des jeunes, l'éducation des enseignants d'art théâtral, l'enseignement social et émotionnel, et les méthodes nouvelles de conseil pour la jeunesse.

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THEATRE FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: A DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR COLLABORATIVE PLAY-CREATING

Introduction

> *Everything I create is a reflection of me; I cannot separate the two: art and life. Creating something affirms that I exist, that I am not alone. It makes me feel like I am a part of something, part of humanity, part of the universe … I used to think of art as an ideal, but now I see art as an action, an interaction really. Art is a way of communicating ideas, of stimulating dialogue in people, of linking gaps between people … So when we work through a collaborative play-creating process, the aim is to not reproduce art, but rather to create art. (Mike)*[1]

The thoughts shown above and throughout this paper *in italics* reflect the voices of secondary students engaged in a collaborative play-creating process in a North Vancouver school in British Columbia, Canada (Beare 2003). A collaborative play-creating process is essentially a complex series of interactions between students and theatre facilitators who negotiate and work towards a shared vision, which is to create an original play. By creating a carefully planned collective play, we argue that theatre opens possibilities for positive youth development. This paper theorises a developmental model of collaborative play-creating and its impact on youth. As well, the research examines the nature of student experiences and the meaning and learning that emerges for participants within such a creative and collaborative process.

The methodology used for this study is performative inquiry. According to Lynn Fels and George Belliveau (2008), performative inquiry is a process of knowing, doing, being and creating. Rooted in enactivism theory (Maturana and Varela 1992), performance theory (Schechner 2003), complexity theory (Davis and Sumara 2006) and action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001), performative inquiry investigates the interrelationships between people and their environment. These include our relationships between the various people in the performance process, between various aspects of ourselves, between characters, between the audience, between the physical environment, between technological components, and between the structure of the collaborative play-creating process. Performative inquiry aims to capture not so much the facts, but rather the *experience of realizing/recognizing* through performance, and as such provides a framework to share the meaning-making within this research.

In addition to performative inquiry, the conceptualization and research of the collaborative play-creating process is also grounded from literature in the fields of theatre education and counselling psychology. This research involved collecting and interpreting data, using in-depth interviews, focus groups, and extensive field notes.[2] Nine key themes emerged during the research, and these key concepts support the theoretical model of theatre for positive youth development. To help guide readers through the nature of the developmental model for collaborative play-creating this article is divided into three sections. The first section illustrates some of the theory and literature that inform this approach to theatre for positive youth development. Then, we offer a thorough explanation and discussion of the nine emerging themes of the collaborative play-creating process. Finally, ways to facilitate positive youth development are examined in an effort to find the meaning making behind this collaborative theatre approach.

Theory and literature

The premise of this study is based on the philosophical principles of social constructivism. It has been argued that our understanding of the world is determined by group consensus, thus heavily influenced by social interactions and individuals in positions of power (Guba and Lincoln, 2000). Knowledge is not a fixed state, but rather a fluid one, which changes through a complex series of dialogue. Schwandt (2000) states that all knowledge is interpretative. Interpretations are subjective, constructed, and are in a constant flux depending on the political, social, and cultural environments. Therefore, based on social constructivism, the developmental model examined in this article is a reconstructed interpretation.

There is a great deal of knowledge about the operations and procedures of theatre programs (Bennett, 2001; Gonzalez 2006; Lazarus, 2004), but there is less research about the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that occur for the youth involved (Bramwell, 1996; Catterall and Darby, 1996; Cockett, 1996; Errington, 1999). To better understand these less visible processes, this article looks to the field of positive youth development. Kaczmarek and Riva (1996) state that *positive youth development*

— or, as they name it, *optimal adolescent development* — is a radical shift that moves adolescent research away from the study of pathology to the study of well-being. By focusing on how youth build up their self-confidence, resilience, and other protective factors, researchers are better able to understand how youth reject deviant and self-destructive behaviours, deal with the life crises and day-to-day stressors, and embrace healthy and self-constructive behaviours. In general, the field of positive youth development is more focused on prevention, and less on intervention.

