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## **An Alternative Practicum Model for Teaching and Learning**

Key words: practicum, drama, collaboration, bullying

### **ABSTRACT**

In this article, I have examined how a drama-based practicum impacted learning in meaningful ways for pre-service teachers and grade-6 students during a three-week alternative teaching placement. Because the nature of drama-based teaching and learning invites participants to think and feel with ideas and emotions continually intersecting, I investigated cognitive and affective learning moments during a three-week collective play development process. The recorded participant responses clearly suggest that using this process to address social justice issues created a conducive and rewarding learning environment for participants.

*The creativity and excitement from the students made it all worth while. They were happy to learn and eager to participate in each lesson. After teaching in this style, why would you go back to the traditional style? (Pre-service teacher)*

Instead of completing a traditional teaching practicum, 12 pre-service teachers from the University of Prince Edward Island engaged in a drama-based teaching unit with grade-6 students for a component of their final school placement. In groups of three, the pre-service teachers led four elementary classes in a variety of drama-based activities before guiding the students into a collective play development process that highlighted their learning about bullying and drama. Prior to working with the elementary students, the pre-service teachers developed

their own collective drama and toured their social justice play to schools across Prince Edward Island. The three-week team-teaching project with elementary students enabled these pre-service teachers to apply their recent learning of collective playbuilding, and, equally as important, to create a meaningful learning experience for grade 6 students.

Over the last few decades researchers have reported the positive effects of the arts on academic and student development (Catterall, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Eisner, 1998; Deasy, 2002; Greene, 1995; Rose, Parks, Androes & McMahon, 2000; Wagner, 1998.). Furthermore, a number of studies have specifically considered the impact of drama on social learning (Basourakos, 1998; Beale 2001; Belliveau, 2004; Bouchard, 2002; Courtney, 1980; Edmiston, 2000; Gallagher, 2001; Winston, 1998). Of these studies, however, the impact drama-based teaching has on (pre-service) teachers' professional growth and students' perception of learning has yet to be thoroughly researched.

This article builds and expands on current research in drama and learning, as I examine how a drama-based approach impacted learning about teaching (and social justice) for pre-service teachers and students during a three-week practicum. The nature of drama-based teaching and learning invites participants to think and feel because ideas and emotions continually intersect; therefore, it is important to recognize and highlight both cognitive and affective learning occurrences within the drama practicum. Because the interplay between the approach (drama) and the content (bullying) became a site for meaning-making, I examined through participant responses how the pedagogy fostered a deeper understanding of teaching as well as social justice.

## BACKGROUND RESEARCH

### A. Drama

A primary goal of using drama in schools, according to O'Neill (1995), is to help students better understand themselves and the world they live in. Using drama to explore curriculum and self can enhance students' understanding (of various content and issues) and allow them to critically reflect on what they are experiencing through the arts-based process (Basourakos, 1998). Henry (2000) suggests that by improvising and role playing, younger students develop emotional (as well as cognitive) intelligence, negotiating skills, and the ability to translate ideas to a new situation. Drama is unique because it allows participants to imagine without having to live with the consequences of their imaginative actions (Edmiston, 2000). Therefore, it provides a safe approach to learning, and, according to Bouchard (2002), "drama creates a distance between individuals and their real-life situations through the characters and situations being enacted" (p. 410). By the same token, as drama activities unfold, the line between what is being symbolically represented and the so-called real life experiences begins to blur. Needlands (1990) suggests that "the fictional situation and characters become more and more recognizable to the creators of the drama, and the relationships begin to form between what is happening in the drama and what happens in the outside world" (p. 69). What is more, the process of drama allows, indeed encourages, participants to shift positions, which invites multiple perspectives and points of view to be represented. Ultimately, the dramatic activities enable participants to experience vicariously that which the other may be living through (Gallagher, 2001).

Theatre practitioners and activists interested in community building and/or social justice issues often engage in collaborative play development (Boal, 1995; Lang, 2002; Van Erven,

2001; Taylor, 2003). This collaborative approach includes various drama strategies (e.g., role playing, improvisation, tableaux) in the collective building process, and equally as important it represents an innovative pedagogical approach (or structure) for teaching and learning. A collaborative play development process (ideally) fosters a constructivist, student-centred, community approach, where peer learning occurs, group dynamics are developed, and a greater appreciation for each others' strengths is recognized and celebrated.

