

SOCIAL DRAMA IN AN ACTIVITY-BASED PEER GROUP:  
A THEATRE FOR FOSTERING SELF- AND OTHER- UNDERSTANDING

by

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## ABSTRACT

A phenomenological approach was used to investigate the social experiences of "at-risk" adolescents as they occurred in the context of a drama project comprised of discussion and role play based on social issues deemed relevant by the participants. Experiences of self- and other-understanding were examined in and beyond the context of the project. Fourteen adolescents enrolled in an alternate "transition" classroom program for adolescents identified as "at risk" for school drop out participated in the social issues drama project during 12 class periods over one month. The researcher and her assistant facilitated the activities in the project. Initially, participants completed questionnaires assessing demographic background, stress, and empathy. The adolescents' responses served as a springboard to the qualitative data. Over the next eight class periods in the project, the group engaged in discussion and dramatic role play activities based on relevant social issues identified by the participants. All of the above activities were audio taped. During the last two sessions, the adolescents participated in individual interviews that were audio taped about their experiences in the project. Transcripts of the discussions, role plays, and interviews were analyzed concurrently with observations and field notes taken by the researcher and assistant.

The data were organized into four components: (1) a description of the adolescents' background; (2) a content analysis of the social issues identified for the subject matter of the drama activities, namely relationship issues in peer, family, and friendship contexts; (3) analysis of the participants' processes of

perspective-taking, empathy, and prosocial behavior in and beyond the context of the role play activities; and (4) the adolescents' experiences of the project and the effects they perceived as resulting from the project. Implications for educational practice and for further research are discussed.

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## CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

Schools are among the most pervasive socialization contexts in our culture, and among the single most influential for shaping the course of human development over the life span (Ladd, 1990, p. 1081).

Because the quality of peer relations early in life is linked to later adjustment (Ladd, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987, 1993) and adolescence is a critical time for identity formation (Brown, 1990; Harter, 1990), consideration must be given to the dynamic interactions between adolescents' self-perceptions and the perceptions of others as they operate within and among peer groupings in the educational setting. Indeed, as illustrated in the quote above, the social identity of an individual within the school environment and his or her perceptions of belonging to school are vital to that individual's adjustment. Moreover, isolation and rejection in school may not only lead to dropping out, but also to maladjustment in adult life (Finn, 1989; Parker & Asher, 1987).

The peer group is a social context in which reinforcement for facilitating "the acquisition and modification of prosocial behaviors" (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 96) occurs. In adolescence, participation in the peer group fosters the sharing and internalization of perspectives (Lightfoot, 1992). Nevertheless, not all peer group experiences are positive. For example, adolescents who are at risk for drop out may be at further risk to negative peer influences because the potential to disengage from school may be strengthened by affiliation with peers who are also at risk (Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougall, 1996). In order for adolescents to remain connected to school, they must have a stake in the processes of the classroom and perceive school as necessary for survival--a place for empowerment rather than alienation (Finn, 1989). This may be

achieved through providing a forum in school in which adolescents are able to discuss and deal with social issues that are important to them, that is, problem-solving in a safe place with adult facilitators who foster a supportive environment.

In a recent research study, Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found that participation in extra-curricular activities heightened engagement in school for students at risk for drop out. Other researchers have found that in high school, opportunities for involvement in various extra-curricular activities not only allow previously unpopular students to use previously submerged talents and abilities, but also provide a "theatre" for new relationships among students who previously may have felt alone in the world (Kinney, 1993). As a former coordinator of both a curricular and an extra-curricular drama program in a rural high school, I have witnessed the positive impact on student relationships and self-confidence exerted by involvement in an activity-based peer group. Such a forum for social interaction and for discussion and exploration of important life issues appears to be beneficial to adolescents as they navigate their changing roles in the social world.

The aim of this study was to collaboratively develop and participate in a drama project based on social issues with a group of "at-risk" adolescents enrolled in an alternate school program. Specifically, the purposes of this project were two-fold. First, I sought to understand the social experiences of "at-risk" adolescents by constructing and collaboratively participating with a group of at-risk adolescents in a drama project employing role-play and discussion and based on social issues of relevance to the adolescents. The second objective was to examine the impact of the activities in the drama project on the participants by employing a phenomenological approach (Osborne, 1990).

Although the project took place within the regular classroom, it provided a foray for the participants into the world of drama--unavailable to these students in

either curricular or extra-curricular contexts within the school. The project involved role-play, perspective taking and discussion of social issues relevant to the adolescents. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, the adolescents' conceptions and constructions of self- and other-understanding were examined.