In the past 10 years, there has been an explosion of literature on the topic of positive youth development. For example, Breinbauer and Maddaleno (2005) offer the most current theoretical models on positive youth development, while Catalono et al. (2004) provide an extensive investigation on specific programs that promote positive youth development. For his part, Ungar (2004) adds to this field by providing ways for organisations to nurture hidden resiliency in troubled youth. However, there is currently little research that specifically examines *theatre* for positive youth development.

The literature on positive youth development suggests that the examination of social interactions and leisure activities with peers, friends and other groups may help to better understand how to reinforce the natural protective factors in youth today. There is a great deal of evidence that indicates strong links between youth development and extra-curricular activities within the field of counselling psychology (Biddy and Posterski 2000; Blewitt and Broderick 1999; Canadian Institute for Health Information 2005; Eccles and Barber 1999; Elmen and Offer 1993; Larson and Kleiber 1993; McNeal 1998; Offer and Schonert-Reichl 1992; Tonkins et al. 2005) and theatre education (Belliveau 2005; Boal 1995; Gonzalez 2006; Lazarus 2004; Nicholson 2005; Taylor 2003; Wagner 1998; Way 1967).

Rauner (2000), writing about caring in youth development and community life, describes development less in terms of turning points and more with regard to continuity. For her, development is a process, not an event. She examines caring (or, in academic terms, pro-social behaviour) as the necessary relational ingredient needed to foster continuity in adolescent growth. Her work highlights a wide range of organisational models that aim to foster positive youth development and community. For her part, Joan Lazarus (2004) presents ways to build positive and productive communities — communities where theatre and student learning are interwoven and equally respected. The foundation of her work is based on the concept that theatre education should focus not solely on performance, but more importantly on learning. The theories presented by Larazus and Rauner, among others, strongly support the model discussed here.

The collaborative play-creating process

The collaborative play-creating process is a theoretical model that emerged from several years of working with secondary students. It features nine key themes that weave theatre and self. For the purposes of this article, we define *theatre* as an event or space where people come together to create, participate in and/or witness live performances. Theatre can occur on a traditional stage surrounded by elaborate lighting and a sound system, or in a bare classroom with desks pushed aside. Regardless of the environment, the ultimate purpose of theatre is to bring people together (Rohd 1998). We use the term *self* as the combination of all facets of an individual: thoughts, feelings, movements, memories, experiences and behaviours, whether they are public or private, imagined or real (Biddy and Posterski 2000). Self is not a constant state, but rather a fluid one. Self is determined by how we perceive and define our identity, and our identity is shaped greatly through our interactions with others. Some aspects of ourselves are well developed, while other parts lie dormant, waiting to be discovered. Self evolves over time, and changes from situation to situation (Breinbauer and Maddaleno 2005).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the nine themes are represented by two separate yet interwoven components: theatre and self. The *theatre* section is composed of four overlapping play-creating steps: scriptwriting, rehearsing, performing and reflecting. The *self* section comprises five developmental stages for performing arts youth: inclusion, control, intimacy, empowerment and vision.

Now let's examine the process and meaning behind the nine emerging themes. It is important to remember that the ordering of these themes is unique from person to person, and from play to play. While the themes are explained separately, in an actual theatre creation environment, these themes are operating simultaneously, and often in a chaotic and non-linear way. Before we explore the nine themes, an explanation of the *hub group* is necessary. We have discovered that the success of the collaborative play-creating process depends heavily on the quality of the hub group. The hub group consists of senior students (usually around 10–20 of them) who are responsible for key aspects of the collaborative