## **B. PRACTICUM**

Although Seagall (2002) and others claim that the practicum experience is the most valuable aspect of teacher education programs, Schulz (2005), Goodlad (1990) and Zeichner (1996, 1999) question some of the ways conventional practica are approached in teacher preparation programs and suggest alternative models. The technical model of focusing on skill development, mastering lesson plans, and classroom management should be, and continues to be an important component, but it is not sufficient preparation for pre-service teachers. Schulz (2005) sees a need for a change towards “a practicum experience that provides teacher candidates with opportunities for inquiry, for trying and testing new ideas within collaborative relationships, and for talking about teaching and learning in new ways” (p. 148). Instead of demonstrating instructional skills learned in methods courses, Zeichner (1996) suggests that the practicum should be a time for growth and learning, where pre-service teachers come to understand the broader implications of being a teacher, and to appreciate the ultimate aim of teaching: to help children learn.

The UPEI drama practicum aimed to broaden what it means to be a teacher, offering an arts-based approach to learning that included cognitive as well as affective ways of knowing, working in collaboration with others, and looking at social justice as an integral part of a learning

environment. The three-week drama project was designed as a fresh turn in practica experiences, in that it set out to broaden the scope of teacher education. With the inclusion of a drama-based teaching focus, along with a social justice component, this practicum took teacher and student learning in new directions and opened possibilities for new ways of knowing.

## **CONTEXT OF STUDY**

The majority of teacher education programs in North America consist primarily of course work and teaching placements in schools. These practica generally require pre-service teachers to spend from two weeks to three months in a classroom working with another teacher learning the skills of the profession. At UPEI, pre-service teachers must complete four teaching blocks of five to six weeks duration spread across the two-year program. In the first three placements pre-service teachers generally work in traditional school environments; however, in their fourth and final six-week block they are encouraged to experience an alternative practica.

Over the last few years, the UPEI alternative practicum has evolved, with more and more pre-service teachers taking advantage of placements that may further develop their pedagogical skills. Placements have included pre-service teachers working with children in hospitals who are hospitalized for extended periods of time; developing and delivering curriculum material with local museums and Parks Canada; offering pedagogical support in a women's shelter, specifically teen mothers; and working in international placements in developing countries. A clear plan for the alternative practicum has to be developed by the pre-service teacher, and the objectives should be suitable for the agency where they will work. As importantly, a faculty member has to be willing and able to supervise such placements.

Because of my drama background, I proposed a drama-focused alternative practicum to interested pre-service teachers in 2002-03. In my course work, I had introduced drama as a way

of learning across the curriculum, a way of creating a student-centred environment, community building, and social justice. Eight pre-service teachers expressed interest in the drama-based alternative practicum, and, respectively, they all took on the challenge with me in 2002-03. During our initial meetings and through drama-based activities we brainstormed potential topics in search of discovering a theme for our collective play development process. Joan MacLeod's (2002) play about the Reena Virk incident *The Shape of a Girl* kept reoccurring in our discussions and role playing sessions, so eventually the theme of bullying, with a particular focus on the bystander, emerged. [See Belliveau (2004) "Pre-service teachers engage in Collective Drama" for specific details about the process and learning that emerged in the first year of the alternative drama practicum.]

In 2004, in the second year of the alternative drama practicum, 12 pre-service teachers were selected.<sup>1</sup> The candidates once again collectively decided to tackle the issue of bullying, as they saw this as an important issue to address while on their previous practica.<sup>2</sup> Of the 12 participants, only two had any prior theatre or drama experience before entering the education program, and the group included pre-service teachers from various levels (primary, intermediate, and secondary) and disciplines (Science, English, Social Studies, French). Prior to their six-week (March-April, 2004) practicum, the pre-service teachers began collectively developing an anti-bullying play with a grade 6 audience in mind.<sup>3</sup> This drama process built on some of the skills the pre-service teachers developed from an Integrated Arts class they had previously taken with me, where we worked on various drama strategies (tableaux, role playing, improvisation, forum

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<sup>1</sup> Over 25 of the 60 eligible pre-service teachers applied for the drama practicum in 2004. The selection of candidates was based on criteria such as prior success in teaching, willingness to work in a group, motivation to promote social justice, and willingness to take risks.

