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# Preschool Creative Drama: A Curriculum and Its Effects on Learning

Erin Kelli Lindberg

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

PRESCHOOL CREATIVE DRAMA: A CURRICULUM  
AND ITS EFFECTS ON LEARNING

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Theatre Arts and Dance  
Theatre Education

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This Thesis by: Erin Lindberg

Entitled: *Preschool Creative Drama: A Curriculum and Its Effects on Learning*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in the College of Education in the School of Theater and Dance, Theater Educator Intensive

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The purpose of this study was to create a creative drama curriculum for preschool students, which was in line with the Tennessee State Standards for Preschoolers and to study the effects the unit had on the development of certain academic, social, and emotional skills. The curriculum and the related research study were executed in order to add to the growing field of preschool drama programs, and theatre with the very young. The Hats! creative drama curriculum was created and used in four different teaching sites with students aged three to six years old. Through the creative drama program this researcher, parents, and teachers found that students enrolled in this program saw at least some improvement in all of the researched areas of development as opposed to students who did not participate. Although more research is needed, this study and curriculum show that creative drama can be used successfully with young students to enhance learning, emotional growth, and social skills.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Of all the arts, drama involves the participant the most fully: intellectually, emotionally, physically, verbally, and socially. As players, children assume the roles of others, and they learn about and become sensitive to the problems and values of persons different from themselves. At the same time, they are learning to work cooperatively, for drama is a communal art; each person is necessary to the whole. As spectators, children become involved vicariously in the adventures of characters on the stage. Drama also offers children an opportunity to become acquainted with literature and to enjoy the visual arts through scenery and costumes. (McCaslin 7: 4)

#### **Goal of Thesis**

When looking at the options for enrichment classes and after-school activities for young preschool students in Memphis, Tennessee, a noticeable absence of creative drama and theatre programs was found for students under six years old. All of the other arts were represented—dance, music, visual arts—but not theatre or creative drama. This seemed an odd omission because the very nature of a preschool student inclines them toward play, toward exploration of narrative and role-play, and toward reading and performing their own stories. SunFish Children's Theatre was born out of this desire to provide creative drama opportunities for younger students. In particular, the focus would be on providing opportunities for preschool children to take part in drama classes. These classes provided age-appropriate dramatic training through the exploration of children's literature. The classes were not rehearsals for a performance, but an exploration of

storytelling, pantomime, and character development. A cohesive, age-appropriate, academic curriculum was developed to market to preschools, daycares, and after-care programs. One major obstacle was educating administrators and parents about the benefits of a preschool creative drama program. In order to create a full creative drama program for preschool students, a twelve-lesson curriculum was created and founded on research done on dramatic play and creative drama. This thesis research was the result of a specific program (see Appendix A) created to enhance the development of social, emotional, and academic milestones of preschool students involved in a creative drama program

The curriculum was created to meet the needs of students in a city where 59% of elementary students perform at or below the basic proficiency in reading language (Tennessee Department of Education [TDoE] “Profile”). The curriculum was also created to match specific state standards, to flow within a typical school’s structure, and to meet academic goals. These goals were obtained through the use of several theatrical techniques such as dramatic play, creative drama, teacher-in-role, and role-play.

This research focused on using a creative drama program, separate from a preschool student’s (ages three to six) daily school lessons, to enhance social, emotional, and academic development. Research in the field of creative drama with preschool students is just beginning to take shape. Sara Smilansky showed research on dramatic play, unguided pretend play, with preschool and young students began in the 1970s and has been documented to positively affect several areas of development (Christie; Dockett; Elias and Berk). Theatre education with older students (elementary through high school) has also been widely researched as increasing retention, graduation rates, reading

comprehension, and cognitive development (American Alliance for Theatre Education [AATE]). However, little research has been done to explore how (or if) exposure to creative drama affects development in the preschool student. New research in this area has begun to show that important developmental milestones are accelerated and/or enhanced when young students participate in theatrical activities (Ahmadi and Nojabae; Weinert-Kendt; Yaser and Aral). Because this is still a new field, more practical user-based research is needed to document classroom experiences and results in preschool students who participate in a creative drama program.

### **Terminology**

For the purpose of this project, several terms need to be defined and their specific purpose in this study addressed. Dramatic play is often used in the preschool classroom as a way for students to independently explore characters and social dramas without the guidance or assistance of an instructor. Creative drama, on the other hand, is a way to explore a narrative, situation, or characters with the guidance of an instructor through structured theatrical techniques. Nellie McCaslin, author and expert in creative drama, explained the differences between dramatic play and creative drama in her book, *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond*. Dramatic play “is the free play of the very young child in which he explores his universe, imitating the actions and character traits of those around him” (McCaslin 3: 6). This is the child’s way of exploring the world and its people, relationships, and consequences. McCaslin references *Understanding Children’s Play* to explain the importance of dramatic play in building personal character and developing social skills: “dramatic play helps the child develop from a purely egocentric being into a person capable of sharing and of give and take” (qtd. in McCaslin 3: 7). The

role of dramatic play is widely accepted as one of the best practices in the preschool classroom as it has been proven to increase vocabulary and social skills and aids in the transition into kindergarten and beyond. Gökçen Özbek, Drama Educator at Oluşum Drama Institute, Ankara, Turkey, noted:

Drama has the potential to captivate learners because it builds on the spontaneity and make believe action of dramatic play. . . . It is through this process of direct participation and critical reflection that they [the students] come to understand what is meant by the concept. . . . Using drama in education can lead to the development of broader understanding through “generalizing and making connections” via the personal involvement that initially engages and motivates students in their learning. (52)

This is an important step in childhood development and one that can be taken a step further through creative drama techniques.

Similar to dramatic play, creative drama can be described as “improvised drama” done by preschool aged children (McCaslin 3: 9). However, as “play making . . . it goes beyond dramatic play in scope and intent . . . [and] it may make use of a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end” (McCaslin 3: 8-9). However, this is not to be confused with creating a formal play for performance. Creative drama is an exploration of a story where each rehearsal deepens the “understanding and strengthening [of] the performers rather than perfecting a product” but is not meant for performance (McCaslin 3: 8). Both creative drama and dramatic play can be utilized in the preschool classroom to develop social, emotional, interpersonal, and academic skills by allowing the child to explore various characters, scenarios, environments, and consequences. The intent is not performance, so focus is taken away from recreating and is instead placed on expounding upon, trying something new, and exploring differing options and opinions. This allows

the child to fully discover the story, character, consequences, and perspectives, thus enhancing cognitive and sensory development.

The idea for a creative drama program for preschool students came from the exploration of other forms of theatrical opportunities offered for children under the age of six. Although not included in the final classroom product or thesis research, theatre for the very young was instrumental in creating the dialogue to begin a preschool program and contributed to some of the activities and theatrical elements that were infused into the final curriculum created for the preschool creative drama program. Theatre for the very young focuses on performance for and with young children often as young as three months old. Other terms such as Baby Theatre or Early Years Theatre are also used to refer to this specific type of performance (Mack). Tony Mack, Australia Council Fellow and lead researcher on youth arts organizations internationally, continued on to describe theatre for the very young as not simply “entertainment,” but a performance that is “characterized by a rigorous approach to making quality art experiences.” He noted that it is usually performed by professional, trained actors, uses little verbal communication, is “mostly presentational . . . [and] may have participatory elements or even take the form of interactive installation performance art” (Mack). In the article, “From Cradle to Stage,” the authors mentioned that theatre for the very young performances are created with their target group in mind; thus moving from attachment/nurturing shows for those under twelve months, to emphasizing independence with toddlers, to beginning simple narrative story and role-play with children two years of age and older (B. Fletcher-Watson, S. Fletcher-Watson, McNaughton, and Birch 133). This element spurred the dialogue about creating an interactive, student-based program for preschoolers. Although

this program did not develop into a performance by adults for preschoolers, some of the methods and techniques of theatre for the very young were used to create the games, activities, and structure of the creative drama program.

Teacher-in-role is where the leader or educator becomes a character and enacts the drama along with the students. The leader may stay in for the full drama or enter and leave as needed to move the action forward (McCaslin 7: 13). This was the main form of interaction taken with students during class time, as it immediately brought the student into the environment or story that was being explored. Teacher-in-role also helped to break down social barriers between adult and child and helped some students to transition from social anxiety or rebelling against authority into a time of parallel play. As this program progressed, less teacher-in-role was used in order to develop independence in storytelling and theatrical experiences.

### **Purpose of Study**

This particular curriculum was not only created to provide young students the opportunity to participate in creative drama, but also to develop age-appropriate skills through the art of storytelling and expression. Once a child begins to mature past the toddler stage, around age three, they begin to understand story structure, become interested in role-play, and begin to use language more to explore and describe their environment, needs, and emotional state. The curriculum created for the preschool creative drama class, entitled Hats!, was based on exploring the world of theatre through the use of hats. Based in children's literature, poetry, and song, the Hats! curriculum provided the opportunity for preschool students to explore and give meaning to their world, their own emotions, and their own self. Storytelling was a key component in this

curriculum not only to provide a structure, but also to expose students to reading, rhythm and rhyme, vocabulary, and chronological structure. Memphis, Tennessee, has a very low literacy rate; most students test at or below basic proficiency in all subjects, especially in reading and language arts (TDoE “Profile”). Because of this, an emphasis was placed on reading and language arts; and a piece of children’s literature, poetry, or song was explored in every lesson through creative drama techniques..

Creative drama fits into the natural development of most preschool children. “As preschoolers, children begin to express themselves through play, art, music, and storytelling. During Kindergarten, they begin to add language that describes their internal state to this repertoire of self-expression” (Church 94). Ellen Booth Church, author and professor of early childhood education, mentioned that as a part of the preschooler’s development, the child may instinctively use dramatic play to express feelings of real thoughts and emotions. She emphasized that parents (and caregivers) should encourage this “journey of self-expression” as it is “often more important and meaningful than the destination, which in this case, is [the] child’s belief in herself” (Church 94).

New research studies on drama with young children show significant increases in a child’s imagination, creativity, and cognitive development. Amy Susman-Stillman, Director of Applied Research and Training at the University of Minnesota’s Center for Early Education and Development, noted “the science is catching up” (qtd. in Weinert-Kendt 44). Susman-Stillman wrote that theatre, or creative drama, is a best practice to encourage developmental growth in creativity and literacy. She continued on to say,

We’re finding that the best practices in early childhood development and the best practices in theatre arts overlap a lot. . . . Some of the tasks for early childhood are done by theatre including the development of



creativity and imaginative play. Literacy skills are also coming online in this period.” (qtd. in Weinert-Kendt 44-5)

She also noted that children often carry their theatrical experience into “avenues of their [own] play” (qtd. in Weinert-Kendt 44-5). Gökçen Özbek, Drama Educator at Oluşum Drama Institute, Ankara, Turkey, noted “[d]rama, which cares about both the cognitive and emotional aspects of the individual, is a process of learning where participants can be taught through carefully structured experiences . . .” (50). Creative drama techniques could be instrumental in connecting learning behaviors and creativity to classroom learning through dramatic exploration of specific subject areas. Some link this connection between learning and imaginative play as having to do with the child’s positive state of mind. They note that because positive memories are more often etched in one’s mind, anything learned during this time of imaginative play becomes integrated into the person’s long-term knowledge and understanding. Melvin Konner, author of *The Evolution of Childhood*, noted that “[r]esearch suggests that people in positive and playful mood are more open to experience and learn in better and more varied ways” (qtd. in Weinert-Kendt 45). In this way, structured creative drama and dramatic play lead the child through to deeper understanding and help to construct deeper levels of learning.

Not only does theatre help the young mind develop, it specifically builds skills in literacy and language, emotional well-being and expression, and enhances interpersonal skills. Melanie Peter, Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at Anglia Ruskin University, stated that, “[n]arrative ability is thus instrumental for the development of social relationships and for acquiring a sense of identity through positioning oneself within shared experiences and events (9). She defined the term “narrative” as “commonly associated with story” and that “[f]or the very young children, cultural stories may be

their earliest experiences of morality and cultural values.” These stories can also emphasize the use of “patterning, sequencing,” and the chronological retelling of events, experiences, or literature (Peter 9). Because this narrative ability is important to a young student’s developmental growth, storytelling was a major component of the creative drama program, Hats! By basing each class on a form of children’s literature or song, the students were introduced to all of the components needed to fully explore their world through language, social situations, creative problem solving, rhythm and rhyme, and expression.

### **Significance of Study**

Theatre appeals to a child’s strongest experiential senses of imagination, visualization, and participation. Memphis is one of the lowest performing cities in most academic categories in Tennessee, and Tennessee is among the lowest performing states in standardized test scores in the United States (TDoE “Profile”). There is a need not only for better education but also for new teaching methods. By creating this curriculum, talking with teachers and administrators, and publishing this research, there can be a dialogue about incorporating creative drama techniques into the classroom.

Although most schools and aftercare programs offer enrichment classes, these are usually confined to ballet/tap, gymnastics, piano, yoga, or karate. Although these are good classes to offer, not every child is able to participate in these options due to learning difficulties, social anxiety, or physical disabilities. Creative drama, however, is a class that is open to every child of any ability. It fosters creativity in a student-centered environment and is in natural alignment with several developmental milestones such as vocabulary, interpersonal communication, emotional balance, decision making, and

gross/fine motor skills. Memphis, Tennessee, has several professional and community theatres with education departments; however, most programs were only offered to children over five years old. Before Sunfish began its preschool creative drama program, no one had offered a preschool creative drama class or any other theatrical programming for children ages three through six years old.

### **Approach to Project**

The Hats! curriculum created for this project was intended to make use of all the available creative drama techniques while still conforming to city, state, and school standards. This curriculum was used in classrooms with varying educational philosophies and needed to conform to all the standards presented in those philosophies. These educational philosophies were as follows: Reggio Emilia method, Montessori, and Core/STEM (science, technology, engineering, math). The curriculum was created in a way to allow for student discovery and exploration as well as to introduce storytelling and vocabulary, promote literacy, and to incorporate other age-appropriate skills. The class was introduced to the lesson's theme through a story, song, or poem and then explored through drama games, class discussion, and other creative drama techniques.

The idea of creating creative drama with preschool students was not performance-focused. Rather, the focus was put on the skills developed through the process of exploration and creation. Ping-Yun Sun, author and theatre-in-education researcher, noted that the idea of drama and theatre in the classroom should not focus on the performance. He stated that the focus "should be shifted from learning drama to emphasizing the process of learning through drama" (Sun 1). This curriculum was developed to promote several key age-appropriate skill sets in order to observe how

participation in a creative drama class affects social, emotional, and academic development. These skill sets included relationships in and between the student's environment, peers, family, and authority figures; appropriate expression of emotion; literacy/vocabulary; and refinement of gross and fine motor skills.

The creative drama program, entitled Hats!, made use of a variety of hats and hat-themed literature. The use of literature was important to the structure of each class, as it corresponded with state standards for developing literacy and word recognition and its connection to storytelling and exploration of the theme and story. Melanie Peter, Senior Lecturer in Education and Early Childhood at Anglia Ruskin University, emphasized the use of story in drama classes for the very young:

[d]rama in education enables children to explore this [narrative], and to re-examine a story's idea, with topics and issues being revisited over time using increasingly sophisticated conventions derived from theatre. These enable children to 'play' with the narrative and come to an understanding of the story's possibilities and the art used to create it. (14)

This leads to moments for problem solving, empathy of character or situation, exploration of environment, and connection between action and word; thus further enhancing these age appropriate skills.

Most children in this age group tend to gravitate towards playing dress up. This idea of role-play is very important in developing social, emotional, and interpersonal skills. Gökçen Özbek noted that "the technique of role play is embodying a character or a 'type' and reflecting this character's thoughts and feelings. It provides the children . . . the opportunity to voice their own ideas through the mask of role . . . [and] is especially useful for helping children with social difficulties" (57). Sue Cowley, author of several best-selling teaching and parenting books, emphasized the effects of role-play as

“enhancing students’ imaginative skills, experiencing what it’s like to be someone else, understanding why some people behave differently to others, [and] seeing things from another viewpoint or perspective” (qtd. in Özbek 57). Melanie Peter noted that “in role play, children explore human experience, and the realism of different perspectives, motivations, intentions and consequences, to create increasingly complex social narratives” (10). Because of the tactile nature of preschool children, their propensity to using props or costumes to create characters, and in order to facilitate the idea of role-play, there was a need to bring in some type of non-descript costuming. Hats met that need as they were easily transported, could be as character specific as needed, and were easy to put on and take off. By using the same hats in different stories or to create different characters, students explored different perspectives; thus learning about different cultures, different roles, responsibilities, and emotional investments those characters made. This further helped students develop empathy, trust, and respect. The hats were also used to create things other than a hat, a basket for example, which furthered the student’s creativity and encouraged abstract thinking.

