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John Payne-Rios

*University of Central Florida*



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BRAVE SPACES AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING STRATEGIES IN THE  
THEATRE CLASSROOM: WHAT DO THEY MEAN FOR ALL STUDENTS, INCLUDING  
THOSE WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBTQIA+?

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education  
in the College of Community Innovation and Education  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the high school experiences of theatre students at a large university in Central Florida to determine which of the Collective for Academic and Social Emotional Learning's (CASEL) five social-emotional learning strategies (SEL 5) were remembered (CASEL, 2022). An opt-in focus group of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+) and were involved in K-12 theatre were interviewed to examine if the SEL 5 strategies being utilized had a distinct impression on this vulnerable population (Krishan, et al., 2016). Due to scheduling, only one student was able to participate in the focus group, a transexual male.

In addition, teachers of the same Central Florida county were surveyed to determine the SEL 5 strategies most often used in their classrooms (including rehearsals and extracurricular activities). A content analysis was then performed on this qualitative data and then member-checked through an artificial intelligence program, ChatGPT.

Within the SEL 5 framework, parallels were found between the descriptions of the SEL 5 and Arao and Clemens's (2013) description of a *Brave Space*, who used Augusto Boal and Paolo Freire as inspiration for their social justice framework.

Qualitative Analysis was performed on all responses, then member-checked through an Artificial Intelligence (AI) program, ChatGPT. It was found that Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills were the SEL 5 ranked highest by not only teachers but students as well. Both groups ranked Self-Management and Responsible Decision Making as the lowest two. Students ranked Relationship Skills higher than Social Awareness. These top three SEL 5 competencies correspond to *Challenges, Not Attacks*; *Mindful Respect*; and *Conflict with Humanity* in the Brave Space model by Arao and Clemens (2013). Now these are known, there is

discussion for school leaders to then transform school culture into a place where brave discussions can happen, and respectful behaviors can occur.

To Dad, my best friend.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the endless support of my husband, Luis, and our daughter, Bellamia. To my mother who has seen this day come to fruition, and to my father who did not. I could not have done it without all of you...and the Rocco, Tati, and Coco.

To my committee, it has been such a blessing having you with me on this journey. Dr. Ceballos, thank you for helping me understand the true need for why this research is so warranted. Dr. Gordon, thank you for pushing me to keep this servant leadership focused, as the ultimate benefactor are students. Dr. Hopp, without your incredible qualitative and arts focused knowledge combined with your ability to reign me in, mixed with your ever-present joie de vivre, I would not have gotten here. Dr. Listengarten, I have known you the longest, and I have been humbled, awestruck, and inspired by your theatrical lens since 2005. You saw something in me that I did not see in myself back then, I am forever in your debt. This dissertation serves as a testament to your effect on my life.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*High school was a mess of untreated anxiety for me...by the time my senior year of high school came around I had a well-paying job as a sound designer...I don't know how I got through it, but I must have been pretty brave. – Charlotte,*

There have been times in the past fifteen years this researcher has been witness to multiple instances of student bravery, especially within the theatre classroom. Other brave actions from students include self-disclosure with peers and with trusted adults in the theatre classroom, during the rehearsal process, and even after performances. Moreover, in anecdotal discussions with other teachers, it seemed the frequency of these events happens more often in theatre classrooms than other classrooms. Therefore, it begs the simple question - why? The disclosure tended to be of bullying at school, frequently related to a student coming to terms with their sexual orientation. One student in particular was a student for three years consecutively, and each year he would disclose more personal information and in high school he came out as bisexual. In subsequent discussions with me, he spoke on how theatre classes, rehearsals, performances, and the student-teacher relationship really helped him to solidify his identity. This was the impetus for this research.

The term 'Safe Space' has been publicly used since the mid-1970's and has come to have a variety of different but similar definitions (Greene, 1995; Boostrom, 1998; Zimmer, 2015; Greytak, 2016). The majority have to do not only with physical space but used as more of an ethereal construct. Boostrom (1998) refers specifically to the Safe Space in a classroom as a place where students "...are not isolated, alienated, threatened, intimidated, or 'stressed-out'" (p. 405). For the purposes of this study, this is the definition with which we will continue. It has been established that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and asexual

(LGBTQIA+) students experience more bullying, self-harm, depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies than heterosexual students of their same age (Greytak, 2016). It has also been shown that theatre programs in schools provide an outlet for student engagement, fun, stress relief, which and all together provides a Safe Space for at-risk students (Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017). Hunter (2008) goes into detail on the importance of and lack of research dedicated to a Safe Space and its relationship to performative practice. She continues to emphasize its importance saying that it is a precursor to “any collaborative activity” (p. 6).

Thompson (as cited by Stengel & Weems, 2007) argued that the ‘Safe Space’ framework is too theoretical and not practical in the classroom. It gives marginalized students, including LGBTQIA+ students, a false sense of security. While Thompson does not offer any solution, he continues discussing the reimagining of safety on campus and requires the recognition of “playing with and against our existing desires, fears, assumed needs, and sense of (fair) play” (p.506). The notion that Arao and Clemens (2013) popularized was that of a *Brave Space* rather than a Safe Space. The Brave Space model, derived from a social justice framework, consists of five basic tenets agreed upon by all individuals operating in the agreed upon Brave Space. The tenets are: (a) controversy with civility (revised to ‘humanity’), (Arao, B., personal communication, July 25, 2022), (b) personal responsibility, (c) reflective decision making, (d) mindful respect, and (e) challenges, not attacks.

Arao and Clemens’ (2013) Brave Space model and the skills associated with the five competencies that the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) used for their Social Emotional Learning (SEL 5) framework were similar. The skills associated with each of the SEL 5 mirrored language with the wording of how Arao and Clemens (2013) defined their five Brave Space tenets; the details of which will be discussed later. In short, they



are Self-Management (personal responsibility), Relationships Skills (controversy with humanity), Responsible Decision Making (reflective decision-making), Social Awareness (mindful respect), and Self-Awareness (challenges, not attacks).

It was Taylor Loest (2019) that appears to have first discussed Brave Spaces and its relationship with theatre. “The creation of a Brave Space is a perfect avenue for theatre programs of any size to incorporate pedagogy toward Conflict Resolution Education (CRE)” (p. 43). Loest continues:

Within a Brave Space, theatre is a powerful tool to teach civil discourse, both through the dialogue of the medium, as well as the observation and hearing of how others dispute, solve, and discover the truth of an issue. Theatre, with its direct roots to democracy, can give K-12 students the skills to confront conflict and the dialogue to respectfully build community on a democratic foundation. (p.46)

The nature of storytelling (re: drama) revolves around conflict. This ability of a Brave Space to provide an opportunity for students in the K-12 system to strengthen or readdress their own beliefs, values, or norms is invaluable as they mature. Moreover, what is significant about Loest’s observation is that Brave Spaces are not only being tied to theatre, but also to conflict resolution and the importance of community building. By using these techniques that theatre teachers manifest in their classroom, faculty, staff, and administrators can create a shift in the school culture towards a place of honesty, inclusion, and courage.

This research focuses on the innate Brave Space opportunities that the theatre classroom creates through the SEL 5 strategies, and what effects that may have on students, particularly those students who identify as LGBTQIA+. To minimize IRB restrictions and in hopes of ascertaining more reflectivity and clarity of thought, this research will focus on university

students' perceptions of their K-12 theatre classroom. In an attempt to examine the pool of current research on students' reflection on their K-12 theatre experiences, an exhaustive search of the journal databases EBSCO, ProQuest, and Taylor Francis found 1,097 articles and books using the search terms "theatre", "schools", "students", and "perception". After filtering those articles 28 were found that focused on the following: arts education, students' performance, school culture, and/or identity theory. Of those 28 articles, 8 articles dealt specifically with a student's perceptions of their current or former theatre classroom. Five researchers focused specifically on current high schoolers (Van Houten, 1999; McHammond & Osterlind, 2011; Angrove, 2012; and Gibson, 2021); one researcher focused on both former and current high schoolers (Arreola, 2019); and one researcher focused exclusively on elementary students (McSwain, 2014). Both Cowart (2013) and Olsen (2021) were the two that examined this phenomenon reflectively from a former student's lens. Both voices lend strong support to this current research. Olsen (2021) examined the importance of lessons learned in theatre classrooms by examining the safe learning environment it creates, the peer relationships developed, and the emotional skills that are developed. It seems that this dissertation is the most similar to Cowart (2013), whose qualitative study examined former students' perceptions of their theatre classrooms and the psychological needs that were met and the life skills that were developed. While it does not focus on LGBTQIA+ students specifically, one interviewee in Olsen (2021) work identified as gay, and Cowart (2013) found that several members involved in theatre felt as "outsiders" from the rest of the school (p. 101). This dissertation seems not only to be delving into new research through an LGBTQIA+ theatre specific focus group, but also nodding to a question for future research posed by Cowart (2013), "Was the impact on students due to theatre itself, the theatre teacher, or a combination of both?" (p. 171).

To approximate the number of LGBTQIA+ students in Florida, the last known data was from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). They did not collect data on youths who identified as intersex or asexual, therefore their data only applies to students who identify as LGBTQIA+. The 2019 Youth Risk Survey results indicate that approximately 21.5% of Florida high school students identified as LGBTQIA+ (as cited by Duncan, 2021). In 2019 the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) reported that there were 852,276 students in grades 9-12. Meaning that in 2019, there were approximately 183,239 students who identified as LGBTQIA+. In the 2022-2023 school year there has been a 4.9% increase in students, now at 894,055 (FLDOE, 2023). If the same percentage was held, it would mean that today there are approximately 192,221 students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

### Problem Statement

Violence and bullying behavior at schools has significantly increased since 1990 which has led to negative effects on student academic and emotional growth (Polanin et al., 2021). School bullying has led to suicidal ideation and practice, acts of violence at school, and an overall negative school climate (Kesler et al., 2023). Negative school climates lead to more significant disciplinary issues, lack of academic success, and feeling void of a sense of belonging (Greytak, 2016). This is especially true for vulnerable populations in schools, especially students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Mittleman, 2023). Policies to quell bullying behavior have worked, but coping strategies for these victims are still not universally focused on in schools (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018). Therefore, the problem of practice investigated through this dissertation was to determine the social-emotional learning strategies theatre teachers and students use, including those students who identify as LGBTQIA+, to create opportunities for brave discussions in order to promote a more accepting and positive school climate.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to (a) analyze the common teaching strategies used by theatre teachers qualitatively in a Central Florida school district and (b) survey University's theatre majors about their reflections of their high school theatre experiences. The University resides in the same school district as the teachers who were surveyed. This was done in order to ascertain if the five social-emotional learning (SEL 5) strategies as described by CASEL (2022) were utilized by teachers and if these strategies had a lasting effect on students. This was examined through the lens of Brave Spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013) as the language in the SEL 5 and Brave Spaces overlap. Once the strategies that theatre teachers have been using were identified, it was compared with the reflections of university-aged theatre students. These reflections serve to act as an indicator for the life lessons that theatre has provided students after graduation. If school leadership utilizes these strategies already present in the theatre classroom to create a school culture of both Safe and Brave Spaces, the life lessons provided by the university student's reflections can serve as a measurable outcome with which to assess campus-wide growth. What follows is the significance, rationale, research questions, operational definitions, conceptual frameworks, delimitations and limitations contained within this research. This was supported by a literature review followed by the methods and procedures, analysis of data, and discussion, culminating in areas for future research.

### Significance

LGBTQIA+ students are bullied within schools (Greytak, 2016). The motivations behind this can stem from any number of factors including inherent homophobia, envy, religious beliefs, or unfamiliarity (Greytak, 2016; Rehage, 2018; Marshall et al., 2015; Kosciw et al., 2014 as cited by Bailey, 2015). Violence and aggression are nothing new to our society. It seems that younger

generations, even as young as 8–9-year-olds, and possibly younger, are taking part in bullying behavior on campus (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). Some students who come out as LGBTQIA+ in middle or high school are coming to terms with their identity in a way that heterosexual and cisgendered individuals do not face (Rehage, 2018). It is important to note the bullying behavior that Sutton and Smith (1999) noted showed that most people do not support the victim when the bullying behavior is encountered. They termed witness to bullying ‘assistants’ and ‘reinforces’ for either actively being a part of the bullying behavior or an observer who does not engage in the situation, respectively (p. 98). More importantly, students are not the only ones who can create a school culture that is less than favorable to LGBTQIA+ students.

The Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Education Network (GLSEN, 2019) currently provides standardized training for K-12 faculty in how to handle SEL and the LGBTQIA+ community. This 501(c)3 was created by teachers for teachers to address LGBTQIA+ counseling, laws, and rights that students, parents, and teachers face. Unfortunately, the all-important follow-through on these training courses may not occur. Payne and Smith (2012; 2017) discussed that this may be due to lack of knowledge about LGBTQIA+ issues by administration (leading to a lack of motivation to continue) or the continued perception that LGBTQ issues are campus risks to be managed rather than opportunities for inclusion. Bolman and Deal (2007) suggest that it may be due to the extensive length of time that it takes for the benefits of proper training to blossom. However, this lack of professional development can be extremely costly with at risk youth like the LGBTQIA+ community (Schools, 2023).

In addition, teachers and administrators may lack clear direction from the district on bullying policies and procedures, specifically LGBTQIA+ bullying. It could lead to school

authorities pushing their own personal religious agendas and political ideologies, or those of key stakeholders, on LGBTQIA+ students to quell the victim rather than the aggressor (Kosciw et al., 2014 as cited by Bailey, 2015). Be it intimidation or influence, the possibility of negative community stakeholder input could lead to district by district, zone by zone, differentiation of disciplinary procedures in regard to LGBTQIA+ bullying. In truth, all students benefit from being able to act out conflict resolution strategies in a Brave Space in which they feel a sense of belonging. This is at the heart of what Arao and Clemens (2013) are driving at. By allowing students to be vulnerable together in a structured manner, a sense of belonging can grow between all participants of the Brave Space.. The social cohesion manifested when a group becomes comfortable with uncomfortable conversations, and the interpersonal respect that comes with that conversation, are important life lessons essential for student growth (Springer et al., 2016). Clever and Tulskey (2002) discuss how important these uncomfortable conversations are and how the ability to engage and facilitate them are useful tools in later life. Therefore, the significance of this research will provide school leaders with evidence and direction to ensure that an inclusive campus climate can be created, developed, and maintained. This campus climate can provide opportunities for healthy challenges, self-reflection, and an increase in sense of belonging by faculty and students, especially those students who are LGBTQIA+.

### Rationale

Denny et al. (2010) found that as bullying behavior increases, the school culture decreases. One potential way of breaking out of this bullying cycle is for schools to provide students a 'Brave Space' to exist and learn in outside of the home. Arao & Clemens (2013) identify five tenets of their Brave Space. This Brave Space oasis can lead to a sense of belonging to that school and its environment (Punzal, 2020). Green et al. (2011) found an association

between a rise in schoolwide mental health opportunities and decrease in bullying behavior suggesting social and emotional learning (SEL) is an important factor to reducing bullying behavior on campus.

Denny et al.'s (2010) study noted that Ttofi and Farrington (2012) specifically point out 'role play' as an effective measure to end bullying. Students who are facing a stressful situation may ruminate consistently on the scenario in hopes of quelling their anxiety. By role playing the scenario out with trusted friends, there is a possibility that they may explore various outcomes of the worrisome scenario in order to minimize their anxiety. Participation in theatre has been shown to promote student growth in self-understanding, empathy, understanding of human emotions (Grover, 1994), and perspective-taking, i.e., imagining what other people may be thinking and feeling (Moskowitz, 2005). Perspective-taking skills can help reduce bias and, as a result, promote feelings of connectedness and mutual understanding between individuals (Moskowitz, 2005).

Inspired by his friend Paolo Freire, Augusto Boal (1974) was a pioneer in using role-play theatre to affect change through improvisation, conflict resolution, and theatre for social change (Stahl, et al., 2021). Freire, an educator himself, fought against the 'banking' model of learning, in which students are simply receptacles in which educators deposit information (Freire, 1970). He saw the teacher/student relationship as more of a reciprocal learning process. Both Freire's educational model and Boal's type of theatre has led to positive facilitated discussions on social justice, boundaries (both physical and ethical), and self-reflective practices with students (Arao, B, personal communication, July 25, 2022; Bishop & Etminski, 2021, Cobb, 2022, Stahl et al, 2021). Bhukhanwala (2014) posits that it is within this space that self-reflection takes place using imagination. This is where those who participate can express feelings of oppression,

powerlessness, and constraint with agency, leading to positive discussions on these power imbalances.

Arao and Clemens (2013) outline five tenets of their Brave Space which was developed from a social justice lens. Since publication however, they have changed the wording of the first rule ‘controversy with civility’. In a post-Pandemic, post George Floyd, post-January 6<sup>th</sup> American world view, the term ‘civility’ can hold a different connotation than when they first published the article in 2013. Dr. Alejandro Covarrubias, a colleague of theirs, rephrased the rule to now read ‘controversy with humanity’. The rationale behind this choice is that it allows for a more empathic and holistic approach, rather than the potential constraints that the word ‘civility’ may project (Arao, B., personal communication, July 25, 2022). Therefore, throughout this dissertation that is how it shall be referred, and why it is different from their original publication: (a) controversy with humanity, (b) personal responsibility, (c) reflective decision making, (d) mindful respect, (e) challenges, not attacks. These social and emotional strategies when used in these spaces can not only help teachers recognize and accept their students in totality, but also can lead to a positive culture shift at schools (Chappell & Richardson, 2018, p. 191). With this knowledge, educators and administrators can introduce these techniques schoolwide in hopes of creating campus-wide Brave Spaces in which all students, especially those in the LGBTQIA+ community.

### Positionality

It is important to understand a researcher’s personal influences. Therefore, following Holmes, (2020) this section serves to better understand my viewpoint, but help to overall understand any personal bias. As a researcher I am an insider collaborating with other insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2014). I have been part of both populations, a theatre major and a theatre



teacher, if this research seems like an intersection of various disciplines, it is. My education and life experience rests firmly in the intersection of LGBTQIA+ activism, psychology, theatre, communication, and education, in that order. My life experience as a gay student going to a Catholic school in South Louisiana in the late 1990's was not a safe place in which to come out. I was not part of the public school system, which ironically had a theatre program. The private schools I went to did not. Speech and debate were the clubs that were available to me. So, I learned at a very early age the importance of proper discourse. Outside of school, I was involved in community theatre from the time I was seven years old. The theatre has always been a place that I have found a place in which I could relate. It was a place in which I found people I could relate to, talk to, and help explain life to me. When I was in University, I found myself in an improv performed quite regularly. After finding my passion for theatre, I stage managed, acted, directed, and designed my way into a master's degree. I have taught communications and theatre at the collegiate level for over fifteen years and at the 6-12 level for the past five.

In the past five years, in a post-Pulse Central Florida community, I have seen the frequency of students who chose to disclose their orientation increase. In discussions with other faculty, this seems to happen more with theatre and other arts teachers more so than with core teachers. It sparked within me the question of "What is it about theatre that gay kids feel comfortable in?" This is at the heart of this study. I want to know why it was not only a safe place for me to express myself but what were the factors that helped create a Brave Space that allowed me to understand and explore my identity and how I project to the world.

As an educator my focus is on ensuring student success. Unfortunately, students who disclose their orientation or gender identity to a teacher may put both parties in an extremely vulnerable position. Ultimately, my positionality resides in ensuring success for all students who

may be vulnerable, whatever that vulnerability may be, and to ensure that theatre can be a place in which they not only find refuge, but a place in which they can find their voice, be brave, and become better individuals.

### Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine the social emotional strategies (SEL) that are used in theatre classrooms (including rehearsals, performances, etc.), and if those strategies resulted in the students experiencing Safe and Brave Spaces for their interpersonal and academic learning. The following research questions will guide this study.

**RQ1:** What are common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers?

**RQ1a:** Do these strategies align with Social Emotional Learning techniques?

**RQ2:** How do students describe their K-12 theatre experiences?

**RQ3:** Do student descriptions of their theatre experiences include tenets of Safe and Brave Spaces, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community?

### Conceptual Framework

The current study seeks to understand the educational social justice model of Brave Spaces and CASEL's (2022) SEL 5 strategies theatre teachers employ, and students retain. In addition, it serves to examine the relationship that these Brave Space/SEL strategies have to LGBTQIA+ students.

Arao and Clemens (2013) provide counterpoints to five common rules utilized in social justice facilitation practices. They are (a) agree to disagree, (b) don't take things personally, (c) challenge by choice, (d) respect, and (e) no attacks. Each counterpoint that Arao and Clemens

(2013) developed to these five traditional rules provide the framework for their Brave Space model. When examining the verbiage and themes that Arao and Clemens (2013) use in these counterpoints that help define Brave Spaces, similarities were found in the descriptions of CASEL's SEL 5 framework (CASEL, 2022). It is important to understand that Brave Spaces are not a replacement for the SEL 5, but rather a practical framework that is founded in facilitation techniques that can be used as part of CASEL's SEL 5 competencies. Arao and Clemens (2013) used both Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a spark for their model (Arao, personal communication, July 25, 2022). Therefore, these will also serve to support the theatrical lens and the educational model discussed.

### Brave Spaces

Arao and Clemens (2013) springboard from the Safe Space into the Brave Space. It serves as a more active approach to defining this space, be it physical or conceptual. Both are useful, valid, as explained later. For example, if there was a classroom discussion on 'bullying' and the teacher and students had come to agree that this classroom is a traditional 'Safe Space' a student who may bully LGBTQIA+ students may not vocalize the risky behavior and instead deny the behavior or engage in *ad hominem* attacks on the activity. However, in a 'Brave Space' the expectation is that students and teachers know going into the space that there will be hard conversations, ownership, and accountability. They discuss the five basic rules of creating a 'Brave Space'.

#### Rule 1

In all five rules, the authors (Arao & Clemens, 2013) take traditional social justice norms and turn the light on these concepts and discuss a different way of approaching what they term a

Brave Space. The first rule argues against the traditional facilitation technique of ‘agree to disagree’. For two people to agree to disagree, there is an acknowledgment of each other’s opinion, but there may not be empathy, understanding, or a growth mindset attached and therefore these two people are stuck in a mutual avoidance. Within the theatre, there is almost a collectivistic mindset, meaning the ‘we’ is greater than the “I”. Keeping the show front and center helps to keep conversations moving forward, rather than getting stuck in an ‘agree to disagree’ cycle. Cultures rooted in collectivistic principles such as China, India, and Argentina are more apt to use this conflict resolution strategy than individualistic cultures found in North America and Western Europe (Fletcher & Olekalns, 1998). In an individualistic society like the United States, children are raised with the sense that their opinion has value, and they should express it. In other words, two individualistic people can ‘agree to disagree’ and because it is the “I” before the “we”, that may be their preferred conflict resolution strategy. However, for collectivistic individuals, including those that work in the theatre, there is a greater desire to put the focus on the greater good (i.e., the show) rather than individual issues. When a director and actor ‘agree to disagree’, the show or performance can suffer, which can lead to internal strife by the director or the actor. Arao and Clemens (2013) suggest that the Brave Space helps to ease this strife via what they term “Controversy With Humanity”. In this, all stakeholders (students, teachers, administration, parents, etc.) understand that there is risk and controversy involved therein. Everyone who enters the Brave Space (be it physical or conceptual) agrees that humanity will be paramount when controversy arises. This allows participants in the Brave Space to voice their opinions regardless of the popularity.

## Rule 2

“Don’t take things personally” is something often heard either in the classroom or at home (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 144). As they explain, linguistically this phrase puts the onus of the offense on the victim, rather than the potential aggressor. Arao and Clemens (2013) explain that from a social justice perspective, it has made the victim of the offensive language feel stifled and somehow wrong for taking offense to something that was said. Therefore, revision is in order. Of course, there are times in which slurs are directly and pointedly meant to demean another person, and there are times in which something is said that may unknowingly offend another person. Under the supposition that in general everyone is good, and they do not wish to cause others harm, by instilling the ‘don’t take things personally’ rule, it silences those who have already been slighted. However, if those who were unknowingly victimized by the aggressor were given the courage in this Brave Space to vocalize statements such as “I feel unseen because you called me Dominican when I am really Puerto Rican” this could lead to a healthy dialogue, facilitated by a teacher or administrator within a given physical and mental space. In Brave Spaces, unlike Safe Spaces, the expectation has already been set that the goal is not “Don’t Take Things Personally” but rather “Own My Intentions and Impact”. In So Doing, the onus goes not to those who have already been slighted, but to those who are potentially causing the conflict to examine themselves in a more empathic light. This social change approach therefore may be more successful at addressing tough issues; by owning ‘intentions and ‘impact’ the conversation moves from the behavior to the mindset. This mindful approach is apparent in other rules as well.

### Rule 3

Third, the traditional notion that a student has a choice in the activities in which they participate should be re-examined according to Arao and Clemens (2013). Not necessarily schoolwork, but if there is to be social change leading to a better learning environment, the concept that a student can ‘opt out’ of difficult conversations should be stymied. They discuss how when a student agrees to enter into a Brave Space and the conversation crests into uncomfortable territory, a student should ask themselves ‘Why is it that I do not want to participate?’ It may be something as simple as indigestion, or it may be a complex opinion that strongly challenges personal beliefs. Regardless, it is the act of self-reflection that can often be risky itself. If perchance it is that the discussion is making the individual feel uncomfortable in the Brave Space, courageously facing these internal struggles is at the heart of a Brave Space.

### Rule 4

As schools become more multicultural, there is an inherent understanding that not all cultures communicate the same. For example, eye contact in individualistic countries may signify confidence in men, but in collective cultures like China and throughout the Middle East, it can be seen as argumentative and gestures in one culture may be quite obscene in another (Point Park University, 2021). Arao and Clemens (2013) write that the goal should be “...not to lead participants to consensus but rather to support them in maintaining increased mindfulness of the different ways they can demonstrate respectfulness to one another” (p. 148). The rule calls into question a single word, ‘Respect’. It is often used in classrooms to ensure equity, active listening, and decorum. However, conversation is rarely had in terms of what behaviors constitute a respectful space. In a Brave Space, stakeholders may have laid the ground rules (a large component of a mutual ‘Brave Space’) for nonverbal respectful communication. Again, this

introspective notion of the Brave Space allows stakeholders to have the courage to act. In this post-modern and socially constructed viewpoint, we must be aware of multiple layers of individual interpretation and cultural hidden norms. Especially when circling back to Rule 1, in what behaviors constitute civil disagreements within a Brave Space.

#### Rule 5

Lastly, in agreeing to enter into the Brave Space, it is with the expectation that the proverbial feathers may get ruffled, and the ownership of active listening, decorum, and learning lies with the individual. Therefore, when teachers make the rule “Don’t Attack,” there is an understood ‘each other’ that follows those two words. Inevitably, feathers will indeed get ruffled and therefore stakeholders should ask themselves simply ‘Why?’ In getting to the root of why people react in certain ways to various negative stimuli, the ability to self-examine is important. When drilling down to understand why someone feels ‘attacked’ it should be reframed as ‘Have My Privileges Been Attacked?’ If the answer is yes, and there is justified cause for a further conversation on how they were attacked, the verbiage, tone, and/or gesture that possibly led to this outcome should be reflected upon. It is important that when feeling offended, the response should not be one of anger towards an outside entity, but rather to determine the privilege that has been infringed.

Boostrom (1998) suggests that a critical dialogue cannot ensue if a space is deemed ‘safe’. He refers to it as a place where teachers should rule out conflict. Cobb (2022) argues that a place of risk cannot exist before there is a place of safety. Therefore, a Brave Space is the elevation of a Safe Space. A Brave Space should be a place of vulnerability as learning is an act of risk; giving up a new condition for an old one can cause pain (Boostrom, 1998).

## Social Emotional Learning

There are 5 main areas that SEL targets (CASEL 5). They are self-management, relationship skills, responsible decision making, social awareness, and self-awareness (CASEL, 2022a). CASEL has found that when each one of these competency areas is focused on with learning activities, there is more engagement, depth of learning, and retention (CASEL, 2022b).

### Self-Management

CASEL's Self-Management competency focuses on a variety of goals, most central to the success of this skill is the ability to manage one's own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in a variety of contexts to ensure goals and aspirations are met (CASEL, 2022). In essence, it is the ability of managing one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations to achieve certain goals and aspirations. Example behaviors that demonstrate success in this competence are delayed gratification, stress management, and an intrinsic motivation to accomplish goals, either personal or group goals. CASEL outlines seven specific behaviors in their literature: (a) Managing personal emotions, (b) proper identification and usage of stress-management strategies, (c) demonstration of self-discipline and self-motivation, (d) establish goals, both personal and collective, (e) the utilization of organizational and planning skills, (f) exhibiting courage to initiate a task, (g) demonstrating personal and/or collective agency (CASEL, 2022).

### Relationship Skills

CASEL's Relationship Skills is centered on the ability to create and cultivate healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate situations with a variety of individuals and various groups. Competencies such as active listening, clear communication, collaboration and



cooperation, conflict resolution strategies, navigate situations with varying social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership opportunities, and advocate and offer help to/from others (CASEL, 2022). CASEL (2022) outlines nine specific behaviors that demonstrate this competency: (a) effective communication, (b) evolve positive relationships, (c) exhibit cultural awareness, (d) habituate teamwork and group problem solving, (e) constructive conflict resolution, (f) resisting peer pressure, (g) group leadership, (h) offering and seeking help, (i) standing up for the rights of others (CASEL, 2020).

### Responsible Decision Making

Caring and constructive choices about one's own behavior and interactions in diverse groups are at the center of what CASEL focuses on in this competency. This includes the capacity to acknowledge ethical and safety concerns and assess the benefits and consequences not only personally, but for the small group and whole collective as well (CASEL, 2022). Behaviors which demonstrate (a) open-mindedness and curiosity, (b) the recognition and solving of personal and social dilemmas, (c) basing judgements of off logos after analyzing information, (d) the recognition (and anticipation) of the consequences of one's own action(s), (e) the application of critical thinking skills to both scholastic and 'at home' situations, (f) the promotion of community, personal, and familial well-being, and (g) the evaluation of personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts are all specific to the CASEL strategies involved in responsible decision making (CASEL, 2022).

### Social Awareness

When a student is able to understand various perspectives and empathize with those around them (including diverse cultures, backgrounds, and contexts), this is what CASEL

considers to be a key component of social awareness. Moreover, this umbrella extends to the capacity for compassion, understanding the broad historical and social norms for behavior in specific settings, and recognizing familial, scholastic, and community resources and support. (CASEL, 2022). Specific actions include: (a) taking another's perspective, (b) recognizing other's strengths, (c) exhibit empathy and compassion, (d) validating the concern for others feelings, (e) grasp and express gratitude, (f) classify various social norms, including prejudiced ones, (g) spotting situational demands and opportunities, and (f) understand how organizations (such as media) influence behavior (CASEL, 2022).