<sup>2</sup> I had also received a SSHRC-aid grant with a focus on drama and bullying in 2003, which influenced the direction and topic of the research orientation for the 2004 practicum.

<sup>3</sup> The play development process was part of their ED 498 practicum course.

theatre, among others) through our playbuilding and process drama work.

The play development process used during the practicum was primarily based on Tarlington and Michaels' (1995) collective playbuilding, Boal's (1985) forum theatre, and Rohd's (1998) theatre and community.<sup>4</sup> After two months of researching, writing, and rehearsing, the pre-service teachers spent the first three weeks of their practicum touring their collective piece *You Didn't Do Anything!* to over 40 elementary schools in the province of PEI. Along with the production, the pre-service teachers developed some cohesive pre- and post-learning activities whereby the elementary students were given the opportunity to meet the cast members in small groups and do some interactive forum theatre activities (Boal, 1985).

The second component of the practicum, and the focus of this article, had the pre-service teachers work closely with four elementary classes in a three-week drama unit. Because six of the 12 pre-service teachers had a French background, two of the four classes the group worked with during the practicum were French Immersion, whereas the other two elementary classes were part of the regular English stream.<sup>5</sup> Both schools would be considered urban, although a number of rural children attended the two public institutions because of their French Immersion programs.

During the three-week teaching practicum the elementary students experienced a variety of interactive lessons, exploring different ways of knowing: reading, writing, improvising, music,

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<sup>4</sup> Specific drama activities during the play development phase included developing tableaux based on social justice issues in schools (witnessed by the pre-service teachers, read about in the literature and/or media, or imagined); inserting multiple voices to the tableaux (tapping in); developing scenes from the tableaux; creating one-liners; playing status games; engaging in forum theatre; extracting lyrics from contemporary music; among other group building activities. See Belliveau (under review) "Collective playbuilding: Using arts-based research to understand a social justice drama process in teacher education" for further details on the play development process.

<sup>5</sup> A team-teaching approach was used during this component of the practicum for practical and philosophical reasons. Practically, the pre-service teachers only had three weeks to develop a play with elementary students; therefore, this became more possible with three adults leading whole and then small group work. Philosophically, the drama practicum centred on collaborative team work, thus the team-teaching became an extension to this collective approach to learning.

visual art, poetry, etc. After the initial process of building a community with the grade-6 students through drama-based activities, the pre-service teachers began a collaborative playbuilding process (Tarlington and Michaels, 1995). They developed one-liners about bullying; created tableaux that looked at power imbalance; built scenes from the tableaux; and presented forum theatre activities. The practicum culminated with the elementary students collectively creating their own script around the theme of bullying. They rehearsed their devised script then performed it for other students within their schools as well as for parents. The three-week drama practicum in elementary schools provided pre-service teachers with a rich opportunity to re-think their experience of collectively creating and presenting a social justice drama, and then directly applying their learning and understanding with elementary students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To uncover the learning that emerged during the three-week drama practicum in elementary schools, participants' perceptions about drama as a pedagogical approach were examined, using several methods of assessing outcomes. The research methods consisted of open-ended questionnaires, journals, and focus groups. The variety of methods, or triangulation, guarded against a narrow perspective of the research project. The information was collected from elementary students, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers. Collecting data from three participant groups offered more insights into the learning process because of the multiple perspectives. The data collection took place in April and May 2004, with the analysis beginning soon thereafter.