The next step was to find children’s literature that was written for three- to-six-year-olds and, because of the one-hour class time, could be read in less than two minutes. According to research conducted by Ping-Yun Sun, “dramatic story reenactments (DSR) . . . promote [student’s] narrative competence . . . [helps students at] connecting and integrating events to storytelling . . . [and] can also increase children’s curiosity about literature before independent reading begins” (2). Poetry and music were also included to promote movement, rhythm, and rhyme. Each class was structured around a theme that was emphasized by the chosen literature. Themes were chosen to coordinate with

classroom learning and research objectives as well as to introduce certain theatre techniques such as pantomime and tableau. Specific topics included the exploration of rhyme and rhythm, using the voice/body/imagination, telling a story versus showing a story, and exploration of various environments and cultures. Parents, family, friends, and teachers were invited to the final class where students who wanted to participate presented different things they had learned over the course of the program. This was not a performance, and the audience was invited to participate in all activities. The presentation became important to the students as they were excited to show their family and friends what they had learned and to have the chance to teach them the games and activities in which they had participated.

By creating a preschool creative drama program, students were offered a new type of enrichment activity. Creative drama not only provides a fun, engaging experience, but also stimulates cognitive, emotional, and social development. These areas of development were further studied during the course of this program, and those observations were recorded for this research study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The goal of this research was to observe the effects of creative drama on the social, emotional, and academic development in preschool students. In creating this curriculum, it was important to create a sound set of lesson plans based in developmentally appropriate practices. While free and directed dramatic play is widely used in the preschool classroom, directed creative drama with preschool students is relatively new. This chapter looks into the progression from free sociodramatic play to creative drama in the preschool classroom focusing on educational philosophies, research studies, and similar preschool programs in the United States and Europe.

#### **Educational Philosophies**

There is a history of play, or dramatic play, being an integral part of successful preschool and kindergarten education, especially in social and cognitive development. Free dramatic play is also referred to as sociodramatic play in which children engage in “imaginative social role playing” (Elias and Berk 216). This type of play is often initiated by the students and often does not include adult guidance. In the 1960s Sara Smilansky began work on defining the types of play in which young children participate. She defined four types of play that correspond with the child’s age and maturation: functional,

constructive, dramatic or pretend play, and games with rules (Furman). The first two develop in young children and their intentional use of objects such as rolling a ball. In the third level of play dialogue, characterization, and imaginative play begin. Smilansky described this level of play as sociodramatic play, and it contains six elements: imitation, “make-believe in regard to objects . . . make believe in regard to actions and situations, persistence of 10-minute duration, interaction, and verbal communication” (Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland 246). Smilansky also noted this dramatic play can be enhanced when given “ample time” and “adequate space” to explore, “realistic props,” and if the children “have a shared background of experiences” and the teacher guides and plays alongside the child or children (Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland 246). She also noted a direct correlation between time spent with other children in free or directed sociodramatic play and language performance, especially in children with learning challenges (Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland). Smilansky’s work catapulted the importance and use of play in early education, and many studies built upon her work. Smilansky’s work continues to be a primary source in research that involves children learning through play. Her structure of play and its qualifiers also continue to be the structure around which most observations and quantitative data are based.

Other significant educational philosophers in the area of play debuted in the 1970s and 1980s as well. Two key philosophies derived from Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget apply directly to the use of play as a means of cognitive development and learning in young children, specifically in the areas of language and social relationships. Gökçen Özbek broke down several of these educational philosophers in his article “Drama in Education: Key Conceptual Features.” He pointed to Piaget, Vygotsky, and Gavin Bolton



as emphasizing the importance of play as “an adaptive, organized means by which children learn to make sense of their physical and social environment.” He continued on to note that the use of play also helps children “gain a feeling of control over complex life issues” as well as critical thinking and problem solving skills (Özbek 48). Although both philosophers endorse sociodramatic play as a best practice, they differed on what was learned through the process. Piaget, Özbek noted, based the importance of sociodramatic play in the way a child explores and experiments through the use of symbolic play. Through symbolic play, the child learns certain social norms and hierarchy as well as develops moral standards. Piaget also noted the child’s cognitive development is stimulated by this creative exploration (Özbek). Vygotsky, however, emphasized the importance of play in the development of language and the “construction of knowledge” (Özbek 49). “Vygotsky proposed that dialogues with others permit children to transfer psychological processes and skills” from the external to the internal (Elias and Berk 216-7). He “regarded sociodramatic play as crucial for cognitive, social, and emotional development” (Elias and Berk 217). Whereas Piaget was child-centered, with others as indirectly affecting a child’s exploration through the creation of a learning environment, Vygotsky centered development around social interactions where learning was based off of past interactions with both peers and adults (Bodrova and Leon). In both philosophies, the importance of sociodramatic play was emphasized as necessary to stimulating cognitive development, social and moral standards, and language development; both have been used to emphasize the importance of play and as foundational material in which to observe children at play.

The role of sociodramatic play evolved into the use of creative drama in the classroom where the teacher or leader could manipulate the play to achieve certain goals (Furman). Although creative drama practices can be traced back to the 1920s and work done by Winifred Ward, the modern movement began in the 1960s with work done by Geraldine Siks and Hazel Dunnington in conjunction with the American Educational Theatre Association. Their book, *Children's Theatre and Creative Dramatics*, and subsequent work laid the foundation for future inclusion of creative drama in the classroom. Gavin Bolton's work beginning in the 1970s launched a new concept and practical methods for using creative drama in the high school classroom. In his book, *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education*, he broke down the elements of drama, specifically "children's make-believe and 'dramatic playing'" noting they are one and the same, except "dramatic playing takes place in a school, has the blessing of the school and is often called drama by both children and teacher" (6). He continued to draw parallels between play, cognitive and social development, and learning, and thereby created a loose theoretical framework of creative drama in the classroom. Although just a theory in 1979, Bolton continued to write and work in the field of creative drama, and his theories have become widely used and referenced. He continues to write about and advocate for creative drama in the classroom, and his work has also made way for creative drama and dramatic play in the preschool classroom.

Nellie McCaslin also began her work in creative drama in the 1970s. Her book, *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond*, was first published in 1968 and its eighth edition was released in 2006; it is generally considered the handbook for creative drama best practices. McCaslin's book is geared toward working with children in all aspects of

creative drama and discusses theatrical terminology, best practices, and types of creative drama as well as creative drama activities. Two editions (3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>) of this book were used to prepare for the creative drama program because of the information and activities included in each edition. Both editions offered different perspectives and explanations that were useful in creating the creative drama program and in researching the use of creative drama in the classroom. In 1987, McCaslin published a creative drama book written specifically for primary grade teachers. Her book, *Creative Drama in Primary Grades*, continues to be used as a primary source for teachers using this method in their classrooms. In this book she specifically addressed creative drama with special needs children, student evaluations, and transitioning from one activity to another. She noted that, “dramatic activities in the classroom are not the frills added on to the diet but an essential and integral component of a curriculum that responds to children’s healthy development” (McCaslin, *Creative Drama in the Primary Grades* xi). She breaks down what should be expected in a lower elementary creative drama class (see Table 1). This aided the creation of the expectations included in the Hats! curriculum; whereas McCaslin’s student evaluation chart (see fig. 1) was used to guide the creation of the Assessment Key (see Appendix B). Although written for elementary students, many of the practices, activities, recommendations, terminology, and structural framework for Hats! was based in McCaslin’s work.

Also in the 1980s, June Cottrell began writing about using creative drama in young elementary classroom. Her book, *Creative Drama in the Classroom Grades 1-3*, not only discussed creative drama as an educational tool but also the teacher as a drama leader. Several of her creative drama games were used in the Hats! curriculum to promote

teamwork and certain educational principles such as storytelling, sequencing, and speech patterns.

Table 1

<i>Theatre Arts Curriculum</i>				
<i>A theatre arts program in the elementary grades should include the following elements</i>		<i>The student shall be provided opportunities to:</i>		
<i>Theatre Arts</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>Grade I</i>	<i>Grade II</i>	<i>Grade III</i>
Expressive use of the body and voice	Develop body awareness and spatial perception through Rhythmic movement Imitative movement	Continue with body awareness and spatial perception through Rhythmic movement Imitative movement Sensory awareness	Continue body work  Begin pantomime  Imitate dialogue	Continue body modes and dance using Rhythmic movement Imitative movement Expressive movement Pantomime
	Imitate sounds	Imitate sounds		Imitate dialogue and create dialogue  Recall sensory and emotional experiences
Creative drama	Dramatize limited-action stories and poems through simple pantomime	Dramatize simple stories and poems in pantomime  Begin puppetry	Dramatize literature through Pantomime Shadow play Imitative dialogue Puppetry	Dramatize literature through Pantomime Shadow play Improvisation Puppetry
	Listen to stories told by teacher, librarian, or good storyteller	Listen to stories told by teacher, librarian, or professional storyteller	Listen to stories, attend puppet plays appropriate for age level	Attend theatrical events emphasizing Content Player-audience relationship Audience behavior and conventions Difference between live theatre and TV
Aesthetic growth through the appreciation of theatrical events				

### Scope and Sequence for Primary Grades

Source: McCaslin, Nellie. *Creative Drama in the Primary Grades: A Handbook for Teachers*. New York: Longman. 1987. Print.

## EVALUATION SHEET

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Students' Names	Listening	Concentration	Response	Imagination	Movement	Verbal ability	Cooperation	Organization	Attitude	Comments
Doe, John	1	2	2	1	3	1	3	1		

Teacher's evaluation of class progress:

## Evaluation Key

1. Shows good response
2. Is adequate
3. Needs special attention and, perhaps, help

Fig. 1. Evaluation sheet. Source: McCaslin, Nellie. *Creative Drama in the Primary Grades: A Handbook for Teachers*. New York: Longman. 1987. Print

## Research Studies

Whereas the use of dramatic play has long been recognized as significantly contributing to the learning process and long-term mental and emotional development of preschool children, the development of creative drama techniques is relatively new. In order to understand the expectations for this study, the research and results from the observation of free dramatic play and its relationship to creative drama must be established. Free dramatic play consists of play by the child without outside direction or structure. Studying the results of research studies on dramatic play will, therefore, determine if and by what degrees adding a literary element or structure to play results in an enhanced development of certain social, emotional, and academic skills.

In 1985, Lou Furman describes Patrick Verriour's creative drama techniques as helping to "ease young children's transition into the world of school" and found it was successful not only in helping transition students from home to school, but also in developing emotional maturity, self-expression, and self-regulation (Furman 174). In a 2001 study based on Vygotsky's theory of play by Cynthia Elias and Laura Berk with the Illinois State University Department of Psychology, dramatic play was shown to contribute to future performance, especially with highly impulsive students, ages four to five, in the area of self-regulation. Self-regulation, according to Elias and Berk, is the "process that subsumes the internalization of social norms and the development of skills to conform to standards" and includes language and critical thinking skills (216, 218). They argued, as does Vygotsky, self-regulation is the basis upon which relationships form at the preschool level and mature into the elementary level. Self-regulation contributes to the building of relationships, interpersonal skills, vocabulary, and language

development. In addition to general self-regulation being affected by dramatic play, language too was affected. They found dialogue between children increased during dramatic play and thusly increased the vocabulary and use of language by the children involved (Elias and Berk).

McCaslin emphasized the use of literature in creative drama classes for primary students noting that, “. . . story that is played makes a lasting impression . . . [and] helps to build appreciation [for great literature] and set a standard for original writing” (*Creative Drama in the Primary Grades* 11). Not only does using literature in creative drama with the very young build creative thinking skills and language development, but it has also been shown to increase in all students and particularly in new-language students such as preschoolers. Using Smilansky’s structure and qualifiers of dramatic play, one particular 1992 study done in partnership between Florida State University and the Florida House of Representatives used Smilansky’s model in order to observe if and to what extent sociodramatic play had an effect on language performance with average kindergarten students. This study found “that a functional relationship exists between enriched sociodramatic play and increased language performance” (Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland 254-6). The ability to build language and social skills was also found to be enhanced by sociodramatic play in a study done by James F. Christie, Professor of Childhood Education at Arizona State University. He observed that, “engaging in dramatic play can help develop children’s knowledge of story structure by giving them an opportunity to invent and act out their own narrative scripts” (Christie 542). Christie also mentioned, “[s]imply giving children an opportunity to engage in free play will not guarantee that rich, sustained dramatic play will occur or that literacy activities will

become integrated” (Christie 543). He suggested that only through creative drama will a student develop language skills. By combining literature with dramatic play, language skills, both vocabulary and syntax, improved and made way for reading comprehension, creative storytelling, and eventually creative writing.

Dramatic play affects not only language, but also other areas of academic achievement. Anthony Pellegrini, using Smilansky’s levels of play, observed children at play after taking standardized tests. He observed that dramatic play was the “best predictor of achievement” in regard to results of standardized tests (Furman 173). Theory of mind is a term often used when discussing how a young child learns or learns to learn. Sue Dockett, Professor of Education at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, defined theory of mind as “[the child’s] understandings of the mind and how it works” (106). In her study, published in the *International Journal of Early Years Education*, she worked with a group of four-year-olds and observed the connection between dramatic play and the development of theory of mind via their relationships with peers and the construction of knowledge. She found the two are necessarily related and are enhanced by dramatic play. In a related study building upon Dockett’s research, Heather Smith, Georgia State University, observed five-year-olds and observed that the benefits of dramatic play begin to diminish once the student enters kindergarten (Smith). However, Smith did note that despite normal maturation, a drama-based program did enhance control, attention span, and focus in the kindergarten students involved in the drama-based program. All of these elements combine to create a personal environment conducive to successful learning.



Several recent studies found that creative drama programs resulted in similar or enhanced results as those on dramatic play. In a 2012 study conducted in Ankara, Turkey, specifically using creative drama, it was found that creative drama programs increased young students' creative thinking, self-awareness, and creative expression (Yaser and Aral). Although this study also indicated the relationship between creative drama and dramatic play in developing social skills, transitional skills, and abstract thinking skills, those in the creative drama program showed more improvement than those only exposed to dramatic play (Yaser and Aral). In a similar study conducted in Tonekabon City, Iran, it was found that “teaching creative drama influences flexibility dimension of creativity in preschoolers . . . originality dimension of preschoolers' creativity . . . [and improved the] speed of action and rate of answering in children” (Ahmadi1 and Nojabae 23). In a 2014 research study done with fourth graders, AnnRené Joseph attempted to prove that creative drama techniques “enhanced academic achievement” especially in the subject area of language arts (2). She found that “students who practiced the creative dramatics interventions had greater vocabulary achievement versus the control group” (Joseph 3).

### **Structure**

In creating the curriculum for Hats!, several sources were consulted to make sure the structure was sound in educational philosophy, cognitive development, state standards, and needs of the students. Several sources were referenced, and specific elements were taken from each. Along with creative goals, it was essential this curriculum be developed in relation to the academic standards and goals for each teaching site. All teaching sites adhered to the course of study as prescribed by the Tennessee State Board of Education in their *Revised Tennessee Early Learning*

*Developmental Standards* and the *Revised Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds*. Most helpful in implementing these academic standards and goals in a creative classroom was the work done by Carol Copple and Sue Bredekamp in conjunction with the National Association for the Education of Young Children in their book, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*. They, too, acknowledged the importance of play as “an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence” (14, 121-38). In their chapter on toddler development, Copple and Bredekamp emphasized the use of story and play and spent several pages discussing how to incorporate both into daily lessons. These developmentally appropriate practices were crucial to creating a curriculum that supported and enhanced what was going on in the student’s own classroom as well as creating a learning experience targeted specifically to this age group.

Although Bolton and McCaslin offered great insight into and about creative drama in the classroom, most of their material is structured for post-preschool students. Although preschool creative drama is relatively new in the United States, several countries abroad have been using creative drama and other theatre techniques successfully for many years in the preschool classroom. In the article, “Creative Drama in Preschool Curriculum: Teaching Strategies Implemented in Hungary,” Tunde Szecsi, Associate Professor, College of Education at Florida Gulf Coast University, used her experiences teaching at a progressive preschool in Hungary to explore the structure of creative drama in the preschool classroom. She described the creative drama process used throughout their school; even the janitors, teachers, and administrators would act as

teacher-in-role playing various characters and challenging students to respond appropriately. She noted there are three types of creative drama: incidental, evolving, and pre-planned. The latter two are used in the classroom to meet very specific needs such as emphasizing reading comprehension and problem solving by exploring a story and its characters or understanding “abstract concepts of culture;” whereas, incidental drama flows from free play and social interaction (Szecsi 121).

Szecsi offered ways creative drama techniques can be used with preschool students to create process-oriented “scenes” (123). Before the scenes occur, Szecsi emphasized the importance of transitioning from the real classroom to a place of pretend and offered several ways to do this, such as sprinkling fairy dust, using a wand, employing verbal cues, or inventing an imaginary journey. These scenes include “talk through” in which a teacher guides narration about a topic; this scene is reserved for students who are new to theatre or have less experience or trouble engaging in abstract thinking. Szecsi also included mime or pantomime or short scenes, “freeze frame” in which students show a frozen action scene, “creative movement” based on animals or other objects, “thought tracking” or personal narration, short verbal improvisation about a character’s feelings or experience, and “gathering” where students congregate in a group improvisation around a common theme such as a campfire or tribal meeting (123). These scenes allow for creative exploration, encourage verbal dialogue and creative expression, and foster a sense of community and safety for young students. This same technique was embraced by McCaslin and others, with each author detailing his or her own version of an improvised gathering. Several of these techniques were used successfully in the Hats! curriculum.