play-creating   process (i.e. directing, choreographing, singing coach, band leader, scheduling, ticket sales, set design, and so on). Based on skills, maturity and past experiences, ideal student-leaders are selected for the hub group. These students are expected to guide the community by mentoring peers, defusing conflicts before they build up, and inspiring ideas for the play. The purpose of the hub group is circular: the members of the hub group act as leaders and positive role models for their younger peers, and in turn they organically pass on the knowledge, skills and overall philosophy of the collaborative play-creating process to future leaders and participants.
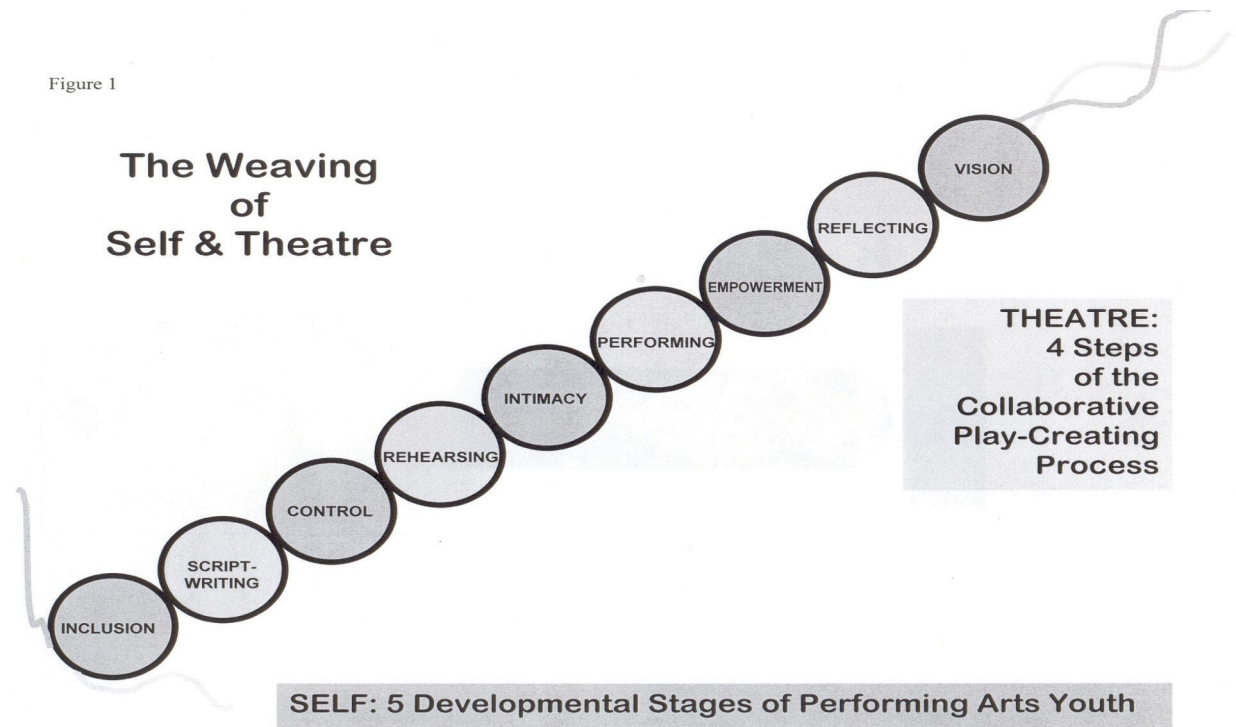
Figure 1: The weaving of self and theatre

Four play-creating steps

1. *Scriptwriting*

> *Just when I don't think I can bear [brainstorming] any longer, we have this breakthrough. We'd find something that actually fits. Then we'd get excited and we start talking all at once. You know you've stumbled onto something amazing when everybody jumps up at once screaming, 'That's it! That's it! That's it!' Suddenly there's this buzzing energy bouncing all around us. It's like we're all connected somehow, no longer alone, stuck in a box. It's the most incredible experience. That's when I know we've given birth to a piece of art and that it was worth the struggle. (Karen)*

Youth are invited to come together to explore possibilities for the next creation, and to discuss the successes and weaknesses of the previous year's production. The core youth involved in these discussions are students in the hub group, and on the *writing team*. The writing team involves a group of 10–20 students from all grade levels who volunteer to help write the play. The drama teacher oversees the writing team (as well as the hub group), and serves as the script editor to provide feedback. On average, the entire scriptwriting process takes about three months, with the group meeting two or three times a week. This does not include the long hours of individual writing done at home both by students and teacher.