Active participation in building a drama project around relevant social issues is indeed a theatre for examining the development of role identity, empathy, self- and other-understanding, and narrative sensibility (Case, 1991). Moreover, providing opportunities for adolescents to feel "with" others through role-play and perspective taking (Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley, & Shea, 1991) may enhance the quality of social relationships (Schonert-Reichl, 1993). Participation in such activities may not only improve interpersonal problem solving strategies (Wentzel & Erdley, 1993), and social skills (Downey & Walker, 1989), but also may be a safe context within which adolescents may construct positive social relationships while exploring and working through social issues relevant to their lives.

The design, evaluation and implementation of programs--curricular or extra-curricular--providing opportunities for adolescents to bond or connect with school while fostering positive peer relations through enhancement of self- and other-understanding is an initiative toward reducing risk for drop out (Finn, 1989; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). In order to develop the social drama activities that potentially would impact positively on adolescent participants, research was reviewed in the following areas: transitions in adolescence, self- and other-understanding, social adjustment and peer acceptance, related social interventions utilizing drama and role-play techniques, and qualitative investigations of adolescents' school experiences.

## Social Development, Adolescence, and Drama

### Adolescence: A risky transition?

Adolescence is the time in the life span that conjures up images of wild, emotional creatures besieged by hormonal storms and exaggerated stresses. While many myths abound about adolescence, little empirical evidence exists supporting such negative stereotypes. For example, Larson and Lampman-Petratis (1989) found scarce evidence that adolescence is associated with increased emotional variability; although they did find age trends in mood self-reports indicating that older adolescents experienced less positive and more negative average daily emotional states. Although many of the myths about adolescence have been debunked in recent years with recent research indicating that the majority of adolescents develop to adulthood without significant trauma, researchers still converge on the notion that adolescence is a stressful life period due to many of the physical, social, and cognitive changes that occur in a relatively short time span (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992; Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996). For example, the transition from elementary school to high school provides potential encounters with new social comparison groups or standards for self-evaluation (Harter, 1990).

Recent research suggests that an adolescent's ability to cope effectively with life stresses and overcome risks depends on the ongoing availability of social resources (Ebata & Moos, 1994). Further, for adolescents unable to traverse the frontiers between their differing social and school worlds, social marginalization impacts negatively on their ability to benefit from school (Farrell, 1990; Finn, 1989; Kelly, 1993; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). Interventions that focus on the quality of peer relationships and on developing self- and other-understanding may reduce pressure and stressful circumstances for such at-risk adolescents. Moreover, because social behavior has been found to be a stronger

predictor of adolescents' school grades than their standardized test scores (Wentzel, 1993), interventions aimed at developing positive social interaction at school may serve a dual purpose--enhancing social adjustment and academic achievement.

Thus, it appears that participation in a social group engaging in activities surrounding and encouraging self- and other-understanding may improve both the quantity and quality of strategies available to the group members for solving interpersonal problems and may enhance social acceptance and adjustment (Wentzel & Erdley, 1993). Moreover, opportunities for practicing perspective-taking and prosocial reasoning through discussion may promote advances in both empathy and prosocial behavior (Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley, & Shea, 1991).

#### Understanding of Self, Understanding of Others

With development in adolescence comes the acquisition of abstract reasoning abilities and the increased differentiation of the self (Farrell, 1990; Harter, 1990). Adolescents are faced with the task of integrating sometimes contradictory self concepts (varying across different social contexts or roles) into a cohesive sense of identity (Harter, 1990; Larson, 1995). Concurrently, potentially negative changes in self-esteem arise when adolescents make the transition from elementary school to the increasingly diverse world of high school complete with new standards of evaluation and social comparison (Harter, 1990). The need is clear for fostering positive and supportive peer relations while maximizing chances for competence. The present investigation and drama project was designed to provide opportunities for fostering self-understanding as well as for fostering positive self identity.

Empathy, defined by Eisenberg (1992) as an emotional response to the emotional state of another--"feeling with" another--may be instrumental in determining the quality of one's social relationships (Schonert-Reichl, 1993). Bruchkowsky (1991) traces the developmental changes in cognitive processing that relate to the development of empathy from the interrelational through to the dimensional stages (approximately ages 1 1/2 to 11 years) (Case, 1993). Researchers have consistently found that empathy is a precursor for prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). In the present investigation, practice in perspective-taking provides an opportunity for adolescents to reflect upon the roots of their understanding of and behaviors toward others.