*The Dramatic Difference* by Victoria Brown and Sarah Pleydell not only supplied easy-to-implement preschool creative drama curriculums, but also provided information on creative drama in the preschool classroom, physical and mental development of preschoolers, and quantitative and qualitative data supporting each element used in their lesson plan. They based their lesson plans on myths, storybooks, environments, and emotions, and their units are steeped in researched methods of cognitive development through the “as if,” where the student explores social and emotional relationships and consequences through dramatic play and creative drama. They also based their methods in the educational philosophies of Piaget and Vygotsky and noted “the early childhood curriculum should address five categories of child development: social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and creative” (4). They went on to describe the learning environment as “...creating experiences through teacher-led drama work, space can be transformed through the imagination” (xii). By incorporating creative drama into the classroom, the student learns to explore different social roles, physical and vocal expressions, and reactions in a safe and imaginative world. These experiences then are related to the real world and as the child explores, the child learns, and the child applies this to his or her everyday life.

Several elements of the Brown and Pleydell curriculum structure were used in the creation of Hats! Teacher-in-role was an important element that was carried into the Hats! curriculum in order to draw a difference between classroom time and creative drama class. As a teacher-in-role, the instructor was able to join in the drama as a character—playing alongside the students and only stepping out of role to lead discussion. In the Preface, Gavin Bolton wrote, the “secret” of the success of these lesson

plans are “the effectiveness of this ‘teacher-in-role,’” explaining that this invites the students to play and creates a new pretend atmosphere unlike that of the typical classroom (x). Brown and Pleydell emphasized the importance here, too, that the teacher allow students to grant them certain character traits, thereby increasing the students’ involvement and creativity and calming some of the teachers’ overzealous characterizations. Another element Brown and Pleydell suggested for the preschool drama classroom is allowing children to lead. In one suggestion, the teacher becomes an “alien” and the student must then describe the Earth using the five senses and answering questions by the “alien” (xi). Much like Szecsi’s gathering scenes, Brown and Pleydell also suggested activities where students explore a new environment or go on a journey. All of these examples continue to involve students throughout their creative exploration and “offers a vital bridge between dramatic play [free play] and teacher-initiated learning. It can compensate for the shortcomings of poor facilities and scant materials by creating an environment in which interactive learning is only as restricted as the imagination itself” (xiii).

### **Similar Programs**

Most early education programs are performance-based theatre for the very young with adults performing for a young audience. Still, one United States theatre company, Imagination Stage, has been working with and for young audiences for over ten years. They offer productions and workshops aimed at children ages three to eighteen. Their Early Childhood Theatre and Education Program has hosted a workshop and preschool program for over ten years that works off of children’s literature as well as performances

geared for children, ages three to six. Their Early Childhood Theatre and Education

Program Manager, Julia Patterson, noted,

[O]ne obstacle is where do you begin? Libraries are already hosting free story times so how do we offer something different and unique to theatre? How do we take the nature of play and support and guide it? We can start by incorporating simple theatrical terms and techniques such as tableau by using picture books such as *Goodnight Gorilla* and using that story to inspire. (Personal interview. 28 Jan. 2015)

The Hats! curriculum is similar to that of Imagination Stage as both meet weekly, are based on children's literature, and have similar goals and expectations.

The use of creative drama with preschool students is a growing trend, but, because of lack of funds, low ticket prices, and competition with free events (such as library readings, etc.), preschool creative drama is still seen as a side amusement and often left for teachers to incorporate into their own daily educational methods. As more scientific and governmental communities begin to embrace the use of creative drama as a viable educational method, especially in preschool education, more theatres and education centers are opening up to preschool creative drama programs.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The conception of the Hats! curriculum and subsequent research study began by studying the use and effectiveness of dramatic play in the classroom (Christie; Furman; Sun). This research led to the discovery and exploration of creative drama as an effective tool to use in the preschool classroom in order to enhance the development of certain emotional, academic, and social skills; this was the technique on which the Hats! curriculum was based. Although several sources for preschool and elementary lessons using creative drama existed, few contained long-term (ten weeks or more) creative drama units. This necessitated the creation of a new creative drama unit that addressed the developmental areas to be studied: academic, emotional, and social. Also, few academic studies existed identifying the effectiveness of creative drama in developing these standard preschool skills. This necessitated the creation of assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the creative drama unit in enhancing these areas of development. After studying the documented effects of dramatic play in the preschool classroom and the documented effectiveness of creative drama techniques in elementary classrooms, the Hats! curriculum was developed. To evaluate this curriculum's effectiveness in developing academic, emotional, and social preschool skills, three types of assessment tools were created: parent surveys, administrative/teacher surveys, and

instructor in-class assessment and observations. This chapter discusses the processes used to create the new curriculum, the assessment strategies, and the collection of data for this research study.

### **Development of the Hats! Curriculum**

The Hats! curriculum was developed after an initial preschool theatre unit created by this writer for the first semester of the SunFish creative drama program proved weak in several areas including the development of any preschool skills. Although this series of ten weekly preschool lessons were loosely based on the work in Longman's *Creative Drama in the Primary Grades*, the SunFish class was structured around teaching theatre (performance-based) instead of using a progressional, process-oriented method such as creative drama. However, several key lessons were learned from the weaknesses of the first semester's program and applied to the new Hats! curriculum such as continual learning, weekly assessments, and strategic lesson planning. Significant changes were made after conducting research in the areas of childhood development, educational philosophies, and classroom drama techniques. This researcher interviewed experts in the fields of theatre and education, as well as studied other research studies on the importance of play in order to create a more cohesive and developmentally appropriate class. After researching similar programs, interviewing experts in the fields of theatre with the very young and preschool education, and exploring best practices in those fields, a second curriculum, Hats!, was created that was both creative drama-based and developmentally appropriate.

The creation of the Hats! curriculum began by consulting several sources on the use of theatre and creative drama in the classroom, as well as the power of dramatic play



and its use to enhance developmental learning in the preschool classroom (McCaslin; Ahmadi and Nojabae; Church; Cotrell; Christie; Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland; Smith; Sun). McCaslin's book, *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond*, however, was the primary source in organizing the methods, terminology, and structure of the preschool lessons. It was through her book that the method of using creative drama to enhance learning was explored and the connection to dramatic play established. Once the method and basic approach was established, other lesson-based books were discovered and their lesson plans and author's commentary were studied (Cotrell; Croteau; McCaslin, *Creative Drama in the Primary Grades*; Peterson and O'Connor). Although most of these sources were written for elementary and high school students, some of the activities, games, and classroom structure were taken from these sources and altered for use in the preschool classroom.

In selecting student goals, the Tennessee State Standards for Preschool Students was consulted and included in the curriculum. These standards set student achievement goals and expectations, created the weekly assessment for understanding, and structured weekly lessons and activities through learning objectives. A list of applicable state standards was included in the Hats! curriculum (see Appendix A). The use of these standards assured that the Hats! curriculum was based on solid childhood developmental goals and expectations and were in line with the academic and developmental expectations of all the teaching sites.

As the general outline and structure of the Hats! curriculum was set, it was important to establish standard expectations of preschool teachers, students, and routines. After receiving permission (see Appendix C) and before the Hats! creative program was

fully written, several preschool-aged classrooms were observed and their teachers and administrators interviewed. These observations were conducted as the Hats! curriculum was being written and notes taken directly impacted the structure of and activities used in the Hats! curriculum. Observations were made in a pre-kindergarten, junior kindergarten, and primary-level Montessori classroom. These classrooms were chosen because they replicated the classrooms and students who would be involved in the creative drama program. Because these were different age groups, specific age-related observations were made concerning the progression of learning, development of skills, academic and social goals, and class structure. During these initial observations before the Hats! curriculum was completed, teachers responded to requests for explanations of activities and what they found helpful when working with a particular age group. Specifically, they noted effective discipline and class management strategies as well as efficient routines for circle time and transition time. The observation of the Montessori primary classroom was particularly significant because students, ages three through six, were included within the same classroom and cooperatively learned from both their instructors and each other. This sense of responsibility, as confirmed by the head directress and teachers, increased self-esteem and challenged the older students to maintain self-control and act as positive role models. This, in turn, led to a balanced and peaceful classroom with few conflicts and emotional outbursts that can be common with young students. Because of this learning balance, the teachers were able to work alongside the students in a cooperative learning environment. This cooperative learning between teacher and student was incorporated into the Hats! program and contributed to the learning environment.

In addition to the classroom observations and teacher interviews, the instructor was also allowed to work with and observe the students at play. Through this one-on-one encounter, the instructor observed learning styles, relationships to peers and authority figures, and responses to various forms of discipline. Student reactions to transitions between activities and the length of these activities were noted. Students became restless at around twenty minutes, and the teachers were quick to respond with a break or transition to another activity. This observation directly impacted not only the length of activities during the creative drama lesson but also in how the class moved from one activity to the next. All of these observations were used to restructure the Hats! curriculum to mimic a typical preschool routine. A specific routine was created on the first day, and a daily outline of activities was given to the group at the beginning of class. This created smooth transitions between activities and fewer interruptions, student distractions, and misbehaviors.

Administrators were also interviewed and given the opportunity to discuss pedagogy, learning-to-learn skills, city and state standards, and their own school's education plan. All administrators from the participating teaching sites were interviewed in order to assess how the Hats! curriculum would fit into their school's curriculum. The role of play, especially dramatic play, in the school's preschool curriculum was also discussed in order to create a comparative baseline for research purposes. In addition to school-specific information, each administrator was interviewed on his or her personal educational philosophy and classroom experience. This not only added information about the use of dramatic play in the preschool classroom, both now and in the past ten years, but also aided in the structure of the Hats! curriculum.

Both librarians and theatre for youth experts were contacted to aide with the final shaping of the Hats! curriculum. Because of the large quantity of children's books, poems, and songs, experts in the fields of children's literature were contacted. It was important that the literature used in the creative drama exercises be highly respected and appropriate for preschool students and that it was conducive to dramatizing with preschool students. Librarians were interviewed and their suggestions greatly broadened the scope of literature considered and eventually chosen for the Hats! curriculum.

During the Hats! creation process, this writer contacted other local and national theatre companies with creative drama or theatre for youth programs for advice or more information on their programs. Although some creative drama games and techniques were taken from written sources, it was important to interview those who had used these in the preschool classroom. This writer also consulted with experts in the fields of theatre and theatre with the very young for advice on their personal classroom experience and information on their contributions to the field of preschool drama. Their expertise aided in infusing the academic expectations through age-appropriate theatrical tools such as improvisation, character work, storytelling, and other dramatic activities.

With the activities, objectives, and basic class structure prepared, a formal lesson plan was created in order to provide a specific guide for the instructor or future instructors, to meet the research study requirements, and to be made available to administrators and parents for their perusal. This writer wanted the Hats! curriculum to follow formal lesson-plan structure that would be acceptable to any teacher or administrator. In order to achieve this goal, the book *Understanding by Design* (UBD) by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe was consulted. The UBD framework was used to create

the formal daily lesson plans for the Hats! curriculum by working backward from the end product (the standards and final class presentation) through the creation of each lesson and objectives. In following the UBD outline, a cohesive, universally acceptable set of lesson plans was created (see Appendix A). This curriculum addressed all of the state standards, research objectives, and curriculum goals set forth for the Hats! curriculum and subsequent research study.

### **Development of the Research Topic**

The decision to base the Hats! curriculum in creative drama came from the research on dramatic play and research found on the best educational practices. However, the decision to document and collect data on the effects of creative drama on the social, academic, and emotional development of preschool students was made based on the insufficient amount of research on similar topics from the United States. In researching creative drama programs, methods, and its use in the classroom, it was found that research studies slowed down in the late 1980s and have only recently begun to gain momentum. However, research has been ongoing and well-funded in several European countries, Turkey, and Australia. The decision to focus the research on the effects of a creative drama program on the social, academic, and emotional development of students was made because of similar research that had been done on both creative drama and dramatic play using these categories. In using these current studies, this researcher was better able to create the parameters for this research study as well as establish a set of comparable observations for future study within the United States. Previous studies done on dramatic play by Christie; Elias and Berk; Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland focused on the use of dramatic play to enhance certain learning areas. This was used as a springboard

to observe comparable subject areas but through the medium of creative drama. Research conducted from abroad on creative drama in the classroom by Ahmadi and Nojabae; B. Fletcher-Watson, S. Fletcher-Watson, McNaughton, and Birch; Yaser and Aral aided in this research by providing comparable use of creative drama in the classroom. The decision to base the research on social, emotional, and academic development was also made because of the close ties to the state developmental standards.

Just as any teacher reflects on the success of a new curriculum used in the classroom, the observation and documentation of the Hats! curriculum only seemed natural. The results of this observation, however, had an impact on the current curriculum, as well as on the use of creative drama as a teaching method and on the continuation of the SunFish creative drama program. In creating a new preschool creative drama curriculum, it was necessary not only to document the students' progress, but also how the creative drama techniques added to the learning process in comparison with students who were not participating. These observations contributed to the creation of a new preschool creative drama curriculum to be used the following semester, and also contributed to the overall use of creative drama as an alternate teaching method for certain preschool skills both through the SunFish preschool programs and in the daily classroom. The creation of the methods and categories of observation were taken directly from previous studies on dramatic play with preschool students, which included three common developmental areas of study: emotional/ transitional, social/ verbal, and academic/cognitive. This writer also used these areas of observation to guide the selection of learning objectives chosen for each lesson within the Hats! curriculum.

### **Development of Assessment Tools and Collection of Data**

Because of the research elements of documenting student progress and the success of the Hats! curriculum as a teaching method, it was imperative that a reliable system of documentable observations and assessments be designed. Because the progression of learning through creative drama was key to this research study, both in the connection to the curriculum as a learning tool and as creative drama as a means of enhancing preschool developmental skills, a daily check for student understanding was needed. The assessment created for this was the Assessment Key (see Appendix B). Also, because the class only met once a week at each teaching site and the instructor was not able to observe student learning every day, a survey was created for both classroom teachers and administration to comment on their observations. In addition to these surveys, it was important to collect observational data from family members and/or guardians who lived with the student. These personal observations served to supply unique insight into any personal changes seen by those who lived with and knew the student personally. Through these three types of data collection tools, a well-rounded picture of the effects of this curriculum specifically and the creative drama method of education was developed.

#### *Class Assessment*

One goal in using creative drama was to focus on student understanding of concepts instead of mimetic learning. It was essential to check for understanding before and after each lesson in order to check for gaps in learning and to measure academic and developmental growth. These checks for understanding and measured growth were conducted in two ways. In order to check for continual learning and progress from the

previous week's lesson, questions were posed to the students asking them to not only recall previous material, but to also apply it in new ways. An assessment key was created to check for understanding and learning progress (see Appendix B). The Assessment Key was used and documented a minimum of three times throughout the semester to assess each student as well as the class as a whole. This assessment also affected the direction of the next class by providing specific feedback on the level of comprehension and understanding. This set of data was then presented along with the other forms of collected data in the final results.

The Assessment Key (see Appendix B) was created using Bloom's Taxonomy on the levels of learning and the developmental goals as outlined by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDoE *Revised*; Wiggins and McTighe). The categories of assessment were selected due to their direct relation to the preschool standards as prescribed by the Tennessee Department of Education. Each category noted specific examples of proficiency levels from low (the ability to remember and understand), to medium (the ability to apply and analyze), to high (the ability to evaluate and create). Each category was subdivided into specific examples of each proficiency level, thereby allowing the instructor to quickly assess the progress of learning within the creative drama classroom.

These categories addressed the three developmental areas of study: academic, emotional, and social. The instructor observed and recorded the students' ability to remember a story, retell the story (comprehension), and perform the story. Additional notes were made on the students' ability to identify and create rhyming words (a state standard for preschoolers) and to create their own story or performance based on a



previously explored piece of literature. Emotional development was assessed through the physical and social manifestations of emotional development and through the students' ability to use facial expression, create stories, and develop characters and their relationships. The instructor also recorded the students' emotional response to directions and their interactions with other students in the class. Areas of social development were assessed during times of social interaction and through the original stories they created. Other social interactions were observed when students worked together during movement sessions, through facial expression and body language during storytelling sessions, and during character creation within a story.

#### *Teacher and Parent Surveys and Interviews*

Because of the brevity of observation time, more information on the child's initial developmental background and their progress in the program was needed than could be observed within the ten or twelve weekly one-hour creative-drama sessions. Therefore, in addition to the classroom assessment, this research study also took into account the opinions and observations of those closest to the participating student: his or her parents and teachers. The student's parents and teachers were asked to participate in the research study through surveys and informal interviews. Whereas the surveys were distributed before and after the creative drama program, the interviews were conducted throughout the semester. Both of these forms of data were essential to assessing the success of the creative drama program.

It was necessary to begin the research study by documenting the student's exposure to dramatic play, creative drama, and theatrical performance. This served the study by creating a baseline for observation and a starting point to measure student

progress. This data was established through teacher and parent surveys given at the beginning of and after the creative drama program (see Appendix F and G). These surveys provided important personal observations of the students and were added to the observations made by the instructor during the course of the program. The initial parent survey addressed personal information about the child's exposure to performance, interests, and play time routines. This was needed to establish the student's exposure to theatre, likely response to a creative learning environment, and any theatrical elements used within the home. The initial teacher survey addressed the teacher's own opinion of theatre and the use of theatrical techniques (including dramatic play) in the classroom. In most classrooms the teacher used dramatic play but was unaware of its connection to creative drama or theatre; this initial survey identified where both the teacher and student were on the spectrum of exposure to theatre and theatrical methods of education in order to better assess the results of the creative drama program.