The scriptwriting step can be divided into six sub-steps: reflecting, brainstorming, storyboarding, writing, editing and polishing. A core philosophy of the collaborative play- creating process is that no students are turned away (e.g. the 2007 production involved over 200 students). Therefore, the writing team needs to

find creative ways to embrace a large number of students, such as integrating songs, dances or choral speeches into the script. After the brainstorming and storyboarding sub-steps are done, students on the writing team are placed in pairs or small groups, and they are assigned scenes to write. After a scene is written, student- writers get feedback from the writing team, the theatre community as a whole and teachers. Through discussions, new ideas arise, followed by a reordering and reorganisation of the storyboard, which in turn leads to more rewrites, edits and polishing.

2. Rehearsing

> Remember, you guys, when we stayed in the theatre until like two in the morning painting the set? (Shelly)

The *rehearsing stage* can be divided into four sub-steps: organising, auditioning, practising and polishing. Before auditions, the organisation of multiple schedules needs to be carefully planned. Since students are busy with homework, paid work, sports and other life commitments, they need support with time management and setting limits. Student-leaders in the hub group meet regularly with the teacher in order to maintain a shared vision. Also, the long list of responsibilities is divided into manageable tasks, so that the tasks can realistically be fulfilled within a given timeframe. A well-organised team increases productivity, and decreases the dropout rate.

Since rehearsal styles vary greatly from director to director, and from play to play, the specifics of the rehearsal phase fall outside the realm of this article. Sometimes the director predetermines what will be done at each rehearsal, and sometimes the scenes are discovered by the students. Regardless of the rehearsal style, all participants need to adapt to the constant technical and performance changes that are being made to the script. In addition, students continue to practise negotiating various aspects of the script and the rehearsal process. Often feedback inspires the participants to take the play in new directions. As actors rehearse, members of the technical team are busy working on various aspects of the play, such as set construction, costuming, lights, special effects and props. Over time, actors and technicians merge together in the spirit of co-creating a shared vision of the play.

3. Performing

> Being in the spotlight has got to be one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I can't describe what performing feels like. It feels — it feels electrifying! It's this rush! I'm standing there and everybody's looking at me, and I can either go run away and throw up, or I can just stand there and just do my thing, you know what I mean? Performing is like basking in the ultimate glow of acceptance, accomplishment and love. You can feel all the actors, writers and crew feeling so proud of what we have created. (Amir)

Whether the play is devised or scripted, the experience of performing usually acts as a powerful buffer for positive youth development. The audience is usually filled with family, friends and staff members who are there to support the students. The acts of performing as a collective whole, accepting applause from the audience and receiving positive feedback from loved ones helps to strengthen the students' self-confidence, which in turn fosters a deeper sense of connection to the community. Each year, the hundred-plus students perform to an average of over 2,500 audience members spread over three evening and two matinee performances. The evening shows usually end with standing ovations.

The performance helps to deepen the level of commitment of the entire collaborative play-creating process. After a performance, students often indicate that the reward of performing was worth the long hours and challenges. With success from the performances comes greater openness to and trust in the entire process, and a stronger commitment to nurturing an artistic and caring community. Often students feel deeply validated by the act of performing, partly because of the praise from their friends and family, and partly because they were able to express themselves in a meaningful way. This provides strong motivation to take the next play to a higher level, which in turn motivates the next hub group, writing team, and future cast and crew to be even more committed to the entire process.

4. Reflecting

> It totally changed my life. It's like the entire experience is fused right inside my body, and I don't feel as insecure anymore — at least with my acting that is. And I can't believe how much the

audience responded to the play. They may not have liked it or even understood it, but they appreciated what we were attempting to do. (Karen)

The *reflecting stage* occurs throughout the entire collaborative play-creating process; however, it is most prominent at the beginning and end. Reflecting is also encouraged by the participating teachers who base some of their classroom lessons around the theme of the play. For example, in the 2006 play, the theme of non-violent communication was explored and linked to drama classes. Students were involved in classroom discussions and created short scenes about conflict resolution, using three different styles of communication: aggressive, passive and assertive.