### Self-Awareness

CASEL (2022) classifies the ability to influence behavior across various contexts by understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and values as being self-aware. In addition, it includes the ability to recognize one's own strengths and limitations with a deep sense of both confidence and purpose. Behaviors specific to this competency are (a) the ability to blend both one's own personal identity with their many social identities, (b) identifying personal, cultural, or linguistic advantages, (c) personal emotional knowledge, (e) exhibiting honesty and sincerity, (f) understanding the interaction between feelings, values, and thoughts, (g) examining personal prejudices and biases, (f) practice self-efficacy, (g) possessing a growth mindset, (h) awakening interests and developing a sense of purpose (CASEL, 2022).

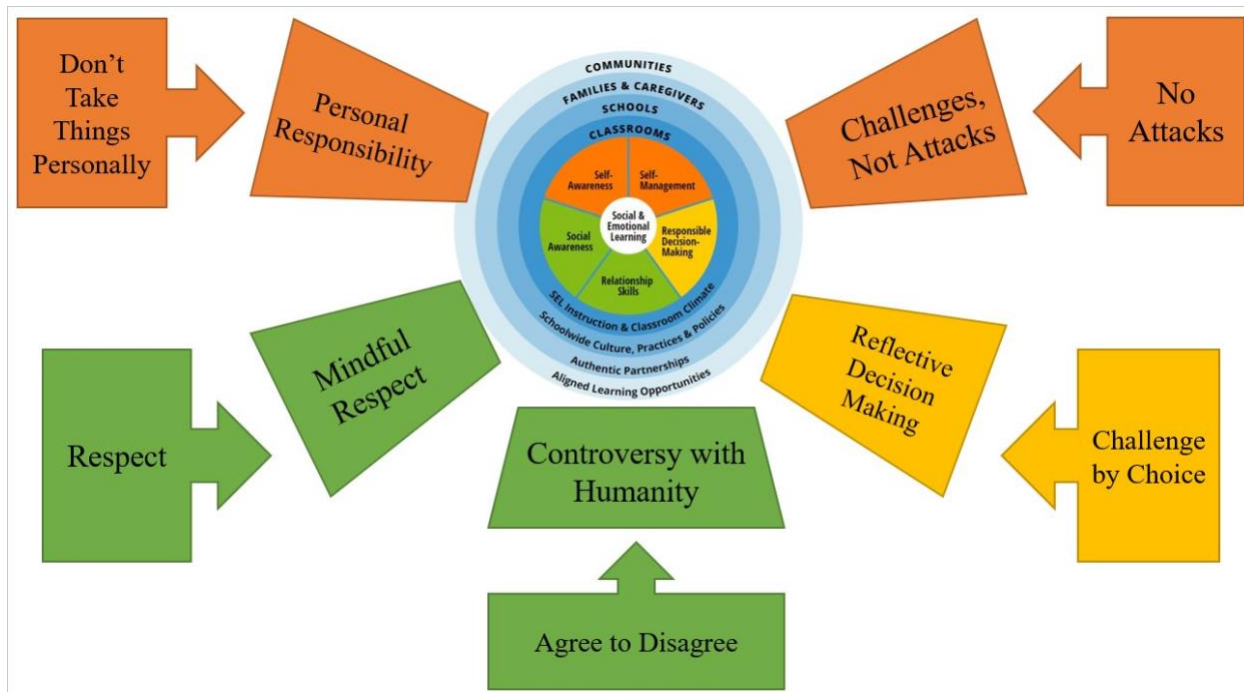
### Brave Space and SEL 5 Synthesis

To demonstrate the parallels between Brave Spaces and the SEL 5 the following will serve to clarify where these frameworks overlap. It is important to note that the Brave Spaces and the SEL 5 relationship is part to whole, meaning that the tenets of Brave Spaces are

contained within each one of the SEL 5. Brave Spaces are simply a tool by which to use each one of the SEL 5 specifically. Arao and Clemens's (2013) social justice framework is a reaction to 5 separate "Common Rules" that are associated with social justice education (p.143-149). Each of the 5 Brave Space rules discussed have been named either previously or by this researcher as (a) Controversy with Humanity; (b) Personal Responsibility; (c) Reflective Decision Making; (d) Mindful Respect; and (e) Conflict, Not Attacks.

As seen below in Figure 1, the rectangles with arrows on the outermost semi-circle are the Common Rules in social justice facilitation that were identified by Arao and Clemens (2013). The trapezoids in the middle of Figure 1 are the counterpoints that were made by Arao and Clemens (2013) for better collaboration between participants and facilitators of social justice. The circle in the middle are the social emotional learning strategies identified by CASEL (2022). The colors signify the throughline between the 5 tenets of Brave Spaces and the SEL 5.

*Figure 1: Alignment of Arao and Clemens's (2013) Social Justice Common Rules, Brave Space Tenets, and CASEL's (2022) Social Emotional Learning Wheel.*



### Controversy with Humanity

As Arao and Clemens (2013) discuss controversy with humanity, they are at their core asking to be aware of the people with whom one interacts. They took this idea from Astin and Astin (1996, as cited by Arao & Clemens, 2013) “a value whereby different views are expected and honored with a group commitment to understand the sources of disagreement and to work cooperatively toward common solutions” (p. 144). This idea of working cooperatively towards a common goal correlates to the SEL 5 competency of relationship skills. CASEL (2022) uses the behaviors of “Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving...negotiate conflict constructively...” and “...navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities” provides a larger context for this Brave Space model to take hold within (Relationship Skills).

## Personal Responsibility

The second rule that Arao & Clemens (2013) discuss is entitled “Don’t take things personally” and their reaction against this traditional social justice concept was to “own your intentions and your impact” (p. 145). This is not dissimilar to how Brookings defines personal responsibility: “Personal responsibility is the willingness to both accept the importance of standards that society establishes for individual behavior and to make strenuous personal efforts to live by those standards” (Haskins, 2009, Para 1). By making these strenuous personal efforts to live by societal standards, one is in fact managing their own behaviors, or self-management as CASEL (2020) describes: “Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation”; “Demonstrating personal and collective agency” and in general the ability to “manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations...” (Self-Management).

## Reflective Decision Making

As Arao and Clemens (2013) discuss the reaction to the third common rule, “Challenge by Choice” it becomes apparent that giving students the ability to opt out of a situation enables an avoidance of discourse, not a confrontation, and hopeful, settlement (p. 146). Where they focus their argument is on the decision itself. Therefore, when concerning Reflective Decision Making, the impetus becomes on the individual themselves of not only being aware of the decision, but the factors leading up to the decision as well. Why the participation (or non-participation) of group involvement depending on a risky or taboo topic is just as important, if not more, as the participation itself. The Thoughtful Reflective Decision Making (TRDM) model proposed by Paternoster and Pogarsky, (2009) was determined to have four measures: (a) collect information for a problem that requires a decision to be made, (b) postulate alternate resolution strategies for said problem, (c) analyze the resolutions through a systematic process, and (d)

retrospectively analyze the quality of problem solver one was. This is not dissimilar to what Arao and Clemens (2013) are referring to. When Arao and Clemens (2013) refer to non-participation and the decision to do so, especially on social justice matters, it is important that there are reflective tactics used as to the reasons behind that being the best course of action. CASEL (2022) terms it “Responsible Decision Making” and use behaviors such as “Reflecting on one’s role to promote personal, family, and community well-being”; “Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one’s actions”; and the ability “...to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.” (Responsible).

### Mindful Respect

“Common Rule 4: Respect” is challenged by Arao and Clemens (2013, p. 147). The focus of respect, especially in context of a social justice framework, relies upon behaviors that show deference to someone else. However, due to the multicultural nature of the world today, the behaviors that are considered respectable may often vary from culture to culture. Therefore, it is upon the individual, when engaged in a conversation with others, to respect them mindfully by approximating, asking, or studying how to show deference and regard in multicultural ways. While the term ‘mindful respect’ was not used directly by Arao and Clemens (2013) it is this researcher’s intention to use this term synonymously with their idea.

The term Mindful Respect, as best can be established, was first used for research purposes by Sheridan, but no exact definition is given (1995). Van Ness’s (2011) breaks Mindful Respect into four unique areas (a) respect as intentional appreciation (b) respect as caring relationship, (c) respect as supportive help, and (d) respect as comfortable space. Hase (2000) refers to it as someone who responds to change well, maintains healthy behaviors when faced with a crisis, manages uncertainty and ambiguity, and creates healthy environments for others to

live and work in” (p. 2). Alaei (2021) cites several examples of the current definitions, specifically “Honoring students’ position and abilities, and seeing them as worthy of esteem; showing regard for students’ basic human right to expression and believing in their growing abilities to manage their own lives successfully” (p. 61, Deiro, 2003 as cited by Alaei 2021). CASEL (2022) describes it as the ability “...to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts” (Social-Awareness). This idea that an individual must “identify diverse social norms”, “show concern for the feeling of others” and “take others perspective” (Social-Awareness) are all integral to understanding those around us.

### Challenges, Not Attacks

Parallels were found between self-awareness and Arao and Clemens’s (2013) “Common Rule: 5 No attacks” (p. 148). It encourages the internalized question “Have my privileges been attacked?” when in a situation that makes the receiver feel uncomfortable. Arao and Clemens (2013) establish that one should focus on challenges, not attacks. By challenging someone’s personal beliefs, that belief may shift or strengthen, depending on the result of the discourse. Arao and Clemens (2013) do not deny that there are times where blatant attacks on personal character do not happen, but they encourage perspective taking when receiving information that may contradict one’s own current perspective. This allows for a significant amount of self-awareness and analysis of one’s own persona, including any and all character flaws. CASEL (2020) defines self-awareness as influencing behavior using emotional intelligence, clarity of thought, and value analysis. In Brave Spaces, the value one may be assessing is an internal flaw. This internal honesty and sincerity with self leads to a growth mindset for all.

### Operational Definitions

The following terms will be operationalized as described below for the purpose of this research.

#### Academic Learning:

Academic learning shall be derived from Denham and Lieberman's (1980) definition of "academic learning time" in which time spent engaged in a learning activity will produce a moderate to high result in growth of knowledge. This includes learning across disciplines, for example learning math in a piano course.

#### Approach Behaviors:

Approach behaviors are the behaviors that follow the motivation by students to engage in interpersonal interactions leading towards a positive outcome. The opposite of these are called avoidance motivation and behaviors. This definition has been adapted from (Gosnell and Gable, 2022).

#### Bravery:

Bravery shall be defined as an act of risk that involves the physical or emotional pain of "...giving up one condition for another" (Boostram, 1998, p. 399).

#### Brave Space:

Brave Space will be defined through the application of Arao and Clemens's (2013) five tenets: (a) controversy with humanity, (b) personal responsibility, (c) mindful respect, (d) reflective decision making, (e) challenges not attacks.

#### Collaboration:

Collaboration shall be defined as the ability for two groups or individuals to work in a productive manner and use each other's ideas to achieve a common goal (Dehartchuck, 2021).

#### Curriculum:



Curriculum shall be considered part of the teacher's lessons. They may be learning standards dictated by the state, county, or other concepts to aid in the development of theatre (Florida Education Foundation, 2022).

#### Teacher Immediacy Behaviors:

These non-verbal behaviors are meant to communicate from the teacher to the student various messages, including warmth, positive relational affect, creates an increased sense of interest in the student and reduced the perceived distance between the two (Andersen et al., 2008)

#### Interpersonal Communication:

Wrench et al. (2008) define interpersonal communication as messages exchanged between two people. This may be from teacher to student, student to student, or teacher to teacher.

#### LGBTQIA+:

Note: If the full acronym is not used, it is because it is only those groups have been studied. "LGBTQIA+" will be defined as any student that self-identifies as non-cisgender person or a person who identifies as non-heterosexual. The acronym will remain the same as stated as this is the most current and accepted shorthand for anyone who defines themselves as "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, or Asexual/Allied (Lambda Legal, 2022).

#### Peer Relationships:

Peer relationships shall be defined as the interpersonal relationships developed with classmates, both positive and negative (Endedijk, 2021).

#### Safe Space:

In Boostrom (1998) he refers specifically to the Safe Space in a classroom as a place where students “...are not isolated, alienated, threatened, intimidated, or ‘stressed-out’” (p. 405).

#### Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity:

Sexual orientation and gender identity shall be defined as the individual orientation in which a person feels a sexual or romantic attraction and whether that individual identifies as cis-gender or otherwise (Lambda Legal, 2022).

#### Social Emotional Learning Strategies:

These 5 Social Emotional learning strategies were last revised by the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (2020). They are self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness. These were taken from Goleman’s (1995) knowing one’s emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships.

#### Theatre/Theatre Classroom:

Theatre and the theatre classroom as related to any and all things associated with the physical classroom, the curriculum, and the co-curricular or extracurricular activities associated with the performing art of theatre. This borrows from Middleton and Dell’Elba (n.d.) in which they define theatre education as a field that “Encompasses dramatic interpretation, writing, multimedia production and technical skill through the artistic processes of creating, performing, responding and connecting.”

#### Vulnerability:

Vulnerability shall be defined as a state of emotional exposure that comes with a certain degree of uncertainty (Fritscher, 2021).

### Unwritten (Hidden) Norms:

Unwritten (hidden) norms shall be defined as those norms within the classroom that were not necessarily spelled out specifically by the teacher, school, or district (Alsubaie, 2015).

### Assumptions

When delving into this research, there must be an agreement on the basis of facts. This research assumes that those students and teachers who are participating have an interest in theatre and live in Florida. The assumptions of the political climate of 2023 in Florida Education and the anti-LGBTQIA+ bills that have passed, most notably, the Family Rights in Education Act, also called the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. An assumption may be made that due to the higher prevalence of liberal ideas within the arts community, these new bills would not be looked on favorably. There has been coverage about these bills statewide, amongst others. This ‘hot button topic’ could potentially skew certain student responses to have a more liberal or political bias. It could potentially lead to a limitation in terms of which students decide to disclose their sexual orientation on a survey. Moreover, it may reduce the number of people willing to participate in a focus group. There must be assumptions about the reliability and validity of using Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT) as a new and potentially valid form of member checking certain qualitative research.

### Delimitations

The delimitations of this research primarily involve the scope of the study. This research is limited to a single state in the southeast of the United States. Therefore, the generalizability of these findings should be examined. The sensitive nature of the sexual orientation and/or identity

of a K-12 student is difficult to acquire, therefore the delimitation on university students who have experienced theatre has been done to mitigate potential violations of privacy.

### Limitations

One of the largest limitations in this study is that the information that is being gleaned is reflective. Memory bias, therefore, is a significant limitation to the findings of this study in both the survey and the focus group. In addition, as this survey and focus group involve social justice, there may be elements of participant bias and/or group thinking that may happen.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Important Issue

LGBTQIA+ students are bullied within schools (Greytak, 2016). The reasons behind this can stem from any number of factors, including inherent homophobia, envy, religious beliefs, or unfamiliarity (Greytak, 2016; Rehage, 2018; Marshall et al., 2015; Kosciw et al., 2014 as cited by Bailey, 2015). Violence and aggression are nothing new to our society. However, it seems that younger generations, even as young as 8–9-year-olds and possibly younger, are partaking in bullying behavior on campus (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). Even though most students face some sort of identity crisis around the ages of 11-14 (middle school), students who come out as LGBTQIA+ face challenges that heterosexual and cisgendered individuals do not face (Rehage, 2018). It is important to note bullying behavior that Sutton and Smith (1999) published showed that most people do not support the victim when the bullying behavior is encountered. They termed them ‘assistants’ and ‘reinforces’ for either actively being a part in the bullying behavior or an observer who does not engage in the situation, respectively. More importantly, students are not the only ones who can create a school culture that is less than favorable to LGBTQIA+ students. As of May 2023, there have been 540 bills targeting LGBTQIA+ people across the nation, 220 specifically for transgender and non-binary people. Florida, along with North Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas have the most restrictive laws and the only two concerning education (Human Rights Campaign, 2023). There needs to be something to ensure that LGBTQIA+ students have a Brave Space in which they feel a sense of belonging.

## Historical Connections - LGBTQIA+ Persons and Theatre

The colloquial correlation between LGBTQIA+ people (particularly gay men) and the arts is not only a matter of hearsay, but also of documented research. Studies dating as far back as 1966 have suggested a scientific correlation (Green & Money, 1966). Drs. Green and Money conducted a longitudinal study of effeminate boys starting in 1958. As the boys grew, they found solace in the theatre as it allowed them to role play. While the excerpt below should be taken within the context of the time in which it was written, it is important to note that these types of studies in the LGBTQIA+ community are monumental and groundbreaking:

While our study demonstrates an association between boyhood effeminacy and dramatic or playful role taking, it poses a question to the primacy of the relationship between them. Might one consider that the boys are to adopt an effeminate role because they have the primary talent, chameleon like, for role taking... Alternatively, might one consider that having differentiated psychosexually as effeminate, the boys extend their effeminate role taking to dressing up and impersonating characters on the stage? (Green and Money, 1966).

This question, of having ‘effeminate’ boys associate with theatre and role play, is fundamental to the stereotype that still exists today. Bottoms (2003) summed up the sentiment to homosexuality in a damning article published by Donald Kaplan in *Tulane Drama Review* in 2002: “...gay people and actors display the same pathological failure to mature healthily...the desire to play a part, to pretend to be something other than oneself...is a sign of fundamental deviance...this helps to explain why homosexuals find homes so easily in the theatre”.

Delving further into historical research helps to round the correlation between all of the LGBTQIA+ community, but specifically gay men and theatre. In 1979 Fredrick Whitam and

Mary Jo Dizon conducted a study to examine if there was a correlation between occupational choices and sexual orientation, specifically from a cross-cultural lens. The table below from that article shows their significant findings that a larger number of homosexual men do go into the field of “Arts and Entertainment” not only in North America, but in Brazil as well.

*Table 1: Whitam and Dizon’s Table, 1979*

Note: Notice that there were 42 homosexual men in America and 44 in Brazil, more than any other category in either country. Printed with permission according to JSTOR’s Terms of Service.

	American								Brazilian			
	Male				Female				Male			
	Heterosexual		Homosexual		Heterosexual		Homosexual		Heterosexual		Homosexual	
White collar	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	(4)
Traditional businesses	19	(34)	8	(22)	11	(26)	6	(32)	2	(13)	6	(26)
Teaching and helping	12	(21)	9	(22)	9	(21)	2	(11)	2	(13)	3	(13)
Arts and entertainment	3	(5)	15	(42)	8	(19)	3	(16)	1	(7)	10	(44)
Home and food	—	—	2	(6)	2	(5)	—	—	—	—	1	(4)
Law enforcement	8	(14)	—	—	2	(5)	1	(5)	—	—	—	—
Sports	5	(9)	—	—	—	—	1	(5)	1	(7)	1	(4)
Outdoor/animal related	5	(9)	—	—	6	(14)	6	(32)	—	—	—	—
Travel related	—	—	1	(3)	3	(7)	—	—	—	—	1	(4)
Grooming	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mechanical	—	—	—	—	1	(2)	—	—	2	(13)	—	—
Hard science	4	(7)	1	(3)	—	—	—	—	6	(40)	—	—
Factory	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Religion	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	(7)	—	—
Total	56*	(100.0)	36	(100.0)	42*	(100.0)	19	(100.0)	15*	(100.0)	23	(100.0)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

\*Discrepancies between Ns in this table and following tables reflect “no answers.”

In 2012, Itai Ivtzan examined if those gay performers were doing well socioeconomically as compared to their heterosexual counterparts. While his findings ultimately rejected his hypothesis, he states quite affirmatively in his discussion that a “...search of the literature regarding homosexuality within the theatrical profession yields surprisingly few results” (Ivtzan, 2012). This is to say that these articles represent a broad history of homosexuality in theatre. LGBTQIA+ youth who are currently involved in theatre or find a home within the theatrical community may look for comradery, leadership, and a sense of community, especially within

theatrical school programs. Kaplan's negative narrative cannot continue to be a benchmark in queer research. Even Dr. Money, who LGBTQIA+ people have to thank for coining the terms *gender identity*, *gender role*, and *sexual orientation*, had significant issues of his own after two of his subjects in a study committed suicide in 2004. This is all to say that the storied past of LGBTQIA+ research, whether within the context of theatre or not, needs revisiting and revising. I hope that this paper will lend itself to the positive research of LGBTQIA+ people, especially directed towards those teens who find solace within the theatre.

### Goleman's Influence

Goleman (1995) builds off Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences by way of Mayer and Salovey (1990). While Gardner's Personal Intelligences were of a much broader range than Goleman, Gardner helped to widen the playing field for other psychologists like Mayer and Salovey. It is from Mayer and Salovey's (1990) work that Goleman's ideas stem (Goleman, 1995). Mayer and Salovey determined that there were four variations on emotional intelligence (EI), (a) Identifying emotions on a nonverbal level, (b) Using emotions to guide cognitive thinking, (c) Understanding the information emotions convey and the actions emotions generate, (d) Regulating one's own emotions, for personal benefit and for the common good (1990). Goleman (1995) developed these ideas further into his five EI's (a) emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, (c) motivation, (d) empathy, and (e) social skills. These serve as the blueprint for CASEL's SEL 5 today, which Goleman co-founded a year prior to his research being published. Goleman (1995) then discusses how Karen Stone McCowan's "Self Science Curriculum" (SSC) is a cousin to Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences, often referred to as "personal intelligences" (p.389). Her curriculum helped to apply CASEL's SEL 5 to a field beyond the workforce, that of education. Goleman (1995) writes



The common thread is the goal of raising the level of social and emotional competence in children as a part of their regular education – not just something taught remedially to children who are faltering and identified as “troubled,” but a set of skills and understandings essential for every child. (p.391)

Goleman understood that the SSC’s influence went well beyond those specific students who may be acting out. Goleman (1995) considers this reactional to the significant amount of prevention programs that were focused on drugs at school, bullying, teen pregnancy, etc. They used the WT Grant Consortium’s study on prevention programs as evidence for their argument (Hawkins & Catalano 1992). The Consortium found that the only way that these programs worked was if they taught “...a core of emotional and social competencies, such as impulse control, managing anger, and finding creative solutions to social predicaments” (Goleman, 1995, p. 391). The Consortium identified emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills and each one of the three had multiple phenomena associated with it. A full list can be found in APPENDIX A, but examples are managing feelings (emotional skills), self-awareness (cognitive skills), and use of nonverbal and verbal language (behavioral skills).

#### Brave vs. Safe Space Framework

It seems as if there is groundwork for Arao and Clemens (2013) Brave Space model in Goleman (1995). He discusses an example between two boys who, rather than avoiding conflict, both “...made some effort to express their point of view in a way that would not accelerate the conflict...This assertiveness...emphasizes expressing feelings forthrightly, but in a way that will not spiral into aggression” (p. 397). The students in the SSC learned that avoiding conflict was not always the best means to a productive end.

McCowan's SSC consists of 13 categories and reads as a first draft of CASEL's SEL 5. They were self-awareness, personal decision making, managing feelings, handling stress, empathy, communications, self-disclosure, insight, self-acceptance, personal responsibility, assertiveness, group dynamics, and conflict resolution. A detailed list of the SSC can be found in APPENDIX B.

In an article in the *Wall Street Journal* (2015), Ben Zimmer alludes to the origin of the phrase 'Safe Space.' He explains that while there is no definitive nexus point, but starting 1976 in women's news journals there were ads asking if anyone was interested in having a 'Safe Space' in which to voice their opinions. The following year, a professor by the name of Howard Millman published a textbook entitled *Creating a Safe Space* and, in his course, he made students sign a contract stating that they would foster a positive learning environment, what he deemed 'a Safe Space' (Zimmer, 2015). Later, when LGBTQIA+ activists started advocating for their cause (post Stonewall) having a 'Safe Space' started to become synonymous with the LGBTQIA+ movement. These 'spaces' were not only a physical space, such as a nightclub or a health care center, but also used as a more ethereal construct meaning that the persons involved were pro-LGBTQIA+, also called 'allies.' These Safe Spaces became a place in which queer people could open up about their identities without risk of rejection, especially in the early days of the LGBTQ+ movement (Hanhardt, 2013).

In K-12 education, GLSEN was founded as a task force by educators, for educators to research, advise, and educate faculty, staff, and administrators on how to handle LGBTQIA+ marginalization and bullying in our schools. Kevin Jennings, the founder and current Assistant Deputy to the Office of Safe and Healthy Students (a subdivision of the Department of Education), provides a combination of a local lateral and national top/down structure to aid in

revamping protocol for schools (Jennings & Richardson, 2010). Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) for educators dealing with homophobic comments helps to provide a Safe Space for LGBTQ+ students (Greytak, 2016). When students did have the availability of a Safe Space to go to, students were not only able to experience the support of faculty and staff; moreover, they were able to experience the lack of support of faculty and staff when they did not step in (Marshall et al., 2015). One important aspect of GLSEN is an incorporation and guidebook for successful Gay/Straight Alliances (GSA) in schools. GSAs not only provides leadership opportunities for LGBTQIA+ students, but they also provide them for heteronormative students as well (Poteat et al., 2013).

Ali (2017) writes that in school Safe Spaces (also called safe zones) branched from similar concepts in the surrounding community. This low-risk area provided a place in which minorities such as undocumented students, international students, first generation students, and students of color could share experiences, vent, and problem solve. Within the context of LGBTQ+ individuals, Safe Space participants are allies to the community and even those school leaders who have had training on how to be sensitive to the needs of minority communities. In general, these areas are used to facilitate dialogue and learning while acknowledging biases and pointing out the fallacies in their biases. However, within the context of a school, these Safe Spaces are used to facilitate dialogue without agenda. The aim then of any student support service (Rankin, 2005) should be to recognize that Safe Spaces in and of themselves do not alter the school climate, but rather they are one facet of a much larger programming model for an inclusive campus. Rankin (2005) then goes on to say that for LGBTQIA+ students in particular, the need for a visible LGBTQIA+ campus community, including faculty, administration, staff, peers, curricula, and most importantly an active LGBTQIA+ student body. While Rankin (2005)

is not suggesting an alternative campus for LGBTQIA+ students, Safe Space initiatives are critical for maintaining a positive school culture (Rankin, 2005).

There has been a rise against ‘Safe Spaces’ on college campuses for nearly 10 years (Juang, 2015). The argument is not because of anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment, but rather in the exclusionary nature of the term itself. The reasoning is that if one area is ‘safe’, the rest of the given area is ‘unsafe’. Several institutions of higher education, including Yale, have offered the alternative of a single Safe Space implying that the entirety of the campus is indeed a safe place in which to express opinions and be heard without fear of verbal or physical retribution. The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (n.d.) refer to a ‘Safe Space’ as someplace in which students feel comfortable expressing themselves with full participation or fear of a verbal or physical attack. In addition, they help to provide validations of experience and feelings, both positive and negative. Miriam-Webster (2022) defines ‘safe’ as a place in which there is no ‘controversy or contradiction.’ Moreover, it says that to be safe means that one is ‘free from risk.’ This becomes problematic when discussing a need for a ‘Safe Space’ in which open dialogue can occur without judgment, as there is always risk involved in disclosing personal opinions or experiences. This can be especially true if the individuals who are deserving of this ‘Safe Space’ are at risk youth.

Barrett (2010) and Boostrom (1998) also identified ambiguity around the term safety and argued that it may be impossible to clearly define what this means in the classroom.

It is important to understand that all marginalized individuals may feel a sense of internal comfort as others like them join the Safe Space; however, there may be diversity of marginalization within the Safe Space. Due to this diversity and unfamiliarity with all individuals within the Safe Space it may still involve risk (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Brueckner, 2000). With this

potential risk, the creation of a Brave Space may be close at hand in order to create and facilitate camaraderie, differences of opinion, and various worldviews. The creation of a Brave Space will always involve risk, but in so doing, it allows a more robust dialogue while providing support for those in need (Ali, 2017). A minority group (not necessarily ethnic) may reject the idea of a Safe Space in which they have to name their accuser, as that is inherently unsafe disclosure (Leonardo & Porter 2010). Moreover, they may resist the notion of a truly empathic ‘Safe Space’ as attempts at disclosing maladaptive situations prior have not led to positive results, and in fact have had a rejection of their expression and labeled hypersensitive (Sparks, 2002).

Goodenow (1993) puts forth the suggestion that a sense of belonging is the psychological membership felt when a student feels one with their school or classroom. It refers to “...the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” (Aerts, 2012, p. 93). There has been an international effort to see how LGB students’ sense of belonging is compared to their heterosexual classmates. The findings show that LGB students do not have a strong sense of belonging as their heterosexual classmates (Aerts, 2012). Therefore, attempting to make a classroom a ‘Safe Space’ can be counter-intuitive to the overall learning environment.

Greene (1995) wrote about how Denis Donoghue connected these Brave Spaces with the performing and visual arts. She quotes him as saying that the arts are “really momentous, because they provide for spaces in which we can live in total freedom.” (p. 134). Donoghue compares our lives to a page in a book. We can live in the workaday world of the text, or we can make a space in the margin. Our ability to live a free life depends on our ability to move out of the text and into the margin. Greene (1995) goes on to discuss how important recognition, acknowledgement, and visibility within these spaces are for the LGBTQ+ community amongst

others including women, the disabled, and the homeless. Greene feels that the sense of belonging comes out of an isolationist void. The more representation exists within these spaces, the less isolated these groups feel, and the more validated minority groups become. Also, she continues by stating it is not enough to carve out one's own space to be heard, it is essential that others recognize this brave or Safe Space that has been self-created. Having this space respected, honored, and validated and using the arts as a tool in which to do so, is at the very heart of this research (p. 176). It is the supposition of Boostrom (2010) that Greene would reject the notion of comfortability in these creative spaces, as un-comfortability leads to change, learning, and growth.