The second survey was distributed shortly after the end of the creative drama program. This researcher designed the follow-up surveys to collect personal and observational opinions of developmental changes that occurred during the course of the program and the potential causes of those changes. The parent survey directly identified how the student changed socially, academically, and emotionally and allowed parents to offer their opinions as to the catalysts of these changes. It also asked parents to evaluate the creative drama program and their child's participation in and response to the program. The second teacher survey asked teachers and administrators how the creative drama program changed the learning environment of the school, the education methods used, and the participating students' development. This was used to assess the changes not only

in participating students, but also how the creative drama program may have changed the learning environment at the school or aftercare program.

It was important to interview the parents and teachers, as they had direct access to and knowledge of the student before and after participating in the creative drama program (see Appendix F and G). This researcher conducted informal interviews with parents and teachers periodically throughout the creative drama program. These interviews assessed observed changes in the student, how the student was enjoying the class, and other observations made by the teacher or parent in regards to the student's participation in the creative drama program. This researcher recorded these interviews via written notes taken shortly after the conversation and stored them in a secure place for later processing. The results from these interviews were compiled along with the classroom assessments and other data collected for this research study. All results were analyzed and compiled into Tables 2 and 3; this aided the researcher in creating a plan for future creative drama programs. The discussion of these results can be found in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

#### *Institutional Review Board Protocol and Data Collection*

Because this research study involved working with minors, special attention was paid to following proper Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. All plans for informing the parents, teachers, and students were submitted and approved by the IRB (see Appendix H). In following this protocol, students were instructed both by their parents and by the instructor that they would be observed during their class, that their participation in the class would be documented, and that they were allowed to opt out of the observation. Special attention was paid to make the students feel safe and encouraged during the program, never singled out or judged in any way. All parents, children, and

administrators were informed of the research aspect of this program and were kept fully informed as the program progressed via e-mail and personal interactions. Parents and administrators were also given a copy of the Hats! curriculum. As per the consent form (see Appendix D) and IRB protocol (see Appendix H), no personal information or names were used in the final study and publication of the research and all data were kept secure.

Once all of the teaching sites completed their programs, the final surveys were distributed and collected in person and through e-mail conversations. This researcher collected the data from the two surveys, interviews, in-class observations, and in-class assessments and processed the results in the following chapters. In order to create a complete picture of student development during the creative drama program, this researcher recorded all of the shared experiences and insights from the parents and teacher with their knowledge and added them to the other observations, assessments, and surveyed data collected throughout the research period.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

Although the Hats! curriculum was successful, there are several areas that should be addressed in preparation for a new curriculum and for further research into creative drama with preschool students. It is necessary to approach this discussion by breaking down the various components of the creative drama program and subsequent research contributed to this field of study. The daily strengths and weaknesses of the program were broken down in order to create a new and better curriculum and creative drama program. Also by acknowledging the weaknesses in the collection of data and approach to research, more efficient and reliable methods can be established.

#### **Classroom Experience**

Students responded positively to the routine of each class and the length of time devoted to each activity. The class flowed from warm-ups to reading the story then into the games and activities exploring that lesson's theme. The activities were well paced, allowing enough time to explore, but not lead to boredom or frustration. Students especially enjoyed the warm-ups because they combined several different experiences in one activity. The warm ups were active and imaginative, requiring the student to jump and stretch or bend and dig. These activities involved the student in the imagined experience by asking them to find their favorite food then eat it and also by asking them what fish or sea creature they caught fishing. This interplay of imaginative involvement

proved also to engage students who were more prone to shyness and inactivity because there were no wrong answers and it did not require any special skills. This same method was used successfully in several other favorite activities such as with the imaginary ball, the hat-as-something-else activity, and the “What am I doing?” game.

Paying special attention to the flow of each class and its tie-in to the day’s topic ensured that students were kept on task. However, the schedule of activities for that class was kept flexible in case students needed more time with a concept or the instructor decided that the class needed to revisit something from a previous lesson. Also, because each activity was selected to revolve around one theme, students were focused on exploring that idea, were less restless or distracted by unrelated material, and were able to recall what the lesson was about; several more advanced students were even able to apply what was learned in a previous lesson to what was done in that day’s lesson. This led to an organized, observable, progressive learning pattern to which students responded well.

Although the class challenged some students, all goals were attainable to all age groups. It was observed that some activities had to be altered slightly because the class as a whole was not grasping the concept or was unable to achieve success at the activity. For example, one class consisting of three and four year olds was having trouble creating their own story after reading *Mister Momboo’s Hat* by Ralph Leemis (Class 5). They were having trouble thinking of new uses for the hat. Although abstract thinking was the goal for this class, the plan was altered slightly and students were first asked to become an animal then choose what that animal would want to do with or to the hat. This aided the success of the activity and was revisited on several occasions. It was also selected by the students to play with their family members at the end-of-term open class.

The positive learning environment created trust between the instructor and the students and therefore encouraged their growth within the creative drama program. The classroom was set up in a way that students were never punished for being shy, withdrawn, or afraid to participate. Other forms of positive engagement were also used. For example, the instructor would acknowledge the child's emotion or reluctance to join and then allow the student to enter into the activity when he/she felt comfortable. Also, it was found that by simply offering to hold a hand or allowing the student to lead the activity encouraged the student to engage and enjoy the class more.

The positivity of the class also directly impacted the creativity of the class and heightened the level of understanding that occurred. Because an atmosphere of safety and acceptance was created, students were more creative in their thinking. This was established first through the warm-ups in which no answer was wrong. If a student wanted to pick marshmallow ice cream off the tree they could; if they wanted to catch an octopus mermaid with shark teeth from the pond they could. This acceptance of the absurd was also present in several other activities such as through character choices and student-created storylines. For example, the most prominent display of creative thinking came when students were taken through a pantomimed hunt of some student's choosing and asked to pantomime solutions to proposed problems such as a river to cross, a sinking friend, or fallen trees. Another example of this heightened display of creative abstract thinking came when students were given hats and asked to create another use for the hat (such as a bowl, a house, etc.). These types of activities were often the favorite of students and parents commented on their child's use of these activities at home. These activities were initiated by students outside of class in the home with parents or siblings

or in the classroom with other peers. One popular activity was when students were given a hat and asked to create a character from that hat. As the semester progressed, students began to create more intricate characters and some advanced students began to react to other students in character and create short story lines. This was also a game that students played in their own classrooms and at home with friends or siblings. The incorporation of creative drama games by the students into their daily life indicated to parents and teachers an increase in students' leadership skills, transference of understanding, and social play because students were not only playing a new game with friends but were also taking initiative to begin the game, instructing their classmates or siblings on the rules, building upon previous learning and exploration, and playing the game in a new environment without prompting from a teacher.

Other areas of success were found in the transference of understanding as pertaining to creative and critical thinking, the state standards, and vocabulary. As referenced above, many of the activities encouraged the growth of creative and critical thinking skills. Students were asked to create and use their own imaginary props, environments, and characters. The imagination of a young child is usually very strong, but this creative drama program took it one step further by structuring and guiding the student through their creation and exploration of the story, theme, or ideas. In this way the instructor became a co-learner, allowing the students to lead the activity. In the activity of Class Six, students were guided through an activity where they were to act out a story of what they would do on a snowy day. This improvised story combined the structure of the story with the imagination of the students. The students were challenged to create real scenes and connect them to each other. For example, the instructor would



give the students the line, “Once upon a time the children all snug in their beds woke up and saw it was snowing! But first they had to get ready.” At this point, the students had to make a decision about what they would normally do to get ready to go outside: eat breakfast, brush teeth, put on snow clothes, etc. This challenged the students to think critically and creatively. Students were exposed to more role-play and situational problem solving; this encouraged the students to think creatively and solve problems such as in the treasure hunt activity. In this activity each student took turns becoming the exploration guide. As the guide he or she chose the obstacle—muddy swamp, snake, fallen tree—reacted to it, and then guided the rest of the class through it. This use of communication and critical thinking skills was also apparent in the home and daily classroom. Parents and teachers both commented on the increase in emotional stability, creative problem solving with peers or siblings, and the maturity of communication with peers and adults. Most parents felt these developments were directly linked to the creative drama class and noted it in their surveys.

The State Standards for Preschool Students were an important part of the Hats! curriculum. It was important that what was done in the creative drama program directly relate to real world academic expectations. It was also important that the activities supported what was going on in the students’ daily classrooms. One main area of emphasis was on reading skills. For this age group, reading skills focus on vocabulary and understanding the parts of a book such as where to find the title, table of contents, and author’s name. The literature component was used to introduce storytelling, chronological plot, and character voices. Students were exposed to several new books throughout the program. This increased the amount of vocabulary the students were

exposed to not only from reading the book, but also from using the same vocabulary and word play in the classroom activities. Lessons were always related back to the state standards and were comprised of emotional, social, and academic goals. Emotional and social standards were incorporated within the different activities such as dancing to the poem and music “Dancing Hats,” teamwork during scene work or activities such as the treasure hunt, and cultural themes such as in Class Eight.

Although the curriculum was well accepted, several things were beyond the control of the program and disrupted the planned flow of the class and hampered its success with all students, especially younger or less advanced students. In several sites, classes were not kept to the recommended maximum of eight students. One site had as many as fourteen three and four year olds with only one instructor. This often led to misbehavior, especially during activities where the students were allowed to pantomime or speak individually. Attention spans in this age group often last between five and ten minutes, especially if the activity requires sitting and listening. Activities were altered to alleviate this problem, but attention to individual students was lost. For example, when warming up with the fishing game students were asked to describe to the class what they caught. When the classes were composed of eight to ten students this took less than three to five minutes. In this situation students were engaged with other classmates’ answers and often dialogued about the catch or made up stories joining the catches together. However, in classes composed of more than ten students, this activity took eight to ten minutes and often led to students becoming impatient, distracted, or restless. Eventually letting the students detail their catch was avoided or left out entirely, especially if the class was tired or restless, in order to avoid losing their attention and opening the class up

to distractions and misbehavior. This was especially important because this activity began the class and set the tone for the rest of the lesson. Larger classes also scored lower in the Assessment Key and developmental outcomes were not as substantial as in other classes.

Distractions also became a major obstacle when working with three and four-year-old students. Accustomed to being observed by their own teachers or administration, students became very distracted by other teachers or parents who entered the room. Although no classroom or teaching site is immune to distractions, something should have been built into the curriculum's structure to aid students' focus in dealing with distractions. Because there was no protocol to follow when this type of disruption occurred, the class often lost focus and exploration time was diminished.

### **Research Analysis of Student Development**

#### *Assessment Key*

The total number of students who participated in the Hats! curriculum was forty-one students between the ages of three and six. Of these forty-one students only twelve elected to participate in the direct study while the remaining thirty students elected to indirectly participate. By indirectly participating in the study the parents agreed that by enrolling in the creative drama program the student would be counted towards the collective but not included in the individual, student-specific observations and surveys. Appendix I includes two graphs documenting the progress made by individual students and the classes as a whole during the creative drama program. Graph 1 illustrates the individual twelve students who elected to participate in the direct study while Graph 2 illustrates the observed progress of the class as a whole. The Assessment Key was used to create these graphs and scores were documented on the first day of class, the fourth or

fifth day of class, and then at the final class. As both graphs demonstrate, each student as well as the class as a whole showed continual progress in the three areas of development (social, academic, emotional). Specifically, however, it was noted that the most significant area of development was in the area of social and emotional development. Over the course of the creative drama program students became more confident in their creative choices and risk taking. This was evidenced by an increase in participation, leadership initiative, and communication with the instructor and classmates. For example, one student came into the creative drama program unable to speak to strangers or communicate her needs or ideas. Throughout the course of the creative drama program she began to participate more in the classroom activities and became comfortable with the class routine, her classmates, and instructor. By the end of the program she was communicating not only her needs but also aiding in the creation of short pantomimes. She helped to create her group's end-of-semester performance and even said her adlibbed lines without the aid of other classmates or the instructor. Another student was described to this instructor as a flight-risk and someone who could not focus. Although he did have trouble sitting in the class, he never ran away from the class and as the program progressed his attention span lengthened. Towards the end of the program, he was actively engaged in most activities and was able to participate more fully than at the beginning. His parents noted that he came home excited about "theatre class" and asked continually if theatre class was that day.

Specific to the Assessment Key, the greatest improvement occurred in the areas of teamwork, non-stereotypical expression, creative movement, following directions, abstract thinking, and retelling of new or previously read stories. The success of these

elements derived directly from the story-related activities. Several elements were incorporated into each activity and each element was revisited in different ways allowing each student the chance to practice these elements multiple times. For example, in retelling the day's story each student was asked to pantomime a part of the story, then as a group to show the story through pantomime or narrated performance. This activity asked the students to pantomime, tell a story, work as a team, create a new twist on the story (abstract thinking), follow directions, and express themselves as a character. This type of activity was incorporated in each lesson and therefore these skills were repeated and practiced more than other areas. Students enjoyed these activities and often used these outside the classroom with peers and siblings. One parent commented that her child now enjoyed going on treasure hunts and she was amazed at the obstacles her son created. Although he enjoyed this type of activity before the program, she was particularly impressed with the creative solutions and the storytelling element that he had added. She noted that, "He tells such great stories and walks and talks like a gruff pirate. It's actually pretty funny."

According to the observations made and the results of the Assessment Key, little progress occurred with rhyming words, movement to music, and character creation. Although most books and poems made use of rhyme, few other activities worked on this area. However, students in general did become aware of the rhyming sounds, most could indicate whether they heard a rhyme, and several could point out which words rhymed. One child's parent noted that their child began asking if words rhymed or not. This continued throughout the semester and although the parent saw little improvement in the creation of rhyming words, she was surprised by how much their child wanted to grasp

this skill and her interest in rhyming words. She attributed this interest to the creative drama program because her child told her that was where she was learning about it. This skill is an advanced skill that most students will not fully explore until Kindergarten or first grade. Rhythmic movement seemed to be a difficult skill to master for most students. Most students enjoyed free movement to music but when asked to replicate a movement or move to a certain beat, students often became frustrated or continued to move as they were before. It was observed that the older students were less frustrated by this skill and able to move rhythmically to the beat. They also seemed more interested in learning how to recreate movements presented by the instructor in the style of music. However, they still preferred to freely move to the music. This was an element that was introduced later in the program and therefore students had less exposure to it. Character creation was a complex skill that in which all progressed, but few students mastered. This was another skill that was directly related to age; the older the student, the more complex of a character he was able to create. Most older fours and five year olds were able to combine both a character voice and character walk albeit exaggerated; however, most younger students were only able to describe their character and very few were able to combine voice, movement, or gestures. At the final class, students and parents participated in favorite activities. One particular activity that was chosen by the youngest class was to show their parents a story similar to *Mister Momboo's Hat* where the hat is used by several different animals in different ways. One student who had been having a lot of trouble expressing himself was able to create the character of a dog using the hat as a bowl. Although it seems insignificant, this student had mostly communicated through grunts and hand gestures throughout the semester. His calm thoughtful characterization

was complex not only for his age but for this developmental level. This student's progress in character development drastically increased especially over the last four lessons. By the end of the semester he was almost on par with the rest of the class. His parent attributed this success with the confidence and personalized attention he was receiving during the creative drama program.

The overall evaluation of in-class assessments showed that the Hats! curriculum was able to produce at least some development in all areas. In the classroom observations, the Assessment Key showed significant development in social and emotional skills through the work done in the creative drama program. However, in several other areas achievement in the High Level was found to be related to the student's age and/or level of exposure to each element.

#### *Parent/Teacher Surveys and Observations*

The collection of surveys was not as successful as had been planned. The lack of participation was due mainly to school coming to an end. Although surveys were made available to the parents and teachers at the final class and through emailed solicitations throughout the summer, only forty percent of parent surveys and thirty percent of teacher surveys were returned. Although participation in the end-of-year surveys was low, the information included in those that were returned was invaluable as they attested to the successes of and drawbacks to the creative drama program in attaining its goals. Comments indicated similar observations by the parents and teachers as were evident in the Assessment Key results.

Parents were particularly encouraged by their child's progress in social areas; particularly in communication and confidence. All participating parents noted significant

development in the areas of communication and expression. Ninety percent of participating parents indicated development in the areas of socialization, curiosity, and the desire to learn or experience new things; sixty percent noticed development in vocabulary. Most parents contributed this progress directly to their child's participation in the creative drama program. One parent noted that her child showed significant improvement in leadership skills, especially in communicating and empathizing with her brother. This same parent also noticed a substantial change in how her daughter expressed her emotions and communicated needs to her parents, other family members, and other authority figures. Both of these comments were echoed by several parents. Another parent noticed that their child's separation anxiety lessened and attributed this to the confidence he built during the creative drama program. Teachers also noticed several of the same behaviors noting that students in the creative drama program despite the age were more empathetic, able to communicate their needs better, and had fewer emotional meltdowns. Both parents and teachers emphasized how much the child enjoyed, talked about, and looked forward to the creative drama classes.