Since performing is a highly charged experience, the cast and crew usually have a strong need to come together after the performance to reflect upon this powerful experience. These meetings occur during class time or after school, and students usually share with the group how the process impacted them. For some, the experience did not impact them in any meaningful way, while for others it felt like a transformation of self. Youth share stories and memories, both happy and sad ones, and highlight key events throughout the process. Some make connections about their growth as performers, while others more openly discuss personal discoveries. Often in the reflecting stage, students express how the play and people involved impacted and shaped their lives.

As individuals take risks in sharing their process with the group, this encourages the more hesitant students to do the same, and in turn the quality of sharing deepens. There is a deeper sense of hearts opening and connections being made, both internally and between people. For some students, there is a deeper appreciation of the process of theatre, while for others there is greater understanding about the connections between storytelling, performance, audience inclusion, personal growth and community.

Five developmental stages of performing arts youth

Compared with the four play-creating steps, the five developmental stages of performing arts youth pose a greater challenge to observe because they focus more on the internal processes. The development model is partially informed by the interaction of group dynamics, and as such draws on group counselling theories and practices (Corey 1995; Johnson 1988; Schutz 1958). Schutz, a pioneer in the field of group counselling, states that the development of interpersonal behaviours of participants in group counselling involves three dimensions: inclusion, control and affection. In addition, his group counselling model indicates that the group must achieve success with each dimension before moving forward to the next dimension. As a group moves through these three dimensions together, there is a constant returning to each of these dimensions, but on deeper and more meaningful levels.

Derived from the influential work of Schutz, the first three of five developmental stages for our model are inclusion, control and intimacy. In addition, two new stages have been added: empowerment and vision. While most youth involved in the play-creating process are operating at the first three stages, we have found that a handful of students advance to the fourth and fifth stages. When reflecting upon youth development, several questions come to mind. What are some typical descriptions of youth at different developmental stages? In what ways do youth engage in theatre and express self? What degree and what kind of self-disclosures are occurring? Finally, what qualities impede and advance progression of youth development?

1. *Inclusion*

I remember how scared I was in Grade 8 when I first came in the drama room. Everyone was so big and intimidating. I was horrified that people would look at me funny. (Paul)

Normally, youth in the *inclusion stage* are junior students or students new to the program. In the inclusion stage, the main focus for these youth is fitting in. They do not usually want to be noticed, especially in front of the whole group. They mainly want to belong. Their way of protecting themselves from the stress of being in a group is by blending in with the group. Some easily participate in shared theatre activities, while others sit quietly and watch. Self-disclosure is usually low because they are not familiar with the group — they are 'testing the waters'.

Developmentally, youth need the focus to remain more on theatre and less on self. The following are reasons that impede progression at the inclusion stage: not feeling accepted by the group; not being able to fit in; over-exposure of self; not feeling good enough to be compared with others; strong overwhelming

feelings of self-consciousness; or extreme levels of competition, elitism or criticism. These reasons impede progression at all stages, but are most prominent in the earlier stage. As a result, it is no surprise that the dropout rate is highest in the earlier stages. The key factors that advance progression from the inclusion stage to the next stage are a feeling of belonging to, and identification with, the theatre group.