The intention of the theoretical framework of a Brave Space is not to replace the Safe Space, but simply to be a different tool for the job (Arao, personal communication, July 25, 2022). Palfrey (2017) specifically discusses safe and Brave Spaces in relation to education and how important they both are. In particular, Safe Spaces are places of free exploration with a distinct set of rules facilitated by an adult or peer expert where students are bolstered by support, develop interpersonal skills, and acknowledge diverse thoughts and behaviors. Brave Spaces go beyond this Safe Space and recognize a world beyond the bosom of mother academe. The physical Brave Space can be anywhere, if within it the goal is to achieve truth (Arao & Clemens, personal communication, July 25, 2022). Zheng (2016) cautions against the inherent positive atmosphere that Palfrey (2017) and Arao and Clemens (2013) argue for. Zheng (2016) argues that the Brave Space model only works if all parties come to the space with "different but equal points" (Para. 7). In other words, marginalized groups inevitably may have the onus of education thrust upon them to educate the privileged majority in a Brave Space when that is not something they may not have the mental or emotional fortitude to engage in. Therefore, in that case, the

minority group would prefer to stay in the Safe Space, where they do not feel the pressure to educate those from differing viewpoints. Language and terminology is constantly evolving in this field, and it should be important to note the contribution of Allen (2020) and his term “places of respite” (p. 1579). He defines it counter to a Safe Space, whereas a Safe Space is used as a place of sanctuary for marginalized people to steer clear of threats, a place of respite allows for community building and is focused on the community and activist teambuilding within this space rather than being a place of hiding. Regardless of the terminology, support will come, but all parties acknowledge that there will be uncomfortable situations contained within and all parties are prepared for that conversation. The ideal, according to Palfrey (2017) is that the safe and Brave Spaces support each other and create a place for challenging as well as supporting students.

### LGBTQIA+ and Education Overview

The coming out process is one of vulnerability, self-discovery, and there are no two journeys that are the same. Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs, formerly Gay Straight Alliances) are in high schools and middle schools across the nation, over 4,000 as of 2019 (Parris et al., 2019). It is imperative that educators understand the important role they play in the social and emotional well-being of the child, but also recognize the role of the legislation that allows them to exist on school campuses nationwide. In *Colín v. Unified School District, Orange County School Board* in California had declared that Colín and his classmates could not establish a GSA on a school campus as the board declared it was a “sexually charged club” (*Colín ex rel. Colín v. Orange Unified School Dist. 83 F. Supp. 2d 1135 C.D. Cal., 2000*). Colín argued that the students’ First Amendment rights of expression and association were violated under the Equal Access Act. They fought to get an injunction for the Defendants to cease their blockage of

allowing the students to meet while the court case was being decided. Ultimately, Colín was victorious, which led to the allowance of the significant number of GSAs around the nation to be formed.

Several studies have been published on homophobia and bullying behavior (Poteat & Rivers, 2010; Regis, 2009; Heinze & Horn, 2009; Berlan, et al., 2010) but what first needs to be clarified is the difference between what constitutes true bullying behavior and simple teasing. While bullying is planned only to damage a specific target (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008, Oliver et al. 1994; Smith et al. 1999) teasing can be a social activity designed to move forward relationships. However, like bullying, there are elements of aggression contained within, but primarily teasing also invokes humor and ambiguity (Mills & Carwile, 2009, p. 287).

Poteat and Rivers (2010) surmised that homophobic specific slurs are common amongst those who bully (Aggression, 1<sup>st</sup> para.). This makes sense with other data for heteronormativity and dominance by heterosexual male students (Poteat & Rivers, 2010, Aggression, 3<sup>rd</sup> para.). The primary bully and the reinforcer were found to have the most frequent use of homophobic language (Predicting, 1<sup>st</sup> para.).

This is to say, when bullying did occur students were able to articulate the importance of the support and assistance they felt by having administrators and teachers in their corner. Moreover, students were able to tell when teachers and school officials did not step in when targeted bullying and marginalization occurred (Marshall et al., 2015). GLSEN has served as a resource for other systems that have been put in place in schools, such as a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA). These have been shown to not only provide leadership opportunities for those within the LGBTQIA+ and heterosexual community; but it also adds to a positive sense of security and higher level of belonging at school (Poteat et al., 2013).



### Social Emotional Learning, Brave Spaces, and Theatre

In terms of the social and emotional intelligence of students, especially starting at the middle school level, when basic developmental tells us that ages 11-13 are a time in a child's life that are extremely confusing, confounded with bad memories, extreme mood shifts, and of course, acne. Examining what theatre brings to the table in terms of social emotional learning, psychoanalysis, self-identity, and emotional intelligence should not be overlooked (Leff, 2018). Students of color who have to play the part of 'educator' with their peers in an effort to raise awareness of societal and economic hardships, it can be very negatively impactful to them. (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). When marginalized students feel a sense of self-doubt, confusion, or even anger at who they are at that moment in time, the theatre becomes that place where a student can just be themselves and allow a space for a student to engage in self-reflection (Medina, 2007). Theatre teachers have studied human behaviors, psychological tactics, and decoding subtexts via their craft; the ability to observe, process, and demonstrate this awareness is a necessary element of creating a Safe Space (Hunter, 2008). Using Whitam and Dizon's (1979) findings on gay men and theatre as a foundation, could it be that students of theatre (especially in high school and middle school) start to arrive at a sense of awareness of their own sexual orientation and the attempt to embrace and empower their own self-image through role-play? This could be the cause and reason why theatre teachers are more likely to act as sounding boards for students to learn about themselves, especially when plays like *Twelfth Night* and *Peter Pan* have gender play in plot and in casting respectively, but still falls within the frame of traditional and family friendly theatre (Newman, J., 2018).

A benefit of theatre and its positive effects on mental and social well-being associated with bullying is that controversial issues can be dealt through a lens of imagination, potentially allowing for more openness, more well-rounded discussions,, and even creating leadership

opportunities (Risner, 2013; Hanrahan and Banerjee, 2017; & Porta et al., 2017). In essence, by using role play to address controversial issues allows the opportunity for an actor to simultaneously have an objective viewpoint and emotional vulnerability.

To achieve a Brave Space, students must first feel safe enough to take risks. The stage is ultimately a safe place to do brave things. Theatre simultaneously provides a space in which a student can feel vulnerable, but rather than running from the vulnerability, they recognize it, embrace it, and use it to empower their performance. This mindful approach for young students is not only part of a larger movement to redefine the Safe Space and ensure that students are not only nurtured but challenged. “Research indicates that establishing a mindfulness practice reduces anxiety, diminishes stress reactivity, enhances coping, benefits attention, increases compassion (and self-compassion), and strengthens emotion regulation” (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018, p. 242). This dichotomy of both vulnerability and empowerment may be due to the nature of what theatre, specifically acting theory, involves.

Constantin Stanislavski was instrumental in acting theory. Much of his method of acting informs the acting traditions and methodologies today. Goodwin and Deady (2013) explain that Stanislavski’s system had two areas of focus, work on the self and work on the role. Working on the role involved script analysis and other tools like affective memory to aid in performance (Goodwin and Deady, 2013). There were two areas of focus within working on the self. The inner, which involve imagination and relaxation, and the outer, involves physical movement and elocution (Merlin, 2003).

Stanislavski (2010) discusses the process by which one can be objectively self-aware using the framework of theatrical praxis. This “passive memory” alludes to a viewing of internal memories without engaging in them (p. 115). An actor must be able to first witness these

memories, then choose to engage with them, and finally activate them by “draw[ing] unconscious creative feeling out of the depths of his being” (p. 138). What this implies is that the emotions associated with each memory can be ‘activated’ by the actor at a certain moment in time and allow themselves to emote truthfully on stage. Kamath (2011) notes that an actor should never lose themselves within a role, and points towards the authenticity of self that is needed for an actor to possess. If an actor attempts to not engage fully with this active memory, then the acting can appear baseless. This objectification and identification of memory and emotion then the application of that emotion onstage is the authenticity actors strive for (Kamath, 2011).

Clare (2015) found a significant relationship in Stanislavski’s acting training and modern mindfulness and Self Awareness approaches. Stanislavski strived for actors to create and foster feelings of sadness, joy, anger, and lust and remember those not only as individuals, but as part of a greater whole. In *An Actor Prepares* (1936) Stanislavski outlines how he uses these emotional techniques to strengthen his performance:

That type of memory...is what we call *emotion memory*. Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced. They may seem to be beyond recall, when suddenly a suggestion, a thought, a familiar object will bring them back in full force. Sometimes the emotions are as strong as ever, sometimes weaker, sometimes the same strong feelings will come back but in a somewhat different guise (p. 182, italics in original)

In essence, Stanislavski wants us to recognize, preserve, and recall emotions so that we can use this catalogue to drive scenes forward and make characters come alive. When an actor can

become the master of their own emotional intelligence by using Self-Awareness, it strengthens their performance (Moore, 1984).

In addition, Stanislavski (1936) discusses the necessity for concentration and how important that becomes not only for an actor to understand themselves, but also to understand the dynamic between themselves and the other actors. This task of concentrating on the given circumstances of the scene (i.e., time of day, conflict within the scene, emotional dynamic between those on stage) is not inwardly focused, but outwardly so. Sowoski (2018) surmises that this concentration on the other, the emotions that come to light, and the behaviors that follow as a result authenticate the actor on stage for a truthful performance. One simple way of ensuring the awareness of the other is to actively listen to those on stage with you. Norville (1962) suggests that listening is “often neglected” in actors training and cites Michael Redgrave (1954) for support:

Only a few actors listen all the time in the way that they should... there is the difference between listening in an artificial strained manner and listening as we listen in real life, which is to listen as spontaneously as we speak (as cited by Norville, p. 34)

Actively listening for the purposes of clear communication is at the center of CASEL’s (2022) definition of Relationship Skills. Understanding objectively the given circumstances of a situation and how to react appropriately within that dynamic to others not only benefits the character on stage, but the actor as well.

Furthermore, Brandt (2016) shines a light on the importance of Social Awareness on stage in Stanislavski method. Brant pulls this quote from Stanislavski’s book, *An Actor Prepares*: “try to learn to look at and see things on the stage, to respond and give yourselves up to what is going on around you. In a word, make use of everything that will stimulate your

feelings.” (Stanislavski, as cited by Brandt, 2016). This is what Stanislavski (1936) referred to as adaptation. Moving beyond one’s character and their relationship to others, the next stage is how that character interacts with the world around them. Brandt (2016) discusses how in doing so, it was liberating to him as an actor as it brought his focus on his partners on stage and their interactions with him and with each other. He was able to focus “...on the reality onstage” and genuinely and truthfully react to his fellow actors, bringing him closer to a more authentic performance (p. 16). The necessity to focus on the others onstage and the outward awareness that Stanislavski is referring to, could fall under CASEL’s (2022) Social Awareness. At its core, Social Awareness relies upon understanding other’s perspectives, feeling compassion, and how does this affect one’s own behavior in certain settings (Social Awareness). In summation, the pedagogical model of theatre must involve teaching students to become self-aware of their own memories and emotions, to create complex and imaginative relationships, and to recognize and utilize social cues and norms.

#### Parallels of Theatre and Education - Boal and Freire Paolo Freire - Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Freire’s concept of a problem-posing pedagogy centered around the students' needs and experiences ran counter to the teachings at the time (NCCA, n.d.). This problem-posing pedagogy flips the standard ‘sit-and-get’ learning model which he referred to as ‘banking’ (Freire, 1970). His concept of linking theory with practice in daily life, praxis, championed the crux of the pedagogy relying on active and continuous dialogue with all parties. This critical consciousness that will develop through praxis will lead to actionable change (Freire, 2005). Freire’s model involves both the oppressor and the oppressed. Those who are oppressed in the classroom feel as if they have no voice, while the oppressor banks information into the head of the oppressed. It is important to note that this is not always a teacher-student relationship, but

also can be a peer-to-peer relationship as well. He saw people as change agents for their world. He felt that as people were driven to incite change, the move towards a happier and more understanding society would follow (Freire, 2005). The goal of these conversations is for liberation by the oppressed, not by hiding and reserving their ideas and opinions, but to do so through constant dialogue. He felt that both dialogue and critique that centered on common vocabulary, imagination, and culture, along with larger social and existential constructs was at the core of liberating the oppressed (Vittoria, 2019). His praxis breaks down the teacher-to-student barrier and reminds us that we all learn from each other, making the teacher-student and student-teacher parallel, not giving power to one over the other. As this happens, both the oppressor (teacher) and the oppressed (student) can join forces to liberate the oppressed.

#### Augusto Boal - Theatre of the Oppressed

If Freire asked, “Who is education for?” Boal asked, “Who is theatre for?” Augusto Boal was significantly influenced by fellow Brazilian, Freire. So much so that his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* is a nod to Freire’s work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning as cited by Chumbes, 2020). Boal, like Freire, was exiled from Brazil and went to work in the surrounding countries. When he was in Argentina, he started working with the migrant workers who he saw as oppressed by those who employ them. He realized that in the act of theatre, these workers could then take agency over conflicts and restorative justice not only with each other, but with their oppressors as well (Boal, 1973). Boal would use the audience (spectators) as problem-solvers in improvisational scenes directly related to the social justice issues in which the migrant workers were entrenched. The spectators would get up and become part of the scene, bringing to life situations of oppression, and potentially how to liberate themselves from these specific oppressions. This “spect-actor” as he termed, is akin to Freire’s

student-teacher/teacher-student where the roles are no longer well defined, and the participants involved are equaled. More importantly, the reflective practices that were employed by Boal with these workers turned simple improvisation into praxis (Vittoria, 2019). Boal also discusses the notion of a “Cop in Your [Our] Head” essentially governing through internalized oppression (Boal, 1990). He continues by calling out that the cop is internal, however the ‘headquarters’ of the cop is external. Essentially, the oppression may be self-imposed due to fear of an outside person or entity. Boal would have the spect-actors role play how to put on a strike even though there may be several spect-actors that would not actually strike in real life (Boal, 1990). In so doing, he is demonstrating that the cop does not need to exist and is driving spect-actors not towards catharsis, but to what he termed as ‘dynamism’ in which those who watched or participated would be motivated to action (Boal, 1990). The act of catharsis is in fact a purging of emotions. However, for Boal he wanted to ensure that these oppressed individuals felt empowered to enact social change, therefore the catharsis was not the goal, but the activation through dynamism was the endgame. By focusing on dynamics rather than activism Boal finds the importance of the exercise in the learning process itself, not on the outcome.

### Brave Spaces, Boal, and Freire

The coming out process for LGBTQIA+ youth is not safe but is in fact quite risky and brave (Boe, et al., 2018, Loest, 2019, Bunting, 2022). Within the Brave Space model outlined by Arao and Clemens (2013), there have been parallels identified between their five tenets of a Brave Space and CASEL’s SEL 5 (2022). These commonalities were found through similarities in definitions and terms in both CASEL’s definitions of their 5 Competencies and the language used in the 5 tenets of a Brave Space. Arao and Clemens (2013) were heavily influenced by both Freire and Boal when they developed the Brave Space framework (Arao, personal

communication July 25, 2022). In fact, Boal's techniques have been proven to improve relationships with LGBTQIA+ people and allyship by 50% (Moreno, 2018). They were also not the only ones to take Freire and Boal and apply it to social justice. Michael Rohd (1998) created his own method of utilizing a Brave Space. Rohd was able to take Boal's work and frame it in community-based conflict resolution. Rohd (1998) discusses the framework needed for this type of theatre as a place that those participating can agree is a place centered on dialogue so that imaginative performances can take place. His work assisted communities with theatrically based conflict resolution strategies that helped to create a brave space within (Loest, 2019). CASEL (2022) classifies conflict resolution strategies as behaviors associated with Relationship Skills. Through Rohd's exercises, both students, teachers, and leaders can benefit from this gamification of conflict resolution through improvisation. Hellman and Milling (2021) recommend more blending of art education and SEL strategies as they were already in practice. Specifically, they recommend further development of the SEL and arts curriculum that explore "...teacher identity, mental health awareness, self-awareness, self-management, diversity, and social justice" (p. 1). Boal and Freire both valued the deconstruction of the classroom (or stage) and a side-by-side model of interacting, be it the student-teacher and teacher-student by Freire or the spect-actor by Boal (Freire, 1970, Boal 1973). Students may feel that they cannot stand up for themselves in real situations of bullying behavior. However, once these vulnerable students practice anti-bullying techniques via role play in Brave Spaces, they may be able to carry that social justice praxis into their daily lives.



### Leadership, the Paradox of Tolerance, and Practical Applications

There is significant research to suggest that there is major lack of training for administrators to lead diverse schools or advocate for marginalized groups within their school (faculty, staff, and students) (Brown, 2004; Gooden & Dantly, 2012, Rusch 2004, Trujillo & Cooper, 2014). Palfrey (2017) suggests that administrators should heed the words of current student populations who indicate a negative campus culture. The duality on a school campus of free and open expression with diverse individuals with their own cultural beliefs indicates that there will forever be this dialectical tension. By 2044, the United States will have no specific racial majority, and by 2055 people of Asian descent will eclipse people of Latin descent (Frey, 2014, 2016 as cited by Palfrey 2017). Those that specifically study administrators and their professional development point towards the curriculum of leadership programs are focused on learning and ascribing to national standards, rather than working on local school-site problems. In addition, quality internships seem to provide the best training, however they are often not utilized due to lack of district partnerships, site-based mentoring, or a lack of hands-on experiences (Young, et al., 2001).

The Paradox of Tolerance, as defined by Popper (1945, as cited by Palfrey 2017) professes:

Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them (p. 100)

In essence, this campus environment in which administrators and campus leaders are given are already inherently at odds. The demographic, political, and cultural environment of schools, and society at large, will only become more diverse, not less. This allows for a great plurality of

thought. School leadership should strive for a community-based approach to their campus in which everyone commits to "...a deep, abiding sense of tolerance" (Palfrey, 2017, p. 100). The conflicting paradox arises when the tolerant are asked to be so to the intolerant, and those who are intolerant are not forced to tolerate anyone (Palfrey, 2017). Marginalized groups on campus pay with their psychological well-being, even in times of booming diversity, when the argument for everyone to have a voice is used as a guise for hate speech (Palfrey, 2017). It is the job of leaders and administrators to bolster the school climate for all students. Educational leaders, according to Palfrey (2017) should be vocal in its values to stakeholders, teach and model tolerance over targeting behavior, prioritize free expression and idea bartering, be transparent in school policies and procedures, and focus on healthy conflict resolution. For Palfrey (2017) the campus environment should have promoted tolerance as a keystone.

The Southern Poverty Law Center ([SPLC], 2017) advises administrators on how to deal with crisis situations. These may be large or small, but regardless they still all will ultimately negatively affect school culture. Wilson et al. (2019) advise using the Safe Space rather than the Brave Space model for administrators as it helps to foster an "inclusive and supportive environment where individuals feel valued and where difficult dialog is seen as a path to growth and success" (p. 52). Here, they argue, it is easier for the departmental culture to become a place where individual differences, feedback, and diverse thoughts are welcome. Practical advice like listening for pejorative statements in the hallways, the school spirit messaging at sporting events, changes in behaviors overall, especially from marginalized student populations, mentality and fellowship of the faculty and staff, and communication with bus drivers are ways in which administrators can be proactive (SPLC, 2017). They are clear in their dealings with hate speech. "...it is important to denounce the hateful act in clear, unambiguous terms. Silence or a lack of

response allows fear, confusion, misinformation, and distrust to grow” (p. 18). Wilson et al. (2019) suggests that when administrators seek out and value all voices, demonstrate ethical values and decisions, accommodate a variety of working styles by faculty and staff, and help others to maneuver organizational school culture, Safe Spaces are easier to create and maintain. School leaders seeking to create Safe Spaces of respect and honesty can facilitate this by establishing clear rules and guidelines for communication, interactions, and daily routines (Wilson et al., 2019).

It is important to note that the administration’s role is not only to help create and maintain a positive school culture for students, but for faculty and staff as well. For example, faculty may like to incorporate LGBTQIA+ inclusive language or scenarios within the curriculum for better representation within the classroom SLPC (2018). If this is the case, administrators are advised to do the following (a) support diverse instruction provided it is standards based; (b) examine data regarding supportive staff, student morale, and inclusive lesson planning; (c) recognize the impact that diverse lessons could have campus-wide; (d) look for similar models at other schools; (e) take time to make a decision; (f) ensure proper documentation is provided (SPLC, 2018, p. 25).

Students who have been targeted by bullying should not be asked by faculty, staff, or administrators to give multiple interviews to various leaders, as this may be mentally too taxing (SPLC, 2017). Melissa Rivers, a school principal, uses her personal experience in delicate matters that school principals may encounter dealing with students who are LGBTQIA+ in Chappell et al. (2018). These include public displays of affection, coming out, transgender issues, and GSA’s.

For example, the usual approach of reporting to parent(s)/guardian(s) that their child was “making out” with another student can create a life-or-death situation for queer students. This fact was never explicitly discussed in any of my education programs nor in the one I taught in. However, I have since learned through firsthand experience and observation that educators must think before “outing” or revealing a student’s sexuality to their parent(s)/guardian(s). In one situation, the assistant principal told both students’ parents their children were violating the school PDA rule with a student of the same sex. While neither of those students was kicked out of their homes, both were subjected to shaming by their parents, and one was forced by her parents to stay away from the other and switched out of all classes with that student (p 185).

It is important to note in the previous example that the principal was not the administrator who handled the situation. Therefore, it is important to note that any SOP’s that the school or administration may put in place are followed by all members of the leadership team, especially if it could inadvertently cause harm to a child’s welfare. If a student comes out as LGBTQIA+ to a faculty, staff member, or administrator, they have provided steps to take to ensure that the focus is on the student (SPLC, 2018).

### Summary of Literature

In summation, there are several factors that need to be considered for Safe Spaces and Brave Spaces to be viable and production options on campus to create a more positive school climate. The Trevor Project (2022) reported that 55% of LGBTQIA+ youth overall, and of those 63% of transgender and nonbinary youth, identified school as a place of gender affirmation (The Trevor Project, 2022). They continue that the five most important ways to support LGBTQIA+ youth are (a) being welcoming to them and their friends/partners, (b) talking with them honestly

about LGBTQIA+ identity issues, (c) proper usage of name and pronouns, (d) uphold their gender expression, and (e) continued education (The Trevor Project, 2022). The role of educators, in particular those who are in theatre, can serve to create these Safe Spaces where students can feel vulnerable, but allow brave choices to be made through role play exercises. In addition, these fields are not just limited to the stage. Behind the scenes, participation in technical theatre can provide gainful employment for those students who may not want to focus on a college path to advanced education. This system parallels both Boal and Freire as the learning does not become from the oppressor (teacher) to the oppressed (student) but rather all parties are learning together. Boal's improvisational techniques for social justice (spect-actor) allows for a diversity of thought that helps to recognize a multitude of viewpoints. School leadership, in turn, should be cognizant of all these services. In addition, school leadership should be decisive but empathetic when dealing with disciplinary issues with LGBTQIA+ youth. Ultimately, if these are followed, then marginalized students should feel accepted and administration should feel empowered.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers and if these strategies aligned with the SEL 5. In addition, students were surveyed to determine their past experiences in K-12 theatre. This was done to determine if students described their experiences using language and themes correlated to safe spaces, brave spaces, or the SEL 5. There was a specific opt-in focus group for students who identified as LGBTQIA+ to explore the experiences of this marginalized community.

The data gathered was to determine the language and themes used by students and teachers and if they align with a Brave Space as described by Arao and Clemens (2013) vis a vis CASEL's (2022) SEL 5. Using convenience sampling, data were collected from theatre teachers in the same county as the University students to identify SEL 5 strategies being used. These teacher surveys and the student data have been compared to determine if any patterns emerge between teachers and students.

This Chapter provides a recipe for replication. Below, the participants, instrumentation, design, sampling, procedures, and what Lincoln and Guba (1985) term as trustworthiness (i.e., reliability and validity) within this qualitative design are discussed. Essentially, the participants, both teachers and students, were either teaching or attending University in the same Central Florida school district. The teacher and student survey were both researcher developed to align specifically with the RQs. The interview questions were developed not only to align with the RQs, but also developed from commonalities, differences, or wonderings after reviewing the student survey responses. It was not asked in the student survey where they experienced K-12 theatre. The responses by both teachers and students were coded by this researcher (a.k.a. human

intelligence [HI]) first into the SEL 5 categories that were mentioned or inferred in their response. After which, the responses were member checked through an artificial intelligence (AI) program, ChatGPT. The results of the member check were compared using the bullet point criteria provided by CASEL (2022) on their website. All instances where AI and HI disagreed on coding were then reconciled using the bullet criteria as a rubric.

### Participants

Purposive sampling was used to recruit students at a Central Florida University who had previous experience in K-12 theatre. There were a total of 37 respondents. After accounting for unfinished surveys, there were a total of 16 participants, three of which identified as LGBTQIA+ and opted for the focus group. There were 11 cisgendered women, two cisgendered men, 1 transgender male, 1 non-binary female, and 1 female that identified her sex but did not specify their gender. Range in age was 18 years old to 27 years old, ( $M = 20.6$ ). Of the cisgendered women, 6 identified as straight, 4 identified as bisexual, and 1 did not answer. There was one gay male and one straight male, both were cisgendered. There was 1 bisexual transgender male, and two persons identified their sexual orientation as queer; one of which identified as non-binary and the other declined to answer. There were three students that opted in for the focus group. However, due to scheduling and attrition, only one of the three were able to participate. So, it was at this point this became an interview. He is a transgender bisexual male who shall be referred to as Sam. Of the 16 student participants, 10 are used throughout Chapter 5 to further discuss the phenomenon of Brave Spaces within the theatre classroom and how they align with the SEL 5. Table 15 in CHAPTER 4: RESULTS gives a full demographic breakdown of each student participant with a pseudonym.

The surveys for the teachers were sent out to a large Central Florida school district. Due to IRB restrictions, the survey could be sent out to a maximum of 10 schools. There were three schools that participated with a total of four teachers answering the survey. There were three female teachers and one male teacher that responded. All female teachers taught middle school (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade) and the male teacher taught high school theatre (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade). There was a 55-year-old female teacher with 10 years teaching experience five of which were teaching theatre. There was a 30-year-old female with 14 years of teaching experience, all but one teaching theatre. There was a 34-year-old female with 10 years of teaching experience, 6 of them teaching theatre. The male teacher had 6 years of teaching experience, five of which were teaching theatre.

### Instrumentation

There were two researcher created surveys that were used to collect qualitative and demographic data. The student survey collected general demographic data including sexual orientation and student classification; in addition, there were seven short answer questions. The survey is provided in APPENDIX C: STUDENT SURVEY. Questions included in the survey were focused on gathering information from the students about interpersonal and academic lessons learned in their theatre classes, their relationship with their teacher, if there was healthy conflict, if they felt courageous, and the atmosphere of the theatre classroom (including extracurricular rehearsals) and any differences it may have had as compared to their core academic classes. The goal of these questions was threefold. It was to ascertain if any social emotional strategies were used in the classroom, if the theatre space was described using similar verbiage as Arao and Clemens (2013) in defining a Brave Space, and if there was any longevity to these lessons learned. The second of the surveys, which was to be filled out by teachers,



provided a space for teachers to answer questions that drove at the heart of social emotional learning strategies, the Freire model of education, comfortability, student growth and risk-taking behavior, and student self-disclosure. It is provided in APPENDIX D: TEACHER SURVEY.

In Table 2 are the survey questions asked to both teachers and students. Each question was developed by this researcher to align with the RQs. The underlined portion of each question was designed to elicit responses from participants that align to each RQ.

Table 2: RQ and Survey Question Alignment

Research Questions	Teacher Survey Questions
<p><b>RQ1:</b> What are common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers?</p> <p><b>RQ1a:</b> Do these strategies align with Social Emotional Learning techniques?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you elaborate on your <u>most effective teaching strategy</u> for theatre?</li> <li>2. Is it important for <u>students to feel comfortable</u> in the theater space? Why?</li> <li>3. <u>How</u> do you make students feel comfortable?</li> <li>4. <u>Do students take risks</u> in your theater space?</li> <li>5. <u>What techniques do you use</u> in the theatre space to help students take risks?</li> <li>6. How does <u>theatre affect student growth</u>?</li> </ol>
Research Questions	Student Survey Questions
<p><b>RQ2:</b> How do students describe their K-12 theatre experiences?</p> <p><b>RQ3:</b> Do student descriptions of their theatre experiences include tenets of Safe and Brave Spaces, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If you learned <u>either academic or interpersonal lessons in theatre</u>, do you still use them today? How?</li> <li>2. <u>What was the atmosphere of the theatre space</u> you remember most fondly?</li> <li>3. Describe the <u>relationship between you and a past theatre teacher</u>. Was there a particularly impactful experience?</li> <li>4. <u>Describe the experiences</u> and atmosphere in theatre classes <u>as compared to your ‘core’ classes</u> (Science, Math, English/Language Arts, and Social Studies)?</li> <li>5. Did the theatre space <u>create healthy conflict</u>? How?</li> <li>6. Did you ever <u>feel courageous in the theater space</u>? Please describe it and how it felt.</li> <li>7. If you participated in theatrical extracurricular activities, <u>was the atmosphere different than in the classroom</u>? If so, how?</li> </ol>

### Research Design

The research study used a phenomenology as a research method which “...describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). A conceptual framework

consisting of the five social emotional learning strategies were used to frame participants' experiences. The description of these five constructs by CASEL (2022), (a) Social Awareness, (b) Self-Awareness, (c) Relationship Skills, (d) Self-Management, (e) Responsible Decision Making, were used to determine if both groups of participants described commonality in their shared experiences. In essence, could the participants from both populations, teachers and students, find commonality in any of the SEL 5 when asked to reflect on their former participation (students) or their current teaching strategies (teachers)? The sole student interview was asked about commonalities that were found in the general survey, and also served to ascertain from an LGBTQIA+ perspective. Once demographic and qualitative data were gathered, they were coded and member-checked through an online artificial intelligence program, ChatGPT. Comparative analysis was used to determine if there were similarities between teachers and student's responses with the purpose of determining what does the theatre space mean and were there parallels to SEL 5, and then Brave Spaces by proxy.

### Population and Sampling

#### Students in Schools

The number of students in Florida, including those who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, were found through a combination of publicly available data from the school district and the CDC. Data from the CDC's 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that 18.2% of Florida high school students identified as LGBTQIA+ and approximately and 3.3% of students identified as transgender (as cited by Duncan, 2021). The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) in 2019 reported that there were 852,276 students in grades 9-12. Using that data with the CDC total percentage of LGBTQIA+ youth (21.5%) there were approximately

183,239 students who identified as LGBTQIA+. There has been an almost 5% increase in student population in this Central Florida school district from 2019 until the 2022-2023 school year (FLDOE, 2023). There are approximately 894,055 students in grades 9-12 (FLDOE, 2023). If the same 21.5% were constant, it could be determined that there are about 192,221 students who identify as LGBTQIA+ within the state of Florida.