Some parents felt that the program did not necessarily aid in the development of vocabulary or enjoyment of reading. However, most parents who commented on this also indicated that their child already loved to read or be read to and that the creative drama program did not augment this desire to read. Parents of older students also indicated that whereas they saw progress in all three areas of study, they were unsure if this was due to participation in the creative drama class or if it was due to natural maturation. Also, there were a few comments on the multi-ages classroom. Some felt this was good and offered leadership opportunities but others felt that their child was not challenged enough.



Although most parents understood that the class was process oriented, a few parents displayed disappointment that there was no staged performance. These parents appreciated the open class where they were able to participate alongside their child, but did not completely agree with the lack of a formal performance. It is important to note that these parents had also enrolled their child in performance driven classes such as ballet, tap, piano, or sports.

The Assessment Key findings and parent/teacher observations all indicated similar progress in emotional, social, and academic development. Most observational data indicated that the emotional and social development areas saw the most growth whereas growth was slower or less developed in the categories related to academic development. Potential sources for the amount of growth observed in these three areas were found in the repetition of activities, the timing of introduction of material, and in the maturity of the student. The more the student was exposed to the category, the more developmental progress was made. For example, creative thinking was used in several different activities in each lesson. As the semester progressed, the students became more confident in their thinking skills and were able to create imaginative places, characters, animals, situations, and uses for their hats. However, specific academic subjects such as rhyming words were only referenced once or twice in each lesson and therefore most students only exhibited the ability to point out or hear rhyming words not to create their own; this only met the low and medium parameters of the Assessment Key. Student progress was also connected to the point in time in which each topic was introduced to the class. In the Hats! curriculum, one activity was to use a hat as something else. This activity was introduced later in the program and most students still needed prompting or

help to create new uses for the hat. Whereas, when asked to create a creature that was caught in the imaginary pond, an activity that was introduced during the first lesson, students showed a tremendous growth in creativity by the end of the program. Some of the developmental progress in all three areas seemed to be related to age. Whether from maturity or exposure to similar topics in their daily classroom, it was observed and recorded that older students grasped topics such as rhyming words, pitch, rhythm, and chronological storytelling much quicker than young students. However, it was also noted that older students did have to be encouraged more to use their imaginations to create environments and characters as well as to think outside-the-box in creative games such as using the hat as something else. Parents and teachers also noticed the difference in academic development as opposed to social and emotional progress. Several interviews and surveys indicated they observed a significant increase in empathy and communication skills in students participating in the creative drama program despite the student's age. For example, students enrolled in the creative drama program threw fewer tantrums, were more likely to communicate their needs verbally, and were observed helping other distressed students. However, they also noted that little or no progress was made academically or that they did not think the creative drama program contributed to their child/student's progress in this area. Whereas the Assessment Key and parent/teacher surveys did indicate an increase in development in all three areas, the creative drama program was shown to greatly enhance the development in the areas of social and emotional development but only slightly enhanced academic development.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The Hats! curriculum and subsequent research study was conducted for two specific reasons: to give preschool students the opportunity to engage in extracurricular theatrical activities and to contribute qualitative research to the field of creative drama with preschool students. The creative drama program and Hats! curriculum were successful in both creating an alternate artistic program for preschool students and in enhancing development, especially in emotional and social skills. The students were engaged and seemed to enjoy the classes. Progress was observed by the creative drama instructor, parents, and teachers. Because of the results from the preschool creative drama classes, the response to and demand for theatrical programming and other opportunities for young children in Memphis has grown tremendously. This positive reaction resulted in several more teaching opportunities for SunFish and the preschool creative drama program. Upon hearing of this program, a local college approached SunFish Children's Theatre about discussing the creation of a theatre for youth or educational theatre program/emphasis area within their theatre department.

In moving forward with this program and research into creative drama with preschool students, there are several areas that need to be improved and obstacles that need to be addressed. Although the program was considered a success, not all academic

or personal needs were met because of the rigidity of some of the planned activities. Obstacles such as a need for more familiarity of creative drama in education by teachers and parents, class time, and mixed-age classes should also be addressed. In researching creative drama with preschool students there is a very limited qualitative and quantitative research being done in the United States. In moving forward, questions such as, “does creative drama enhance learning or does enhanced learning occur through natural maturation?” and “how does creative drama affect the preschool student’s brain?” should be explored in more depth. Research into these areas would add some much needed quantitative research into the field. The outcome of this research could also contribute to an expansion of the use of creative drama not only as an extracurricular activity, but also as a classroom educational tool. By addressing these issues the current program, as well as the field as a whole, would benefit greatly and increase the potential to reach more students in a more effective and efficient way.

### **Moving Forward: Curriculum**

The instructor noted that although students responded to typical preschool academic topics taught through the creative drama program, such as rhyming words, this was not as successful as the emotional and social developmental subjects, such as teamwork and expression. Instead, the creative drama program should focus on supportive developmental topics that enhance social and emotional growth and enhance in-class learning, instead of the development of specific academic topics; these academic topics should be taught in the students’ daily classroom. These academic topics should not be left out of the curriculum altogether, but should instead become a secondary objective. The more young students are exposed to a subject, the more likely they are to

grasp its meaning and apply it. Similarly, by using the creative drama activities to explore an academic topic instead of focusing on its mastery, a student can explore the topic, then take that understanding with them to the classroom where they may master it. By focusing on the mastery of social and emotional skills in the creative drama activities, the students gain mastery over these and have better self-control. Also, they become more complex in their reasoning abilities, more creative and abstract in their thinking, and therefore are able to master academic subjects better in the daily classroom. Another option for increasing the success of teaching academic subjects through the creative drama program would be to offer the class more than once per week. Along with strengthening social and emotional development, meeting more than once per week would allow for more repetition and exploration of themes through the theatre activities. This in turn would increase the students' potential success at mastery of certain topics such as rhyming words and understanding and using new vocabulary.

One of the obstacles in getting a creative drama program started in a new school was that most teachers and parents were unfamiliar with creative drama and the ability for preschool students to participate in it. Most schools that participated in the Hats! curriculum had theatre components such as school plays, but students below the fourth grade were not allowed to participate in the performances. Similarly, although most participating preschool teachers acknowledged the use of dramatic play in their classrooms, most did not use any other theatre education methods. This study demonstrated that preschool students are very excited about learning through creative drama methods and tend to understand concepts better when exploring them through these activities. Therefore, more education materials should be made available to parents,

teachers, and administrators on how to use theatrical methods. This could be done proactively in colleges with teaching programs, or through topical in-service workshops, conference workshops, informative handouts or pamphlets, or online courses. SunFish Children's Theatre is being proactive by offering teacher and administrative workshops and dialoguing with parents about creative drama and other theatrical opportunities for young children.

In working with preschool students, the classroom environment has a lot to do with the behavior and success of the student. This was most apparent in both the amount of time spent with students as well as the mixed ages of the students in each class. As with any subject area, the more time spent with the material the more the student is allowed to explore and understand it. This is true in the creative drama classroom as well. All of the teaching sites could only support the creative drama program meeting once per week for thirty minutes to one hour. One week is a very long time for preschool students, and although most students could remember what occurred in the previous class the progress from class to class was slower than expected. Also, while the hour-long class worked well with short attention spans, the thirty-minute class seemed too short to really explore each activity. This was most obvious in the progress each week with using the hats as different objects. Instead of students being able to fully explore the hat and its properties, the game became rushed by the hour-long time limit and then picked up the following week. It is suggested that the class meet for one hour and twice a week. This would encourage exploration of activities and allow the students the proper time to adequately discover new avenues of creative expression.

The composition of students in a class was also related to the success of the creative drama program not only in regards to interrelationships, but also in regards to how the students responded to activities and challenges. The maturation of the preschool student occurs very quickly, often in months not years. The six months that separate an older three year old from a four year old can result in fewer tantrums, increased communication, understanding of basic principles such as consequences, storytelling, vocabulary, and expression. During the Hats! program, most classes were composed of students between the ages of three and six. It was noted that the classes where students were grouped into closer age ranges were more likely to finish the lesson, exhibit more teamwork, and were better behaved despite being the youngest or oldest. However, in mixed classes students vied for attention and misbehaved because they became bored or easily distracted. Although most teaching sites were not able to accommodate multiple creative drama classes, this research suggested that preschool drama classes should be composed of students grouped as such: older threes to younger fours, older four year olds, and five to six year olds. It was noted that these age groups were similar in their maturation levels and progress through the Hats! creative drama program, and when grouped in this way, exhibited more success in the program.

### **Moving Forward: Observation and Research**

In pursuing research with this age group it is imperative to understand the development that occurs during the natural maturation of children between thirty months to six years old. When observing students in the creative drama program, some students may appear to have suddenly grasped a concept or become more in charge of their emotions responsible, but it is important to break down whether the cause of this is

natural maturation or because of the skills being taught through the creative drama program. Having a reliable control group that is observable in the same way as those enrolled in the creative drama program is also vital for consistent observations. Students in the creative drama program and the control group should come from the same classroom in order for the observer to more precisely detect similar learning patterns and differentiate between the students in the program and the others. By combining an understanding of the natural maturation of preschool students and a comparable control group, the observations made are more credible and useful to this field of study and for advocacy for more preschool creative drama programs.

The parent, caregiver, and teacher end-of-program surveys are also very important to gathering well-rounded information about the students' perceived progress due to the creative drama program. Parents and caregivers have invaluable information to share about their child's background, strengths, weaknesses, daily habits, routines, and developmental progress. Their input is instrumental in assessing the impact the creative drama program had on the child beyond simply having a fun activity to do once a week. Therefore, obtaining their input is important to the overall results of the observational research. In order to increase the participation in this final survey, it is suggested that other means of eliciting participation are used. The lack of participation in this study was mainly due to the end of school, vacations, and lack of time. Using a variety of means to participate in the survey should increase involvement. Options such as offering on-line surveys, having the parent or caregiver fill out the survey before or at the final class, or calling parents should provide several means in which teachers, parents, and caregivers can participate.



Because observation of the student was the main focus in this research study, the instructor's attention was often divided between working directly with the student, running the class, mentally noting developmental progress, and writing notes/assessing each student for research. Running the class and working with the students was the most important task and unfortunately some observations were missed. In order to reconcile this, it is suggested that two or more observers should be in the class at one time. These extra observers, in addition to noting developmental progress, could also assist with classroom management and allow the main instructor valuable time to work with students, run the class more efficiently, and make notes. The addition of these other observers also creates the ability to dialogue about the noted developmental progress, debate whether it is from natural maturation or the class, and discuss the class' progress.

### **Moving Forward: Research in the Field**

There are very few preschool creative drama programs being offered in the United States and even fewer resources for curriculum development. The United States is far behind in researching and exploring the field of theatre for the very young and theatre education with the very young. For example, in 2013 research was already being conducted in Turkey, Ankara by Münevver Can Yaşar and Neriman Aral "to identify six-year-old pre-school children's creative thinking skill levels and to establish whether there is a difference between the creative thinking skills of children who received drama education and those who did not" (1). In order to be competitive with other countries and in order to offer our children greater access to the creative arts and cultural learning, there must be better funding, more curriculum options, and more quantitative research generated in the United States. McCaslin notes that in Howard Gardner's assessment of

multiple-intelligences that each culture prizes one type of intelligence over another; Americans prioritize linguistic and mathematical abilities. However, by exposing students to the arts we are “opening the door to greater understanding and respect for the cultural backgrounds and values of others” (3: 7).

There is a great need to reinvest in theatre for the very young and creative drama with preschool students both in research and in creating new preschool curricula. The history of creative drama began in the 1920s “as a social and educational force to help the children of immigrants learn the language of their adopted country, to provide a meeting place for children and families, and to offer wholesome entertainment to the children of the poor” (Swortzell 333). What began in the 1920s is still true today. Creative drama and theatre education have a way of bringing together children from all cultures and backgrounds, giving them a common language and a world to explore together. Helen Rosenberg, historian, states that as education turned from mimetic teaching to “emphasiz[ing] the education of the whole child” progressive teachers “valued all the arts as natural media for experiential learning and self-expression, but they felt drama was particularly important for its ability to create experiences in the classroom not easily accessible in any other place” (19). It has not only opened a new way to educate but also been a great equalizer amongst students and teachers with such different backgrounds, languages, and beliefs. Pioneers in this field such as Winifred Ward (1930s-1950s), Viola Spolin (1960s-1970s), and Geraldine Siks (1950s-1980s) were from the United States and are used internationally as primary sources in the field of creative drama. However, this once flood of exploration of creative drama as an education tool has slowed to a trickle due to lack of funding in the United States. However, when the United States went

through a recession in the 1990s, most of the government funding left and the private sector took on the brunt of funding. This led to more performance-based plays being produced, and although there are now a many theatres that sponsor creative drama programs, some do so at a financial loss. The national government is funding much of the research, programs, and performances in countries where we see the most growth in this field such as in England, Australia, and those in Eastern Europe. The United States government must step up to bridge this gap.

The field still needs more quantitative research in order to increase outside funding, acceptance, and use of creative drama with preschool students. Little neurological research has been done with preschool students; however, this type of data could open up new areas of study to better understand how the young mind learns, develops, and creates cognitive connections. With the United States' education scores dropping, new methods of teaching and learning are needed. In addition to helping mainstream students by trying to understanding how creative drama triggers development in the young child's brain, we can better understand how to use creative drama to reach students with certain developmental difficulties. This in turn can open up new avenues for the use of creative drama, but can also help to refine how to best use creative drama in education. In this small study it was found that creative drama enhanced students' emotional, academic, and social skills and therefore set them up to be more productive learners and social beings. What if this was implemented and researched on a larger scale? Using creative drama in classrooms where students are just beginning to learn could significantly increase students' future academic skills and success outside of the classroom.

There is a great need not just for plays to be performed for young students, but for curricula written specifically for the preschool classroom and extracurricular preschool programs. Although there are several resources for creative drama in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade, there are very few written specifically for preschool students. Writing specific lesson plans and activities for preschool creative drama programs will give more teachers, aftercare workers, and non-theatre professionals access to the benefits of creative drama in their own classrooms. In addition, more students will be exposed not only to creative learning, but also to the world of theatre. This can be especially valuable to students in low-income educational programs because there is no special equipment or materials to buy as with other learning methods.

### **Conclusion**

Creative drama programs specifically designed for preschool students are needed now more than ever. Creative drama is a dynamic education method especially in the preschool classroom, and more opportunities must be made available. Our students are falling further behind in education compared with other countries; we must explore the causes as well as the solutions. Creative drama programs and research into the field of theatre with the very young are funded in England, Hungary, and Turkey as well as other countries where we have seen abundant growth in testing scores. Creative drama in the preschool classroom must be explored further and offered more abundantly. Jacqueline and Martin Brooks note that, “[e]ducators must invite students to experience the world’s richness, empower them to ask their own questions and seek their own answers, and challenge them to understand the world’s complexities” (J. Brooks and M. Brooks 5). This is being done in the preschool creative drama classroom. The mental tools of

analysis, character development, logical process, abstract thinking, and insight are all taught through experiences in the creative drama classroom. Through improvisation and scene work, students are asked to respond to different scenarios and to interpret feelings, assess situations, and deduce potential effects and outcomes. Arts education allows students to see and experience different perspectives and allows the students' brains to develop a new logical thought process of interpretation, deduction, and perspective. There is a great need for alternative educational and arts programs for young children and creative drama programs are the answer. These programs are not only as a means to an enjoyable afternoon, but also as a way of encouraging exploration, empathy, abstract learning, and a love of creativity and imagination.

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## APPENDIX A

### CURRICULUM FOR PRESCHOOL STUDENTS

<b>Unit Title:</b> Hats! A Preschool Introduction to Creative Drama Through Poetry and Story
<b>Date/Duration:</b> 10 weekly lessons
<p><b>Curriculum Content Standard(s) addressed:</b></p> <p>AL.PK.2. Self-select play activities to support own curiosity and to engage in pretend and imaginative play.</p> <p>AL.PK.3. Demonstrate an awareness of connection between prior and new knowledge.</p> <p>AL.PK.4. Choose materials/props and use novel ways to represent ideas, characters, and objects in a move toward symbolic play.</p> <p>AL.PK.5. Seek additional clarity to further own knowledge.</p> <p>AL.PK.6. Demonstrate a willingness to engage in new experiences and activities.</p> <p>AL.PK.8. Demonstrate a willingness to collaborate with others to solve a problem.</p> <p>AL.PK.9. Maintain focus appropriate to completing task and/or learning activity.</p> <p>AL.PK.10. Seek assistance and/or information when needed to complete a task.</p> <p>SE.PK.1. Describe self-using several different identifying characteristics and/or unique qualities.</p> <p>SE.PK.3. Display sense of accomplishment, contentment, and acknowledgement when completing a task or solving a problem.</p> <p>SE.PK.4. Interact and develop positive relationships with significant adults.</p> <p>SE.PK.5. Seek and accept guidance from primary caregivers, teachers, and other familiar adults.</p> <p>SE.PK.6. Initiate play and interact positively with another child or children.</p> <p>SE.PK.7. Develop friendship skills with increasing ease and comfort to sustain interaction by cooperating, helping, and suggesting new ideas for play.</p> <p>SE.PK.8. Show empathy and caring for others.</p> <p>SE.PK.9. Express feelings, needs, opinions, and desires in a way which is appropriate to the situation.</p> <p>SE.PK.10. Appropriately name types of emotions and associate them with different facial expressions, words, and behaviors.</p> <p>SE.PK.12. Demonstrate an understanding of rules through actions and conversations.</p> <p>SE.PK.13. Engage easily in routine activities.</p> <p>RR.PK.2. With modeling and support, recall important age appropriate facts from informational text by engaging in meaningful discussions and activities.</p> <p>RI.PK.1. With modeling and support, ask and answer questions about informational text.</p> <p>RI.PK.3. With guidance and support, relate informational text to personal experience or other text.</p> <p>RI.PK.4. Develop new vocabulary by engaging in meaningful discussions and activities to promote learning of unfamiliar words found in informational text.</p> <p>RI.PK.5. Identify that the title of the book is found on the front cover.</p> <p>RI.PK.10. Actively listen and participate in small and large group activities when informational text is read aloud or discussed.</p> <p>RL.PK.1. With modeling and support, ask, and answer questions about text read aloud.</p> <p>RL.PK.2. With guidance and support, recall important facts to retell a familiar story in sequence.</p>

RL.PK.3. With guidance and support, identify major characters, settings, and events from a familiar story or nursery rhyme.