2. Control

> *This whole play thing is getting on my nerves. My brother did* Grease *years ago and that was amazing. So why can't we do* Little Shop of Horrors *or something cool like that? I mean, I'm not here for the community. I just want to act. (Steven)*

When performing arts youth feel included in the group, they are more ready to move on to the *control stage*. The main focus in this stage is on group norms around developing theatre skills. In general, boundaries and limitations of acceptable behaviours are explored; different viewpoints, power struggles and potential conflict begin to emerge as the tensions between cooperation and competition are explored. Also, belonging to the group is no longer enough — youth need to know that what they do or say *matters* to the group. In other words, everyone in the group is striving to express their voice and to be heard. This model aims to contain and channel these unique, multiple and sometimes conflicting voices by encouraging youth to express themselves constructively as on-stage performers (e.g. actors, dancers, singers or musicians) and/or off-stage contributors (e.g. scriptwriters, stage managers, directors, costume designers, makeup artists or set-builders).

Although there is some self-disclosure at this stage, the main focus tends to remain on theatre. Youth need time to explore the boundaries and limits of the group norms before exposing private thoughts to the group. Often youth in the control stage emulate senior performing arts youth, and spend a great deal of time practising theatre skills in order to impress them and their peers. At this stage, youth want constructive feedback and positive validation about their performance ability, especially from their teachers and the senior students in the hub group.

Their way of protecting themselves from the stress of being in a group is by focusing on theatre skills. For actors, role-playing helps to "save face" because they can perform certain behaviours and feelings that they would not normally do themselves. Through a trial and error process, they are able to place the consequences of performing these actions and feelings on the character and not themselves. They can say: 'That wasn't me — I was just acting.' Some key reasons that impede progression at this stage are negative feedback, poor performance ability, lack of improvement in theatre skills, and being unsuccessful with asserting viewpoints or changes regarding group norms. The key factor that advances progression at this stage is a feeling of accomplishment over theatre skills and group norms.

3. Intimacy

> *It's funny how when you build stuff with people how you get so attached to them. (Kristy)*

When students feel inclusion in the group and feel some control over theatre skills, they are more open to advance to the *intimacy stage*. The key focus of this stage is forming close friendships and deep bonds. Their way of protecting themselves from the stress of the group is by forming a strong support network. High degrees of self-disclosure between friends, and possibly facilitators, begin to emerge. Youth tend to keep self and theatre separate, or at least very private, until they feel firmly secured with a network of close friends. When a support system is not quite formed, youth are still vulnerable, and these students are more at risk of dropping out if repeated attempts to form friendships fail.

When the support system of friends is strong, youth at this stage tend to be more open with the group. They take more risks, both in terms of theatre skills and self-disclosure to the group. They are more open to trust others and form meaningful relationships. This general building up of a support system serves as a buffer for adolescents to be able to withstand life obstacles and vulnerabilities. The dropout rate begins to level off with success in the intimacy stage. Some key reasons that impede progression of this stage are unresolved power struggles, excessive gossiping, being unable to make friends, excessive competition that undermines friendship, lack of skills to deal with interpersonal conflicts, or the breakup of relationships. The key factor that advances progression at this stage is the feeling of strong connection to friends and the group.

others to shine.

Like the empowerment stage, youth in the vision stage are highly aware that they are serving as role models, but unlike the empowerment stage, the focus is less on the self and more on the theatre process and group as a whole. The way they protect themselves from the stress of the group is by actively and conscientiously facilitating the group through a creative process. These students are committed to the responsibilities of being student-leaders such as head scriptwriter, head set designer, assistant director, choreographer, student band leader, assistant singing coach or head stage-manager.

During the collaborative play-creating process, a great deal of dialoguing occurs between facilitators and student-leaders, and students in the vision stage are integral to these discussions. It is important that they have continuous clarity on the whole artistic vision, receive direct feedback on leadership skills, and problem-solve interpersonal, artistic and technical difficulties. In spite of all the obstacles, pains and struggles many of these student-leaders discover the reward of manifesting a vision and leading their peers. Often students in the vision stage begin to develop a deeper sense of awareness of their own artistic style, and eventually they want to exercise it, free from the influences of the facilitators and the limits of the high school system.

Some key reasons that impede progression at this stage are lack of sensitivity of others, lack of clear boundaries, unresolved power struggles, not being able to withstand the stress of being a student-leader, and not being able to clearly understand or articulate an artistic vision. The key factors that advance progression at this stage are the expression and execution of an original artistic vision, and the feeling of having a deep purpose and responsibility in the project.