Publicly available data from the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) indicates that of the 763,435 students enrolled in Florida high schools, 78,870 students were enrolled in high school courses with the name “theatre” in the title. These included specific classes such as Technical Theatre and Musical Theatre. While the data are not currently available on how many LGBTQIA+ students there are enrolled in theatre, a study from Dizon and Whitam (1979) can provide clarity. They indicated with statistical significance that homosexual men go into the arts three times more than their heterosexual counterparts (5% to 15%). What is currently unknown is the rate of increase from 1979-2019 in regard to all LGBTQIA+ people entering the arts. Therefore, the student participants for this research study were enrolled in a Central Florida University, 18 years or older, and have experienced theatre in their K-12 education. Doing this increased the depth of dialogue within the survey responses and the interview as the participants responded with a sense of objectivity over time. As for the interview, Sam, a pseudonym, identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community and was continuing in his theatrical pursuits at this University. The purpose of this interview was, as stated earlier, so that a vulnerable population within the arts, students who identify as LGBTQIA+, have a voice in this research.

### Teachers

According to the Florida Department of Education’s Archive website (2023), there are currently 204,132 teachers in the state of Florida. For convenience, in the same county in which

the University students were being sampled, teachers from that same school district were being surveyed. There are currently over 11,000 teachers in the same Central Florida county as the University, 5,000 of which are secondary teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). It is unknown how many teachers within this county teach theatre.

### Research Procedures and Data Collection

#### Student Survey and Interview

A Qualtrics survey was sent out via email to theatre students and a large Central Florida University over a List-Serve by an administrative assistant who had access to said List-Serve. See Table 2 or APPENDIX C: STUDENT SURVEY and APPENDIX D: TEACHER SURVEY for the exact open ended questions. It was open for three weeks for students to respond. Once a week, the administrative assistant would send a reminder email to the same List-Serve. There were a sum total of four emails asking for participation. There were 37 students who accessed the survey, and 16 were used as the rest were filtered out for their lack of completeness.

The student opt-in interview was scheduled through Zoom, in which the participant, Sam, acknowledged and agreed to being verbally recorded. In addition, the researcher's screen was shared with Sam, who was able to read the questions and double check the researcher's notes for accuracy in real time. The audio recording was then transcribed using methods described in more detail below and then checked and corrected for any inconsistencies by the researcher.

#### Teacher Survey

The teacher survey was allowed to be sent out via email to 10 schools within the same Central Florida school district as the University students. The School District's IRB allowed for a maximum of 10 schools to be contacted. The schools were then chosen by this researcher at

random. IRB policy within the district mandated that they facilitate the organization of which of the 10 schools would participate. The principal of the schools had to opt-in to this experiment for the theatre teachers to participate. After IRB were notified that a school principal opted in for this research opportunity, a link to a Qualtrics survey was sent to the teacher. Out of the 10 schools originally selected, three principals allowed for this research to continue. A total of four teachers responded. It is unknown which of the three schools had two theatre teachers.

Presumably, at least two of the teachers may have known each other as they work at the same school site however, no indication was given in the responses to support this presumption. The purpose of these open-ended questions was to establish relationships, if any, within teaching strategies and student experience.

#### Human Intelligence (HI) Coding

The comments of each respondent (students and teachers) were parsed into Google Sheets where a spreadsheet was created with the responses, and a descriptive coding sequence. The responses were first reviewed and categorized into CASEL's SEL 5 by this researcher, (a.k.a. human intelligence, [HI]). These descriptive categories were: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) decision making, (d) relationship skills, and (e) social awareness. Each response could fit within any number of these categories.

In Figure 2, Elizabeth was commenting on best practices in the classroom (Q1) and this researcher coded the comment for all of the SEL 5. They are listed under each Descriptive Code. The secondary Descriptive Code (e.g., 1A, 2A, 3A) are the bullet point criteria provided on CASEL's (2022) website as indicators or behaviors associated with each of the SEL 5. The color on each subcategory correlates to the words (or sentiment in the case of 4A) in the response that is associated with each subcategory.

Comments										
Getting kids on their feet as early as possible in the year helps ease the fear and panic associated with acting in front of others, particularly for middle-school-aged children. Also, connecting curriculum to their real-life experiences is invaluable in fostering engagement and/or buy in										
Descriptive Code 1	Descriptive Code 1A	Descriptive Code 2	Descriptive Code 2A	Descriptive Code 3	Descriptive Code 3A	Descriptive Code 4	Descriptive Code 4A	Descriptive Code 5	Descriptive Code 5A	Other Codes
self management	exhibiting courage to initiate a task	self awareness	understanding the interaction between feelings, values, and thoughts	decision making	the application of critical thinking skills to both scholastic and 'at home' situations	relationship skills	evolve positive relationships	social awareness	validating the concern for others feelings	RS overall

*Figure 2: Human Intelligence Coding*

Note: In the “Other Codes” column ‘RS Overall’ means that this comment by Elizabeth was coded for ‘Relationship Skills’ overall even though it was not explicitly mentioned. For example, “...particularly for middle-school-aged children” was coded for Social Awareness via the bullet point criteria “Validating the concern for other’s feelings” as the comment is discussing anxiety associated with the general population of middle schoolers when asked to perform on stage.

Sam’s response on his survey (not the interview) to how he remembers the atmosphere of the theatre classroom ranked ‘high’ on both Self-Awareness and Social Awareness as within the comment, Sam writes “...I was not comfortable at my high school most days, and the theater building was my main safe space.” In this one sentence Sam addresses his own Self-Awareness “I was not comfortable...” and Social Awareness “...theater building was my main safe space.”. Please see Figure 8: Multiple High Rankings of SEL 5 Impact. Student Matrix. for a detailed description. These surveys were short answers, the goal was to get a robust body of research from which to pull. Once each response was coded into one of the SEL 5, then each statement

was subcategorized into one of the specific statements CASEL identifies as examples of these strategies at work. APPENDIX F: SEL COMPETENCIES AND PRACTICES provides a list of each competency and its subcategories. After coding by HI, the data was then entered into an artificial intelligence (AI) online program, ChatGPT, to member-check for consistency and reliability in coding. All coding data was then organized in frequency tables to determine if any phenomenon were present.

### Member Checking Using ChatGPT

In an effort to utilize new technology in research, something Rahman et al. (2023) recommends is to utilize ChatGPT. Chatterjee and Dethlefs (2023) suggest that there should be more interaction with ChatGPT in an academic setting and reported on. ChatGPT is, at its simplest, an artificial intelligent interface that uses predictive text not only for construction, but also synthesis and abstraction of ideas. Mesec (2023) clarified that “Artificial intelligence becomes ‘intelligent’ through guided abstraction, by constantly comparing input data, recognizing their common characteristics, and merging similar ones (coding).” (p. 3). In a similar fashion to how commercial DNA ancestry kits work, the more the public partakes in AI, the more information it receives, and the better not only the predictive nature, but also the synthesis and abstraction of information.

Hosseini et al, (2023) cautions any researcher who uses these types of emerging technologies that the researcher is the one to be held accountable for a lack of accuracy, credibility, integrity, errors, or biases It must be clear that all coding of data was first done by the researcher, then input into ChatGPT to member check categories, and checked again for final interpretation and accuracy. Mesec (2023) maintains that a researcher using AI programs should maintain a critical distance that can be well defined and followed. The outputs from the program



should then be analyzed by the researcher for usefulness, by discarding or negating the ones that do not contextually make sense.

Rahman et al. (2023) suggests that ChatGPT can synthesize transcribed data and they suggest that future research is to “...summarize large text and identify key findings from the literature” (p. 10). Haleem et al. (2023) suggest that it “saves the day” due to its capability of taking unstructured data and creating structure within them, like taking short answer surveys and finding themes within them. Mesec (2023) wrote that when ChatGPT was given prompts it was able to answer with remarkable accuracy. It was able to not only categorize and evaluate, but also identify underlying themes and concepts. Mesec (2023) continues that it is also of extreme import that the prompts that are input into ChatGPT are specific, and if used for research purposes, it should pass through the researcher’s judgement prior to publication.

### Trustworthiness

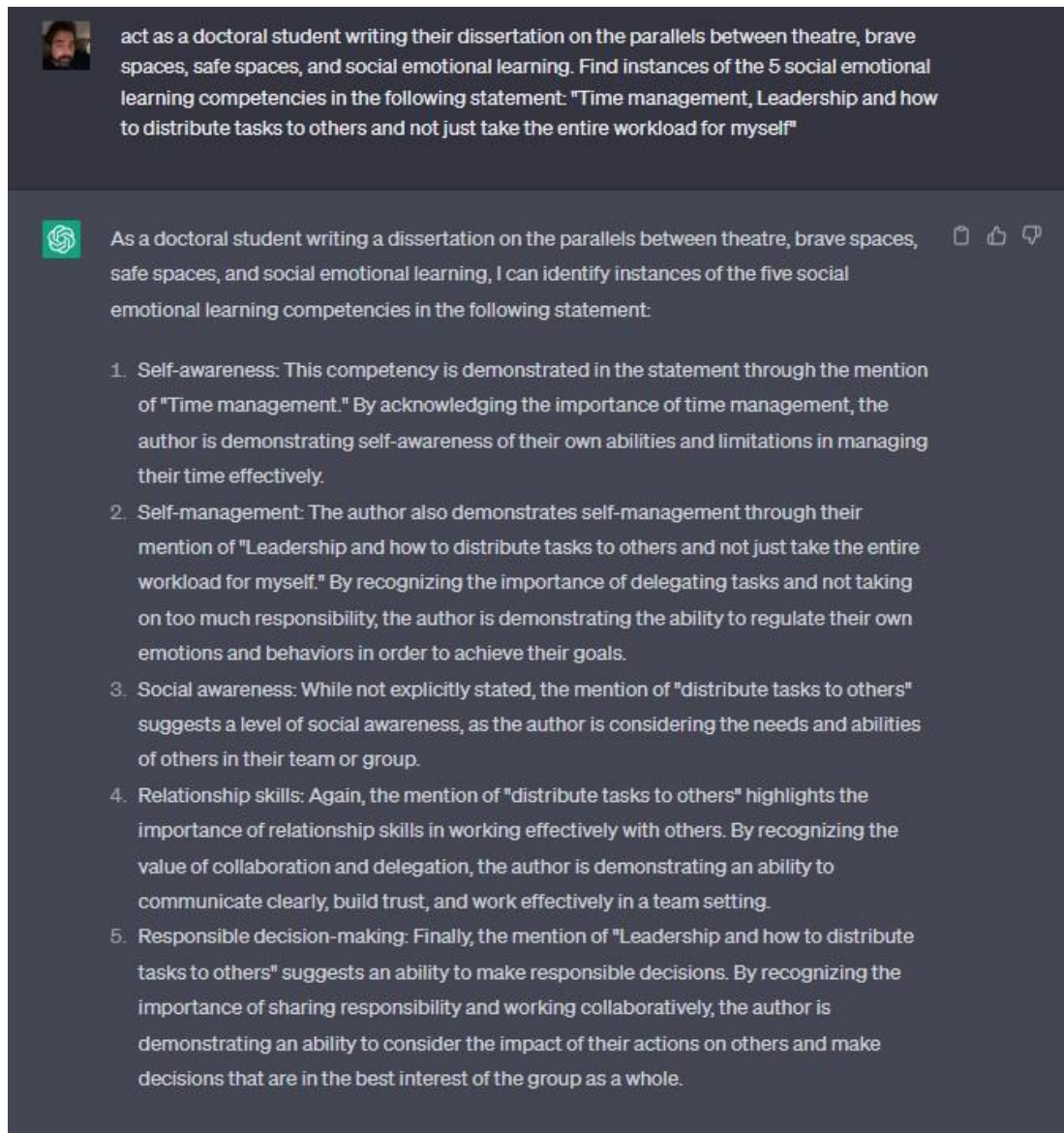
Creswell and Poth (2018) reference a study by Eli et al. (1991) in which they discuss the muddying of waters when quantitative language is applied to qualitative research (p.254). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest ‘trustworthiness’ as an alternative to reliability and validity, used when conducting quantitative research. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss member checking writing that it is “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Stake (1995) suggests that the participants themselves review the qualitative analysis to determine accuracy. All of the students and teachers had the ability to see all of their answers and review them prior to submission of their online survey. Following the recommendation of Lincoln and Guba (1985) ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) online platform, was used to member check this researcher’s coding of all responses. It was used as a member-checking opportunity for its efficiency, objectivity, and innovation in research design. If discrepancies

were noted in the coding between HI and AI, the coding would be reviewed by myself and decisions were made for HI to align with AI, or to continue coding with discrepancies between HI and AI. ChatGPT's member check output provided specific bullet point criteria by CASEL (2022) to assist in determining the justification for ChatGPT's coding. After reviewing discrepancies, this researcher found that all instances of ChatGPT's coding process were sound. Notes taken in Sam's Zoom interview by this researcher were reviewed by Sam in real time as the notes were visible to him as they were shared on screen and available for him to review. After each interview question and follow up question, he was asked to review the notes for accuracy. If any adjustments needed to be made to the notes, it was done to his satisfaction. ChatGPT and Surveys

Chat GPT (e.g., artificial intelligence or AI) member-checked the taxonomy of the responses within the SEL 5 framework. These are Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Self-Management, and Responsible Decision Making. It was then cross-referenced with the original taxonomy done by the human researcher (e.g., human intelligence or HI) to determine similarities in categorization. In other words, HI and AI considered a respondent's comment and placed it into one of four categories: (a) no reference to the SEL 5; or (b) if they both identified references to the SEL 5, (c) were they the same, (d) and impact of the SEL 5 on each response. All results will be discussed in the next chapter. In addition, within this dissertation will be found an acknowledgment of personal bias (See Positionality) and past experiences that have influenced this research.

There was enough background knowledge of ChatGPT by this researcher to know that the more specific information that is fed into ChatGPT, the more specific the information comes out. Therefore, as seen in Figure 3, with the phrasing of "act as" the intent behind it is to let

ChatGPT know from a syntactical sense, that the first thing that it needs to do is to use the frame of reference given. Beyond that, the data input was about the background of this dissertation, and the comment from the respondent.

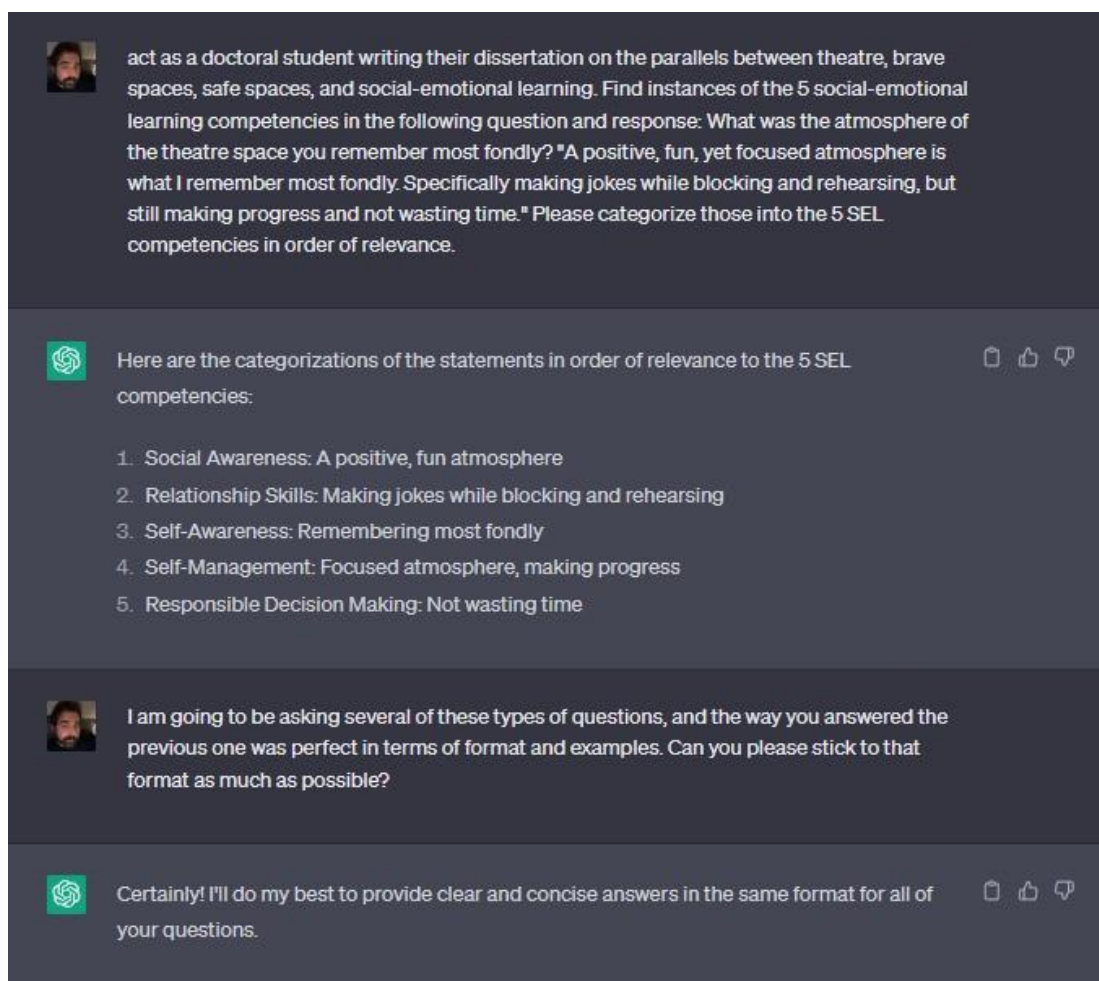


*Figure 3: First Prompt with ChatGPT.*

As seen, ChatGPT was able to analyze the statement and identify markers of the SEL 5. Furthermore, on #3 Social Awareness, that it is using inference and not direct translation as it

responds, “While not explicitly stated...”. The first phrasing went well, but the data was voluminous coming from ChatGPT. There needed to be rephrasing and reorganization.

In a continued effort to provide ChatGPT with the most useful data to approximate HI, the question was added along with the respondent’s response to ensure that ChatGPT may use the question to help analyze the answers. This was due to some of the responses being partial answers to questions or hard to discern without the question for context. For example, Wendy’ response was “Community and support” but without the question for context “What was the atmosphere of the theatre space you remember most fondly?” What was once a vague comment now has contextual meaning.



The screenshot displays a chat interface with a dark background. It shows a user's prompt, an AI response, and a follow-up user message. The AI response includes a numbered list of five SEL competencies. The interface includes profile pictures, the OpenAI logo, and standard chat controls like copy, like, and report icons.

**User:** act as a doctoral student writing their dissertation on the parallels between theatre, brave spaces, safe spaces, and social-emotional learning. Find instances of the 5 social-emotional learning competencies in the following question and response: What was the atmosphere of the theatre space you remember most fondly? "A positive, fun, yet focused atmosphere is what I remember most fondly. Specifically making jokes while blocking and rehearsing, but still making progress and not wasting time." Please categorize those into the 5 SEL competencies in order of relevance.

**ChatGPT:** Here are the categorizations of the statements in order of relevance to the 5 SEL competencies:

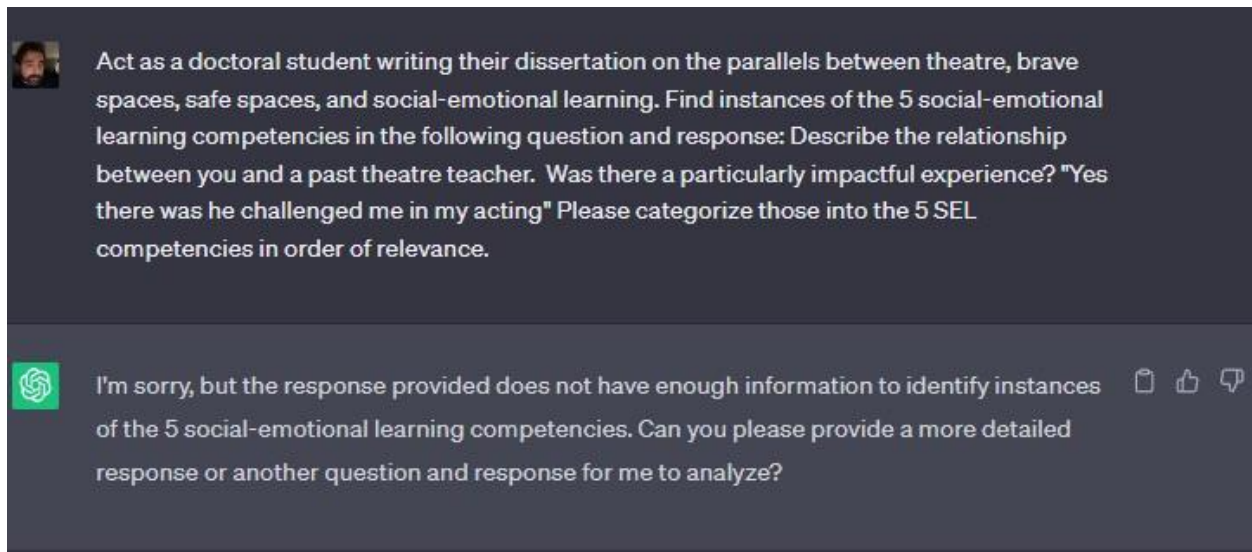
1. Social Awareness: A positive, fun atmosphere
2. Relationship Skills: Making jokes while blocking and rehearsing
3. Self-Awareness: Remembering most fondly
4. Self-Management: Focused atmosphere, making progress
5. Responsible Decision Making: Not wasting time

**User:** I am going to be asking several of these types of questions, and the way you answered the previous one was perfect in terms of format and examples. Can you please stick to that format as much as possible?

**ChatGPT:** Certainly! I'll do my best to provide clear and concise answers in the same format for all of your questions.

*Figure 4: The Revised Prompt.*

Note: ChatGPT started to vary its own responses, as demonstrated in the list above. In addition, the organizational phrasing of “in order of relevance” was an attempt to ascertain which of the SEL 5 had the most ‘impact’ on a statement; all responses were ranked high, medium, or low, and if one of the SEL 5 were not present in a statement, ChatGPT would respond with an “N/A” or similar response as seen in Figure.



*Figure 5: Not enough information for ChatGPT.*

In an instance in which both AI and HI agreed that there was no inference in the response to one particular SEL 5, it would be noted as well. For example, in response to the “Describe the relationship between you and a past theatre teacher. Was there a particularly impactful experience?” Xiomara responded “My theater teacher and I got along relatively well. As long as I did my work, she respected me, and I respected her.” HI interpreted that the statement had inferences of relationship skills and self-management insofar that the individual identified both “Demonstration of self-discipline and self-motivation” and “Evolve positive relationships”, both of which are expressions/behaviors of SEL 5 (CASEL, 2022).

After several rounds of inputting and receiving data, the feedback from ChatGPT was alternating between narrative formats and lists, realizing that the prompt had to be revised and the output was still overall, clunky, through trial and error, eventually an idea hit for the output to be in a chart.

Here are the categorizations of the response into the 5 SEL competencies based on the criteria provided:

1. Self-awareness
  - \* Being one's own self
  - \* Identifying personal strengths and skills
2. Self-management
  - \* Using memorization skills learned in theatre
  - \* Applying outside the box thinking
3. Social awareness
  - \* None
4. Relationship skills
  - \* None
5. Responsible decision-making
  - \* None

Could you relist those left to right in a chart, left to right?

Sure, here's a chart listing the competencies and the instances found in each response, ordered from left to right:

SEL Competencies	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3
Self-Awareness	N/A	Learned to work hard, set goals, and work towards them	Taught to think outside the box and be oneself
Self-Management	N/A	N/A	Used memorization skills learned in theatre
Social Awareness	N/A	N/A	N/A
Relationship Skills	N/A	N/A	N/A
Responsible Decision-Making	N/A	N/A	N/A

Figure 6: ChatGPT responses in a chart format.

This was the beginning of the format in which the data was analyzed. While this format worked well, ChatGPT’s ranking of the impact was not clear. For example, Alexis’s response to the question “If you participated in theatrical extracurricular activities, was the atmosphere different than in the classroom? If so, how?” was “The theatrical extracurricular activities I did had a similar atmosphere to the theatre experiences I had in the classroom.”. This is an example of a comment that HI recognized as one of the SEL 5 (social awareness) as pertaining to that response over the rest of the SEL 5. ChatGPT also agreed that social awareness was ranked as a ‘high’ influence on this statement.

Multiple combinations existed in the coding matrix (See Figure ). It is possible for a statement to have been coded as high, medium, or low in more than one of the categories (See Figure 8).

Comments	Self Management	Self Awareness	Responsible Decision Making	Relationship Skills	Social Awareness
If it's dangerous and I have to report something I do. If they should go to guidance, I try to get them feeling comfortable enough to go. Otherwise, I do casual check ins throughout the year.			medium	low	high
	AI Unidentified - HI Identified	HI Confirmed - AI - N/A	AI Identified - HI Unidentified	HI Confirmed - AI	AI Identified - HI Unidentified

*Figure 7: All Categories in HI Data Coding Matrix. Teacher Matrix.*

Note: This is Angie’s response Angie concerning their duties when a student self discloses personal information.

Notice in Figure 7 that this comment was identified by HI for self-management, and relationship skills. AI coded Angie’s comment for responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness; both AI and HI agreed that this comment did not pertain to self-awareness.



In Figure 8, note that both HI and AI confirmed that the comment reflected elements of self-management and self-awareness, did not have any inferences of responsible decision making or relationship skills, and AI identified social awareness when HI did not. In addition, self-awareness and social awareness were ranked high by AI, and self-management was of medium importance. In the comment text itself, the colors were the researcher's way of parsing what part of the comment applied to which of the SEL 5. Each color was associated with one of the behaviors mentioned earlier.

	Self Management	Self Awareness	Responsible Decision Making	Relationship Skills	Social Awareness
Comforting <b>and safe</b> . I was not comfortable at my high school most days, and the theater building was my main safe space. I could go in there in the morning, during lunch, or after school to hang out. When I was doing bad mentally and had to skip some of my other classes, my theater teacher didn't mind me staying in the theater instead to work on homework or just calm down from anxiety.	medium	high			high
	HI Confirmed AI	HI Confirmed AI	HI Confirmed AI - N/A	HI Confirmed AI - N/A	AI Identified - HI Unidentified

*Figure 8: Multiple High Rankings of SEL 5 Impact. Student Matrix.*


Note: This is Sam's survey comment reflecting on the atmosphere of the theatre space he remembers most fondly in his K-12 experience.

In Figure 8, the red represented "identifying personal, cultural, or linguistic advantages." Meaning, Sam noticed that the culture of the theatre had within it a Safe Space, to his's advantage, and he was willing to utilize that resource. The tan color represents "personal and emotional knowledge," a behavior that is associated with self-awareness.

As the member checking continued with ChatGPT, the format shifted slightly throughout the process while the information itself remained consistent, a final format was established, See Figure 9 below. Notice that not only is ChatGPT finding the word or phrase associated with each SEL 5 category, but it also provided valuable analysis of the level of relevance (impact) of each one of the SEL 5 in that response. In this format (Figure 9) 112 comments from students and 36




teacher responses were analyzed. Figure 10 that follows is an example of the same format; however, it is a question from the teacher's survey and their response.



Act as a doctoral student writing their dissertation on the parallels between theatre, brave spaces, safe spaces, and social-emotional learning. Find instances of the 5 social-emotional learning competencies in the response to this question "Describe the relationship between you and a past theatre teacher. Was there a particularly impactful experience?"

My highschool theatre teacher showed me that I was capable to ask for me in life, and also take the things I wanted without guilt. He was willing to teach me to fail, as well as chase success even after failing.

Please chart your response into the 5 SEL competencies in order of relevance, using the format: SEL Competency | Bullet Point Criteria for That Competency | Quote/Phrase | Level of Relevance. Please rank them by the level of relevance, high to low. There may not be a reference to all of the SEL 5.



SEL Competency	Bullet Point Criteria for That Competency	Quote/Phrase	Level of Relevance
Self-awareness	Recognizing one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and limitations	"He showed me that I was capable to ask for me in life"	High
Self-management	Managing emotions, behaviors, and thoughts effectively in different situations	"Take the things I wanted without guilt"	High
Social awareness	Understanding and empathizing with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures	N/A	Not referenced
Relationship skills	Building positive relationships, working cooperatively with others, and managing conflicts	"He was willing to teach me to fail, as well as chase success even after failing"	Medium
Responsible decision-making	Making ethical, constructive choices based on considerations of well-being, safety, and social norms	N/A	Not referenced










Figure 9: Final Format of ChatGPT output for member checking purposes.






Act as a doctoral student writing their dissertation on the parallels between theatre, brave spaces, safe spaces, and social-emotional learning. Find instances of the 5 social-emotional learning competencies in the response to this question "Describe the experiences and atmosphere in theatre classes as compared to your 'core' classes (Science, Math, English/Language Arts, and Social Studies)?"

In theatre class, there was a larger sense of community as we were always working toward a larger, common goal. There was also a sense of trust and respect that was built because of the subject matter and those in the course.

Please chart your response into the 5 SEL competencies in order of relevance, using the format: SEL Competency | Bullet Point Criteria for That Competency | Quote/Phrase | Level of Relevance. Please rank them by the level of relevance, high to low. There may not be a reference to all of the SEL 5.