School drama programs furnish opportunities for collaborative learning, operationalized discussion of pertinent social issues and personal problems, creative and artistic expression, and an integrative, potentially student-directed alternative to traditional institutionalized education. Besides its social, artistic, and expressive functions, drama is an excellent vehicle for teaching curricular content. Drama provides a conduit for learning through a variety of "ways of knowing." Exposure and practice is afforded for diverse learning styles from kinesthetic (expression through movement) to logical (analysis of character and literature), from spatial (directing and set blocking) to verbal, and from musical to social (interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge and expression) (Ramos-Ford & Gardner, 1991). Further, the study of drama may serve not only as an activity base for a social grouping, but most importantly as a means of enhancing empathy and positive relations through active practice in perspective-taking and the foundations of social development.

The present investigation sought to highlight the efficacy of participation in a drama program in supporting positive social development in adolescents. In the present investigation several of the following questions were put forth. What



aspects of the activity foster social adjustment? Does practice in perspective-taking nurture empathy and prosocial behavior outside the program? Once cognitive prerequisites for empathy are acquired, does the opportunity for empathic practice increase prosocial behavior and enhance adjustment in adolescents, especially those perceived to be "at risk"? Ultimately, I aimed to develop a collaborative drama activity that would potentially enhance empathy and foster positive social adjustment both in and beyond the school setting.

### Social Adjustment and Peer Acceptance

Self-esteem and a positive personal identity are related to social status within peer groups (Brown & Lohr, 1987; Kinney, 1993). The emotional effects of immersion in and negotiation of the dynamic school social scene impact adolescents' self-perceptions. On what is a positive self-perception contingent? Ladd (1990) links school adjustment to maintenance of friendship early in one's social career. Conversely, peer rejection is related to victimization and aggression (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). Further, the combination of aggressiveness and submissiveness coupled with low levels of prosocial behavior predicts peer rejection, which in turn is associated with loneliness and worry concerning social relationships (Parkhurst & Asher, 1992). The safe context of a social drama program could potentially provide a forum for discussion and active practice in working through the social and personal issues pertinent to the adolescent participants as well as provide opportunities for students with common interests and concerns to become friends. Moreover, the elements of the social drama program could potentially combine to facilitate improvement of self-perception and self- and other-understanding among the participants, thereby indirectly providing adolescents with important and necessary skills for developing quality friendships.

Parker and Asher (1993, 1987) have highlighted the importance of friendship quality and peer acceptance during childhood and adolescence. Their findings indicated that group acceptance and friendship quality are independent predictors of loneliness. One focus of the present investigation was that by facilitating peer collaboration in drama, friendship and peer relations would be promoted. It is noted by Parker and Asher (1987) that quality of friendship and acceptance with one's peers impact adult adjustment. For example, according to Schonert-Reichl and Hymel (1997), friendship quality may function as a buffer for protecting against rejection among such adolescents. Thus, the social drama project undertaken in the present study and the community atmosphere of the classroom may foster development of quality friendships and positive social interaction through role play activities and discussion of issues of self- and other-understanding.

Ladd (1990) has found that not only does number of friends in new classrooms predict favorable school perceptions, but also those children with more positive school perceptions maintain more prior friendships throughout their school careers. By furnishing opportunities for adolescents with diverse talents and aptitudes to participate and excel in a collaborative endeavor, a drama program may make school perceptions of alienated students more positive.

Because social knowledge concerning emotional states is predictive of peer popularity (Adams, 1983) and behavioral disorders are associated with lower levels of competence (Schonert-Reichl, 1993), interventions designed to foster and enhance social competencies in at-risk children as well as programs designed to facilitate developmental empathy are essential.

Because findings in the area of peer acceptance and adjustment have been primarily obtained through correlational, largely quantitative investigation, it

is vital to critically examine this work in order to situate any gaps, which must be filled with future research.