The elementary students taught by the pre-service teachers completed an open-ended questionnaire at the end of the drama-based unit (n=74) and they wrote journal responses about their learning periodically during the three-week process. These comments offered ways of

understanding how and why the grade-6 students felt the drama project impacted their perceptions about learning through drama. The 12 pre-service teachers also completed an open-ended questionnaire at the end of the project. As well, they kept a journal using semi-focused questions over the preparation and implementation period. They were asked to comment on their growth as teachers, their perceptions of elementary students' learning, and the impact of using drama as a pedagogical approach. A focus group session was conducted with the four teachers in whose classes the pre-service teachers led the drama-based unit. There were four open-ended questions on which teachers could comment on perceived student learning, plus time to add any other feedback. All participant responses (journals, open-ended questionnaires, and focus group) were coded and analyzed for reoccurring themes and insights.<sup>6</sup>

## FINDINGS

### 1. Elementary student responses

The research question asked in this article centres on understanding the ways in which the drama-based approach impacted learning. To examine this larger question in respect to the elementary student responses, I analyze and cluster three sub-themes that emerged. Overlap occurs within the sub-themes, yet the following groupings offer lenses into the learning perceived by the grade-6 participants during the process. All 74 elementary students reflected in their journals about using a drama process as a way to address and deal with social justice. As well, they responded to the question *“Was drama an effective way to learn about bullying?”* in the open-ended questionnaire at the end of the project. Three dominating categories emerged

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<sup>6</sup> The research assistants, acknowledged at the end of this article, read the comments independently to look for reoccurring themes. Then, common themes among the four researchers were used to make generalizations about the recorded data. All participants in the project signed a waiver allowing me to use the data (questionnaires, journals, focus groups) for research purposes. The research project was ethically approved from University of Prince Edward Island's Research Ethics Board.

during the analysis:

### **1.1. The drama approach made learning meaningful.**

- *Acting out helped me to learn about bullying because we experienced it.*
- *By doing drama I will remember it more than writing it down.*
- *Drama helped me express my feelings in a different way and to learn about others.*
- *It was like real life situations and it helped us to know how to cope.*

The students were eager to play out their thoughts in the drama-based process, and because a safe environment was created by the pre-service teachers it appears that many of the elementary participants felt comfortable expressing their ideas vocally and physically.

### **1.2. Feelings experienced during the drama activities.**

- *The songs we listened to made me feel empathy.*
- *I felt unwanted as a low status person in the drama activity - sad, embarrassed, alone.*
- *The role play made me think how people who are bullied must feel. I feel for them.*
- *Being a bystander was hard for me because I didn't know if and when I should get involved. It didn't always feel real or right to step in.*

The various drama-based activities appear to have helped students tap into their affective domain, which allowed them to feel what someone may experience in a bullying situation. As a result this encouraged empathy development among individuals and groups.

### **1.3. A team environment was created**

- *Creating a play is working together as a group and making sure everyone feels comfortable.*
- *Everyone worked together and no one was left out.*

- *We all put our thoughts in to it.*
- *Teamwork, everyone wanted to participate.*

The written comments in the open-ended questionnaire and the journals personalized the data, and their comments support ways in which the drama-based project impacted learning. Over 75 percent of the written comments suggested that students learned a number of strategies to address bullying through the interactive drama process. As well, the majority of students constantly referred to how learning through drama was fun and meaningful for them as individuals.

## **2. Pre-service teachers**

The 12 pre-service teachers who participated in the project kept a journal, in which they reflected on various issues about teaching and learning during the drama practicum in schools. They also responded to an open-ended questionnaire at the end of the project which focused on questions about their perception of student learning as well as their own professional growth through the drama-based unit. A number of themes emerged within the journal and questionnaire responses, and I highlight the dominant responses under two clusters: *perceived student learning* and *professional growth*.