SEL Competency	Bullet Point Criteria for That Competency	Quote/Phrase	Level of Relevance
Social Awareness	Perspective-taking and empathy	larger sense of community	High
Relationship Skills	Building and maintaining healthy relationships	sense of trust and respect	High
Responsible Decision-Making	Making ethical and constructive choices	working toward a larger, common goal	Medium
Self-Awareness	Understanding one's emotions, thoughts, and values	N/A	Not applicable
Self-Management	Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve goals	N/A	Not applicable

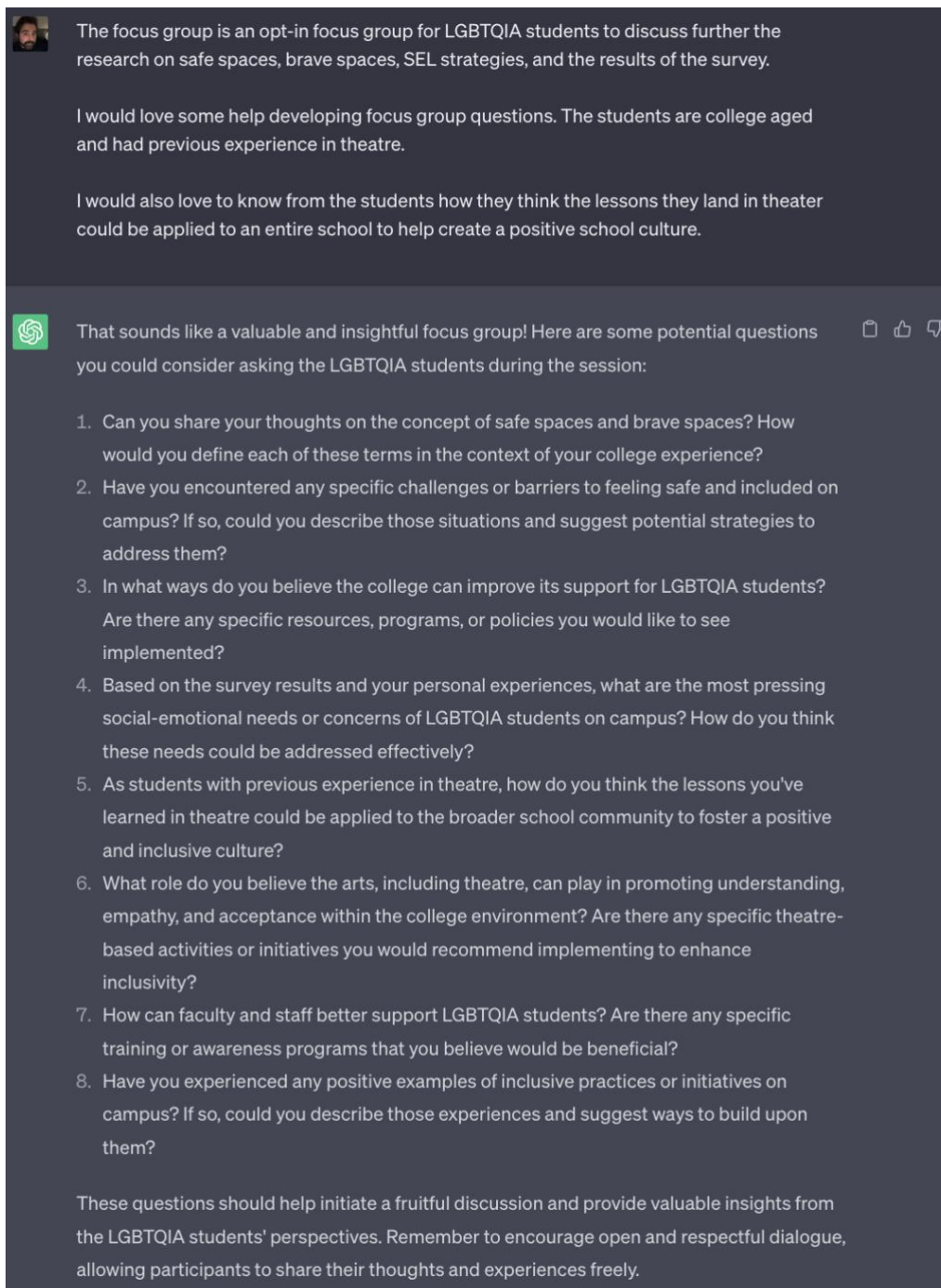




*Figure 10: ChatGPT Teacher Survey in Final Chart Format*

Note: The bullet point criteria are the behaviors that were identified by CASEL for each of the SEL 5. In addition to providing member check information, ChatGPT helped to form the basis of the interview questions.

### ChatGPT, Otter.ai, and Interview

In an attempt to use ChatGPT to its full potential, after all student respondent's comments (112 total) had been entered in ChatGPT, it was asked to assist in creating prompts for the focus group, Figure 11 is the result of that. When prompting ChatGPT for potential question stems, the assumption was that there would indeed be a focus group. These suggestions by ChatGPT became the genesis of the final questions used for the interview.



*Figure 11: Conversation with ChatGPT to Develop Then Focus Group Questions.*

Note: Notice how ChatGPT responds positively to the idea of the focus group, provides detailed question stems, and advice on the implementation of the focus group.

While each question ChatGPT gave was helpful in its own right, it was determined after examining the questions that they were either too specific, awkwardly phrased, and in general needed rewriting to better create open ended interview questions. There were 10 questions asked to Sam (the interview participant) and eight follow up questions totaling 18 responses by Sam that were coded for inferences of the SEL 5. For exact questions, please see APPENDIX E:

#### INTERVIEW SURVEY QUESTIONS

To ensure transparency and accurate recording of information in the interview, a Zoom call was arranged and after agreeing to consent of being voice recorded, Sam's interview was recorded via iPhone's Voice Memo. During the interview Zoom video call, the researcher's screen was shared with Sam, and he could check to ensure accuracy of notetaking by the researcher. After each question Sam was asked to go over the notes and adjust any inconsistencies or add any additional information. It was then transcribed using Otter.ai, a voice to text transcription service. After deleting from devices and uploading the private data to Microsoft OneDrive for IRB purposes, the recording transcription was double checked by the researcher for any inaccuracies. Minimal were found and corrected.

#### Summary of Methodology

Data was collected from two different populations within the same school district. The first were University students who were theatre majors. They were asked to respond to open ended survey questions through Qualtrics regarding their experiences in K-12 theatre. There was an option for those students who identified as LGBTQIA+ to participate in an opt-in focus group, due to attrition and scheduling for this study, one participant was interviewed that identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. The teachers were sent a Qualtrics survey as well containing open-ended questions relating to their teaching methodologies. All comments

were collected and coded into descriptive categories aligning with the SEL 5. ChatGPT was used to member check the HI's coding. The bullet point criteria provided by CASEL (2022) on their website was used as a rubric to analyze any discrepancies between HI and AI. All discrepancies were reconciled prior to in-depth analysis.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The research of this study focused around these RQs:

**RQ1:** What are common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers?

**RQ1a:** Do these strategies align with Social Emotional Learning techniques?

**RQ2:** How do students describe their K-12 theatre experiences?

**RQ3:** Do student descriptions of their theatre experiences include tenets of Safe and Brave Spaces, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community?

The data from the surveys and interview are organized according to each RQ and the data will be reported.

### Overall Summary

Out of the 112 responses from 16 students, the most common SEL 5 strategies overall identified were Self-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Social Awareness. Out of the 36 comments from the teachers the most common SEL 5 strategies overall were Self-Awareness tied with Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills. Out of the 18 interview questions with Sam, Relationship Skills, Self-Awareness, and Social Awareness. The total of the 166 responses from students, teachers, and Sam's interview responses were 104 comments coded for Self-Awareness, approximately 63%; 102 comments were coded for Relationship Skills, approximately 61%; 94 comments were coded for Social Awareness, approximately 57%; 77 comments were coded for Self-Management, approximately 46%; and 44 comments were coded for Responsible Decision Making, approximately 27%. Comments could be coded for multiple SEL 5 strategies. Table 3 includes the total percentages and the breakdown by student interview with Sam, the total number of students, and the total number of teachers.

*Table 3: Total Percentages of the SEL 5 in Responses of Students and Teachers*

SEL 5	Sam	Total Students	Total Teachers	Overall
Self Awareness	77%	56%	75%	63%
Relationship Skills	94%	53%	69%	61%
Social Awareness	77%	47%	75%	57%
Self Management	38%	46%	50%	46%
Decision Making	27%	29%	44%	27%

What the above data shows is that when surveying theatre teachers it was found that for RQ1 and RQ1a a praxis based in Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills was determined to be the most utilized by theatre teachers. When surveying students for RQ2, it was found that praxis based in Self-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Social Awareness were found to be the ones most reported by the students. Finally, when examining the data answer RQ3, it was found that students responses did indeed correspond to elements of Safe and Brave Spaces. For the interview with Sam specifically, his responses were coded in the same process as the teachers and students. First by HI, then member checked by ChatGPT (artificial intelligence/AI) as the rest of the survey questions were. He identified Social Awareness and being more influential than Self-Awareness or Relationship Skills. The purpose of the interview was to ascertain if there was any significant influence withing the LGBTQIA+ community. His responses differed to the larger student group as they ranked Self-Awareness as the most impactful SEL 5 strategy, followed by Relationship Skills then Social Awareness. Therefore, there may be opportunity for future research on this to further examine the phenomenology between LGBTQIA+ individuals and the lessons that theatre may provide.



### Results of RQ1 and RQ1a

**RQ1:** What are common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers?

**RQ1a:** Do these strategies align with Social Emotional Learning techniques?

The above research questions were answered through the analysis of data. The tables and results below serve as evidence to support RQ1 and RQ1a. It was found through this analysis of data that the most common teaching strategies by teachers were strategies that aligned with the SEL 5 skills of Self Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills followed by Self-Management and Responsible Decision Making, respectively. Table 4 shows the demographic data for the teacher respondents (TR) and their responses to the demographic questions from the online survey.

*Table 4: Demographic Breakdown of Teacher Participants*

	<b>Pseudonym:</b>	<b>Age:</b>	<b>Sex:</b>	<b>Gender:</b>	<b>Teaching Theatre:</b>	<b>Total Years:</b>	<b>Grade Level:</b>
<b>TR1</b>	Elizabeth	55	Female	Female	10 years	5 years	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> Grade
<b>TR2</b>	Angie	30	Female	Female	14 years	13 years	Pre-K-8 <sup>th</sup> Grade
<b>TR3</b>	Adam	29	Male	Male	6 years	5 years	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
<b>TR4</b>	Vicki	34	Female	Female	10 years	6 years	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> Grade

### Teacher Data – Impact of SEL 5

#### Self-Awareness

Through analysis, there were a total of 27 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Self-Awareness (Table 5).

*Table 5: Frequency and Impact of Self Awareness Coded Comments in Teacher Responses*

Self Awareness	COUNTA of Self Awareness
high	14
medium	9
low	4

Vicki, a 34-year-old cisgender female, put it simply as a teacher’s awareness of the importance of self can allow “...them to incorporate their own interests and backgrounds into their work.” AI (e.g., ChatGPT) coded this part of the full response by Vicki as Self-Awareness. Vicki’s full comment also included High impact for Social Awareness and Medium impact on Self-Management. What Vicki demonstrates with her response is that she understands how important it is for teachers to let a student’s awareness of self and individuality influence their art. It is through this awareness of emotions that actors communicate with the audience. Adam, a 29-year-old cisgender male, wrote “Developing that comfort and trust with the director is essential for students to feel able to take risks. Just getting up on stage is a risk, they won't do it (well) unless they feel comfortable.” AI coded this statement High on Social Awareness (1<sup>st</sup> sentence) and Self-Awareness (2<sup>nd</sup> sentence). The reference to Self-Awareness is indeed that self-efficacy awakening moment that CASEL (2022) identified as one of the markers of Self-Awareness.

Angie, a 30-year-old cisgender female, paints a clear picture of the importance of theatre to an individual’s self-worth and awareness of themselves.

Participating in theater helps children of all ages grow as humans, not just performers. In theater classes, students build skills like collaboration and teamwork, public speaking, reading, writing, listening, and self-confidence. All of these skills, whether or not they pursue theater as a career, help them become better students, workers, and humans. This was in response to Q6 on the teacher survey asking about theatre’s relationship to student growth. This ability for theatre teachers to understand how a skill like active listening can benefit

a student and their interpersonal growth overall is an invaluable praxis. Angie not only echoes similar responses that students gave in their survey when asked about what skills theatre has taught them, but also adds the unseen but noticeable skill of self-confidence. This background process could be the impetus for the positive behavioral changes that occur.

Elizabeth a 55-year-old cisgender female, mirrors the same sentiment as Angie by writing “Theatre builds confidence, self-esteem, problem-solving, navigating group dynamics, language skills, assertiveness, etc.” This is important to note because variation in themes are not dissimilar across all four teachers. In fact, when taken as a whole all of these skills mentioned by Elizabeth, Angie, Adam, and Vicki create a through line. What can be observed in these responses is that by allowing the space for students to put themselves in their work it puts them in a place of Self-Awareness. Through this process trust is developed by the student which could lead to increased self-confidence raising a student’s self-esteem.

### Social Awareness

There were a total of 27 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Social-Awareness (Table 6).

*Table 6: Frequency and Impact of Social Awareness Coded Comments in Teacher Responses*

<i>Social Awareness</i>	<i>COUNTA of Social Awareness</i>
high	21
medium	5
low	1

Elizabeth is a 10-year veteran of the classroom and responds to Q2 of the teacher survey “Is it important for students to feel comfortable in the theater space? Why?” as follows:

I've never met anyone who was willing to take a risk when they are in a space or around people who feel intimidating, uncomfortable, or unsafe. Security and belonging are probably the single most essential components of a successful theatre class.

This acknowledgement of the Mindful Respect that students must perceive by their peers in order to feel supported in vulnerable moments are the lessons that theatre teaches. Moreover, that sense of belonging is what drives students to continue with theatre and is what Greytak (2016), Punzal, (2020), Goodenow (1993), Aerts (2012), and Greene (1995) refer to. Vicki, who has been teaching for 10 years as well, adds to this sentiment by writing “When a student feels significant is when they are able to reciprocate those onto others.” This response echoes some statements made by students in so far that students not only discussed the collaborative nature of theatre and how influential it was to them, but also how the one-on-one dynamics within theatre boosts the significance that a student may feel to the teacher and their peer groups.

Q1 on the teacher survey was “Can you elaborate on your most effective teaching strategy for theatre?” When teachers were asked about their students and the lessons learned, and students about the teacher that had the most impact and why, the statements by both students and teachers were overwhelmingly positive. The two qualities of Social Awareness that seemed to rise to the surface when looking at this crossover, were “understanding and expressing gratitude” and “recognizing strengths in others” (Social Awareness). Mindful Respect allows one to show honor and deference to those that inspire them. Taken as a whole, there were definite parallels in the admiration and Mindful Respect that the students and teachers shared. Elizabeth wrote “There is not enough space to ever explain what-all my students have taught me.” I've learned hundreds of different points of view, and life experiences I could not have ever fathomed...” This emphatic admiration for her students and the awareness of how her life has been affected by

others is a direct representation of the Freire model of education. This praxis, where the teacher and student learn from each other; this is the nexus point that to which Arao and Clemens (2013) referred to in Chapter 2.

### Relationship Skills

There were a total of 25 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Relationship Skills (Table 7). Notice the large discrepancy between how often these three of the SEL 5 had a high impact versus a medium or low impact.

*Table 7: Frequency and Impact of Relationship Skills Coded Comments in Teacher Responses*

<i>Relationship Skills</i>	<i>COUNTA of Relationship Skills</i>
high	16
medium	5
low	4

Knowing the importance that Relationship Skills plays on students, it follows that teachers are aware of the interpersonal dynamics at play. In fact, Elizabeth purposely makes it a point in rehearsal to develop “Relationships, relationships, relationships!!”. Teachers can focus on modeling the ever-important humanity, and through this a sense of community is born. Q3 on the teacher survey asked, “How do you make students feel comfortable?” Vicki writes:

I think a lot of the interactions that happen outside of traditional instructional time is what matters the most - the greetings at the door, the mental health check-ins, asking how their weekends/breaks were and what they did, interjecting facts and interests of myself in conversations, etc.

Through modeling these Relationship Skills (‘communicating effectively’ and ‘developing positive relationships’) as laid out by CASEL (2022) not only in class but outside of class, students are learning how to interact and engage with both peers and adults.

Elizabeth writes “...giving students a space to feel connected (to me or to each other) is an absolute must.” Therefore, the theatrical games that teachers play involve a significant amount of community building. After certain scene work, Angie asks “...about who had an awesome scene, who had an epic fail, and what did you see someone else do that was cool? Normalizing risks and mess ups makes the students more comfortable to take risks.” Vicki suggests that time in pairs could “...ease them in to trusting people”. By using theatrical praxis, founded in Freire and Boal, teachers can create space and opportunity for creative conflict to take place with students. What makes this work is the foundation in humanity found and developed through CASEL’s (2023) Relationship Skills. While this may seem daunting to some, Vicki suggests that time in pairs could “...ease [students] in to trusting people”. In fact, Chin et al. (2022) used Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed at a School of Medicine to aid first year resident nurses to develop practical relationship skills like active listening, engagement, observational skills, and empathy.

### Self-Management

There were a total of 18 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Self-Management.

*Table 8 Frequency and Impact of Self-Management Coded Comments in Teacher Responses*

<i>Self Management</i>	COUNTA of Self Management
high	5
medium	6
low	7

All teachers on the survey noted that when a student self discloses information, they let the student know that there is certain information that must be reported, and then if the student chooses to disclose more, they attend to the student with “empathy and compassion” (Elizabeth) because sometimes a student “...just need[s] someone to truly listen to them and let them know that their feelings are valid and they are cared for.” (Elizabeth).

Vicki advised that it is good practice to remind educators that students need reinforcements of normalcy when around challenging tasks. “I always try to remind my students when they struggle during a task that no one ever learned anything from something being easy – a little struggle and challenge is good and helps us grow.” There is a resiliency that comes with Personal Responsibility and the acceptance of even a temporary setback, and how one overcomes that situation to continue goal setting for the collective good, is a skill learned many times over in theatre.

Elizabeth, rather than working through theory, application, practice of skills as a potential teaching strategy has been able to, much like Freire and Boal, flip the lesson so that the engagement happens at the beginning of the lesson. This aids in student buy in at the beginning of the lesson. She writes:

Surprisingly, sometimes the opposite tactic is effective! Get students on their feet trying a skill after bare bones frontloading and THEN having them learn more about the theory around the skill often allows for easier access to the theory and application of same to what they have already tried.

This Self-Management by Elizabeth allows for shifts in curricular sequences and ultimately student-centered learning, as Elizabeth knows what works best for their specific classroom dynamic.

### Responsible Discussion Making

There were a total of 16 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Responsible Decision Making. Notice that just as in Table 10, Responsible Decision Making has higher medium and low impact than a higher impact.

*Table 9: Frequency and Impact of Responsible Decision Making in Teacher Responses*

<i>Responsible Decision Making</i>	COUNTA of Responsible Decision Making
high	2
medium	5
low	9

Within the teacher survey, they were asked about how they handled students self-disclosing personal information and how they handled these scenarios. All four teachers indicated that, depending on the information provided to them by the student, they would engage or thank the student, then, if needed, contact proper authorities. In addition, all teachers reported that they let students know of their decision-making process prior to engaging in their sensitive disclosure. Adam had a unique way of discussing issues, “I also suggest that we can always talk about an ‘anonymous friend’ and the student then feels more empowered to not be in the spotlight per say, but the same rules apply should a red flag go off that may jeopardize my job responsibilities.” In essence, Adam is referring to Reardon (2007) by allowing students themselves to weigh the risk of disclosing against the benefits of personal catharsis, it allows the



students to select the proper time for disclosure. By Adam creating a contingency plan, albeit with limitations, it provides students the opportunity to make their own choice.

Angie responds to the same question in this way, “If it's dangerous and I have to report something I do. If they should go to guidance, I try to get them feeling comfortable enough to go. Otherwise, I do casual check ins throughout the year.” This systematic approach to student welfare may not be dissimilar to teachers outside of the world of theatre. The emphasis on this is that there is a process in place. A decision tree has been described and contingencies have been accounted for. In Angie’s attempt to get the student to feel comfortable enough to visit guidance counselors, the issue of comfortability is a focus of hers. When students feel more comfortable around teachers and other school leaders, trust could increase.

It is important to understand that the nature of decision making revolves around trust. Ho and Weigelt (2005) have shown that people trust each other more when the stakes are higher. “[Students] will do whatever you want until they don’t trust you. Trust is everything.” according to Adam. In theatre, the stakes are always high for the performer, technicians, director, and the entire production team. Therefore, it stands to reason that due to the nature of a high stake’s environment within the theatre, students and teachers may trust each other more than in other disciplines. However, more research should be conducted to determine this.

### Teacher Data – Member Check Analysis

As previously stated, the teacher data was first coded by HI then member checked through AI (ChatGPT). What follows are the results of the member check.

AI and HI agreed that there were 7 comments made by teachers that did not have to do with Self-Awareness. There were 15 comments where both AI and HI agreed that there were inferences to Self-Awareness. There were 2 instances where HI identified an inference to Self-

Awareness, but AI did not. There were 12 instances where AI identified markers for Self-Awareness when HI did not. This means that out of the 36 comments made by teachers, AI and HI agreed on 22, rounded to approximately 61%.

*Table 10: Self Awareness Teacher Member Check Data*

<i>Self Awareness</i>	<i>COUNTA of Self Awareness</i>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	7
HI Confirmed AI	15
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	2
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	12

AI and HI agreed that there were 9 comments that were made by teachers that made no inferences to Social Awareness. There were 20 instances in which HI and AI agreed that a comment had markers of Social Awareness. There were 7 comments that AI found had markers for Social Awareness, and HI did not. There were no instances of HI finding markers for Social Awareness when AI did not. This means that out of the 36 total comments made by teachers, AI and HI agreed 29 times, approximately 81%.

*Table 11: Social Awareness Teacher Member Check Data*

<i>Social Awareness</i>	<i>COUNTA of Social Awareness</i>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	9
HI Confirmed AI	20
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	7

AI and HI agreed that there were 7 comments that were made by teachers that had no inferences of Relationship Skills. There were 16 instances where HI and AI agreed that a comment had markers for Relationship Skills. There were 4 comments that HI identified as having makers for Relationship Skills when AI did not, and there were 9 instances when AI identified a comment as having makers for Relationship Skills when HI did not. This means that out of the 36 comments made by teachers, rounded to approximately 64%.

*Table 12: Relationship Skills Teacher Member Check Data*

<i>Relationship Skills</i>	<b>COUNTA of Relationship Skills</b>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	7
HI Confirmed AI	16
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	4
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	9

AI and HI agreed that there were 10 comments that were made by teachers that had no inferences of Self-Management. There were also 10 comments that AI and HI agreed that there were references to Self-Management in the comments. There were 8 instances when AI identified a marker for Self-Management when HI did not, and there were also 8 instances when HI identified a marker for Self-Management, and AI did not. This means that out of the 36 comments made by teachers, HI and AI agreed on 20 of them, rounded approximately to 56%.

*Table 13: Self-Management Teacher Member Check Data*

<i>Self Management</i>	<b>COUNTA of Self Management</b>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	10
HI Confirmed AI	10
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	8
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	8

AI and HI agreed that there were 7 comments that were made that did not have any markers to Responsible Decision Making. There were also 10 comments that AI and HI agreed that there were inferences to Responsible Decision Making. There were 13 comments that were identified by HI as having markers for Responsible Decision Making when AI did not, and there were 6 instances where AI found markers and HI did not. This means that out of the 36 comments, 17 were agreed upon by both AI and HI, rounded to approximately 47%.

*Table 14: Responsible Decision-Making Teacher Member Check Data*

<i>Responsible Decision Making</i>	COUNTA of Responsible Decision Making
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	7
HI Confirmed AI	10
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	13
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	6

### Results of RQ2

**RQ2:** How do students describe their K-12 theatre experiences?

Students who participated in the survey were all purposively sampled from a Central Florida University. All students were theatre majors or theatre graduate students. Table 10 is a demographic breakdown of the student respondents (SR) and their responses to the demographic questions from the online survey. In addition, all data below will provide supporting evidence that students comments were coded and identified by both HI and AI to have markers of Self-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Social Awareness as the top three SEL 5 strategies used. This differs from the teachers who had more markers for Social Awareness than Relationship Skills.

*Table 15: Demographic Breakdown of Student Participants*

	<b>Pseudonym:</b>	<b>Age:</b>	<b>Sex:</b>	<b>Gender:</b>	<b>Orientation:</b>	<b>Under/Grad:</b>	<b>Classification:</b>
<b>SR1</b>	Bella	18	Female	Female	No Response	Undergraduate	Freshman
<b>SR2</b>	Alana	18	Female	Female	Straight	Undergraduate	Freshman
<b>SR3</b>	Danny	18	Male	Male	Gay	Undergraduate	Freshman
<b>SR4</b>	Pilar	19	Female	Female	Bisexual	Undergraduate	No Response
<b>SR5</b>	Julie	20	Female	Female	Bisexual	Undergraduate	Sophomore
<b>SR6</b>	Gabi	19	Female	Female	Heterosexual	No Response	Freshman
<b>SR7</b>	Sam	19	Female	Male	Bisexual	No Response	1 <sup>st</sup> yr. transfer
<b>SR8</b>	Gretchen	22	Female	Female	Heterosexual	Undergraduate	Senior
<b>SR9</b>	Xiomara	23	Female	Female	Bisexual	Undergraduate	Senior
<b>SR10</b>	Tatiana	20	Female	Female	Heterosexual	Undergraduate	No Response

<b>SR11</b>	Alexis	21	Female	Non-binary	Queer	Undergraduate	Junior
<b>SR12</b>	Charlotte	22	Female	Female	Bisexual	Undergraduate	Senior
<b>SR13</b>	Piper	27	Female	Female	Heterosexual	Graduate	No Response
<b>SR14</b>	Laurie	21	Female	No Response	Queer	Undergraduate	Junior
<b>SR15</b>	Luis	24	Male	Male	Heterosexual	Undergraduate	Senior
<b>SR16</b>	Wendy	19	Female	Female	Straight	Undergraduate	Sophomore

### Student Data – Impact of SEL 5

There were 16 student participants. Each participant answered 7 questions, totaling 112 responses. Of those responses, each one was coded for one of the SEL 5 in varying degrees of impact through a combination of HI and AI analysis and member checking. Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills were marked as the highest three categories.

#### Self-Awareness

There were a total of 63 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Self-Awareness.

*Table 16: Frequency and Impact of Self Awareness in Student Responses*

<i>Self Awareness</i>	<i>COUNTA of Self Awareness</i>
high	47
medium	11
low	5

When asked about their favorite theatre teacher, Danny, an 18-year-old gay cisgendered male, wrote that his teacher “...freed me up and allowed me to put my authentic self into everything I do and to lead with love.” Danny’s full comment AI coded for High in Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills; it also scored a Medium impact for Self-Management. What is interesting about Danny’s comment is the parallels between authenticity and self. Tesser (2002, as cited by Leary, 2003) discusses the nature of authenticity and that a person who is

authentic is “...operating in an interpersonal niche in which adequate acceptance can be attained simply by being oneself” (p. 53).

When Pilar, a 19-year-old bisexual cisgender female, responded to Question 1 from the student survey (Q1) “If you learned either academic or interpersonal lessons in theatre, do you still use them today? How?” in an exemplary demonstration of how self-awareness was present in the students’ comments. She wrote:

Yes. I learned skills like collaboration, flexibility, problem-solving, time management, critical thinking, and more through theatre. I still use those skills today in my collegiate work, my personal life, and in the beginning of my professional career as a performer.

It should be noted that the correlations between what students remember and what teachers are indeed focusing on in the classroom are parallel. For example, Elizabeth wrote “Theatre builds confidence, self-esteem, problem-solving, navigating group dynamics, language skills, assertiveness, etc. I could go on all day!” in response to Q6 on the teacher survey “How does theatre affect student growth?” Notice that both she and Pila identify problem-solving by name. This has been identified by CASEL (2022) as one of the markers of Relationship Skills, which will be discussed later.

Alana, a cisgendered 18-year-old straight female answered a question about the creation of healthy conflict within theatre. She responded:

I think theatre pushed me to grow as a person. [We] had selective auditions, so not everyone...got into the show. As sad as this made me ...I don't think I would have tried as hard if I had always gotten in.

AI ranked this comment as having a high impact in Self Awareness and Self-Management, Medium on Social Awareness, and Low on Relationship Skills. Concerning Self Awareness, this

reflective stance on how Alana responded to the challenges of the theatre, and she let this fuel her, rather than defeat her. She continued: “They made it less about competing with others...and more about being the best version of yourself and getting into the next show if you didn’t get in the last one.” This mindset is important to have when discussing self-awareness. As previously discussed, CASEL uses qualities like “possessing a growth mindset”, practice self-efficacy”, “exhibiting honesty and sincerity”, and “the ability to blend one’s own personal identity with their many social identities” as indicators of Self-Awareness.

The more aware an actor is of themselves, the more accurately they can portray their character. Gretchen, a 22-year-old cisgender female, adds to this discussion in so much that she says that she can “...use both sides of my brain in this one field.” AI coded this as High for Self-Awareness. This duality of ‘actor-brain’ and ‘character-brain’ existing within the same space, and the emotional awareness and training it takes to readily access these emotions, is what an actor spends their life doing.

Piper sums up an actor’s perspective quite well and even parallels Arao and Clemens’s (2016) Brave Space. “Yes, I felt safe enough to make bold choices in rehearsal and in performance. It felt freeing and helpful in developing my sense of self.” This duality of creating a Safe Space that allows individuals to act bravely, and the resulting reflection of those brave actions, is at the center of Self-Awareness.

### Relationship Skills

There were a total of 60 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Relationship Skills.

*Table 17: Frequency and Impact of Relationship Skills in Student Responses*

<i>Relationship Skills</i>	COUNTA of Relationship Skills
high	34
medium	20
low	6

Pilar lets us know in response to the question “Describe the experiences and atmosphere in theatre classes as compared to your ‘core’ classes (Science, Math, English/Language Arts, and Social Studies)?” that they “...received a lot more one on one interaction and had a closer relationship with my teacher versus in my core classes. I felt a lot safer to make mistakes in theater and discuss academic and personal issues with my teacher than in my other classes.” What Pilar is alluding to is the increased one-on-one interaction with their theatre teacher, perhaps with Freire’s praxis, allowed Pilar to develop the positive relationship between themselves and their teacher. What Pilar is ultimately pointing towards, though, is that there was a connection with her theatre teacher over core teachers. This point helps to illustrate the need for this study and the need for every teacher to build positive relationships with their students.

Gretchen discusses the teaching strategies that helped her connect most with her theatre teacher:

the most impactful experience....[my teacher] lifted us up and addressed us as the artists we were even at such a young age. He reassured us that he would never yell at us or put us down or make us feel small, but rather guide us to being the best artists we could be. This acknowledgement by this teacher to Gretchen and her classmates suggests it left a lasting impression. What is impressive is that this statement could imply that not only would the teacher not act negatively towards the students, but he would also not allow the same behavior peer to peer. If so, it could be a subtle nod toward ‘standing up for the rights of others’. Through this effective communication this teacher was able to build a foundational relationship with their students utilizing SEL strategies.



Gretchen and Sam reference ‘resisting negative social pressure’, a hallmark of the SEL 5 competency, Relationship Skills. Gretchen wrote that in previous theatrical spaces she “...[was] able to create healthy conflict because we were able to openly discuss conflicts and would check in with not only ourselves but each other.” This notion of ‘checking in’ is where this comment bears the impacts of Conflict with Humanity. It is the notion that after the conflict has occurred, the follow up exists to ascertain any dilemmas, questions, or wonderings from the previous conversation. This means that individuals who are involved in theatre are being taught to check-in and remain humane in treating each other with loving kindness.