RL.PK.9. With guidance and support, relate the story to previously read stories, ideas in the themes, or personal life experiences.

RL.PK.10. Actively listen and participate in small and large group activities when literature is read aloud or discussed.

RF.PK.2. Demonstrate increasing understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds.

RF.PK.2a. Recognize and discriminate rhyming words in spoken language.

SL.PK.1. Participate in collaborative conversations which include book reading and theme-related vocabulary, with adults and other children during transitions and routine daily activities, including free play.

SL.PK.2. Demonstrate the ability to recall information for short periods of time and retell, act out, or represent information from a familiar text read aloud, or a recording.

SL.PK.4. Actively participate in conversations to tell or talk about familiar people, places, things and events, and with prompting and support, add additional details that help enrich and extend the conversation.

SL.PK.5. Create representations and extensions of experiences or stories and discuss them with others.

SL.PK.6. Speak clearly and audibly to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

S.PK.7. Observe and discuss changes in weather and seasons using common weather related vocabulary.

S.PK.11. Demonstrate an awareness of changes that occur in their environment.

SS.PK.2. Demonstrate awareness of different cultures through exploration of customs and traditions, past and present.

SS.PK.4. Recognize that all children and adults have roles, rights, and responsibilities at home, school, in the classroom and in the community.

SS.PK.5. Participate in the community or group life of the class.

SS.PK.8. Develop awareness about a wide variety of careers and work environments.

CA.PK.4. Engage in music activities having different moods, tempos, and rhythms by listening, singing or performing.

CA.PK.6. Express feelings of what is felt and heard through dance or creative movement.

CA.PK.7. Move in spontaneous and imaginative ways to music, songs, rhythm and silence.

CA.PK.8. Participate in a variety of dramatic play activities to represent fantasy and real life experiences.

CA.PK.9. Respond and react to theatre and drama presentations.

PD.PK.2. Demonstrate awareness of spatial boundaries and the ability to work and move within them.

PD.PK.3. Develop body strength, balance, flexibility, and stamina to move self through space in a variety of ways.

### Stage 1-Desired Results

<p><b>Understandings:</b></p> <p><i>Students will understand that...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poetry can be performed through pantomime, improvisation, imagination, and narration</li> <li>• Their faces, bodies, and voices can create different characters, emotions, and environments</li> <li>• Theatre is storytelling</li> <li>• Poetry is storytelling</li> </ul>	<p><b>Essential Questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we use our imagination to explore the world around us and recreate it for others?</li> <li>• Can we visit a place we've never been? How do we recreate it for others?</li> <li>• What is play?</li> <li>• Why do we tell stories?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Students will know...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic theatre terminology (see attached) and stage directions</li> <li>• Types of jobs that correspond with uniforms</li> <li>• How to tell a story through pantomime, improvisation (imagination), and narration</li> </ul>	<p><b>Students will be able to...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow directions given by the instructor and follow set classroom routines (i.e. raising hands to speak, sitting in crisscross applesauce during reading time, etc.)</li> <li>• Create a character from information found within a given text or by verbal instruction</li> <li>• Identify rhyming words</li> <li>• Create different emotions using the face, body/ body language, gestures, and voice</li> <li>• Re-tell a story in chronological order</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 2-Assessment Evidence</b></p>	
<p><b>Performance Tasks:</b></p> <p><b>Student performance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will <i>perform</i> several poems either by memory or with teacher narration using pantomimed actions and created characters and dialogue.</li> <li>• Students will discuss and create the performance space based on the theme of "Hats." The set will be created using things the students have created throughout the program.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Other Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class discussion/creation</li> <li>• Re-telling of story/poem</li> <li>• Review of previous material by student</li> <li>• Observation of student's progress per the assessment key (included)</li> <li>• Review of Essential Questions and the progression of answers from class one to class ten</li> <li>• Final student performance</li> <li>• Creation of routine, following directions, and progression in</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will discuss and create costumes using found objects, costume pieces/accessories, props, and created pieces.</li> </ul> <p><b>Student written story/poetry:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The instructor will assist the class in creating their own story or poem incorporating the theme of “Hats.”</li> <li>The poem/story will be created through improvisation and class discussion of material already read and explored.</li> <li>The poem will be shared and/or performed during the student performance.</li> </ul> <p><b>In-Class work:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will create spontaneous scene work based on the day’s poetry/ story.</li> </ul>	<p>other “kindergarten skills” such as raising hand, verbal communication of emotions and needs, etc.</p>
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### Stage 3- Plan Learning Experience

Note: Most of these activities have been adapted or taken from *Kidstuff, Perform It!* and *Kids Take the Stage*.

#### Day One: Getting to know each other, learning routine and rules

- 1) Teacher enters class with a specific hat on her head and asks the students to describe the hat, why it would be worn, where it would be worn, and how the hat makes them feel.
- 2) Name game: “My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I wear a \_\_\_\_\_ hat, and this is how it makes me feel (facial expression or movement).” Go around the circle with each child and then repeat each one: “This is \_\_\_\_\_ and they like to wear a \_\_\_\_\_ hat, and this is how it makes them feel (repeat expression or movement).”
- 3) Read the poem “Hats” and ask the students to think of what they could use hats for? What jobs? What places/events?
- 4) Transition into rules: tie in to hats and jobs and ask what kind of rules they follow (construction hat/helmet keeps the head safe). So what kind of rules should we have in our class? Write these down and post in the room.
- 5) Introduce warm-ups: Every job has things we must do to prepare. We need to warm up our bodies, voice, and imagination. Use “Dancing Hats” to warm the students up. Have appropriate music to fit each genre.
- 6) Introduce warm-ups: Picking apples, digging for worms, going fishing. Students reach up high to “pick apples” (or other favorite



food...let them be creative), then take a bite out of the apple and chew with mouth open (to warm up face). Then “dig for worms” keeping legs straight. Then take one “worm” and put it on your fishing pole (pantomime) then cast into the “pond” (center of circle). This is a great time to tie-in our theme: ask each student what kind of hat they would wear fishing...why? Then have them “reel it in” and ask each student what they caught! (Warms up body, voice, and imagination.)

- 7) Introduce warm-ups: Freeze and melt. Call out “Freeze,” students then freeze in their spot. Then say, “Melt.” At this command the students “melt” into silent puddles and wait for the next direction. This can also be used to gain control before a new activity or if the class is getting too rambunctious.
- 8) Sit down to review the day’s work. Read *Whose Hat* by Margaret Miller to revisit why and who wears hats. Introduce the essential questions.

## **Class 2: Introduce theme, explore rhyme/ rhythm, revisit routine/rules**

- 1) Warm-ups: “Dancing Hats” (use different music and talk about what it is! Could you add a new dance? If so, what hat would you wear? Try to incorporate your own student’s backgrounds and ethnicity.), Picking Apples/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing.
- 2) Review what was done in the last class. “What was your favorite thing we did?” Begin to take note of the student’s favorites and ones to show in their final performance.
- 3) Introduce what you will be doing today. “Today we will be exploring rhythm and rhyme. Can anyone tell me what rhythm is? Can you show me? Can anyone tell me what rhyme is? Can you show me?” Use the two poems you have already read (“Dancing Hats” and “Hats”) to explain rhythm and rhyme...have the students point out the rhyming words by raising their hand when they hear a rhyming word.
- 4) Let’s explore rhythm. Using the music for “Dancing Hats” have the students walk or dance to the music. Ask them to remember what hat was worn. This is a great time to introduce them to the type of music they are listening to in preparation for Class 8 on culture. Ask students, “How does this make you feel?”
- 5) Sit down and sing “That Spells Hats” (first by yourself then encourage the class to sing along). Have the children supply other reasons to wear hats and sing about them (i.e. to protect their heads, to shade their eyes, to keep them warm, to play dress up, etc.). Also look at the rhyme in the song. “Can you think of other words that rhyme?”
- 6) This time sing the song “That Spells Hats” and then create a scene using the created information (i.e. “When it’s cold” have

them build a snowman or shiver; “When it’s raining” have them jump in puddles).

- 7) Recite “Our Hats” and ask students where they are going (“out the door”). “What hat are you wearing? Why? Show me!” (Again emphasize the rhyming words.) Use this short poem to emphasize the different uses for hats. What other words could replace “warm” in the poem (dry, cool, etc.)? Then ask them to show you or tell you why.
- 8) Close the class by reading them “Happy Hat.” This is a fun poem to end the day with. Again, reinforce the theme of the day (rhythm and rhyme) and ask the students to recall what all was done. “What was their favorite? Why?”

### **Class 3: *Tell Me a Story*; Our senses: Voice**

- 1) Warm-ups: “Dancing Hats” (use different music and talk about what it is! Could you add a new dance? If so, what hat would you wear? Try to incorporate your students’ backgrounds and ethnicity.), Picking Apples/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing.
- 2) New Warm-Up: Focus on the voice by having the class sing a familiar song (“Twinkle, Twinkle”). Discuss pitch. How does music make you feel?
- 3) New Warm-up: moving the voice. Have student do sirens (What does that sound like?) and repeat a short poem. Discuss diction and projection (Big voice, little voice or inside voice, outside voice, stage voice.) Be careful to emphasize not to yell.
- 4) Sit down. Review what was done in the last class. “What was your favorite thing we did?” Begin to take note of the students’ favorites and ones to show in their final performance. What was their favorite poem? Do they remember it? Can they recall or re-tell it?
- 5) Introduce what you will be doing today. “Today we will be learning about our voice! What do we do with our voices? How can we make our voice change?” Have the students try out different voices.
- 6) Read *This is The Hat* by Nancy Van Laan. Ask the students: “What were the different ways the hat was used? Did you notice the use of rhythm and rhyme? How? Where? (Revisit what was discussed in the previous class). How did this affect my voice? How would *you* say it?” Have the students vocally act out the characters of the story.
- 7) Show students a hat. “If you were wearing this hat, what would you sound like?” “How does this hat make you feel? (Safe? Scared? Happy? Silly?)” “How does that emotion make your voice change? (vocal-pitch) .”

- 8) Have the class sit in a circle. Show one hat to the class. Say, “Tell me about this hat!” Go around the circle, having each child say a few words about the hat (shape, use, origin, etc.) Then tell the students that they will be creating a story about the hat. Going around the circle, have each student say one sentence about the hat. Encourage them to connect their sentence to the previous sentence. (Emphasize using a character voice if they are speaking about the hat in first person...how would this hat sound? How would the person wearing this hat sound?) This is a PROCESS. It will take a few times to get it, Be patient and positive—this is a learning experience. This activity will be revisited in later classes. (Keep track of these, you may want to use them in your final performance. It is also a good catalyst to help with memory. Remember the story you created last time about the \_\_\_\_\_? Tell me about it again!)
- 9) Review what was done in class today. “What was your favorite? Why?”

#### **Class 4: Show Me a Story; Our Senses: Body**

- 1) Warm-ups: “Dancing Hats”, Picking Apples (or something class chosen)/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing. Vocal warm ups (Routine matters!) Today emphasize how our bodies move. Introduce neutral position.
- 2) Review what was done in the last class. “What was your favorite thing we did?” Begin to take note of the student’s favorites and ones to show in their final performance.
- 3) Read “Hats of Every Color” by Heather Tekavec to review rhythm and rhyme, and to introduce occupational hats. (You can also reference or use pictures from *Whose Hat?* read earlier.) “Can you show me?” Have students stand up (with or without the hat) and pantomime an occupation or action that references a hat (i.e. cowboy-lasso a cow, construction worker-hammer a nail, chef-stir a bowl, etc.).
- 4) Ask students, “What is theatre? What is a performance?” Review essential questions. How have these changed since the first class? Let the students know that they just performed by acting out the hat’s occupation! Also point out that this is *pantomime* (see terms).
- 5) Before beginning the next pantomimed improvisation, introduce stage directions and terminology (see attached terms) and set the parameters of your stage (this will be the set stage for the rest of the classes). Have students practice the stage directions and give each one a turn at being the director and directing the class (and you) to different sides of the stage.
- 6) Have the students sit down in the “audience” and remind them of proper theatre etiquette (applaud, encourage, sit up, no talking, watch the performer(s), etc.) and ask for one volunteer. Have students stand up (*without* the hat) and pantomime an occupation or action that references a hat. Ask the other students to raise their hands to guess what the actor is doing.

- 7) Now take two or three volunteers and have them (with or without the hat(s)) create a “snapshot” (frozen “picture”) of a scene that involves a hat (this can be abstract—hat as a nest, hat as a bowl, etc.—or traditional—farmer, policeman, cowboy, etc.). Then have the rest of the class tell a story that describes what is happening. Ask the performers if this was correct. If not, how could we change it? Be positive.
- 8) If there is time and it is appropriate to the level of the class, have the students act out (with words) a short scene or story using the hat for inspiration. This will be done more in the next class.
- 9) Review what was done in class today. “What was your favorite? Why?” Write down the improvised stories/ snapshots to use later.

### **Class 5: Perform Me a Story; Our Senses: Imagination**

- 1) Warm-ups: “Dancing Hats”, Picking Apples/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing. Vocal warm ups. Today emphasize using the imagination. “How else could the apple (chosen food) be eaten? What else could we catch in the pond?”
- 2) Review what was done in the last class. “What was your favorite thing we did?” Begin to take note of the students’ favorites and ones to show in their final performance. Remind students we will be doing more improv and pantomime today—review terminology introduced in the previous lesson.
- 3) Ask students if they remember reading, *This is the Hat* from Class 3. Review the story. “Can you show me the story?” Review the different characters and emphasize their order (this helps teach pattern recognition).
- 4) “Now we will read a similar story.” Read *Mister Mombo’s Hat* by Ralph Leemis. Discuss the similarities and differences (they both get their hats back v. different animals and uses).
- 5) “Now let’s create our own story!” (This could be the beginnings of your final performance piece.) Using these two examples, first have each student choose an animal and one way that animal could use the hat. (At this age some children may feel more comfortable being partnered up. If this is the case, try to encourage each one to think of a different way to use the hat i.e. a spider could use it as a bed or to drink water from. Use both in the story but discuss how that would work. Do the two spiders agree on the use? Do they disagree? How do they compromise?) Then talk through the story. Next, have the students act out what they are doing. Finally, have the students narrate and act out the whole story (the instructor should be the first to lose the hat).
- 6) To connect the lesson to writing and narration skills, write a prompt on the top of a piece of paper (“Once upon a time . . .” or “There was an old hat . . .”) and ask the students to draw something to complete the sentence (make sure to write down what the student has created!) This can be used as part of the “set” or as a prompt to help create a story for the final performance.
- 7) If there is time, review the other stories and poems shared and create a performed piece for each of them.
- 8) Review what was done in class today noting the favorites and the high points “I liked the way we did \_\_\_\_\_” or “Suzie did \_\_\_\_\_.” (Include all

students.) Begin to discuss the final performance and ask the class what they want to do.