### **2.1. Perceived student learning**

In the pre-service teachers' responses two main themes recurred about their perceptions of student learning through drama during the three-week practicum:

#### **2.1.1. Meaningful learning can be fun.**

- *The students had fun, learned and were on task. They were always eager and excited. Students who look forward to learning are students who will give and get the most out of it.*
- *Not only did the use of drama help the students express themselves and learn about bullying, but it also allowed them to look at this kind of learning as "fun"! The*

*material was not forced upon them. It was brought to them in interesting ways, enabling them to learn through the different teaching methods.*

- *The three-week process has proven to me that learning can be fun. In using drama, our students were able to clearly demonstrate through writing and performing their understanding and feelings towards the issue.*
- *The project proved that learning doesn't have to be painful, and at one point the students' wondered if they were learning since we were having so much fun with all the activities. However, their journal reflections indicate how they were able to tap into all our objectives and learning outcomes.*

Most of the pre-service teachers noticed a significant difference in student motivation during this practicum experience, when comparing it to their previous three practica. They noted how the grade 6 students were intrinsically motivated to learn, and they felt this was largely due to the way the content was presented. The drama-based approach was perceived to be engaging for the elementary students, challenging them to explore social justice as well as their personal beliefs and values. The pre-service teachers expressed how they met the curriculum objectives during the drama unit, and all the while making the content relevant and fun.

### **2.1.2. Cooperative teamwork – learning by doing.**

- *Grade six students are perfectly capable of doing productive small group work, and of solving differences in opinion without teacher interference. They need to have expectations, yes, but beyond guidelines, I think students thrive on being able to create something new, on their own.*
- *The collective play building process gave everyone an equal chance to talk, and I noticed that both the outgoing and the quieter students worked together to discuss the*

- best way to display a scene.*
- *Every student was equally important within their productions, and they really responded to “doing” what they were learning about which really made the important parts stick out. They put the play together themselves with us only guiding them.*
  - *All students were involved in each activity. And not only did they learn about the various types of bullying, but they also learned about solutions. One student commented that she had been told about solutions before, but never had she actually applied them in role play. She thought that now that she had done the action and said the words out loud, it would be easier to do it for real.*

Team-building is often a natural result of drama-based learning because to collectively create a piece everyone needs to be part of the process (Lang, 2002). The pre-service teachers facilitated an environment that fostered positive group dynamics, and within this structure, they quickly realized how grade 6 students could work cooperatively and respectfully in groups when given the opportunity. The pre-service teachers noted how the act/process of collectively building the plays with the elementary students became significant learning moments by creating space for students to clarify and openly discuss their understanding and feelings.

## **2.2. Professional growth**

The pre-service teachers noted in their journals and in the open-ended questionnaire how they felt the alternative drama practicum impacted their beliefs about teaching. Three categories emerged that reflected how pre-service teachers saw the experience as professional growth:

### **2.2.1. Drama is a meaningful approach for learning**

- *The creativity and excitement from the students made it all worth while. They were happy to learn and eager to participate in each lesson. After teaching in this style,*

*why would you go back to the traditional style? Learning is happening for both the teacher and students and it is meaningful and enjoyable.*

- *The practicum helped me become more comfortable in using drama in the classroom, and ultimately more comfortable and aware of who I am as a teacher. This solidified the fact that drama is one of the best ways to teach students. I saw first hand how effective drama is, how much the students enjoyed it, how to bring the curriculum to life.*
- *The project enhanced my desire to continue to incorporate the arts into my classes. I am always trying to think of ways to make my classes more creative and stimulating for the students.*
- *My teaching style was perhaps most greatly affected by this project, from the perspective of tapping resources and talents that I never knew I had. Because of this experience, I feel that I will be able to encourage my students to take risks and try things they otherwise believe they are not suited for.*

Drama as an approach to teaching was relatively new to the majority of the pre-service teachers in the project; therefore, they were unsure how their planned lessons would be received by the elementary students. They also questioned whether or not students would be engaged, and, consequently, if they would learn from the drama-based process. The pre-service teachers' reflections strongly support that their drama experience expanded their understanding of what teaching and learning could entail.