Both Gretchen and Sam discuss the ramifications and how to handle situations when conflict arises without humanity. Gretchen’s experience with conflict in high school theatre meant “I don’t think it created healthy conflicts. The drama that happened in the drama department was fueled by pettiness and immaturity.” This observation of where the negativity arises is very astute, and not an uncommon realization by those who have been part of a clique. When asked about advice he would give his past self, Sam said “Don’t get involved in the [personal] drama, basically. Because just in school environments, there’s always [peer to peer] drama...speak kindly about other people [and] don’t talk about each other behind people’s backs. Because that just makes everyone feel bad.” This quote echoes what Gretchen is referring to. Moreover, Sam goes on to identify the circular nature of contributing to ‘the drama’ and infers that the only way to break the cycle is to walk away. Now, as both Gretchen and Sam are university theatre majors, they now possess the wisdom to advise themselves on Relationship Skills, and how important that is within the theatrical workforce.

It is important that the idea of conflict is normalized as a neutral word, not as one with negative associations. Much like in the way that Charlotte compares theatre, somewhat

humorously, to a “perpetual group project”. She continues that the reason that conflict is so unique within theatre is that “It emphasizes conflict between peers that is about collaboration and not just competition.” Collaboration is when both individuals think highly of each other’s ideas and see how to collectively improve it. This default idea that conflict equals competition and that there can be only one winner, but a multitude of losers, is why the shift in verbiage from Arao and Clemens ‘conflict with civility’ was so important. Being civil can still be misinterpreted and a place for grudges to hide under the surface. That is why Dr. Covarrubias’s contribution was so important. By reframing civility into humanity, we are forced to acknowledge ‘the other’ as humane. In so doing, it deescalates any potential negativity, because the one thing that we can all relate to, is the acknowledgement of our own humanity.

Gretchen suggests that a significant amount of the teamwork was extracurricular. “I remember the rehearsal processes the most. It is where all of the relationships were cultivated.” Remember, proximity and exposure are mitigating factors in how well individuals get along. Sam wrote that since he was working technical theatre rather than being a performer, “...it was more healthy as the conflicts would require us to work things out to continue supporting a production.” Notice that both Sam and Gretchen both point to praxis as to where these relationships were forged. The beauty of both Sam and Gretchen recognizing this aspect of theatre and its importance is that it helps to inform that the nature of theatre is collaborative, and the Relationship Skills needed to be involved in this community happen when theory meets practice.

### Social Awareness

There were a total of 53 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Social Awareness.

*Table 18: Impact of Social Awareness in Student Responses*

<i>Social Awareness</i>	<i>COUNTA of Social Awareness</i>
high	37
medium	13
low	3

There were a range of responses from theatre students who answered questions about Social Awareness in theatre, especially related to their teacher’s pedagogy. For example, Gabi, a 19-year-old cisgender heterosexual female, responded to Q3 from the student survey “Describe the relationship between you and a past theatre teacher. Was there a particularly impactful experience?” by writing:

When I started...writing, she let me bring [in] the scenes...she worked on them with me, and I got to perform them. She...encouraged my theatre goals, and was so happy when I told her I would be studying theatre in college.

This example by Gabi demonstrated the teacher’s ability to utilize Social Awareness as a means of helping Gabi grow. These behaviors, including ‘recognizing strengths in others,’ ‘demonstrating empathy and compassion,’ and ‘recognizing situational demands and opportunities,’ are all markers of Social Awareness by CASEL (2022). No relationship has gone without conflict before. In reference to conflict within the theatre, Gabi wrote:

Whenever I was in a space with open and respectful artists, the conflict would be productive. Sometimes your vision for a piece is completely different from another, neither one is wrong, and theatre teaches how to compromise and find the best of all worlds.

This quote was found to have High impact for both Self-Awareness and Social Awareness. What Gabi was referring to are those difficult conversations that must happen within the theatre community when visions are misaligned. This dilemma is not unique to theatre, but often the

hidden norms of compromise are learned early on and quickly in this field. Notice that Gabi even reveals that the nature of a ‘respectful artist’ is one that understands compromise for the good of the show.

There were several responses from students that discussed the positive community that theatre can provide individuals. However, as the nature of theatre is indeed dramatic, it can provide a space for the braggadocious and egotistical, as some of the student comments alluded to. There have been several studies done on the negative effects clique relationships can have on students, (Damico, 1975; Peretz et al. 2021), particularly in theatre groups (Kosnik, 2014).

Charlotte wrote of her experience within these cliques:

The theatre program had one singular friend group. Bullying and exclusion became an issue. When you have several cliques and you get kicked out of one, you just join in with another. When there’s one social clique that everyone in the cast is in, and you’re not, there’s not really anywhere else to go.

What Charlotte is pointing to is the population of this community very often has a finite pool of individuals. In high school, there are other potential cliques to join in, varying from sports, to music, to journalism. However, within the theatre community, it is often a smaller population of individuals to populate this community.

Charlotte continued to discuss how when she was accepted by the “in-group” it was “amazing” and it was “...a group who really cared about each other, spent time with each other, and shared interests.” Pilar, referred to their high school theatre community as “tight knit” and Danny remarked that it was because students “...don’t have to be there, but want to be there” as a contributing factor to this community. By establishing and maintaining these healthy relationships, it provides space for individuals to have healthy conflict, and the relationship skills

that are used to mitigate these situations is exactly what Arao and Clemens (2013) refer to (Relationship Skills). The objectivity needed to understand the nuances of cliques and the part they play for relationships in general is summed up by Tatiana, “Being in the out group felt hugely isolating. Still, you can’t force kids to like each other.”

There were other comments, like those of Gretchen, who succinctly wrote: “My theater teacher and I got along relatively well. As long as I did my work, she respected me, and I respected her.” From a pedagogical standpoint, this teacher set clear expectations of how their class was supposed to operate and how they should be treated. This falls in line with CASEL’s (2022) marker ‘understanding the influence of organizations and systems on behavior’ under Social Awareness.

Piper simply wrote that she remembers her theatre classroom environment as “...a respectful, focused, honest and judgement-free atmosphere.” When asked about the differences between the theatre classroom and her other core classes (Science, English, Social Studies, and Math) she responded:

In theatre class, there was a larger sense of community as we were always working toward a larger, common goal. There was also a sense of trust and respect that was built because of the subject matter and those in the course.

AI ranked this comment high on Social Awareness and Relationship Skills, and Medium on Responsible Decision Making. Specifically referring to Social Awareness, what she is alluding to is the collectivistic nature of theatre. Other art forms such as dance, painting, sculpture, and musician can all be done by a single individual, in a vacuum. However, theatre even by its own definition cannot be done alone. Theatre comes from the Greek *theatron* meaning “a place for

doing” and drama from *dramatos* meaning “to do”(Online Etymology Dictionary, 2023). It is the only art form that requires a doer and a watcher. This sense of community is built within the fabric of the art form itself. CASEL (2022) themselves refer to “understanding the influences of organizations and systems on behavior” (Social Awareness). Those who are involved in theatre understand at a very basic level that the art form is communal, and every individual has their role and purpose, and no single person’s job is more important than the other as without the collective, the art would fail.

### Self-Management

There were a total of 52 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Self-Management

*Table 19: Frequency and Impact of Self-Management in Student Responses*

Self Management	COUNTA of Self Management
high	28
medium	18
low	6

What was overwhelmingly clear from the data collected was that most individuals had a positive connection with their theatre teacher. Tatiana, a 20-year-old heterosexual female, speaks to her goal-oriented philosophy “I think doing theatre as a kid taught me how to work hard, and to have goals and be able to work on things to reach them.” By fostering the drive in a theatre student, a teacher could create someone like Tatiana, who values self-efficacy, grit, and tenacity, which is helpful regardless of the ultimate field of study. Piper, a 27-year-old heterosexual cisgender female, writes “I never looked forward to anything like I did theatre. Theatre was always a chance to be creative and have fun, and to be proud of our work because it was unique to us.” Managing a healthy sense of pride may create a sense of motivation to do better, a sense

of belonging. We can return to Aerts (2012) to examine pride and its relationship to a sense of belonging “...the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” (Aerts, 2012, p. 93). These others, students, administrators, and teachers have a responsibility to model positive Self-Management. Piper also spoke about the theatre space and her relationship with her theatre teacher:

It was a space where there were no wrong answers. The director let the cast problem-solve and allowed for our choices on stage to be our own. It was never intensely stressful coming from the people in positions of power.

What is striking about this statement by Piper is the owning of choices on stage. This ability to provide 'for the student and by the student' accountability can allow for a more self-assured individual. Moreover, it could be inferred that Piper's teacher understood Personal Responsibility as well, as the stress put upon students by the teacher appears to be relatively low stakes by Piper's standards. In an increasingly data driven and positivistic framing of education, the post-modern idea of 'no wrong answers,' as written by Piper about the theatre space is as refreshing as it is reactionary.

There were a total of 26 instances of the word 'teacher' in the student surveys. Of those, only three were coded for negative comments. The other three negative comments were directed towards other students or classroom dynamics. In coding the negative comments, it should be noted that some of the responses were heavily emotionally colored, and there were incidents reported that still seemed raw for some individuals, years after these events have happened. Pilar was one in particular:

I was the set designer for our spring musical, Little Shop of Horrors and tried to keep up with what was needed from me with very vague and unhelpful directons [sic]. When I

couldn't give our set teacher exactly what he needed (by reading his mind) he would yell at me. Eventually this cultivated in him pulling me into the scene shop and screaming at me, firing me off the show (two weeks till opening), and berating me verbally till he was literally shaking and red in the face. He could be heard through our soundproof shop doors and another teachers office door. He told me I would never work in this industry and I didn't deserve my set designer title and how I was a failure. This disturbed me greatly how I was able to go to higher ups and nothing was done about it. I couldn't believe [sic] everyone sat around and did nothing about it. I learned how to treat people and how to behave as a decent person and also in a design and show setting as well as how to approach problems with higher ups. His harassment of me continued throughout the rest of my senior year.

This is a prime example of how Personal Responsibility applies to everyone, including teachers and administrators. Pilar's teacher lacked the Self-Management skills to keep his temper in check. What is apparent is the teacher's lack of both emotional and classroom management, and a breach of decorum and protocol between the student and teacher relationship.

Backstage technicians, like Pilar, are responsible for the costumes, props, lights, sound, makeup, and scenic elements are just as if not more disciplined than actors when it comes to the level of Personal Responsibility they take on. Alana explains:

I really always felt most at home in the paint shop of my high school theatre or my community theatre (while in high school). I remember it being laid-back and self-paced. I could take on as much or as little as I wanted to, pick up new skills, improve on old ones, or just cool off and paint a large surface cleanly and evenly.



This ability to control the amount of work one has, and the pace at which they learn falls in line with concepts associated with CASEL’s Self-Management like self-motivation, stress management, and planning and organizing (Self-Management). Moreover, this is the praxis that Freire (1970) discusses within his Pedagogy of the Oppressed. If a teacher can foster and allow for a student to have self-accountability, it should allow for more meaningful and permanent personal growth. Shaull in his introduction to Freire (2005) writes that the choice in education to hand over the learning and the responsibility of learning to the students, rather than relying on the banking method of which Freire objected, will eventually lead to tensions between those of the old guard (banking) and new guard (praxis).

Catharsis, (Gk. *katharsis* ‘purging’) is a term used in theatre when an emotional release happens, and the audience, actor, or designer, can breathe again. For example, when a large scenic project is complete, a character breaks down on stage weeping, the audience leaves the show ‘satisfied’ with how it ended. This ability to manage where and how one’s own personal *katharsis*, either to break down or to relish victory, can be seen when Alana discusses that she can “...just cool off and paint a large surface [in the scene shop] cleanly and evenly.” This inference to the calmness and process of painting itself is therapeutic and helps them to reflect their Personal Responsibility in that moment.

### Responsible Decision Making

There were a total of 33 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from the respondents that had identifying markers of Responsible Decision Making

*Table 20: Frequency and Impact of Responsible Decision Making in Student Responses*

<i>Responsible Decision Making</i>	<b>COUNTA of Responsible Decision Making</b>
high	5
medium	14
low	14

Notice that all three were ranked with a markedly high impact in a respondent's comment as compared to the very few instances where it had a low impact in a comment. In addition, compared to the rest of the SEL 5, Responsible Decision Making is the only one that was reported with higher medium or low impact statements and fewer high impact statements.

Students like Tatiana write about the importance of the bond created with trust between their theatre teacher and his students, "He supported everyone...as well as those [students] struggling with mental health issues." This support is not specified, but it seems as if Tatiana's teacher was 'identifying solutions for personal and social problems,' a marker of Responsible Decision Making (CASEL, 2022).

Charlotte, a 22-year-old bisexual female, was able to advocate for herself in her junior year with a new theatre teacher to the school. She wanted to be the Technical Director (TD). Every school and theatre break down responsibilities differently, but typically the TD is responsible for all scenery, props, costumes, makeup, sound, and lights. It is a hefty job, and is, in the grand hierarchy of theatre, equal to the Director, Music Director, and/or Choreographer. Charlotte writes that her teacher "...said she trusted me entirely. That meant a lot to me and was very formative for my confidence as a leader, especially as a girl who grew up being dismissed as 'bossy'". It should be noted that in this moment, this reflective aspect of how Charlotte identifies themselves as often being dismissed and bossy, and how formative the decision was for the teacher to trust them, potentially helped manage Charlotte's persona.

The nature of decision making and the arts has been studied (Baker & Delmonico, 1999; Baim, 2017; Broom & Broom, 2018) however few look reflectively at previous decisions made

and their latent impact(s). Julie, a 20-year-old bisexual cisgender female, writes about the courage it took for her to make a decision that carried significant weight.

There is absolutely a time I felt courageous. One of my high school choir teachers was wrongfully accused of something.... so spoke to the guidance counselor about the accusation and its inaccuracies. I was - as far as I know - the first one to refute the allegation...I was put under the impression that without my testimony, my teacher would have lost his job.

To make it clear, at no point does Julie indicate that it is because of her training in theatre that gave her the courage to do so, however just the process of Reflective Decision Making, and why she chose to do so, should still be discussed. She continues “I did feel courageous...he was a good person, and I couldn't stand by and let someone hurt his reputation.” Reardon (2007) discusses the six processes used in decision making as: “...setting primary and secondary goals; determining the importance of achieving them; tipping the power balance in your favor; weighing risks against benefits; selecting the proper time for action; and developing contingency plans” (Para. 5). Julie found the importance of achieving this goal extremely high. In addition, by telling the proper individuals, the balance of power was shifted to her favor, especially apparent in her comment “Many other students told me that their opinions changed on the situation once they heard what I had said.”

#### Student Data – Member Check Analysis

As previously stated, the student data was first coded by HI then member checked through AI (ChatGPT). What follows are the results of the member check.

AI and HI confirmed that there were no inferences of Self Awareness in 40 of the 112 total statements. There were 33 statements in which HI and AI agreed that there was an inference

of Self Awareness. There were 30 statements that AI coded as having markers for Self-Awareness, and HI did not. There were 9 that HI identified that AI did not. This means that out of 112 total responses, both AI and HI agreed on 73 items, rounding to approximately 65%.

*Table 21: Self Awareness Student Member Check Data*

<i>Self Awareness</i>	<b>COUNTA of Self Awareness</b>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	40
HI Confirmed AI	33
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	30
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	9

AI and HI confirmed that there were no inferences of Social Awareness 51 out of the 112 total statements. There were 24 statements that AI and HI agreed that there were inferences of Social Awareness. There were 8 statements that HI identified as having references to Social Awareness that AI did not, and there were 29 that AI identified that HI did not. This means that out of the 112 total responses, both AI and HI agreed on 75 items, rounding to approximately 66%.

*Table 22: Social Awareness Student Member Check Data*

<i>Social Awareness</i>	<b>COUNTA of Social Awareness</b>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	51
HI Confirmed AI	24
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	8
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	29

AI and HI confirmed that there were no inferences of Relationship Skills in 43 of the statements. Both AI and HI agreed that there were 37 comments having to do with Relationship Skills. There were 23 times that AI identified references to Relationship Skills when HI did not, and there were 9 times when HI identified references to Relationship Skills and AI did not. This means that out of the 112 responses, both AI and HI agreed on 80 items, rounding to approximately 71%.

*Table 23: Relationship Skills Student Member Check Data*

<i>Relationship Skills</i>	<i>COUNTA of Relationship Skills</i>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	43
HI Confirmed AI	37
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	23
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	9

AI and HI confirmed that there were 43 comments in which there was no instance of Self-Management discussed. There were 32 comments that both AI and HI agreed that there were comments and inferences about Self- Management. There were 20 comments that AI identified as utilizing Self- Management inferences and 17 comments when HI identified markers for Self-Management and AI did not. This means that out of the 112 responses, AI and HI agreed on 75 items, rounding to approximately 66%

*Table 24: Self-Management Student Member Data Check*

<i>Self Management</i>	<i>COUNTA of Self Management</i>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	43
HI Confirmed AI	32
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	20
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	17

AI and HI confirmed that there were 61 comments that did not contain any inference to Responsible Decision Making. There were 14 comments that both AI and HI confirmed that had inferences to Responsible Decision Making. There were 18 inferences to Responsible Decision Making that HI identified that AI did not, and there were 19 instances that were identified by AI and not HI. This means that out of the 112 responses, AI and HI agreed on 75 items, rounding to approximately 66%.

*Table 25: Responsible Decision-Making Student Member Data Check*

<i>Responsible Decision Making</i>	COUNTA of Responsible Decision Making
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	61
HI Confirmed AI	14
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	18
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	19

### Student Interview Data – Impact of SEL 5

#### Relationship Skills

There were a total of 17 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from Sam that had identifying markers of Relationship Skills. Notice that in the interview with Sam that out of 18 comments, 17 of the comments that Sam made had identifying markers of Relationship Skills. There is no other category that received as high as a percentage (94%) in the student group or the teacher group. Like the other groups, Sam’s comments were linked to Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills. Not only were ranked highest out of the SEL 5 like the other groups, but also of note is that none of these categories had a low impact on the statements, they were all ranked medium or high impact.

*Table 26: Frequency and Impact of Relationship Skills in Interview Responses*

<i>Relationship Skills</i>	COUNTA of Relationship Skills
high	16
medium	1

It has been previously discussed that Sam’s relationship with his teacher waned after he came out as transgender. The impact of the relationships he developed within the theatre program are significant. His thoughts on the impact of theatre within the LGBTQIA+ community specifically point out the need for strong relationships in this vulnerable time:

The community space that my high school theater had and helped me discover more about myself, I guess, just by being with like other likeminded people. There were a lot

of other queer kids in my high school theatre. So, I made friends with all of them, obviously, and we helped, you know, figure each other out, I guess, throughout high school.

What is telling about this statement is that Sam is saying that through the bond and the relationship we share with our friends, we develop a better sense of self. He even said that he has made "...good lifelong friends in high school theatre that I'm still in contact with." In Sam's case, there were several members of the LGBTQIA+ community within his theatre environment. When this happens, the opportunity to discuss similar experiences grows. He continued to discuss the importance of finding people who were living similar experiences as him and the role they played in supporting each other.

We're all going through the same journey kind of at the same time. It's like, I'd watch my other friends....I'm trans female to male...[and] I had not figured that part about me out yet...A lot of my friends...were all girls to begin with...because we, I don't know, we just like vibe with each other, I guess. But then, like, I watched all of us kind of end up transitioning in the end, whether they ended up like, nonbinary or also trans masc or trans male. So, it was like, as we were all kind of figuring those aspects of ourselves out, like, we would like, talk to each other.

This important fact that there has been studies linking effeminate behavior and queerness to theatre shows that this field of study has an innate pull to this vulnerable population (Green & Money, 1969; Whitam & Dizon, 1979). Sam suggests another reason why the relationships are so strong between LGBTQIA+ individuals and theatre. "In general, theatre, in school settings create a community... since more queer people are drawn to theatre for... performing the creative aspects and stuff. Also, being considered maybe a bit of like an outcast thing, like

marching band, too.” This notion of a conglomeration of outcasts, in which those who are rejected bond together through a common goal, has been a fundamental truth in the LGBTQIA+ movement since the Stonewall Riots in 1969 (Giesecking, 2016). What should also be noted is that Sam is stating that regardless of orientation, theatre just by its nature creates a community of which one is a part. Interestingly, Sam’s comment centers on the bonding-in-otherization. LGBTQIA+ individuals, along with countless other minorities, are other-ized in a heteronormative world. The phrase “the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb” (Albert, 2005, p. 95) may be attributed to this sort of situation. Often, the homophobia LGBTQIA+ individuals face by their own family members may cause them to seek family of choice, elsewhere. Sam’s inference that the LGBTQIA+ community is more often found within the theatrical community, allows for a pre-disposed group in which a vulnerable teen may find a sense of belonging. It is humorous that Sam draws parallels to other extracurricular activities that are not typically seen as what is in vogue as other extracurriculars. Perhaps that means that this phenomenon is not unique to theatre, and this deserves further investigation by researchers.

Sam’s viewpoint on the importance of the teacher and student relationship, and how to best facilitate the growth of that relationship, is insightful. Sam first points out that the environment that fosters positive relationships in theatre are different than the rest of the school environment by stating that he gets bullied more outside of the theatre environment. He then shifts towards a global view of negative school climate on campus and describes the behaviors that teachers can do to curb bullying overall, and in so doing form stronger relationships with students.

I get bullied a lot more outside of the theatre, [in] regular classes, like math and English and stuff. [T]he teachers wouldn't necessarily notice...[Bullying] that's happening in the



hallways...So, I guess, teachers being more aware of how students are treating each other and noticing when students are getting harassed for being queer, or just being like, weird.

Like, I was just weird and different, and kids would pick on me in the hallway.

Notice that not only does he say this this behavior by the teachers could help LGBTQIA+ students, but any student who is 'weird'. This speaks to the expansion of these behaviors by the teachers schoolwide for a more positive school environment.

### Self-Awareness

There were a total of 14 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from Sam that had identifying markers of Self-Awareness.

*Table 27: Frequency and Impact of Self-Awareness in Interview Responses*

Self Awareness	COUNTA of Self Awareness
high	7
medium	7

Notice the impact that ChatGPT gave Self-Awareness in Sam's response. As seen, there were equal number of statements that ChatGPT coded as High and as Medium impact. Sam was open about his struggles with mental health through high school. He disclosed that he had depression and he talked about how he used playwrighting in his classes to help deal with his mental health issues.

I don't think I had anything queer related in it...I hadn't really like, come to terms with stuff yet. So...the character was like, a projection of who I was...these other characters...were my internal monologue and thoughts and which were like negative, because it was dealing with mental health and like depression and stuff I was dealing with. So, the play was kind of about...my own personal experiences...anecdotes from my

middle school years to my high school years...defining moments that impacted my mental health.

This highlights one of the more introspective aspects of theatre, and that is of the playwright. If art imitates life, playwrights often write from their own experiences and draw from their childhood (Reaves, n.d.). Drama therapy has used playwriting as a means of elevating personal events towards a more entertaining and dramatic structure (Saldana, 2005). Moreover, Hoare (1950) describes in his book the three qualities that are essential for playwriting (a) a knowledge of themselves, (b) knowledge of the outside world, and (c) knowledgeable about theatre as a medium in and of itself. Just as it is true that painters paint what they know, so do playwrights. Therefore, by writing this play, Sam was able to become more self-aware of himself by putting on paper "...moments that impacted my mental health".

Sam also discussed his journey as a high schooler transitioning from female to male and how through theatre, he had a support system (See Relationship Skills). Perhaps an unexpected transition was his journey towards leadership for younger LGBTQIA+ students.

Once I...started transitioning, I found...some of the younger kids in the theatre, you know...coming up to me, and...asking me for advice. And then...my friends, too, and we all just kind of like, support each other...you know. The more knowledgeable ones pass that knowledge down to people who are, you know, starting out anew.

His awareness that he became someone to go to for advice, rather than someone who needed to be advised is apparent when he discusses the knowledge being disseminated to others. As those around him were coming to him for advice, it seems that he was aware of the value of his own knowledge and wanted to help others by sharing his knowledge of self.

His response when asked about what advice he would go back and give himself is telling as well. “In general, not trying to force myself to be likable to other people. Because you know, the people who do like you for who you are, they'll stay with you, they'll stick with you. You don't have to change yourself to be accepted in certain groups.” This quote demonstrates that not only is Sam aware of how he is a different individual now as compared to then, moreover he is reminding himself to not concede in the manipulation of his own personality. Later, he discusses the advice he would give queer students today “Don't change yourself for anyone else. In the environment that we're in today, keep yourself safe, if it comes to a point where your safety is in question [by] being out.” Sam is letting students today know how important it is to be sure of self and the power that comes with being self-aware. Simultaneously he relayed the importance of a keen Social Awareness if threats are imminent. He continued “....but don't let anyone like, force you...back in the closet...detransition, or...conversion therapy yourself into being straight if you aren't.” What Sam's advice is getting at is that a strong sense of Self-Awareness can be a raft that navigates rough waters. Social Awareness serves as a sail, paddle, rudder, throttle, and other tools to help mitigate societal social constructs.

### Social Awareness

There were a total of 14 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from Sam that had identifying markers of Social Awareness.

*Table 28: Frequency and Impact of Social Awareness in Interview Responses*

<i>Social Awareness</i>	<i>COUNTA of Social Awareness</i>
high	10
medium	4

One notable response from Sam concerning the social systems that are in place within school theatre is the International Thespian Honor Society (ITS). It was founded in 1929 and has a long

history of scholastic and dramatic excellence with chapters around the world (Educational Theatre Association, n.d.).

You know, they say theatre is like a cult. And so, you know, all these upperclassmen kind of roped me in, and they're like, 'Hey, you should induct into the Thespian honor society.' You do a bunch of hours working on shows and stuff. And you get a little card and you get to say, you're part of this honor society.

This sort of structure is important in maintaining unspoken and spoken rules within high school theatre. There are strict rules that must be completed by working on school or community theatrical productions (Educational Theatre Association, n.d.). CASEL (2022) describes 'understanding the influences of organizations and systems of behavior' as a marker for Social Awareness. Within this context, when the group of students proceeded to recruit Sam, it meant there was already buy-in by members of the theatre students, increasing the social desire to be part of the in-group. There is a prestige to being in an Honor Society, especially for those who may consider themselves 'outcasts.'

There are social constructs that do help to reinforce who we are as individuals. The theory of Reflected Appraisal asserts that we learn about who we are as individuals by referencing how those around us, see us (Payne-Rios, 2014). This analysis of other's perceptions of us draws friends closer and enemies apart. There is no reason to create friendships with individuals that do not confirm one's own view of themselves. This ability to take other's perspectives is a marker for Social Awareness (CASEL, 2022). For a group of marginalized individuals, finding community provides more than just strength in numbers. These are the building blocks of more permanent plutonic intimate friendships, which are invaluable not only in students' lives, but may last years beyond graduation.

There were also instances in the student surveys and Sam's interview where negative aspects of a student's theatre experience were brought to light. Sam's response below, when discussing his theatre teacher and going to school during the pandemic, shows when Mindful Respect is not mutually agreed upon by all parties:

And she didn't really understand people's fears with the pandemic, especially at the beginning, you know? And a lot of us were like, 'Hey, there's a pandemic going on. Can we like, cancel it shows for this year? I feel like that would be a better choice and keep everyone else safe.' I don't know. She was really mad about that for some reason.

This example shows that Sam's teacher was not listening to the concerns of her students, and the approach behaviors the rules of engagement on Mindful Respect were broken. In these instances when the Brave Space tenets (SEL 5 strategies) are not present in a situation in which they are supposed to exist, interpersonal communication suffers.

In response to Sam's poor experience with his teacher, a follow up question was asked about his ideal scenario of what should have happened when he came out to his teacher:'

I'm not going to ask anyone to change their beliefs. I just think respect is important. Which I felt like I didn't get a lot from her once I came out. In an ideal world, if I were to tell a teacher, I come out to them, I say 'I'm trans. And I tell them my name and my pronouns. In the ideal world, they would be like, Cool' I'll call you that from now on, if I mess up, and messing up is okay...as long as they're aware of it, and they correct themselves, that's perfect for me.

What is important to understand about Sam's situation and this hypothetical scenario he created, is demonstrating Mindful Respect by changing behaviors and adapting to show respect to

another individual. There is a simplicity to what Sam is asking and therein lies the rub, if showing Mindful Respect is that simple, why not?

CASEL (2022) includes a small sentence with a large impact as a bullet point for Social Awareness. 'Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones' is a lifelong process. Sam confirmed, somewhat humorously about the diverse social norms within theatre:

I found that a lot more of the people were...just in tech...they were like...cis[gendered] het[erosexual] guys, because the tech class was like a...workshop class. So, you even got to like cut wood or whatever. (laughing) Masculine! I don't know. (laughing continued) 'Building stuff is fun' or whatever.

Sam's tongue-in-cheek comment about the gender roles associated with how heterosexual men are viewed within the group dynamic of theatre and Sam's ultimate position within his school theatre department as a technical student should not be overlooked. Sam's Social Awareness of the relationship between LGBTQIA+ individuals and where they were represented in his high school theatre continued:

So, I found a lot more queer people on the performing side of it. But there was a bit of an overlap there. Where some people like me, who started out performing first, but then jumped over to tech because they didn't really want to be on the spotlight. If ...doing both [performance and tech], I feel like there was like a higher likely chance that you're queer.

When examining this statement from a Social Awareness lens, CASEL's (2022) bullet point criteria 'recognizing situational demands and opportunities' can be highlighted. Sam, and others like him, found that the demands associated with being on stage were not aligned with what they were comfortable with. Rather than disassociate themselves from the world of theatre, altogether, the community with which they are part of the in-group, they found opportunities within the

theatre to grow and develop in a manner that was more suited to them. Sam and his friends “...who were...lesbian, gay, non-binary, trans., They were ... performing in some shows, but also taking on like leadership positions for tech, like making costumes. Like, I did props, stage management, stuff like that.” This ability to pivot and create these opportunities for themselves shows the Social Awareness of those students within the theatre department. Furthermore, it helps to develop planning and organizational skills, the courage to take initiative, and a sense of agency, all of which are marked by CASEL (2022) as indicators of Self-Management.

### Self-Management

There were a total of 7 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from Sam that had identifying markers of Self-Management. Notice that both Self-Management and Responsible Decision Ranking make more of a normal distribution with the level of impact in the statements given by Sam as compared to Relationship Skills, Self-Awareness, or Social Awareness.