### **Class 6: Exploring the story: Environment**

- 1) Warm-ups: “Dancing Hats,” Picking Apples/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing, Vocal warm-ups. Today emphasize the environment. What if the pond is frozen? What foods do we eat in the fall? In the spring? In the summer? Would it be easy or hard to dig for worms in the winter? How could we dig for them when the ground is frozen?
- 2) New Warm Up: Show everyone an imaginary ball. Hold it in your hand, roll, it, toss it (without words) to show what it looks like. Now ask the students to pass it around. When it gets back to you, change it (silly putty, heavy, hot, large, small, cold, etc.) Now let the students (without words) change it. Have them react to the passing of the object not simply change it instantaneously.
- 3) Review what was done in the last class. Can they act out their story from the previous class? “What was your favorite thing we did?” Take note of the student’s favorites and ones to show in their final performance.
- 4) Ask students if they remember the poem, “That Spells Hat” (from Class 2)—if not, sing it for them and ask them to sing along. Use this song to transition into discussing environment. Relate it to the books read last time. “Where did each event take place? What was the weather like? Does that make a difference in what we do on stage?”
- 5) Sing “That Spells Hat” again and this time have the students act out the different endings.
- 6) Sit down and read *A Hat for Minerva Louise* by Janet Morgan Stoeke. “How does Minerva’s environment affect her? How does it affect the other chickens?” “What is her solution?” “Does it work?”
- 7) Now have students improvise a snow day. How does it change from the beginning of a snow day (excitement, build a snowman, etc.) to the end of the day (being cold, wet, tired) to coming inside (hot coco, fireplace, etc.) Now improvise going to the beach, the jungle, the swamp, the mountains, etc.
- 8) Turn this in to a “treasure hunt” by asking the students what they found. Have them “show” you what they have found instead of simply telling you (Are they petting it? Is it hard or soft? Is it attached to something? Heavy?) Why is it important to show this on stage?
- 9) Now apply this to the stories and poems that have been reading. “How does this change the performance of the piece? How does it affect your voice? The way you walk? Your body language?”
- 10) Review what was done in class today. This is the day to start finalizing what will be done for the final performance.

### **Class 7: Exploring the story: Improvisation/ Rehearsal**

- 1) Warm-ups: Have students choose what they are going to pick off the tree...how does this change from before? Is it heavy? Light? Long? How

does it change the eating of it? Picking Apples/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing, vocal warm ups. Imaginary Ball.

- 2) Review what was done in the last class. “What was your favorite thing we did?”
- 3) Ask them what makes a good story? “What is your favorite story?” “Why?” Discuss parts of a story (beginning, middle, end).
- 4) Revisit *This is the Hat* and *Mr. Momboo’s Hat*. Without reviewing, have students improvise their favorite scene (try to encourage them to *show* you the scene not just tell it to you.)
- 5) Now put them in groups of two or three and give each group a hat. Have them think up a story using that hat (abstract or traditional). Now perform them for each other.
- 6) Transition into the pieces you have chosen for your final performance. How can you change them to make them better? Improv it out!
- 7) Now take one of these stories or the one created in Class 5 and explore it beyond what you have now. Place it in a new setting (environment), give the characters new traits (walk, gesture, voice, etc.), use a different hat (how does this change what it can be used for? i.e. A straw hat can’t hold water.)
- 8) Sit down and review what was done today in class. “What are you excited about?”

#### **Class 8: Exploring the story: Cultural/ Rehearsal**

- 1) Review what was done in the last class. “What was your favorite thing we did?” “How has our story changed?” “How has our show changed?”
- 2) Warm-ups: Picking Apples/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing, vocal warm-ups, imaginary ball.
- 3) Today, emphasize the cultural aspect of theatre. When playing “Dancing Hats” use different music and talk about where it comes from. Could you add a new dance? If so, what hat would you wear? Try to incorporate your own student’s backgrounds and ethnicity.
- 4) Show students pictures of hats from different countries. How would this change our show? Have students describe the different hats they like.
- 5) Have the students improv setting their show in a different country or climate.
- 6) Rehearse show in order—the more routine you make it the better for this age group.
- 7) Review what was done in class today making note of the achievements and high points and what will be worked on next week.

#### **Class 9: Rehearsal/ Create a set**

- 1) Warm-ups: “Dancing Hats” (use different music and talk about what it is! Could you add a new dance? If so, what hat would you wear? Try to incorporate your own student’s backgrounds and ethnicity.), Picking Apples/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing, vocal warm-ups, imaginary ball.

- 2) Introduce “set.” Have students describe what their dream set for this production would be. Then talk about what they could really create.
- 3) Read “Hats of Every Color.” Ask the students what kind of hat is their favorite. Have students create a hat out of a found material (go outside!), paper plate, construction paper, and other craft items. Use these to decorate the space.
- 4) Rehearse the full performance.
- 5) Review what was done today and give notes (try to be encouraging). Talk about what will happen during the next class (performance).

### **Class 10: Rehearsal and Performance**

- 1) Warm-ups: Good morning stretch/hug yourself, Picking Apples (or chosen food/ Digging for Worms/ Going Fishing, vocal warm-ups, imaginary ball.
- 2) Rehearse the full show, making few changes.
- 3) Perform it!

### **Recommended Modifications and Accommodations**

- Attention should be paid to the average age of the class (i.e. if the class is younger, attention should be given to one or two poems instead of all.)
- Attention should be paid to the attention span of the class and modifications made accordingly (i.e. if the class is high-energy make sure to keep activities engaging and vary activities—sitting, playing, standing—to accommodate this)

### **Specific Resources for Unit**

- Tennessee State Board of Education’s Developmental Standards for birth-48 months and the revised standards (with common core) for four year olds
- *The Intentional Teacher* by Ann Epstein: especially pages 23-40 (language), 89-105 (physical movement), 107-126 (visual art)
- Poetry for exploration (attached)
- Books: *Whose Hat* by Margaret Miller, *This is The Hat* by Nancy Van Laan, *Mister Momboo’s Hat* by Ralph Leemis, and *A Hat for Minerva Louise* by Janet Morgan Stoeke
- *Kidstuff: A Treasury of Early Childhood Enrichment Materials* Volume 4 Number 5
- *Perform It!* By Jan Helling Croteau
- *Kids Take the Stage* by Lenka Peterson and Dan O’Connor

### **General Resources**

- The public library
- Interview and observation of preschool teachers/classroom
- *Designs for Living and Learning* by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter

**Poems to be Used in Class**

**“Hats”** Anonymous

*The Cat in the Hat,*

I’m sure you’ve heard that.

But now here’s a new one,

A story ‘bout hats.

Hats can be short,

And hats can be tall.

You can wear them to the market,

Or you can wear them playin’ ball.

Some people wear their hats

To block away the sun.

Some people wear their hats

Just because they think it’s fun.

The pilgrims, they wore hats,

And nurses, they do too.

Sombreros are a Spanish hat,

But that I bet you knew.

Hats can be all colors,

All shapes and sizes too.

Like a cowboy hat or a pirates hat

In black or white or blue.

Magicians use their hats

To pull their rabbits from.

And a sailor has his hat on

When it’s home from sea he comes.

There are hats for all occasions

And many places too.

So tonight we thought we’d model

The hats we made for you.



**“Dancing Hats”** by Shelia Debs from *Kidstuff*

When I wear an Indian headdress,  
 My feet dance to a tom-tom’s beat.  
 When I wear the hat of a gaucho,  
 My feet dance a fandango tango.  
 When I wear a Frenchman’s beret,  
 My feet dance the cancan.  
 When I wear a straw hat,  
 My feet dance tappity, tap, tap.  
 When I wear a sombrero,  
 My feet dance around a hat to and fro.  
 Hats make my feet start prancing.  
 Hats are made for dancing.

**“That Spells Hats”** Original Author Unknown

Sung to: "Frere Jacques"

H-A-T-S

H-A-T-S

That spells hats

That spells hats

Everybody wears them

Everybody wears them

When they're *cold*. (*insert new reason*)

When they're *cold*. (*insert new reason*)

**“Our Hats”** Original Author Unknown

These are our hats.

What are they for?

They keep our heads *warm* when we go out the door.

**“Hat Happy”** Original Author Unknown

I wear my hat upon my head  
I wear my hat upon my hair  
I wear it here I wear it there  
My hat and I go everywhere.

I wear it in the rain and snow  
I wear it even when it's hot  
My hair feels lonely when its off  
My head feels happy when its not.

And when it's time to get to bed  
And Mama says, "Take off your hat,"  
I do exactly as I'm told  
And put it on my kitty cat!

**“Hats of Every Color”** by Heather Tekavec

I'm a clown, a jolly fellow.  
My hat is the color of yellow.  
When I fight fires, I protect my head.  
My hat is the color of red.  
I catch robbers; here's a clue:  
My hat is the color of blue.  
I hide rabbits in my magic hat.  
My hat is the color of black.  
I'm a chef, I cook just right.  
My hat is the color white.  
I'm a king, my crown is old.  
It's a shiny shade of gold.

### **Preschool Theatre Terms**

Cue- a signal for an actor to speak or move on stage, often the last word or action of another character

Blocking- directions given to the actor as to their movement onstage

Script-the written (usually published) lines and blocking for a play, scene, monologue, or one-act

Pantomime- performing a scene or action without using words or sounds

Improvisation- creating a brief acting scene with little preparation and no script

Projection- speaking loudly and using proper breathing techniques

Diction- speaking clearly; clearly pronouncing all consonants

Neutral position- feet are shoulder width apart, shoulders back, slight bend in knees and head up

Apron- the area of the stage in front of the curtain

House- where the audience sits

Wings- the area offstage to the right and left; they are usually curtained and serve as entrances and exits for the actors as well as storage for any scenery taken on and off stage

Director- one who oversees the entire vision of the play; he or she usually give the actors blocking and meet with the design team to create a unified vision of the production

Choreographer- creates/blocks any special movement for a show, such as dance numbers or fight scenes

**APPENDIX B****ASSESSMENT KEY**

### Assessment Key

\*Using Bloom's Taxonomy as suggested by Tennessee State Board of Education.

\*\*Use this to assess individual students and the class as a whole to determine progress; use this throughout the unit.

	<b>High: Evaluate &amp; Create</b>	<b>Middle: Apply &amp; Analyze</b>	<b>Low: Remember &amp; Understand</b>
<b>Re-telling of a <i>new</i> or previously read story/ poem</b>	Can create a new story based on some aspect (plot, character, etc.) of original story, and/or can change an aspect of the story with logical outcome	Remembers plot in detail and can answer questions about characters decisions, emotions, and environmental factors.	Remembers basic plot details
<b>Identification of rhyming words</b>	Can create rhyming words and put them in a sentence	Can identify and can create new rhyming word	Can identify rhyming words
<b>Movement to music</b>	Creates own movement that fits the situation, is on beat, and shows variety	Creates own movement without encouragement	Shows some movement with strong encouragement from instructor
<b>Expression (Voice, body, face)</b>	Creates proper and unique expressions that fit within the scene without guidance	Creates standard/ stereotypical expressions that fit within the scene	Maintains same expression throughout scene
<b>Character creation</b>	Creates a new character using the voice, body and movement	Creates a new character using one or more of the following: the voice, body and movement	Cannot create a new character or characterization different from own self
<b>Following directions</b>	Follows all directions at first request or without being asked	Follows most directions at least by the second request	Does not follow directions
<b>Handles props/ costumes/etc.</b>	Creates new uses for item and uses it in a creative way/scene	Uses/Describes item in a new way that does not make sense	Uses item for intended purpose
<b>Pantomime of story/ poem</b>	Can act out the story/ poem nonverbally adding creative details or extra steps	Can act out the basic story/ poem nonverbally	Can relate some of the story nonverbally

<b>Teamwork</b>	Shows leadership within the group (new ideas, giving gentle direction, working with others to create)	Works well with others to solve a problem or create a scene	Has trouble being a part of group work
<b>Acting out a story/poem</b>	Can create a character that tells <b>and</b> acts out the story	Can verbally perform a basic story with simple characterization	Can verbally relate the basic story with little characterization

## **APPENDIX C**

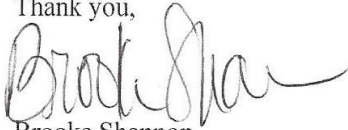
### **PERMISSION APPROVAL FROM TEACHING SITES**

January 15, 2015

Grace St. Luke's Episcopal School  
246 S. Belvedere  
Memphis, TN 38104  
(901) 278-0200

I am aware and give permission to Erin Lindberg to conduct observations, interviews, and collect data relating to and to be included in her thesis research for the University of Northern Colorado's Masters of Theatre Education Program. I understand she will obtain direct consent and permission from student's parents and/or caregivers and will be in touch with them throughout the process. I also understand that no identifiable information on specific students or their family members will be used in the published research.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Brooke Shannon".

Brooke Shannon  
Director of After School Care and Enrichment  
Grace St. Luke's Episcopal School  
bshannon@gslschool.org

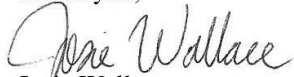


January 15, 2015

Lindenwood Church  
After School Care  
2400 Union Ave  
Memphis, TN 38112

I am aware and give permission to Erin Lindberg to conduct observations, interviews, and collect data relating to and to be included in her thesis research for the University of Northern Colorado's Masters of Theatre Education Program. I understand she will obtain direct consent and permission from student's parents and/or caregivers and will be in touch with them throughout the process. I also understand that no identifiable information on specific students or their family members will be used in the published research.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Josie Wallace".

Josie Wallace  
Child Care Director  
Lindenwood Childcare Center  
901-458-8687  
[josie.wallace@lindenwood.net](mailto:josie.wallace@lindenwood.net)

January 15, 2015

Maria Montessori School  
740 Harbor Bend  
Memphis, TN 38103

I am aware and give permission to Erin Lindberg to conduct observations, interviews, and collect data relating to and to be included in her thesis research for the University of Northern Colorado's Masters of Theatre Education Program. I understand she will obtain direct consent and permission from student's parents and/or caregivers and will be in touch with them throughout the process. I also understand that no identifiable information on specific students or their family members will be used in the published research.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maria Cole".

Maria Cole  
Director  
Maria Montessori School  
mms1986@bellsouth.net  
(901) 527-3444

**APPENDIX D****MINOR, PARENT, AND TEACHER  
CONSENT FORMS**



Project Title: *The Effects of Theatre Education on the Development of Preschool Students*  
 Researcher: Erin Lindberg, School of Theatre Education  
 Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx E-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxx or xxxxxxxxxxxx  
 Advisor: Dr. Mary Schuttler Phone: (970) 351-1926 Email: mary.schuttler@unco.edu

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
 UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
 (Minor form)

Parents

I will be sharing the below script with your child during our first class time together. I ask that you also read this to them and then sign below. I will never use you or your child's name nor any personal or identifiable information in my research. This consent form is simply to make sure everyone is aware. Thank you again for your support of this very important research.

Students, throughout our time together, we will be playing theatre games, reading books, and sharing our own stories from our imaginations. We will also be creating our own show for our family and friends to see. I want you to know that I will not only be playing along with you, but also watching all of the awesome things you are doing. Sometimes I will write notes to myself in this journal on all the great things you are doing, the stories you are sharing, all the new things you are learning, and the creative ways you play. I am then going to share some of these things with other teachers and publish it in a book for others to read. Did you know I am in school too? I am learning how to be the best teacher I can be! This book I am writing is also for my teachers to read so they can help me be better at teaching you and all my students. There are other people who will be reading this book so they can understand how awesome and important theater for younger students is! If you do not want me to write these things down or do not want me to share this with other teachers, please let me know at any time and I will stop writing. I want this always to be fun for us! Your parents have told me it is ok for you to talk to me and to share these things with me. Do you have any questions for me? Thank you so much for your help!

*\*Please initial the appropriate statement and sign below.*

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement to my child.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have NOT read the above statement to my child and have decided not to allow my child to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement to my child and have decided to allow my child to participate in this study with these restrictions\_\_\_\_\_.

Child's Name\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name/ Sign Name/ Date\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature/ Date\_\_\_\_\_



Project Title: *The Effects of Theatre Education on the Development of Preschool Students*  
 Researcher: Erin Lindberg, School of Theatre Education  
 Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx E-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxx or xxxxxxxxxxxx  
 Advisor: Dr. Mary Schuttler Phone: (970) 351-1926 Email: mary.schuttler@unco.edu

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
 UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
 (Parent form)

Parents,

Thank you for enrolling your child in this semester's preschool theatre class, *Hats! Exploring the world of theatre through poetry and prose*. This particular program is also very special because it will be used in the research for my Master's thesis exploring the effects that theatre education has in the development of personal and interpersonal skills in young students. The research will be conducted in several ways: personal class observations, teacher and parent surveys, and interviews with teacher and parents. I will be observing the progress made by each student during the course of our semester and speaking with you about how you feel the class is affecting your child through two surveys taken at the beginning and end of the program, and through personal conversations with you. I will be compiling this information over the course of the program and all data will be kept in a secure location to which only I will have access (any identifiable information will be shredded after 3 years). *I will not be using any names or identifying characteristics in my notations or in the thesis itself. I will also take every precaution to protect you and your child's safety and confidentiality.* This information will help me by giving me concrete examples of how theatre education techniques can be used to enhance learning and social/ personal development in young students. By signing below, you understand that my observations of your student's progress will be used in my thesis. In addition, I would like to use photographs taken during the process to show costuming, set, and action that may include your student in them. *I will not be using any names or identifying characteristics in my notations or in the thesis itself. I will also take every precaution to protect you and your child's safety and confidentiality.*

If you or your child ever feels the need to no longer participate in this study please feel free to let me know. The decision to take part in this study is solely up to you and your child and will not be taken personally nor will it affect their participation in the class. I look forward to working with every student and want to bring out the best in all of them!

Participation is voluntary. You or he/she may decide not to participate in this study, and if he/she begins participation he/she may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. The decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like your student to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910. If you are willing for your child to participate, and do not mind me using my observations of his/her performance or photographs that may include him/her, please sign below. I look forward to working with each of you.