### **2.2.2. Team teaching and cooperative learning**

- *I felt teaching with peers was phenomenal in that we were all equals and open to others' ideas. I hope to replicate this team environment in my future classroom.*

- *It was interesting working in a team atmosphere, there were some definite challenges, but things turned out really well for all of us, as well as for the students.*
- *It was wonderful to be able to create something in a cooperative effort, have it come together and be viewed by a wide audience and then (best of all) have it be considered a great dramatic comment on a subject of serious importance. This reinforced my belief that cooperative efforts in the classroom, although sometimes chaotic, can pull together and result in something wonderful and relevant.*

Working in groups is a complex endeavor that is fraught with negotiations and compromises.<sup>7</sup>

The pre-service teachers had to plan their lessons in groups of three, and the majority of their lessons had the elementary students working in groups. Because bullying issues tend to be about tensions between individuals and groups, the pedagogical approach was meant to awaken and open up discussions about felt experiences from the group. A respectful atmosphere was created by the pre-service teachers; as a result, groups were able to overcome and productively work through differences through the drama-based learning. Similar to many teacher education programs, pre-service teachers at UPEI frequently presented lessons in groups during their coursework; therefore, they had prior experience in team-teaching. In addition, the collective playbuilding process they engaged in prior to the alternative practicum was focused on developing understanding of others and team-building strategies. This is not to say that tension did not exist among the pre-service teachers as they were team-teaching – it did – but they were able to deal with it in a professional manner.

### **2.2.3. Confidence in teaching, risk taking**

- *This project was the highlight of my education program experience. It provided me*

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<sup>7</sup> Working through tensions among group members in a collective drama process is a central issue in a previous article (Belliveau, 2004).

*with an opportunity to learn more about myself and what I can offer the teaching profession, and also gave me the confidence to do a quality job in the classroom. Not only do I have confidence in what I am doing, I now believe in what I am doing.*

- *This project has contributed to my growth tremendously. I was interested in this project because I knew it would be a risk in my learning and I wanted to challenge myself. I am very proud of the students, my peers, and myself in what we accomplished with this project. After this drama project, I know that I can do, or try, anything and feel successful.*
- *After this experience, I am a confident teacher again. Through the risk I found out that I can be a teacher. Teaching is not a recipe, it's about leading kids towards learning, and the path will be different for each kid.*

Taking risks and expanding what it means to be a teacher were central objectives of the alternative practicum. Because a safe and collaborative environment was created in the planning and teaching, the majority of pre-service teachers commented on how they gained confidence to try new things and how they saw possibilities for innovation in teaching. They also commented on how they felt that their own beliefs about using drama as a teaching approach were validated and reinforced through the process. They also alluded to the positive impact that team-teaching had on their professional growth, and how it provided a model for elementary students to work cooperatively.

### **3. IN-SERVICE TEACHERS**

The four elementary teachers who opened their classes to the pre-service teachers during the three-week practicum responded to guided questions. Listed below is a synthesis of the recurring comments made by the teachers during the focus group session. Their reflections are in

response to three of the questions from the focus group.

### **3.1. How do you think the drama project benefited your students?**

- *The drama project helped struggling students to express themselves in different ways.*
- *My students gained tremendously from the hands on, interactive process. Through the doing they absorbed much more on the topic.*
- *Many students let go and laughed. Some of the students had never released this joy in class before.*

### **3.2. Can you comment on the drama-based approach?**

- *Everyone was involved in the process, and the ideas of most individuals were valued and shared in the process.*
- *Kids were highly motivated during the entire project. They wanted to be there. They wanted to participate and learn.*
- *The play they developed has become reference point for discussions.*

### **3.3. Other comments about the process?**

- *The activities reinforced some of my beliefs about integration and using different teaching methods.*
- *Project could have lasted longer. Perhaps more time for debriefing. Once the production was done, the pre-service teachers had to leave, leaving a void.*
- *This type of initiative is how to reach students on sensitive topics.*

The four teachers unanimously reported that this practicum project had a very positive impact on their classes and that their students developed a cohesion that has lasted beyond the three weeks. One of the features of drama-based teaching is that all voices are included in the process, and the students generally find common links with one another through the creative work. The teachers emphasized how all students were able to get involved and participated,

taking pride in their drama work. They reported that students often mentioned how the process was so enjoyable that they were forgetting they were actually learning.

An insightful suggestion shared by an in-service teacher was to create more time for the pre-service teachers to debrief the play development process with the elementary students. The practicum ended with the grade-6 students sharing their collective play, but no time remained to reflect on the learning process with their mentors. An extra few days could be added, or presenting the play prior to the end of the practicum in order to make time for debriefing would be beneficial. In analyzing the in-service teacher comments, it became clear that the practicum, to a certain extent, became an extended professional development opportunity, as the four teachers respectively stated throughout the process how they learned different strategies, largely drama-based, to approach curriculum and social justice.