*Table 29: Frequency and Impact of Self-Management in Interview Responses.*

<i>Self Management</i>	<i>COUNTA of Self Management</i>
high	1
medium	5
low	1

As with the teacher data, Self-Management had fewer instances of occurrence than Self-Awareness, Relationship Skills, or Social Awareness. Unlike the previous three of the SEL 5, it also was coded as having a low impact in a single statement by AI, as seen in Table 29.

In Sam’s comment about his playwriting that was discussed earlier, he said that the characters he wrote were representations of his “inner monologue and thoughts” and that he was writing about depression and other mental health issues he has been dealing with. This part of his

statement was coded as Low impact by AI. ChatGPT (AI) recognized that he was managing his emotions and behaviors through the act of playwrighting. He continued to disclose how playwrighting was in fact helping him through this process. by saying that when he is “...able to rework and edit my own thoughts, like on paper, I can get a better idea of what I'm dealing with.” This comment was coded as having a Medium impact of Self-Management within the context of his full statement.

When Sam was discussing his theatre teacher, and the tepid relationship they had, he was describing what his ideal scenario would have been when he came out her “I tell them my name and my pronouns...if [they] mess up, and messing up is okay, at first because it's like, you know, it's a change. It's new. As long as they're aware of it and they correct themselves.” This deference in managing his emotions and behaviors if a teacher misspoke or misgendered him is CASEL’s (2022) Self-Management in action. Additionally, it shows Social Awareness on the part of Sam as he is understanding and taking another’s perspective.

Lastly, Sam’s advice for young artists or for those who want to be involved in theatre in school speaks directly to Self-Management:

Don't get involved in the drama, basically. Because just in school environments, there's always drama. And that's the most advice that I could think of, in general, not even relating to being queer. It's just speak kindly about other people don't talk about each other behind people's backs.

What Sam is saying is that behaviors and relationships matter, especially within the world of theatre. Use Self-Management techniques by CASEL (2022) to rise above gossip, pettiness, and other school related problems. Notice that Sam qualifies this statement by saying this is not just advice for queer individuals, but for all students in general.



### Responsible Decision Making

There were a total of 5 times when either HI and AI agreed, or AI identified a comment from Sam that had identifying markers of Responsible Decision Making.

*Table 30: Frequency and Impact of Responsible Decision Making in Interview Responses.*

<i>Responsible Decision Making</i>	COUNTA of Responsible Decision Making
high	1
medium	3
low	1

The impact statement that was marked as High impact by AI was “A lot of us were like, ‘Hey, there's a pandemic going on? Can we, like, cancel shows for this year... keep everyone else safe.’” This was marked by both HI and AI as having markers for Responsible Decision Making. According to CASEL (2022) “the ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions...” applies directly to this statement by Sam (Responsible). What is being described by Sam was a general consensus among theatre students to cancel their production of *Shrek: The Musical*, as this was sometime between 2019 and 2021, when much of the learning was hybrid or online and there were strict guidelines on theatrical performances due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the nature of the tension between Sam and his theatre teacher, he eventually became “less active” as he put it. What is interesting is that he may have formally distanced himself from his teacher, he still “...felt the need to help out my classmates.” He would then show up on performance nights “...and [the actors/crew] were like, ‘Oh, no! We ran out of this or that!’ and then like, to help them out, you know, like, go and run to the store and get it for them.” He was able to separate the needs of the show and personal feelings and anticipate the consequences if he did not show up, knowing that his classmates may be counting on him to

quickly solve problems, especially when it comes to safety backstage. This is a hallmark of Responsible Decision Making as defined by CASEL (2022).

When Sam was asked what advice he would give to students in theatre was “Finding a balance... making sure that to still do theatre, you aren't sacrificing your other grades.” This skill of learning to differentiate what needs are most important and prioritize that over other needs and wants speaks towards the ‘responsible’ in Responsible Decision Making, especially when it comes to grades and core classwork.

#### Student Interview Data – Member Check Analysis

As with both the teacher and student surveys, the interview data was first coded by HI then member checked through AI (ChatGPT). What follows are the results of the member check.

*Table 31: Self Awareness Interview Member Check Data*

<i>Self Awareness</i>	<i>COUNTA of Self Awareness</i>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	1
HI Confirmed AI	13
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	3
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	1

AI and HI agreed once that there was a comment that was made by Sam that did not have any inferences of Self-Awareness. There were 13 comments in which AI and HI agreed that Sam made a reference to Self-Awareness. There were 3 instances where HI identified markers of Sam speaking about Self-Awareness that AI did not identify, and there was one that AI identified that HI did not. This means that out of the 18 comments made by Sam, HI and AI agreed on 14 of them, rounded approximately to 78%.

*Table 32: Social Awareness Interview Member Check Data*

<i>Social Awareness</i>	COUNTA of Social Awareness
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	2
HI Confirmed AI	12
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	2
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	2

AI and HI agreed that there were 2 comments made by Sam that did not have to do with Social Awareness. There were 12 comments that both AI and HI agreed that Sam mentioned references to Social Awareness. There were 2 times when HI identified markers of Self Awareness when AI did not, and there were 2 times the reverse was true. This means that out of the 18 comments made by Sam, HI and AI agreed on 14 of them, rounded approximately to 78%.

*Table 33: Relationship Skills Interview Member Check Data*

<i>Relationship Skills</i>	COUNTA of Relationship Skills
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	1
HI Confirmed AI	15
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	2

AI and HI agreed that there was one comment made by Sam that did not have to do with Relationship Skills. There were 15 comments that both AI and HI agreed that Sam mentioned references to Relationship Skills There were 2 times when AI identified markers of Relationship Skills when HI did not. HI did not identify any markers of Relationship Skills that AI did not. This means that out of the 18 comments made by Sam, HI and AI agreed on 16 of them, rounded approximately to 89%.

*Table 34: Self-Management Interview Member Check Data*

<i>Self Management</i>	COUNTA of Self Management
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	6
HI Confirmed AI	7
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	5

AI and HI agreed that there were 6 comments that did not have to do with Self-Management. There were 7 comments by Sam that both AI and HI agreed that mentioned markers for Self-Management. There were 5 comments that HI identified markers for Self-Management when AI did not. AI did not identify any markers of Self-Management that HI did not. This means that out of the 18 comments made by Sam, AI and HI agree on 13 of them, rounded approximately to 72%.

*Table 35: Responsible Decision-Making Interview Member Check Data*

<i>Responsible Decision Making</i>	<b>COUNTA of Responsible Decision Making</b>
HI Confirmed AI - N/A	8
HI Confirmed AI	4
AI Unidentified - HI Identified	5
AI Identified - HI Unidentified	1

AI and HI agreed that there were 8 comments that did not have to do with Decision Making. There were 4 comments by Sam that both AI and HI agreed that mentioned markers for Decision Making. There were 5 comments that HI identified markers for Self-Management when AI did not. AI identified one comment as having markers for Responsible Decision Making when HI did not. This means that out of the 18 comments made by Sam, AI and HI agree on 12 of them, rounded approximately to 66%.Results of RQ3

**RQ3:** Do student descriptions of their theatre experiences include tenets of safe and Brave Spaces, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community?

Throughout this research there have been specific instances of where the language from the tenets of Brave Spaces and tenets of Safe Spaces applies. To return to Boostrom (1998) a Safe Spaces are place where anyone can go where they “...are not isolated, alienated, threatened, intimidated, or `stressed-out’” (p. 405). Arao and Clemens (2013) rest their Brave Space social justice framework upon 5 tenets used as section headers in the above in association with their partnered SEL competency (CASEL, 2022). Of the 16 students that took the survey, the following words were used to ascertain the prevalence of Safe Spaces and Brave Spaces within

their responses. The responses were searched for various conjugations of the word as well. They were: isolated, alienated, threatened, intimidated, stress, brave, safe, challenges, respect, responsibility, decision, and choice. There were two questions on the student survey that used the term “courage” and “conflict”, both of which were found prominently within the answers for those specific questions. There were 8 students who identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Of those LGBTQIA+ respondents, one student used the word brave, one student used the term Safe Space, one student wrote intimidation, 2 students used the word challenges, 4 students used the term respect, and one student used the term choice.

Charlotte wrote about how she must have been *brave* to take on a significant amount of *responsibility*. These terms are used not only in Brave Spaces, but in the SEL 5 as well. Sam was the only student to use the term ‘Safe Space’. Moreover, he referred to his Safe Space as the theatre teacher’s classroom in which they could go in during lunches or to discuss mental health issues. Alexis discussed how ‘intimidating’ the theatre space could be. However, they go on to write “...but once I did a thing I was scared of, I realized how hard I work to get there.” The sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy that was gained by this student is still memorable enough to be discussed after the fact. This suggests that overcoming challenges are indeed brave. Danny was the only LGBTQIA+ individual who used challenge, it was identified a total of three times, though. Danny found it fond remembering that their theatre teacher “...always challenged us and pushed us to be the best performers we can be.” This notion of a teacher challenging, and not attacking a student, is the space that Arao and Clemens (2013) identify in their article. Other than the word conflict or challenges (due to their use in the question), ‘respect’ had 4 instances of use. While some, like Alexis, who identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, wrote about

the atmosphere of the class as a respectful one. Others, like Piper, wrote on the importance of the subject matter and more process focused:

In theatre class, there was a larger sense of community as we were always working toward a larger, common goal. There was also a sense of trust and respect that was built because of the subject matter and those in the course.

What should be noted is the trust and respect come from the subject matter itself and the individuals in there, not necessarily the teacher themselves. Lastly, a simple response by Piper to the question about courage (See Appendix C) encompasses this concept of Safe and Brave Spaces. “I felt safe enough to make bold choices.” Arao and Clemens (2013) in personal communication with this research discussed the notion that to create a Brave Space, there needs to be a Safe Space created first. If a student is willing to be bold and have the courage to take healthy risks and understand that the risk taking is minimal and supported by their teachers and fellow students, it stands to reason that they will continue to do so within this environment.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### Introduction

Within this dissertation both students who experienced K-12 theatre and current theatre teachers answered surveys relating to their experiences teaching theatre (teachers) and learning it in the classroom (students). Both students and teachers responded to short answer survey questions in which all the SEL 5 were found to be present. Results have been reported in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusions. The purpose of the last few sections are to expand on the findings and theoretical framework to provide further understanding for future leaders and researchers to apply these strategies to their school culture for the purposes of making a more positive school culture. Lastly, a statement of synthesis to help fully encapsulate this study and its application.

### Summary of Research

There is current research to support there is an increase in bullying behavior on K-12 campuses in the United States, especially for vulnerable populations like the LGBTQIA+ community (Polanin et al. 2021; Kesler et al., 2023; Greytak, 2016. Mittleman, 2023). There has been little consistency in the application, follow up, or management of coping strategies for victims of bullying from a school district level (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018). The qualitative analysis provided within this dissertation is for the purpose of analyzing common teaching strategies used by theatre teachers and university student's reflections on their K-12 theatre experiences. Through these teaching and learning strategies discussed by both teachers and students, all SEL 5 strategies were identified. Moreover, they were ranked in the same general

order for both students and teachers. Teachers identified both Self-Awareness and Relationship Skills as having equally strong impact, as both were ranked the highest identified impact in their survey.

The purpose of this was to determine if the five social-emotional learning (SEL 5) strategies as described by CASEL (2022) were utilized by teachers and if these strategies had a lasting effect on students. Arao and Clemens (2013) identified the Brave Space model based around 5 tenets, all 5 of these tenets were discussed in Chapter 1, and each have been found to have similar themes and verbiage with the SEL 5. The three SEL strategies that ranked the highest, Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills correspond with Challenges, Not Attacks; Mindful Respect, and Conflict with Humanity respectively from the SEL 5.

There were three RQs for this study:

**RQ1:** What are common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers?

**RQ1a:** Do these strategies align with Social Emotional Learning techniques?

**RQ2:** How do students describe their K-12 theatre experiences?

**RQ3:** Do student descriptions of their theatre experiences include tenets of safe and Brave Spaces, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community?

RQ1 was an attempt to ascertain the specific theatrical classroom techniques taught by teachers. RQ1a, was to determine if the strategy behind these theatrical activities aligned with the SEL 5. RQ2 was an attempt to ascertain, through a reflective lens, the experiences that theatre students engaged in within the classroom and if these activities and strategies were in line with the SEL 5 and Brave Spaces. Furthermore, it was to examine if any of these activities have lasting interpersonal effects on them. Lastly, RQ3 was an attempt to ascertain what qualities within the responses of students align with Safe and Brave Spaces as defined by Boostrom



(1998) and Arao and Clemens (2013). This means the student responses were aligned with the SEL 5 strategies, and Arao and Clemens (2013) Brave Spaces by proxy.

There were two surveys that were sent to two different populations. One population, the students, were University theatre majors at a large southeastern university and the other population, the teachers, were from the same county school district as the University. Respondents from the teacher survey answered questions relating to teaching methodologies, what they have learned from their students, and what procedures are in place when a student discloses something personal, amongst other questions. The student survey answered questions that honed in on the interpersonal lessons learned from theatre, their fondest theatre teacher, when they felt courageous within the theatre space, in the company of similar questions. There was an opt-in option for those students who identified as LGBTQIA+ that wanted to be part of a focus group to discuss this further. Due to scheduling, there was only one interview completed.

### Discussion of RQ1 and RQ1a

The following discussion is to help synthesize and make sense of the responses from teachers in their survey and what these results mean for creating a Safe and Brave Space for students on campus.

RQ1 and RQ1a are:

**RQ1:** What are common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers?

**RQ1a:** Do these strategies align with Social Emotional Learning techniques?

### Challenges, Not Attacks / Self-Awareness

There have been several studies that incorporate Self-Awareness into school culture, especially as part of SEL (Grove & Laletas, 2020; Rogers, 2019) particularly in the arts Rizzuto et al. (2022). Schiepe-Tiska et al. (2021) found that self-awareness was indeed an effective part of creating a positive school culture. However, the lack of school or district training within this field significantly limits how teachers (and administrators) are supposed to facilitate these endeavors. They also found that only about 1% of all teacher preparation courses included concepts of Self-Awareness. The results of this qualitative analysis show that both teachers and students rank Self-Awareness as having a significant impact on what is taught and what is remembered from the theatre classroom. Whether these lessons are putting the term ‘Self-Awareness’ as the primary learning goal or not is unknown, but what is known is that students are becoming self-aware because of these lessons, and the crux of the lessons that theatre teachers are engaging in are centered in Self-Awareness. By using the technique of ‘Challenges, Not Attacks’ to frame conversations between faculty and students, administrators and faculty, or even leadership to district, if both parties come to the proverbial negotiating table with the understanding that a challenge to someone’s through process or behavior is not a direct attack on them personally could ease tension and create great opportunities for deep and meaningful conversations with all parties.

Mark Brotherton, a professor at the University of Central Florida, was well known for his phrase “It’s called a play, not a serious” (Personal Communication, n.d.) He used this humorous catchphrase with actors to remind themselves to have fun. In today’s education system, especially within the K-12 environment, students are required to do statewide and national testing. This may be paired with the common narrative that students must perform well, or they

may not be accepted into a college or university, the only path to success. It is natural for feelings of self-doubt, confusion, failure, and even isolation to become a part of a child's internal monologue due to these stresses, especially if that student may already be part of a vulnerable population (Medina, 2007). If students are not taught to understand their emotional highs and lows, then how will they function as adults in society? Societal norms dictate that emotions are expected to be not only understood, but also managed in a way that does not interfere with social decorum. Faculty and administrators are often left with a lack of training for their staff and themselves when it comes to understanding diverse demographics (Brown, 2004; Gooden & Dantly, 2012, Rusch 2004, Trujillo & Cooper, 2014). Rizzuto et al. (2022) suggest that those teachers who are prominently using strategies aligned with Self-Awareness (e.g. performing and visual arts teachers) should provide training to the rest of the faculty and administration on how to utilize these strategies within the school.

Arao and Clemens (2013) advocate for creating both safe and Brave Spaces, as they are used for different scenarios. They argue that one is the foundation for the other. Brave Spaces are a result of a facilitator creating a Safe Space, then setting ground rules for brave interactions. These actions can indeed be challenges to those who are in the same Brave Space with them. These actions, according to Freire, should be not only between students, but between students and teachers as well. Dewa Nyoman (2018) incorporated self-awareness strategies at an elementary school in Bali. He found that simple tasks like interviewing parents prior to the student's acceptance in the school and reviewing the rules, values, and culture of the school helped with overall school culture improvement. In addition, he said that a main factor was for the parents to help incorporate similar systems at home to reinforce what was learned at school. By following the Safe and Brave Space models campus-wide, regardless of classroom or office,

there can be introspection and a challenging of one's understanding of themselves. It means that students and faculty will not have to fear being called out, but rather create ground rules for a common discourse practice.

Through the lessons of Stanislavski (1946), Boal (1974), and Rohd (1998) faculty and school leadership can develop site specific practices to increase the development of Self-Awareness schoolwide. Teachers and administrators can assess their own emotions daily through these practices and understand how their emotional state will affect their daily work, their relationships, and also any conflict that might arise that day, positive or negative.

According to all four teachers surveyed, and from the responses gathered from the students, theatre teachers have used Self-Awareness within their pedagogy to help students both become better actors and people. As acting relies on an individual's perception of themselves, one cannot change without the other. Recall in Chapter 2 when discussing Stanislavski's *emotional memory*. Having the courage and Self-Awareness to readily access these emotions and bring them to life creates multitudes of opportunities for students to understand themselves through role play. Recall Leff (2018) and how it was found that SEL, self-identity, and emotional intelligence are of vital importance to theatre. Possessing the ability to objectively assess one's own experiences and emotions, select those emotions for application, and actively use those emotions within a scene is the zenith that theatre teachers look for in acting, which is no easy task. To learn to examine, accept, and channel not only the positive memories, but the more trauma informed ones that can drive a scene that is full of woe or anger; that is a significant challenge for an individual, especially at a young age. A teacher can predicate this intimate moment by creating a Brave Space. It is a place where an actor can be vulnerable, and their classmates can be respectful, supportive, and connected to the actor in this moment. This is the

supportive environment that not only allows individuals to accept praise from their peers but recognize the strength in themselves for the exercising of their own emotional intelligence.

Self-Awareness was written about by both teachers and students and these soft skills are very often involved in introspection practices. These soft skills associated with self-awareness, and the ability to verbalize these introspections, was studied and found to be instrumental in problem-solving techniques (Burwell & Shirk, 2007; Fox et al., 2011; Jäkel & Schreiber, 2013 as cited by Kreibich & Henneke, 2021). The gamification of this process are central to what Michael Rohd and Augusto Boal were focusing on with their theatrical praxis.

#### Mindful Respect / Social Awareness

According to this research, theatre teachers reported that they showed Mindful Respect mostly through the CASEL (2022) markers of Social Awareness through (a) expression and understanding of gratitude and (b) by recognizing strengths in others. Van Ness (2011) suggests that as long as these are intentional, caring, and supportive behaviors done in a comfortable space it aligns with Mindful Respect. Arao and Clemens (2013) may add that these displays of gratitude or recognition of strengths should be done in a way that is appropriate for the receiver of the accolades, not the giver.

Theatre teachers often give feedback, praise, and critiques while a scene is being rehearsed, this praxis leads to change (Freire, 2005). This means that if teachers and administrators follow the Brave Space model, they will experience Mindful Respect as it is being modeled for students in real time. Notice that Van Ness (2011) aligns the space that this should take place in, but never discusses if it is a physical or ethereal space. In fact, in his dissertation he discussed how it should mainly be ‘safe’.

It is possible for administrators to learn how to facilitate Mindful Respect by learning from theatre teachers. By the nature of their discipline, theatre teachers have practiced mindfulness by studying human behaviors and practicing observation. In doing this, they create Safe Spaces, (Hunter, 2008). Moreover, they are teaching these practices to their students.

For school leaders applying mindfulness techniques, especially when there are moments of tension between faculty and administration, it can be invaluable in ensuring that faculty feel respected and heard. In doing this there is less stress and anxiety on campus, coping skills are increased, and overall compassion grows (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018). Palfrey (2017) suggests that school administrators strive to achieve a community-based approach where tolerance, even of those that are intolerant, are respected.

Mindful Respect is not the only aspect of Social Awareness that teachers should be focused on, though. Several other themes came to light in this research. The risk and reward equation is a mitigating factor in student participation. There must be a sense of safety provided by the teacher in order to get the desired effect. The greater the safety, the greater the risk. If a teacher can create an environment through theatre games where all students can have a sense of safety, then the risks they will be willing to take will increase. This means that students are seeking this sense of safety at school. The LGBTQIA+ community seeks a place of familiarity and comfort, especially on school campuses. This does not apply only to students who are LGBTQIA+, but to faculty, staff, and administration as well. Students who see members of their own vulnerable community in positions of leadership, without compromising or hiding who they are as individuals, could foster trust, bonds, and mentorships between adults and students on campus.

It is important to understand the relationship between the Freire model of education and Social Awareness. Freire broke down the traditional dynamic between teacher and student and put them on a level playing field, where all parties learn from each other (Freire, 1970). There were comments from teachers that spoke directly to how much they have learned from their students, indicating that on some level theatre classrooms already run on this praxis. This means that it could be easier for theatre classrooms to create these Safe and Brave Spaces compared to other classrooms where it is the more traditional ‘sit-and-get’ method. This means that if other teachers or school administrators want to facilitate Safe and Brave Spaces on campus, examination of the Freire model may give them insight on how to do so. In addition, as Freire and Boal were friends in life and their viewpoints on theatre and education are not far apart as they both question the traditional nature of oppression and how to challenge it, it should go without saying that Boal’s theatrical techniques should be practiced aiding with Social Awareness in the classroom. CASEL (2022) even backs up this claim as identifying unjust social norms is a marker of Social Awareness.

#### Conflict with Humanity / Relationship Skills

It was found in this research that the primary means by which teachers reported using Relationship Skills, as described by CASEL (2022) within the classroom were with both effective communication and positive relationship building. It should be noted that theatre is a collaborative art form, unlike visual arts or solo performing arts (e.g., dance and music). Due to this, the distinction that theatre brings to the performing arts is one of collaboration. A dancer can dance if no one is watching and it is still called dance, but if an actor recites a monologue with no audience to watch them, is it theatre? The answer is no, as there is no one there to watch them. Therefore, even the relationship that the actor has with the audience must be integrated

within theatre curriculum. What this means is that theatre above all other performing art forms relies on Relationship Skills for its very existence. This is why it is so integral to understanding the onstage and backstage aspects of theatre. Without a solid understanding of how one's Relationship Skills can impact at a macro level, then students may take advantage of each other, or teachers may try to take advantage of others on campus.

Ensuring that positive working relationships are formed with others is a goal of every teacher, but especially in a collaborative art form like theatre. Conflict arises naturally within any group dynamic; therefore, it is important to refer back to Dr. Alejandro Covarrubias who revised Arao and Clemens (2013) *Conflict with Civility to Conflict with Humanity*. This was seen as a more empathetic verbiage as civility can imply neutrality rather than compassion (Arao, B., personal communication, July 25, 2022). Through this compassion, students may start to realize that they have extremely similar or diverse world views. Holochwost et al. (2022) noted previous studies in which theatre education was linked positively with building Relationship Skills, however he makes it clear that this study was done on affluent individuals, not on a more needs-based community (Parsad & Spiegleman, 2012 as cited by Holochwost et al. 2022).

Theatre also helps to reinforce these Relationship Skills through Stanislavski (1936) by means of what he termed as concentration. This outward concentration on scene partners by active listening and applying that to the given circumstances and the actor's own behavior can allow for a more natural and authentic performance. What this means is that through the works of certain theatre practitioners, like Stanislavski, Boal, and Rohd teachers can implement these Relationship Skills so that students of theatre may understand how to look outward to others not only within a scene, but in an everyday social setting and use these techniques to foster leadership, stand up for the rights of others, and resist negative social pressure (CASEL, 2022). It



is not only acting teachers that influence Relationship Skills. The technical aspects of theatre require collaboration from seven different departments (costumes, lights, sound, makeup, scenic, props, and marketing) to ensure a unified vision is achieved for the best audience experience. Within each of these departments there are several layers of technical artists that must all propose, revise, and fabricate or execute the directive from each of their departments. This means that each of the individuals engaging in this endeavor are constantly using one of the five different conflict resolution strategies (compromising, collaborating, competing, accommodating, or avoiding) (Payne-Rios, 2014b). Each one of these has its place within the proper conflict, which can drive creativity. Allowing teams of students to problem-solve by effectively communicating how they would solve these conflicts in a constructive manner are markers of Relationship Skills (CASEL, 2022).

#### Personal Responsibility / Self-Management

It must be noted that both students and teachers consistently wrote responses that were coded for Self-Management and Responsible Decision Making the least often. They were ranked fourth and fifth in Sam's interview, the student surveys, and the teacher surveys. What this means is that when examining the SEL 5 from a theatrical lens, it seems that other Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills are the most centrally focused upon. One reason this may be is due to the necessity for Self-Awareness to exist for it to be managed. Responsible Decision Making may require the existence of the other SEL 5 for a responsible decision to be made. Theatre allows teachers to facilitate engaging activities in a manner that levels the playing field for everyone. It allows students who may have bullied others to be the victim of bullying in an improv scene. Through this, teachers can facilitate real change in students. Through specific planning and organization of lessons, teachers can often allow for

multiple engagements to access a concept. For example, when learning about trust, a teacher might pair up the students then blindfold one partner and have them lead the other around the room. An alternative may be a ‘trust fall’ scenario. Either way, physical engagement is present and active in the classroom. This physical engagement is somewhat unique to theatre and if, for example, a teacher were to do a trust fall into their students, the optics are leveled from a student perspective, and that teacher and the student are equal.

Freire and Boal both sought equitable learning on all parties through praxis. While the traditional school model in the United States does not follow this model, it does fit nicely into the project management-based world of theatre. Vicki touched on the ability of teachers to provide normalcy in failure and to use these as opportunities for growth and change. What this does is it allows students to let down their guard and be open and accepting of praise and critiques. Modeling failure and teaching how to personally respond to it, in addition to learning how to deal with it from a group dynamic, can challenge students to think critically in a personal and collaborative manner.

When this more equitable and lateral dynamic of theatrical relationships is broken because of a breach of conduct, the resulting damage to the relationship may have longer lasting impacts, as Pilar alluded to. What this study has shown is how important it is for teachers to understand how to self-manage within their classroom. Pilar’s teacher, by her account, did not manage his emotions in a healthy way, and it affected her enough to describe in detail the event. This means that teachers who do not have a firm grasp on Self-Management can negatively impact students for years. The question that should be raised after knowing this is “If a teacher does not have Self-Management, what is the likelihood of their classroom management style being any different?” It cannot be directly correlated, but Pilar discusses how this situation gave

her the resolve to move forward. She learned how to handle these situations in a more positive manner now that she has been a victim to the significant negative impact that not accepting one's Personal Responsibility within a situation can do. These are indeed the 'show-must-go-on' moments that theatre instills. In terms of school culture, Haskins's (2009) definition of Personal Responsibility is twofold in that not only are all parties on campus accepting the standards of behavior, but also to live by those standards, even off school grounds. It is telling that not only did all four teachers respond to the survey indicating their Personal Responsibility if a student were to disclose information that may need to be reported to the Department of Children and Families (DCF), but also three of the four specifically discussed the decision-making process in why or how they would do so.

#### Responsible Decision Making / Reflective Decision Making

It was telling that three of the four teachers wrote about the specificity of their decision-making process when it came to student disclosure. This inevitability of trust that the student and teacher must create in these intimate moments is not done lightly by either party. Adam used CASEL's examples of Responsible Decision Making by learning how to make reasoned judgements after being presented with facts and analyzing the data (situation). In so doing, his transparency with the student in decision making allows for a more open style of communication and ultimately more trust between the two. What this means is that Adam puts the power of the decision in the hand of the student after he explains his responsibility. By doing this, the student Adam helps to facilitate the Thoughtful Reflective Decision Making (TRDM) model (Paternoster and Pogarsky, 2009). Adam helped students (a) collect information about his decision-making process, (b) created alternative resolutions with an anonymous friend, (c) the student can then

analyze the best option presented and (d) retrospectively examine their own decision making process after choosing to discuss themselves, or an anonymous friend.

It is important that teachers and administrators understand the gravitas that certain decisions can make. For example, if a principal at a high school magnet planned to accept 200 more students than the previous year, without informing the faculty, this may have a negative effect on teacher morale as anticipation of class sizes may come to life.

Within the academic theatre setting, students and teachers should and often are, open to new challenges. This is because the nature of theatre is heterogenous. No two plays will ever be performed the exact same way by the exact same actors with that exact same audience. Theatre teachers instill in their students the expectation of change and the acceptance of that change.

Often, theatre teachers may have to anticipate decisions and forecast imaginary results. This is because theatrical scripts are often copywritten material in which producers (schools) need to pay rights and royalties to. Schools are often on limited budgets, and it is important for theatre teachers to spend what limited fiscal resources they have wisely. Therefore, they will use the Predicted Outcome Value Theory to do so (Sunnafrank, 1988). Essentially, humans predict the ‘value’ that an individual may have in the future (for us or for ‘the greater good’), while meeting them in the present (Payne-Rios, 2014c). Typically, this happens in the first few conversations with an individual. In essence, theatre teachers predict the value of their student’s population and determine if the students at the school could meet the demands of the show. If so, then the teacher may then decide to spend money and purchase the rights for the show.

#### RQ1 and RQ1a Summary Statement

**RQ1:** What are common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers?

**RQ1a:** Do these strategies align with Social Emotional Learning techniques?

The previous discussion centered on the SEL 5 strategies that teachers used in the classroom. There were multiple instances, both negative and positive, in which these SEL strategies are used by teachers. Teaching strategies included lessons in which Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills were the most often found of the SEL 5.

### Discussion of RQ2

**RQ2:** How do students describe their K-12 theatre experiences?

There were 7 questions asked of students in relation to their theatre experience (See Appendix C). There were 112 total responses from students. Of those responses, Self-Awareness was found to be present in 63 of the 112 responses, making it the most common written about by students. Markers for Social Awareness were found 60 times and Relationship Skills were found 53 times. Self-Management was mentioned by students 52 times, and Responsible Decision Making was found in 33 of the responses.

### Challenges, Not Attacks / Self Awareness

When students are able to strategically push beyond their own boundaries to reach their goal; they can then reflect and fully appreciate the self-gratification that comes after. Student actors with high Self-Awareness, should understand that if a teacher who is acting as a director tells them “I didn’t believe you in that moment. Try it again.” it is, as Arao and Clemens (2013) might say, a challenge to them, but it is not an attack on them personally. In fact, reflection upon that moment and an attempt to re-access that emotional recall that Stanislavski (1936) strives for at a key moment in time is not easy. Moreover, for that emotion to be projected by that student actor to the audience so they decode that emotion with verisimilitude is quite a complicated endeavor.