*\*Please initial the appropriate statement and sign below.*

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided to allow my child to participate in this study.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided NOT to allow my child to participate in this study.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided to allow my child to participate in this study  
 with these restrictions\_\_\_\_\_.

Child's Name\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name/ Sign Name/ Date\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature/ Date\_\_\_\_\_



Project Title: *The Effects of Theatre Education on the Development of Preschool Students*  
 Researcher: Erin Lindberg, School of Theatre Education  
 Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx E-mail: xxxxxxxxxxx or xxxxxxxxxxx  
 Advisor: Dr. Mary Schuttler Phone: (970) 351-1926 Email: mary.schuttler@unco.edu

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
 UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
 (Teacher form)

Thank you for consenting to fill out a survey and/or be interviewed on your observations of your student's developments during the course of this special preschool theatre program. This particular program is very special because it will be used in the research for my Master's thesis exploring the effects that theatre education has in the development of personal and interpersonal skills in young students. I will simply be observing the progress made by each student during the course of our semester and speaking with you about how you feel the class is affecting your students. This information will help me by giving me concrete examples of how theatre education techniques can be used to enhance learning and social/ personal development in young students. By signing below, you understand that my observations of your student's progress will be used in my thesis. *I will not be using any names or identifying characteristics in my notations or in the thesis itself. I will also take every precaution to protect you and your student's safety and confidentiality.* All parents have been given a similar consent form and a statement of consent has been read to all students. All research participants have signed a similar consent. You will only be asked your observations of the students whose parents have signed a consent form and who are participating in this program. If you ever feels the need to no longer participate in this study please feel free to let me know.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study; and if participating, may decide at any time to stop. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910. I look forward to working with you.

*\*Please initial the appropriate statement and sign below.*

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided NOT to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided to participate in this study with these restrictions\_\_\_\_\_.

Print Name\_\_\_\_\_

Sign Name/ Date\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature/ Date\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX E****DISCLAIMER**



Dear Parents and Students,

I am so glad and thankful that you have agreed to be a part of this preschool theater class and to assist me in creating an outstanding master's thesis. I encourage you to enjoy yourself and have a fun experience with this class! I have made the curriculum available to you but if you ever have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at any time via email at [xxxxxxx@xxxxxx.com](mailto:xxxxxxx@xxxxxx.com), my cell at (xxx) xxx-xxxx, or in person. We will not be doing anything out of the ordinary, I will simply be making observation in my teacher's journal on the skill development of each student as it pertains to the Tennessee Standards for preschool students. This is a common practice with most teachers in the classroom. These observations will be available to you at any time. I would like to be transparent in all that I do and will never use you or your child's name or any identifiable characteristics in my research; I will do everything in my power to keep you and your child safe and their and your information and comments confidential. I will also be asking you for your feedback as we progress throughout this program. I will be asking you for observations you make at home with your child and their participation in this theatre class. Thank you for taking this journey with me as we explore all of the wonderful thing that theatre can bring into a child's life. I welcome your feedback, participation, and comments at any time.

Please understand that your child's participation is strictly voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study, and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Thank you for your support and trust.

*\*Please initial the appropriate statement and sign below.*

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided to allow my child to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided NOT to allow my child to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above statement and have decided to allow my child to participate in this study with these restrictions\_\_\_\_\_.

Print Name\_\_\_\_\_ Child's Name\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)



**APPENDIX F****SURVEYS PRIOR TO PROGRAM**

## Parent Questionnaire I

**Please fill out the following information and completely as possible; complete sentences are not needed. The completion of this form indicates that you are consenting to participate in this study.**

*\*No identifying information will be used in the publication of this research. The identifying characteristics (such as name) are for immediate identification only. All information on this form will be kept secure and confidential.*

Parent (Filling out form)\_\_\_\_\_ Child's Name\_\_\_\_\_

1) Have you ever been to a play or performance? \_\_Yes \_\_No If yes, please include recent productions: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Has your child ever been to a play or performance? \_\_Yes \_\_No If yes, please include recent productions:\_\_\_\_\_

3) Has your child ever participated in a play or performance (school plays count)? \_\_Yes \_\_No If yes, please include recent productions:\_\_\_\_\_

4) Are you aware of the term "creative drama" or "dramatic play"? If so, please explain  
\_\_\_\_\_

5) What do you consider your child's strengths: *(Use the back if needed)*

Socially\_\_\_\_\_

Emotionally\_\_\_\_\_

Academically\_\_\_\_\_

6) What do you consider your child's weaknesses: *(Use the back if needed)*

Socially\_\_\_\_\_

Emotionally\_\_\_\_\_

Academically\_\_\_\_\_

7) Does your child enjoy play time? \_\_Yes \_\_No Does this include playing dress-up or role playing? \_\_Yes \_\_No

How does your child usually spend his/her free or unstructured time?\_\_\_\_\_

8) What is your child most interested in?\_\_\_\_\_

9) What is your child least interested in?\_\_\_\_\_

10) Is there anything you feel the instructor needs to know?\_\_\_\_\_

11) Do you mind sharing why you enrolled your child in this creative drama/theatre class?\_\_\_\_\_

---

**Thank you for your participation! You will receive another questionnaire at the end of the semester to reflect on any changes you have observed. Your completion of these forms is very much appreciated!**

### Administrator Questionnaire I

**Please fill out the following information and completely as possible; complete sentences are not needed. Please use the back if you need more room. The completion of this form indicates that you are consenting to participate in this study.**

*\*No identifying information will be used in the publication of this research. The identifying characteristics (such as name) are for immediate identification only. All information on this form will be kept secure and confidential.*

Administrator/ Teacher (Filling out form) \_\_\_\_\_

1) Have you ever been to a play or performance? \_\_Yes \_\_No If yes, please include recent productions: \_\_\_\_\_

2) How important do you feel creative drama is to a preschool student (5 high priority, 1 no need)? \_\_\_\_\_

3) Are you aware of the term 'dramatic play' or 'creative drama'? If so, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

4) To your knowledge, do you currently use any theatre education techniques in your classroom? (i.e. ice breakers, dress-up, creative play, scripts, etc.) \_\_Yes \_\_No

If yes, what techniques do you use? \_\_\_\_\_

How do the students generally respond to these techniques? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been using these techniques? \_\_\_\_\_

5) Is there anything you feel the instructor needs to know? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**I know your schedule is tight but your participation is greatly valued! Thank you!**

## **APPENDIX G**

### **SURVEYS AFTER THE PROGRAM**

## Parent Questionnaire II

**Please fill out the following information and completely as possible; complete sentences are not needed. Please use the back if you need more room. The completion of this form indicates that you are consenting to participate in this study.**

*\*No identifying information will be used in the publication of this research. The identifying characteristics (such as name) are for immediate identification only. All information on this form will be kept secure and confidential.*

Parent (Filling out form)\_\_\_\_\_ Child's Name\_\_\_\_\_

Have you noticed a change in any of the following areas since your child has been enrolled in the SunFish theatre class? If you would like to go into more detail, please use the back of this form.

- 1) ☐ Yes ☐ No Communication (more description, adjectives, expression, gestures, etc.)
- 2) ☐ Yes ☐ No Socialization (more at ease, leadership, etc.)
- 3) ☐ Yes ☐ No Vocabulary
- 4) ☐ Yes ☐ No Curiosity
- 5) ☐ Yes ☐ No Desire to learn or experience/try new things
- 6) ☐ Yes ☐ No Expression (vocal, facial, gestures, body language)
- 7) Do you feel this class has enhanced or changed your child's strengths in the following? How? *(Use the back if needed)*

Socially\_\_\_\_\_

Emotionally\_\_\_\_\_

Academically\_\_\_\_\_

- 8) Do you feel this class has enhanced or changed your child's weaknesses in the following? How? *(Use the back if needed)*

Socially\_\_\_\_\_

Emotionally\_\_\_\_\_

Academically\_\_\_\_\_

- 9) How does your child usually spend his/her free or unstructured time? Has this changed since attending theatre class?\_\_\_\_\_

- 10) What is your child most interested in? Has this changed since attending theatre class?\_\_\_\_\_

- 11) What is your child least interested in? Has this changed since attending theatre class?\_\_\_\_\_

- 12) Is there anything you feel the instructor needs to know? Have you experienced any situations or made observations that directly involve your child's participation in this theatre class? Please explain.\_\_\_\_\_

**I know your schedule is tight but your participation is greatly valued! Thank you!**

## Administrator Questionnaire II

**Please fill out the following information and completely as possible; complete sentences are not needed. Please use the back if you need more room. The completion of this form indicates that you are consenting to participate in this study.**

*\*No identifying information will be used in the publication of this research. The identifying characteristics (such as name) are for immediate identification only. All information on this form will be kept secure and confidential.*

Administrator/ Teacher (Filling out form)\_\_\_\_\_

- 1) Have you noticed any of your students talking about this creative drama class? Please explain (mood, situation, etc.).

\_\_\_\_\_

- 2) Do you feel this creative drama class has changed the environment of the school or classroom? \_\_Yes \_\_No  
If so, how?\_\_\_\_\_

- 3) Have you observed any noticeable changes in participating student's development in the following? If so, please specify.

Socially\_\_\_\_\_

Emotionally\_\_\_\_\_

Academically\_\_\_\_\_

- 4) Is there anything you feel the instructor needs to know? Have you experienced any situations or made any observations that directly relate to the participation of students in this theatre class? Please explain.\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**I know your schedule is tight but your participation is greatly valued! Thank you!**

**APPENDIX H**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**

*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: January 26, 2015

TO: Erin Lindberg  
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [694201-2] Theatre Practices with Preschool Students  
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: January 26, 2015  
EXPIRATION DATE: January 26, 2016  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of January 26, 2016.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.



Erin –

**Thank you for your patience with the IRB process. Your revisions and provision of additionally requested materials is much appreciated and thorough.**

**Before using your consent/assent forms in participant recruitment and data collection, please add the following mandatory sentence verbatim to the last paragraph instead of your contact information (which is already included in the heading):**

**"If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910."**

**These revised materials do not need to be submitted for subsequent review. Please be sure to use all of the specific revised, described protocols, and amended materials in your participant recruitment and data collection.**

**Best wishes with your very interesting thesis research. Don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.**

**Sincerely,**

**Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair**

**This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.**

*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: June 10, 2015  
 TO: Erin Lindberg  
 FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB  
 PROJECT TITLE: [694201-3] Theatre Practices with Preschool Students  
 SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification  
 ACTION: APPROVED  
 APPROVAL DATE: June 10, 2015  
 EXPIRATION DATE: January 26, 2016  
 REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure. All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of January 26, 2016. Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project. If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

**Erin-**

**Hello and thank you for submitting the amendment of the additional parent questionnaire to be included in your research. Your amendment is approved. Best wishes with your continued work on this research project.**

**Sincerely,**

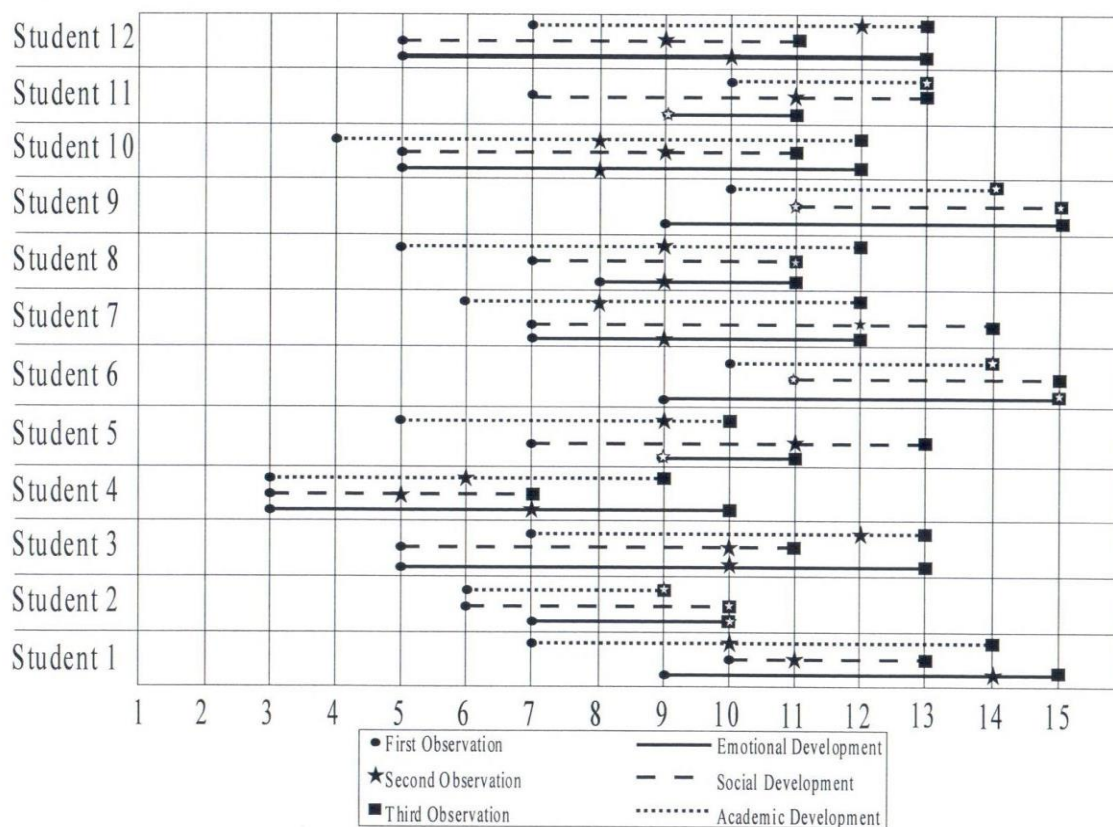
**Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair**

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

**APPENDIX I****GRAPHS OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT**

## Graph 1

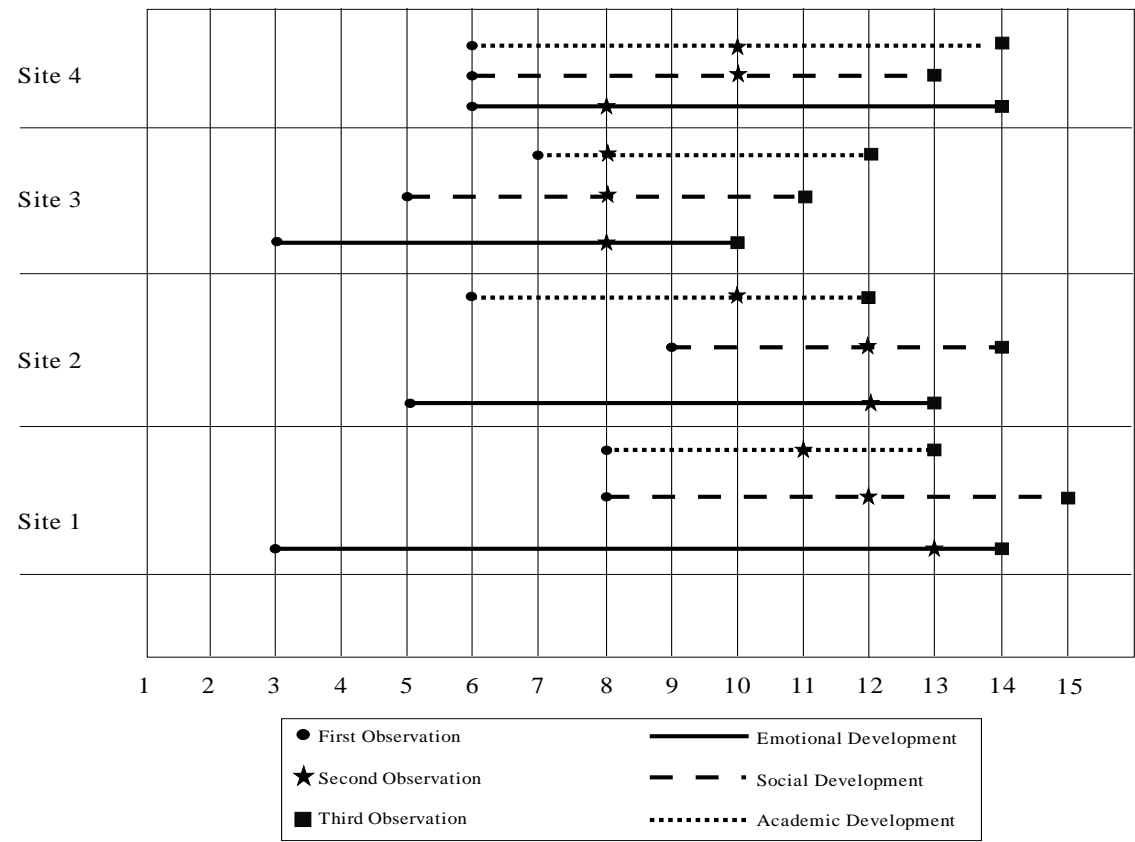
Graph of Individual Student Development



Graph showing the development of each participating student in the areas of emotional, social, and academic development from the first, second, and final Assessment Key observations.

Graph 2

Graph of Classroom Development



Graph showing the development of the class as a whole at each teaching site in the areas of emotional, social, and academic development from the first, second, and final Assessment Key observations.