One common caveat of quantitative research on adolescent peer relations is the utilization of questionnaires on which adolescents are forced to respond in a format imposed by the researcher. Specifically, data in the majority of studies reviewed herein on friendships and peer relationships were gathered through non-naturalistic, analogue methods such as questionnaires and inventories. Thus, participants' responses were limited by uniform definitions of constructs imposed by the research design. For example, the Peer Nomination Inventory (PNI) employed by Perry, Kusel and Perry (1988) to assess victimization and aggression levels in students, was limited by its inability to assess either frequency and severity of victimization or varying thresholds of perceived victimization among students. Further instrumentation limitations include the exclusive use of self-report measures. In the present study, data were collected via qualitative methods of observation, interviews, and participant validation. In the present investigation it was hoped that a clearer picture of the motivations behind responses and behaviors would emerge from a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Artificiality, as in Adams (1983) assessment of social competency through participants' responses to hypothetical video vignettes could be reduced with complementary qualitative investigation. "Going to the source"--observing, interviewing, and listening to the adolescents in and about their own situations is vital (Zaslow & Takanishi, 1993).

Issues of interpretation, including definitional issues and assumptions, must be considered in any research study that seeks to understand adolescents' experiences across salient social contexts. Often, research fails to account for the whole social picture of the participants in context. Parker and Asher (1993),

for example, focussed solely on school based interactions in their study of friendship and adjustment; possibilities of salient relationships in other contexts such as neighborhood or church were overlooked. Alternative interpretations, such as the possible reciprocal rather than causal relationship between quality of early peer relations and later school adjustment, must be addressed.

Ideally, a blend of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies is a judicious and potentially enlightening strategy in formulating a research plan (Creswell, 1994); through cumulative and comprehensive evidence will understanding be built. Therefore, qualitative and descriptive research exploring aspects of adolescent social development in school (Dillon, 1989; Farrell, 1990; Kelly, 1993; Kinney, 1993; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994; Richards, 1987) were examined which provided a balance to quantitative research findings in terms of informing the present study. In terms of the methodology used in the present study, qualitative phenomenological methods were first informed by participants' responses to questionnaires about events and social issues in their lives. This process provided the researcher with both preliminary information about the participants, and the framework for role play and discussion in the project. Additionally, this approach provided an opportunity for the participants to reflect on social issues in their lives. The design of the present study was not a true blend of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, but was rather a phenomenological, context-specific inquiry.

### Drama and Social Interventions

In order to inform the development of an engaging and meaningful social issues based drama project, literature in the areas of 1) the interaction of drama activities and aspects of social development, and 2) social interventions using aspects of drama was examined. In addition, my background and experiences in

drama education, informed by the writings of noted drama educators (Boal, 1995; Cohen, 1978; Verriour, 1994), provided complementary support to the framework for the development of artistic aspects of the project.

In designing a program of drama activities that would potentially enhance self- and other-understanding, I looked to related social interventions involving the use of role-play and the use of drama. From my review, I found that many of the extant programs using role-play as a means of improving social skills were very structured or systematic and tended to resemble school curricula isolated from the meaningful experience of the participants (Goldstein, 1993; Pecukonis, 1990; Vaughn, 1987). Additionally, from my review it became clear that active participation in drama allowing for student input regarding the content (social issues examined) and creative aspects of the activities may prove more motivating and engaging than a systematic intervention curriculum (Boal, 1995).

The use of drama in exploring adolescent social interactions is not new. Safer and Harding (1993), for example, investigated the use of the "Under Pressure Program," a program that used a live theatre performance as a basis for discussion of adolescents' attitudes to substance abuse and prevention. The goal of the program was to go beyond the didactic "Just Say No to Drugs" advertisement campaign. First, the adolescents viewed a musical drama performance concerning substance abuse. Next, they engaged in discussion and role-play concerning the issue. In order to determine the effectiveness of the live theatre intervention in terms of preventing substance abuse, participants responded to questionnaires and engaged in discussion after viewing the theatrical piece. Participants' self-report responses on the questionnaires and field notes gathered by a researcher who observed the discussions were focussed on peer and family influences on substance abuse and help-seeking behaviors. Results indicated that the viewing of the musical play about

substance abuse issues was effective in soliciting feedback about adolescents' views on substance abuse and resources available for dealing with such social problems. Although this method used creative and motivating techniques, the social issue discussed was imposed on the participants rather than determined by them. The goal was not to give the participants the opportunity to choose and work through relevant issues, but to measure their responses to a piece of theatre they watched but in which they did not participate.