The weaving of self and theatre: The change process

While the theoretical model of the collaborative play-creating process has been presented in a logical and sequential manner, readers need to remember that youth do not develop in a neat and orderly fashion. Each experience is unique, and development varies greatly from person to person. Development is unique, gradual, complex and multi-layered. Change does not occur overnight, but rather results from a slow accumulation of experience upon experience. In this model, development is not random: it is viewed as circular and increases in sophistication. In addition, development is relational. Youth develop from natural social interactions with peers, friends, teachers and family. Also, youth develop through multiple levels of dialogue and action that is naturally drawn out from the structure of the collaborative play-creating process.

Figure 2 illustrates how participants are moving through a continuous cycle of externalising and internalising. The externalisation process involves the visible acts of expression; it is the doing. In this case, one externalises the steps of theatre that involve scriptwriting, rehearsing, performing and reflecting. The internalisation process involves invisible acts of integrating or incorporating new thoughts, feelings or behaviours within the self. In this case, one internalises components of self that involve inclusion, control, intimacy, empowerment and vision. In short, the participants externalise parts of theatre, and internalise parts of self- externalising, internalising, externalising, internalising, and so on. This entire interaction between externalising theatre and internalising self is connected together by one thing: dialogue.

Dialogue can be external or internal, and stems from interactions with friends, characters in the script, performers, crew members, directors and facilitators, student-leaders, audience members, and the greater community that includes school, family and society. This dialogue involves a circular process of outer dialogue and inner dialogue that is occurring while participants are externalising theatre and internalising self. Inner dialogue is thinking about what one *is* experiencing, *has* experienced or *will* experience. Outer dialogue is communicating with others about what one *is* experiencing, *has* experienced or *will* experience. Inner and outer dialogue indicates self-awareness, and shows how participants make sense of the entire collaborative play-creating process. This inner and outer dialogue indicates the quality of development, and whether a participant is progressing through a stage or is blocked.

The externalisation and internalisation processes are greatly influenced by youth listening to the outer dialogue of others, and witnessing the externalising processes of others. With healthy doses of inner and outer dialogue, facilitators and student-leaders can provide the support and guidance for youth to externalise parts of theatre and internalise parts of self. A deeper understanding of this entire change process can lead facilitators to foster theatre for positive youth development.
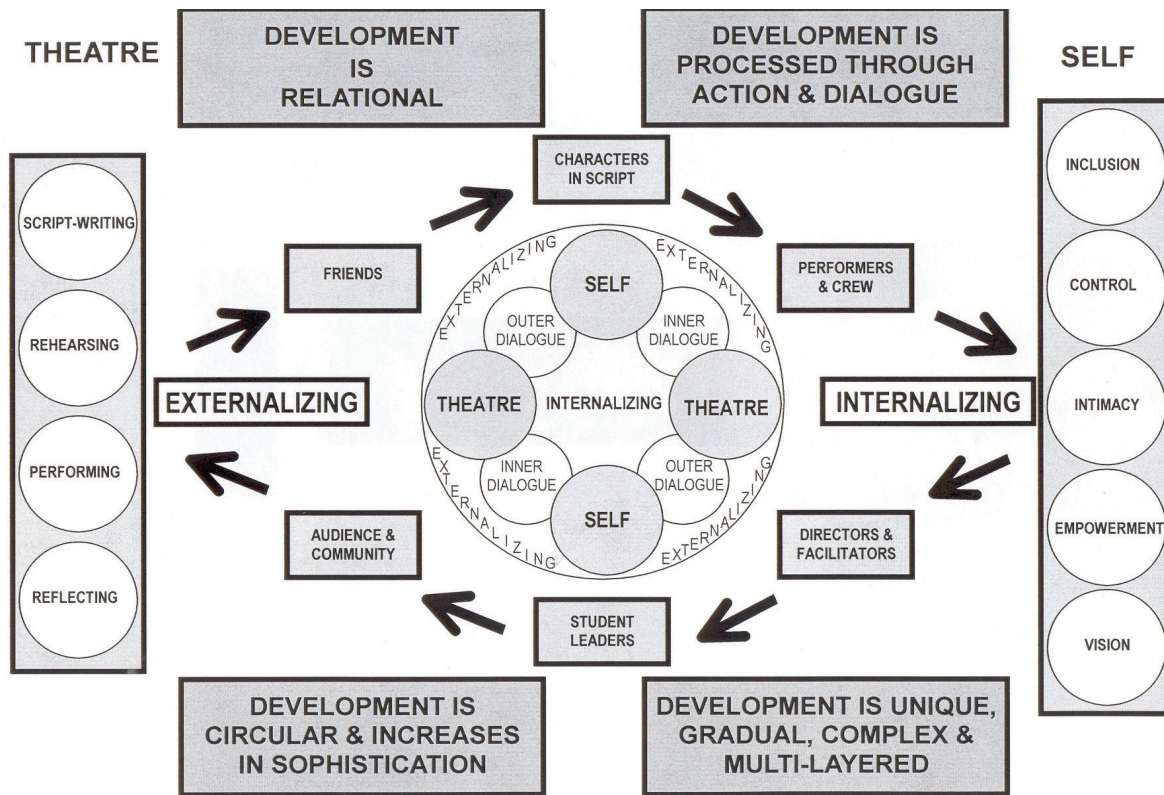
Figure 2: Change process in collaborative play-creating

Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to better understand the potential of theatre as a positive youth developmental model. Even though the participants are not involved in a formal group counselling setting, the act of co-creating a play together greatly influences the participants interpersonally, intrapersonally and artistically. The principles of social constructivism led to the construction of this theoretical framework involving nine emerging themes, weaving between theatre and self. We have discovered that most participating youth are operating at the first three developmental stages (inclusion, control, intimacy), with each of their experiences being unique, multi-layered and complex. Over time, there is a gradual evolution in their development and a constant returning to these three stages, each time going to a deeper level. Most participants focus on identifying with the theatre group, controlling their performing arts skills and making a core group of friends. Only a fraction of students actually advance to the latter stages.

The development model is based on numerous years of observations and reflections on the collaborative play-creating process involving over 1,000 students during the last eight years. Due to length restrictions, we focused this article on examining the theoretical model; however, the different voices in the research data have been represented in a script, which was constructed from the transcriptions of the interviews and field notes, along with the feedback in the focus groups (Beare 2003). A limitation of the model is that the developmental stages have only been tested within one high school setting. New directions for this study would be to compare this theoretical framework with students from different cultural, regional, and socioeconomic communities. Also, more research would be beneficial to determine whether the gains of the participants in the collaborative play-creating process are long lasting. If so, in what ways? If not, why? Interviewing or obtaining statistics from the alumni of the collaborative play-creating process may provide validation or new direction for this research. Also, what are the differences, if any, with alumni students who were involved in multiple collaborative play-creating processes compared to one?

The construction of this theoretical model aims to stimulate further discussion and greater insight into better ways of fostering theatre for positive youth development. The development of youth cannot be

forced or arbitrary — as highlighted below, theatre for positive youth development is a natural and organic by-product of youth coming together to collaboratively create a play within a caring and artistic community.

> *You see, we're actually experiencing what art wants us to do — unifying people to discuss and exchange ideas — to question ourselves. And the questioning and dialoguing is happening as we're creating the piece itself. It's a double whammy! It's a multiplication of something that is already great! You're multiplying everything by the number of people involved. You're connecting minds, connecting hearts, connecting ideas … (Mike)*

Notes

1. The names used throughout the paper are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.
2. The research was ethically approved by the University of British Columbia, with the participants interviewed signing consent forms to participate. One of the authors was principally responsible for collecting the data in schools. In-depth interviews were conducted with four students and one facilitator, lasting approximately 90 minutes each.

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