## **CONCLUSION**

The learning that emerged from the three-week practicum is difficult to fully measure. Nonetheless, this snapshot of participants' stated perceptions and beliefs about engaging in a drama-based teaching experience offers insights to teacher educators, educators, and policy makers. The study clearly indicates that participants saw great advantages of engaging in an alternative practicum where drama was used as the central pedagogical approach. And, although the long-term effects are not clear, the immediate impact of the drama practicum on students, pre-service, and in-service teachers suggests a positive growth. A community of learners developed among the teachers and the four selected classrooms, where teamwork and respect were fostered.

The process itself of working in groups through drama activities seems to have reinforced and supported the social justice theme within the practicum. Most often, antisocial

behavior such as bullying comes from a lack of communication and understanding, and drama often opens up these misunderstandings or at least helps people appreciate and explore other perspectives (Basourakos, 1998; Bouchard, 2002; Winston, 1998). In this sense, the pedagogical process of drama informed the content, because as the group worked through the challenges of team-dynamics they gradually found ways to collaborate more effectively. The participants became more aware of inner power relations and how to address these in productive ways. By the same token, the content they were studying (bullying) allowed the groups to explore their own behavior and feelings about social justice, and it seemed natural to explore this through improvisation, creative writing, and role playing. In effect the content was impacting the teaching style.

Over the course of the three weeks, the four teachers who shared their grade-6 classrooms for the drama unit observed a gradual change in dynamics within their respective classrooms. They commented on how they saw the development of different strengths in particular students, strengths such as collaboration which they had not noticed before. As well, some of the lower academically achieving students emerged as leaders during the drama work which seemed to boost their self-esteem and motivation. The pre-service teachers, for their part, had personally experienced a drama-based process as they created their own collective drama *You Didn't Do Anything!*, yet their responses clearly indicated that it was only while leading the grade-6 students that they fully appreciated the learning that occurs when using drama as a pedagogical approach. A number of written comments suggested how the drama-based approach fostered a respectful team environment, in turn generating a more conducive learning milieu. Clearly, an appreciation for alternative pedagogy was achieved through the practicum, as teachers, pre-service teachers, and elementary students respectively singled out the value and power of drama

as a way of learning and knowing.

Research studies have already pointed to the positive effects on student learning when drama is used as a pedagogical approach or as an intervention strategy (Conrad, 1998; Gallagher, 2001; Rose, Parks, Androes & McMahon, 2000; Wagner, 1998). As well, researchers have reported that drama initiatives more often than not encourage affective learning, creating opportunities for positive social development (Basourakos, 1998; Bouchard, 2002; Courtney, 1980; Gallagher, 2001; Winston, 1998). The findings in the three-week drama practicum support current research, and more importantly, the results contribute new knowledge (or insights) by examining and illustrating how teachers and students gained from the alternative drama practicum. Participants clearly indicated that drama was recognized as a meaningful way of teaching and learning about social justice issues. A follow-up survey with the 12 pre-service teachers to see whether or not the drama practicum had long-term effects on teaching practices would provide valuable information on the efficacy of this alternative practicum.

In an ideal teaching environment, classrooms would have three or more enthusiastic and dynamic teachers, yet this is an unlikely scenario. Nonetheless, as part of teacher education, I think it is crucial for teacher educators to consider alternative practica opportunities where pre-service teachers can expand and explore the possibilities of teaching and learning beyond a traditional classroom setting. The UPEI drama project presents a model where pre-service teachers, in their final teaching placement, were given an opportunity to expand the boundaries of a practicum experience. The learning that emerged for the pre-service teachers through team-teaching, using drama as a pedagogical approach, and teaching for social justice is something they will take with them for the rest of their careers. The confidence they gained in trying new approaches to teaching, and the learning they experienced with fellow teachers and grade 6

students is seldom achieved in a traditional practicum experience.

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