According to the students surveyed, through theatre pedagogy, students are primarily learning the skill of Self-Awareness. This was the benefit of having university students as the target demographic. This allowed a longitudinal distance which provided a more objective space for reflection. Interpersonal skills like listening, eye contact, public speaking, and conflict resolution strategies were all reported by the students as skills they learned through theatre. It is because of the project-based nature of theatre classrooms that students hone these skills. It is a place where actors can memorize lines by themselves, or with a group; a place where technicians can build a prop alone or with others. More importantly, it is a place where students can receive critiques that they may or may not agree with. As an artist, a student can apply suggestions from student critics or teachers, or they may choose not to. This application of critical thought is unique to project-based classes like theatre. As an artist works solo, they are essentially creating their own Safe Space, and when they ask for critiques, they are moving from a Safe to a Brave Space.

Both Safe and Brave Spaces are needed on campus, but for very different reasons. If a student is being bullied for their sexual orientation due to behavior and mannerisms alone, the student may still be confused about who they are as an individual, and they may need that Safe Space to self-reflect. It is a place to shut out the world as that student is feeling vulnerable and, in that moment, that student needs protection to process. However, if all that is provided for students in a Safe Space, then there is no chance for justice as the bullies have not been confronted. Safe Spaces offer defensive caves to process, Brave Spaces allow for offensive conversations where critical thinking, respect, introspection, and advocacy occur. For example, Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed are (at its most basic form) improvisational games that can be played to work on social justice issues, like bullying. This means that students who have

received theatrical training may be better at handling bullying situations, as they have been potentially improvised in class. Moreover, they may have found a deeper understanding of who they are if they have studied emotional memory or how to assess their own emotions.

Another way in which students develop a sense of challenging someone without personally attacking them is through theatrical casting. A truism within the theatre is “Just because you are not right for the role does not mean that you are not a good actor.” An adolescent may be devastated if they audition for a role and then find they are not cast. Especially if they are still attempting to understand themselves and who they are in relation to the school culture overall. However, if through the process they are self-aware enough to know that even though they are the ones auditioning, they are not the totality of their audition. By practicing Self-Awareness their self-esteem, self-worth, and self-image can rise above it. As this may happen countless times over the life of theatrical practitioner, this skill constantly gets developed and redefined.

One way in which it is seen innately within the culture of theatre is the culture of casting. Morowitz (1986) humorously describes audition stress as “...the actor’s occupational hazard” (p.29). He then goes on to write how the actor during an audition can become “...a quivering concentrate of tremulous vulnerability...it is not his job at stake, but his life,” he continues:

...his self-esteem in shreds, his despair tucked tightly behind his shirt front, his drooping spirit buoyed up from an encounter that may hurl him – yet again – ignobly into the dust. Sometimes, these tremors of desperate energy fuse themselves into a creative outburst; more often they merely set off a series of underground quakes that shatter his composure and produce ineptitude. (p.29).

In essence, what Morowitz is referring to is the plight of the actor. An actor must be self-aware enough to understand that if they did not get a role, obviously that creates a personal challenge for them to overcome in their next audition. What it is not, however, is a personal attack.

Fundamental within the praxis of theatre is that an actor is both their character and themselves, while simultaneously understanding that if they are told they are a “bad choice” for a character, it does not devalue them as a human being. Morowitz is not only bolstering the influence of self-awareness and its importance within the field of theatre, but also the high-level psychological awareness an actor (or a designer) must possess to understand the nuances between these spaces between challenges and attacks.

#### Conflict with Humanity / Relationship Skills

What is interesting is that if Sam’s coded interview questions were combined with the ranking from all students, it pushes Relationship Skills as the SEL 5 strategy that was the most coded for. This means that the impact of the tenets of Relationship Skills on students as defined by CASEL (2022) are significant when they have theatrical training. Only one question from Sam’s interview was not coded for Relationship Skills. This could mean that as students identify as LGBTQIA+, they may be self-aware of their identity already. Therefore, the next most important skill learned would be Relationship Skills. This makes sense as CASEL (2022) describes behaviors associated with Relationship Skills like resisting negative social pressure, developing positive relationships, and negotiating conflicts.

Astin and Astin (1996) point towards a post-modern sensibility understanding that through multiple viewpoints will be reflected in conversation, and those various viewpoints are honored. In addition, those involved will develop better Relationship Skills by working towards a common solution as a group. This means that through the collaborative nature of theatre,



students are learning to take multiple perspectives and mitigate conversations with their peers in a manner that is school appropriate. Vicki discussed how important it was for outside class interactions were in developing Relationship Skills. What is interesting is that in most schools that have theatre as part of their curriculum, there will very often be after-school rehearsals. Unlike other performing arts which may be practiced during the day, theatre rehearsals are typically in addition to classroom curriculum. Through proximity and consistency, two markers for the development of friendships (Payne-Rios, 2014c), theatre teachers and students will create a bond more so than core teachers as the amount of time spent with them is minimal in comparison.

Students involved in theatre have opportunities for leadership, much like any extracurricular activity. With students, especially at a middle school level, this can become tricky. For example, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade Assistant Stage Manager (ASM), must tell the cast to be quiet so they can give notes after a rehearsal. Often, the grades in the cast may be a mix of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. While the 6<sup>th</sup> graders may show deference and respect, this may diminish on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade ears. As the ASM attempts to gain control of the situation, they may have to attempt a different tactic to ensure that all students are quiet and respectful. This means that students navigate these social norms with regularity in the theatre compared to other core classes, which helps to develop their Relationship Skills.

#### Mindful Respect / Social Awareness

When Arao and Clemens (2013) discuss in Common Rule 4 the idea of respect, they attach the concept that when seen through a multicultural lens, respect looks very different to many different people. Therefore, it is part of our citizenry to understand how to show deference and respect in ways that that others can feel most respected. In other words, what Gosnell and

Gable (2022) referred to as approach behaviors must be agreed upon by all parties when facilitating a Brave Space. Remember that Van Ness (2011) had four areas for Mindful Respect (intentional appreciation, caring relationships, supportive help, and comfortable space). This intentional appreciation must be done in a manner that honors that individual in a way that they see fit, not as the complimenter sees fit.

This space to which Van Ness (2011) refers does not necessitate a physical space, but rather a space in which an individual can feel comfortable receiving the Mindful Respect. One of these ways in which Mindful Respect is shown is to avoid the individual. In essence, if an actor “needs a moment” after what they felt was a harsh critique from their director, one way to show Mindful Respect is to let them have their Safe Space. In so doing, students in theatre who are observing this are able to take the actors perspective and show concern in a respectful way, both of which align with Relationship Skills (CASEL, 2022). Medina (2007) even describes the theatre as a place where students can drop all pretense and facades and be their authentic self. Moreover, according to Medina (2007), it allows students a space to reflect in a healthy manner. This means that when Sam was discussing that the theatre was his Safe Space, the research backs up this finding. Rankin (2005) adds to this reporting that Safe Spaces are necessary for a positive school climate.

The nature of stereotypes may lead LGBTQIA+ students to theatre, but the benefits that they receive from theatre through this Safe Space where brave things happen is what engages them enough to stay. When faculty respond negatively towards marginalized students, it can be more impactful than if the faculty support them (Marshall et al., 2015). It was reported by students in this study that theatre teachers had a richer relationship with their students as compared to others. We also know have historic data from Green and Money (1966) show a

correlation between effeminate male behavior and their penchant for theatre. This means that students from vulnerable populations who develop an interest and participate in theatre may be more disheartened than others when a significant adult in their lives reacts negatively towards them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

### Personal Responsibility / Self-Management

One way that theatre practitioners often use to keep on schedule is the Sword of Damocles that is opening night. It is the exception, not the rule that opening night may change. It is because of this looming threat that theatre students learn how to manage their time and resources effectively when preparing for a show. Theatre models Freire (1970) in that students are responsible for their own learning. Unless there is an understudy for a student actor, it is up to that actor specifically to learn his or her own lines, blocking, motivations, in addition to songs and choreography if it is a musical. Technicians must buy, build, or borrow props, costumes, sets, etc. It is engrained within the very nature of the assignment, so to speak. Therefore, the motivation by students and by teachers to stay on task is ever present. This means that it is every student's Personal Responsibility to maintain forward momentum.

Many of the responses from students regarding Self-Management centered on a Personal Responsibility to work hard and to manage time effectively. There is a saying of unknown origin in theatre "Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable!" This is a philosophy shared by many in the theatre world. What is interesting about this dichotomy is that theatre can be seen as a free-form artistic endeavor, but it is indeed run with the precision of a Naval ship. There are many factors within the theatre that make this dichotomy so unique. It is a collective of individuals that all have to be in sync. This monochronic view of time, in that it is a commodity to be used to your advantage, or to be wasted is a hallmark of an individualistic group (Payne-Rios,

2014d). Collectivistic groups (like theatre), tend to be polychronic, where time is looser and relaxed (Payne-Rios, 2014d). What this means is that students who are involved in theatre learn to think in a collective manner (i.e., ‘we before me’). Moreover, the entire collective understands the value of time and how precious every moment is when preparing for opening night.

The second most common response from students that was coded for Self-Management had to do with work ethic. This collective monochronic view of time contributes to this idea of hard work in the theatre in so far as there is little time to remain off task. In Aristotle’s *Poetics* he discusses the six elements of drama: plot, character, theme, diction, music, and spectacle (Payne-Rios, 2014e). Of these, plot and theme can be seen as the playwright’s responsibility. The others are the responsibility of the actors and the technicians. There is a showmanship to theatre. This is because there is accountability built in. The designers are accountable to the rest of the cast, the dancers are accountable to the choreographer, and the entire show is made accountable by the audience, who often have fiscally invested in the performance as their money went to ticket sales. The motivation and accountability that the show has is the entertainment factor that wants to impress the audience, traditionally called spectacle. Understanding this accountability, work ethic, and time management means that students who study theatre could perform well in other careers that require the same skill set.

### Responsible Decision Making / Reflective Decision Making

When Arao and Clemens (2013) discuss Rule 3, they refer to Neill (2008) as the inspiration for their notion of ‘challenge by choice’, (e.g., Reflective Decision Making). This is the concept that not only will a participant learn by participating, but also learn by *not* participating. The caveat is that the non-participation must be accompanied by self-reflection on the ‘why’ of non-participation. For example, when working on a Boalian spect-actor

improvisational game, according to Boal, the spect-actor should be so dynamically moved by the scenario that they would join in the game. However, for some individuals, the topic may be too sensitive or too ‘real’, and therefore there is non-participation. LGBTQIA+ issues may be controversial in some high school classrooms, depending on state laws and general community attitude towards the LGBTQIA+ population. Arao and Clemens (2013) point out that students who opt-out of a scenario or a discussion may still be absorbing information, but since the reflective process is internalized, it remains unseen. Those students who may opt-out or just choose to observe a scene based around the bullying of an LGBTQIA+ individual may still be learning, processing, and/or revising their decision to participate if a similar scenario presents itself again.

When a student comes out of the closet and identifies as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, one potential outcome is that a ‘safety-in-numbers’ scenario may arise, especially if it is a small ‘outcast’ community, like a theatre department. In other words, one student’s decision to come out may affect other student’s decisions to do the same, either positively or negatively. Regardless, the ice has been broken and by witnessing how an individual is treated, the possibility of other’s joining in may increase. When Sam came out to his theatre teacher, the relationship turned tepid. In spite of this, it allowed other students to not only come out as well, but seek advice from Sam. According to Sivers (2010) this ‘first follower’ concept celebrates the number two position. In other words, if one individual in a theatre department in their high school comes out of the closet, then a second person may do the same. Once that second individual self-discloses their non-heteronormative identity, then it becomes easier for more to follow because the chances of being ostracized have been minimized, and there is now a group to identify with. Within the last statement, Sam discusses the positive impact his coming out had to

others. Moreover, they were seeking advice and he was providing this information to them to let them make their own decision. This reflection on promoting personal and community well-being is one of the indicators of CASEL's Responsible Decision Making (Responsible).

The shift in language from "Responsible" from CASEL (2022) to Reflective in this research stems from Arao and Clemens (2013). In their section 'Challenge by Choice' they describe the process as "internal" and to "...actively encourage participants to be aware of what factors influence their decisions about whether to challenge themselves on a given issue." (pp. 146, 147). In other words, they see the process of decision making as a behavior, but also as a chance to reflect on the process of making or avoiding that decision. Responsible Decision Making was the least common SEL strategy identified. How or why remains to be seen and should be researched further. It is due to the reflective nature of the student survey that the prospective of time brought the respondents clarity. Pilar wrote about a decision she made to stand up to an unfavorable teacher "When I stood up to the tech teacher who treated me so poorly in my senior year, I felt like I was free from that system they had put us in. This blacklisted me from the rest of the shows...but I felt it was worth it." With this aft looking perspective, Pilar was able to acknowledge the consequences of her actions and refers to herself being liberated, even though her decision brought with it significant consequences. This reflective process should lead to future growth, as is the nature of learning.

### Discussion of RQ3

#### Summative RQ Analysis

RQ1 wanted to find out "What are common teaching and learning strategies among theatre teachers?" It was found that, through the framework of SEL 5 (RQ1a), theatre teachers

identified Self Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills as the most commonly used of the SEL 5 within the theatre space. The SEL 5 were paralleled with Arao and Clemens's (2013) Brave Space. The three corresponding tenets were Challenges, Not Attacks (Self-Awareness), Mindful Respect (Social Awareness), and Conflict with Humanity (Relationship Skills). Each one has been discussed in detail earlier on in this Chapter. RQ2 was attempting to ascertain “How do students describe their K-12 theatre experiences?” Using the framework of the SEL 5, the findings mirrored that of the teacher’s survey, finding that Challenges, Not Attacks, Mindful Respect, and Conflict with Humanity were the top three lessons learned in theatre. Throughout this dissertation, there have been several positive and negative examples of how a student’s K-12 theatrical experience has affected their life. This includes relationships with teachers, with other students, with themselves, and with the theatrical process overall. Most comments were positive in relation to their past accounts of their experience with theatre. Those that were negative typically referred to the teacher or the social interactions between students. Finally, “Do student descriptions of their theatre experiences include tenets of safe and Brave Spaces, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community?” This has most certainly been proven throughout the examples in this Chapter. Their student survey was split nearly 50/50 in terms of the orientation of the respondents. Both heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ students wrote on the nature of Safe Spaces and the importance it was not only to them, but for the whole student population. While no student wrote the phrase “Brave Space” Charlotte did respond that she felt “brave” after taking on a significant amount of during a particular school year. Sam’s interview allowed for a more detailed analysis through the lens of a male transgender student who was going through the process of coming out in high school. During the interview, Sam spoke on coming to terms with his identity and the interplay that had within the dynamics of high school

theatre. He also spoke on the importance of the relationship with school leaders and what should be done to facilitate schoolwide changes and create a Safe Space in which brave experiences can be lived.

My initial expectations from the student responses were met in so far as the phenomenon of the SEL 5 being used to create Brave Spaces within the classroom. However, what was unexpected were the negative student experiences and how those factored into this study. Particularly Pilar's experience as she used the negative experience with her teacher as a lesson in how not to treat others in a professional or school setting. Another interesting result of this study was the significant correlation between student and teacher responses in relation to the SEL 5 that were used by teachers and remembered by students. The trend of Social Awareness, Self-Awareness, and Relationship Skills as key factors utilized in theatre classrooms has great potential for not only growth by both teachers and students in the classroom, but it could even be used by school counselors and disciplinary deans for restorative justice practices and drama therapy. Finally, the member checking through ChatGPT hopefully will provide templates for other researchers to use this new technology to advance scholarly research. As this technology is in its relative infancy, especially its use in research, the process of inputting key words, AI's ability to infer unwritten themes, and its ability to output data with efficiency will surely have significant developments in the future.

### Implications for Practice

In acting, a tactic is the way in which a character achieves their goal. This dissertation is pointed towards using the Brave Space tenets as tactics for school faculty, staff, and students to foster a positive school climate. It has also been proven with this research that these Brave Space tenets are used within theatre. It was consistently shown by the data provided within this



dissertation that Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills are the top three social emotional learning strategies used by theatre teachers. Moreover, not only are they taught, but these are the strategies that are most remembered by theatre students. Therefore, theatre teachers can provide a wealth of professional development for school leadership to ensure that these tactics are carried out with fidelity. The 5 tactics are (a) We Challenge, Not Attack; (b) We Pay Mindful Respect To Everyone; (c) We Will Have Humane Controversy; (d) I Accept Personal Responsibility; and (e) Reflect On Our Decisions. These tactics can be used by school leaders as policies and procedures to cultivate a positive school climate. Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills were identified by both teachers and students as the main SEL strategies that are taught through theatre. It has been suggested that the reason that Self-Management and Responsible Decision Making were consistently ranked fourth and fifth was their predication on the other three SEL strategies. Therefore, what follows are specific implications for the three main SEL strategies identified.

#### Self-Awareness / We Challenge, Not Attack

There have been several studies that incorporate Self-Awareness into school culture, especially as part of SEL (Grove & Laetas, 2020; Rogers, 2019) particularly in the arts Rizzuto et al. (2022). Schiepe-Tiska et al. (2021) found that self-awareness was indeed an effective part of creating a positive school culture. However, the lack of school or district training within this field significantly limits how teachers (and administrators) are supposed to facilitate these endeavors. They also found that only about 1% of all teacher preparation courses included concepts of Self-Awareness. Rizzuto et al. (2022) suggest that those teachers who are prominently using strategies aligned with Self-Awareness (e.g., performing and visual arts

teachers) should provide training to the rest of the faculty and administration on how to utilize these strategies within the school. For example, Dewa Nyoman (2018) incorporated self-awareness strategies at an elementary school in Bali. He found that simple tasks like interviewing parents prior to the student's acceptance in the school and reviewing the rules, values, and culture of the school helped with overall school culture improvement. In addition, he said that a main factor was for the parents to help incorporate similar systems at home to reinforce what was learned at school.

#### Social Awareness / We Pay Mindful Respect To Everyone

Palfrey (2017) discusses the importance of recognizing, celebrating, and learning through diversity on campus. At a fundamental level, he recognizes that Brave Spaces are a place in which free expression can co-exist with diversity. The Minnesota Department of Education (2023) outlines K-12 lessons on Social Awareness that are applicable in every classroom, tied to academic standards, and examples of activities that promote these ideas are given. Moreover, it outlines staff and administrative responsibilities as well. These include understanding how their own actions can influence school culture as a whole and to recognize, respond, and celebrate diverse viewpoints in class. Want (2016) found that teachers learned the most about Social Awareness through teaching it in their classrooms. Want (2016) found that the two main aspects of social awareness that teachers cultivated were respect and empathy. Both Piper and Elizabeth wrote about how empathy was of vital importance in learning how to act and teaching acting theory.

Van Ness (2011) reviewed several studies on multicultural respect in the classroom. Arao and Clemens (2013) make it clear that the important part of respect are the behaviors associated with it. These should be analyzed with a lens focusing diversity. Behaviors such as knowing student's names, seeking to earn student's respect, and praising and critiquing students individually all contribute to a positive Social Awareness on campus. (Ladanye, 1983; Diero, 1996 as cited by Van Ness, 2011). While Van Ness (2011) was specifically discussing Social Awareness in the context of English as a Second Language classes, he found that often teachers did not understand the behaviors that demonstrated respect to various students. This is why it is important for ground rules to be discussed at length prior to engagement in certain activities designed to engage behaviors of respect and empathy.

#### Relationship Skills / We Will Have Humane Conflict

The nature of theatre, as previously discussed, is collaborative. From initial design meetings to the last night where the show is struck down, the relationships developed between cast, crew, and management is vital to the show's success. Most students did indicate that the conflicts that were had in K-12 theatre helped them grow as individuals and learn that conflict itself is not unhealthy, but it can be handled in unhealthy ways. Van Ness (2011) writes about the importance of 'unnecessary conflict' within the classroom dynamic, and it is the teacher's job to regulate this. This can be done by using one of the five basic conflict resolution strategies mentioned earlier (competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, or accommodate) (Payne-Rios, 2014b). Each one of these five strategies, originally proposed by Thomas and Kilman (1974) can be practiced regularly through improvisational scenes.

There were a handful of students that had a negative experience with their theatre teacher, however many students wrote about the benefits of the student-teacher relationship, and how it was unique in theatre to other student-teacher relationships. The high stakes environment that theatre provides can create ample opportunity for students to relate, problem solve, and foster dialogue that helps to develop collaboration and negotiation strategies.

### Future Research

There are many opportunities this dissertation provides for future research. There are several questions that remain and several that were raised with this research. This dissertation did not specifically focus on the interaction between students and teachers, and therefore it is not clear if the SEL 5 strategies were due to the pedagogy or personage. Using AI as a ‘partner’ in academic research is still in its nascent phase. Since only one interview was conducted, it is important that this field of study grows by engaging in more focus groups and perhaps longitudinal studies about the effects Brave Space implementation can have. The methodology of this dissertation should be studied to see if the member checking with other research by AI produces similar results. It is an interesting phenomenon that both teachers and students identified Self-Management and Decision Making as the fourth and fifth most identified SEL 5 strategies. There is an opportunity there for other researchers to determine if this is similar in other countries. Is this phenomenon unique to theatrical arts, or do other performing arts (orchestra, chorus, band) provide similar findings? The implementation and experimentation of Arao and Clemens (2013) Brave Spaces using Boal’s spect-actor and Freire’s praxis should be documented and studied in totality, especially across diverse populations. There should be more

research done on the implementation of these strategies in schools, especially at every level. A Brave Space in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade may look very different than a Brave Space in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation was to examine the teaching and learning strategies in K-12 theatre, and how those relate to the SEL 5 and Brave Spaces. It has been shown that the application of Brave Space strategies is contained within the SEL 5 and are being used in theatre classrooms. Moreover, all students, including those who identify as LGBTQIA+, found a Safe Space in theatre to be authentic. It is with this knowledge that administrators can move forward with specific strategies in mind to help create a campus culture for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This research has given me the unique opportunity not only to provide answers for some researchers, but to provide questions for future researchers. Throughout this dissertation there have been discussions of social-emotional learning strategies, safe and brave spaces, theatrical pedagogy, and school culture. Through praxis, we must remain ever present at the opportunities that the SEL 5 can provide for school leaders through the lessons of theatre. Leadership training, improvisational skills, problem-solving, group work. This can all be achieved by an investment by school leadership in the arts, specifically in theatre. Theatre provides a safe space for *everyone*, and it can give any individual a license to act bravely. What may be viewed as slander on the streets is a statement on the stage. This is the opportunity that the arts can create on a campus environment. A school's culture can be transformed if administrators, faculty, and students all buy in to this.

## **APPENDIX A: W.T. GRANT CONSORTIUM**

## Active Ingredients of Prevention Programs

### EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Identifying and labeling feelings
- Expressing feelings
- Assessing the intensity of feelings
- Managing feelings
- Delaying gratification
- Controlling impulses
- Reducing stress
- Knowing the difference between feelings and actions

### COGNITIVE SKILLS

- Self-talk—conducting an “inner dialogue” as a way to cope with a topic or challenge or reinforce one’s own behavior
- Reading and interpreting social cues—for example, recognizing social influences on behavior and seeing oneself in the perspective of the larger community
- Using steps for problem-solving and decision-making—for instance, controlling impulses, setting goals, identifying alternative actions, anticipating consequences
- Understanding the perspective of others
- Understanding behavioral norms (what is and is not acceptable behavior)
- A positive attitude toward life
- Self-awareness, for example, developing realistic expectations about oneself

### BEHAVIORAL SKILLS

- Nonverbal – communicating through eye contact, facial expressiveness, tone of voice, gestures, and so on.
- Verbal – making clear requests, responding effectively to criticism, resisting negative influences, listening to others, helping others, participating in positive peer groups.

SOURCE: W. T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, “Drug and Alcohol Prevention Curricula,” in J. David Hawkins et al., *Communities That Care* (San Francisco: JosseyBass, 1992)

## **APPENDIX B: SELF SCIENCE CURRICULUM**



## **Main Components:**

- **Self-awareness:** observing yourself and recognizing your feelings; building a vocabulary for feelings; knowing the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and reactions
- **Personal decision-making:** examining your actions and knowing their consequences; knowing if thought or feeling is ruling a decision; applying these insights to issues such as sex and drugs
- **Managing feelings:** monitoring “self-talk” to catch negative messages such as internal put-downs; realizing what is behind a feeling (e.g., the hurt that underlies anger); finding ways to handle fears and anxieties, anger, and sadness
- **Handling stress:** learning the value of exercise, guided imagery, relaxation methods
- **Empathy:** understanding others’ feelings and concerns and taking their perspective; appreciating the differences in how people feel about things
- **Communications:** talking about feelings effectively: becoming a good listener and question-asker; distinguishing between what someone does or says and your own reactions or judgments about it; sending “I” messages instead of blame
- **Self-disclosure:** valuing openness and building trust in a relationship; knowing when it’s safe to risk talking about your private feelings
- **Insight:** identifying patterns in your emotional life and reactions; recognizing similar patterns in others
- **Self-acceptance:** feeling pride and seeing yourself in a positive light; recognizing your strengths and weaknesses; being able to laugh at yourself
- **Personal responsibility:** taking responsibility; recognizing the consequences of your decisions and actions, accepting your feelings and moods, following through on commitments (e.g., to studying)

- **Assertiveness:** stating your concerns and feelings without anger or passivity
- **Group dynamics:** cooperation; knowing when and how to lead, when to follow
- **Conflict resolution:** how to fight fair with other kids, with parents, with teachers; the win/win model for negotiating compromise

SOURCE: Karen F. Stone and Harold Q. Dillehunt, Self Science: The Subject Is Me (Santa Monica: Goodyear Publishing Co., 1978).

## **APPENDIX C: STUDENT SURVEY**

1. If you learned either academic or interpersonal lessons in theatre, do you still use them today? How?
2. What was the atmosphere of the theatre space you remember most fondly?
3. Describe the relationship between you and a past theatre teacher. Was there a particularly impactful experience?
4. Describe the experiences and atmosphere in theatre classes as compared to your 'core' classes (Science, Math, English/Language Arts, and Social Studies)?
5. Did the theatre space create healthy conflict? How?
6. Did you ever feel courageous in the theater space? Please describe it and how it felt.
7. If you participated in theatrical extracurricular activities, was the atmosphere different than in the classroom? If so, how?

## **APPENDIX D: TEACHER SURVEY**

1. Can you elaborate on your most effective teaching strategy for theatre?
2. Is it important for students to feel comfortable in the theater space? Why?
3. How do you make students feel comfortable?
4. Do students take risks in your theater space?
5. What techniques do you use in the theatre space to help students take risks?
6. How does theatre affect student growth?
7. How do you respond when a student shares something personal with you?
8. How do you help students transition from theatre theory to practice?
9. Have you learned lessons from your students? Please describe some of them.

## **APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SURVEY QUESTIONS**

1. Have your theatre experiences impacted you? Please explain how.
2. Did you enjoy being involved in theatre?
3. Do you believe theatre helped you discover more about yourself and express your emotions?
4. What do you think the impact of theatre is for those who identify as LGBTQIA+?
5. Can you elaborate on any social issues that you were made aware of during your time in theatre?
6. In your opinion, how can theatre in schools encourage students to be more inclusive and accepting of diverse perspectives?
7. Were your interpersonal skills strengthened in your involvement in theatre in K-12 schools?
8. Knowing what you know now through your experience in theatre, what advice would you give yourself in high school concerning conflict resolution?
9. Considering your previous experience in theatre, what specific principles or techniques do you believe can be adopted to cultivate a positive school culture?
10. In your opinion, what role should educators and administrators play in integrating theatre-based approaches to enhance school culture?



## **APPENDIX F: SEL COMPETENCIES AND PRACTICES**

**Self-Awareness**

- Integrating personal and social identities.
- Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets.
- Identifying one's emotions.
- Demonstrating honesty and integrity.
- Linking feelings, values, and thoughts.
- Examining prejudices and biases.
- Experiencing self-efficacy.
- Having a growth mindset.
- Developing interests and a sense of purpose.

**Self-Management**

- Managing one's emotions.
- Identifying and using stress management strategies.
- Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation.
- Setting personal and collective goals.
- Using planning and organizational skills.
- Showing the courage to take initiative.
- Demonstrating personal and collective agency.

**Responsible Decision-Making**

- Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness
- Learning how to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts.
- Identifying solutions for personal and social problems.
- Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions.
- Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school.
- Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being.
- Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts.

**Relationship Skills**

- Communicating effectively.
- Developing positive relationships.
- Demonstrating cultural competency.
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving.
- Resolving conflicts constructively.
- Resisting negative social pressure.
- Showing leadership in groups.
- Seeking or offering support and help when needed.
- Standing up for the rights of others.

**Social Awareness**

- Taking others' perspectives.
- Recognizing strengths in others.
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion.
- Showing concern for the feelings of others.
- Understanding and expressing gratitude.
- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones.
- Recognizing situational demands and opportunities.
- Understanding the influences of organizations and systems on behavior.

SouSource: CASEL, (2022). *What is the CASEL framework?* CASEL.

<https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#classrooms>

## **APPENDIX G: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD EXEMPTION**



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

## Institutional Review Board

FWA00000351  
IRB00001138,  
IRB00012110  
Office of Research  
12201 Research Parkway  
  
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

### EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

February 28, 2023

Dear John Payne-Rios:

On 2/28/2023, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Initial Study
Title:	To What Extent Are Brave and Save Spaces Aligned with Social-Emotional Learning Within the Theatre Classroom: A Qualitative Study of Students and Teachers
Investigator:	John Payne-Rios
IRB ID:	STUDY00005032
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HRP-251- FORM - Faculty Advisor Scientific- Scholarly Review, Category: Faculty Research Approval;</li><li>• CITI Certificate - Thomas Vitale, Category: Other;</li><li>• Faculty - IRB Email Form, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Focus Group - UCF Students Explanation of Research , Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• Focus Group Data Collection Sheet, Category: Other;</li><li>• Focus Group Topics, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</li><li>• HRP-255-FORM - Request for Exemption, Category: IRB Protocol;</li><li>• IRB HRPP certificate - John Payne-Rios, Category: Other;</li><li>• Student - IRB Email Form, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Student Survey Questions, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</li><li>• Text Message for Focus Group, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Theatre Faculty Explanation of Research, Category:</li></ul>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu). Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Coker", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jonathan Coker  
Designated Reviewer

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