Overall, an investigation into the literature examining various contexts of interactions between drama and aspects of social development revealed that elements of the practice of drama reflected contexts of social interaction. Moreover, a number of studies found that drama activities facilitated positive social development and interaction. Miller and Rynders (1993), for example, examined the use of drama games to enhance positive social interaction between students with and without mental retardation and found positive results. That is, they found that the participants' involvement in drama activities was associated with positive regard by peers and with being targeted for positive social interaction. Similarly, Bieber-Schut (1991) found that a developmental drama workshop improved social skills in visually impaired adolescents. Social skills training involving dramatic role play also has positive impact on the social functioning of schizophrenic inpatients (Spencer & Gillespie, 1983). Finally, researchers have found that drama participation in high school leads to improvements in tolerance of other's perspectives (Beales & Zemel, 1990). Taken together, these findings provide support for the contention that positive social effects result from participation in drama based programs and interventions across a variety of contexts.

Because of the participants' "at-risk" status in the present study, it was important to examine existing social interventions for at risk adolescents that

utilize aspects of drama--namely role play. A common factor in interpersonal skills training programs is the training of role taking in order to encourage positive social interaction. A fundamental premise underlying interpersonal skills training is that the recipients of the training can be helped through education or training rather than through a counselling process (Goldstein, 1993). Such programs have been informed by social learning theory, including Bandura's prescription of modelling desired behavior, rehearsal of desired behavior, and arranged opportunity for successful application of desired social behaviors (Goldstein, 1993). In such programs (Pecukonis, 1990; Vaughn, 1987), role-play is a part of the prescription--the chance to practice or rehearse modelled desirable social behavior. Nevertheless, this prescriptive and didactic application of role-play may serve to isolate the participant from the meaning of the endeavor.

In order to overcome the noted caveat in other investigations, in the present social drama project, role-play was not used as a prescription for training, but was used as a means of learning and understanding through exploration of relevant concerns and issues. Moreover, it was expected that the natural coupling of drama and role-play would prove far more engaging and motivating than a systematic pre-programmed curriculum.

### The Adolescent Voice: Experiences of School

In this section, a number of recent studies are reviewed because the researchers of each of the respective studies have noted the saliency of listening to the adolescents' voices as a means in which to obtain and understand adolescents' experiences in various school contexts. Moreover, all of these studies examined adolescents' school experiences by employing qualitative methodology.

Phelan, Yu, and Davidson (1994) described the pressures and problems experienced by adolescents in the interconnected contexts of school, family, and peers. The researchers interviewed 55 ethnically and academically diverse adolescents in four urban California high schools in order to obtain descriptions of the events and circumstances that affect their lives and their ability to connect positively with educational settings. Interview data were supplemented with observations that provided documentation of interactions between adolescents and teachers and interactions between adolescents and their peers. Interviews were coded to identify values, beliefs and expectations across the students' worlds (school, home, and peer contexts). Socio-cultural components in the lives of the students were examined within the context of the "Multiple Worlds" framework (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994) focussing on the quality of transitions between contexts.

Adolescent students' own descriptions of the pressures and problems provided important information that emphasized their roles as mediators of their own experiences. Different risks and problems were found to be associated with differences in values, expectations and beliefs across contexts and degree of difficulty or ease in making the transitions between contexts of school, home, and peers. For example, adolescents experiencing congruence across contexts in terms of values, beliefs and expectations described pressure to achieve academically. Problems associated with such pressure included serious events, such as suicide attempts. Findings highlighted the importance of not adhering strictly to traditional at-risk adolescent profiles. For example, "model" students may be at risk due to pressures associated with features of their world.

This research points to the importance of acknowledging students' family contexts and the need for educators to be aware of and consider problems students may have at home which may hinder their ability to benefit from existing



school settings. Also, findings indicated the importance of peer relationships in providing a release from family and school pressures. These findings informed the present investigation in that the project provided opportunities for adolescents to be involved in a forum to voice and deal with pressures and problems in the various social contexts of their lives, empowering them to broaden their views and develop more complex understandings of themselves and others.

In her action research study, Richards (1987) asked the question: "how am I going to motivate a group of students who do not want to learn?" (p. 65). Data were collected over seven months in the forms of journal entries, documenting class activities, questionnaires, and student interviews with the focus on student and teacher behaviors and interactions. Informed by research on motivation, the findings were presented as a chronological account of the interchange of teaching and learning processes between "a group of unmotivated adolescents considered worthless" (p. 69) and the researching teacher.

During the course of the action research, Richards acknowledged that she had previously underestimated the capabilities of these students. In turn, she recognized their needs for competence, achievement and for a caring teacher who knows her students as people. The adolescents themselves were instrumental in the interrelated processes of teaching and learning as their voices informed the classroom processes and practices. This notion underlies the approach utilized in the present investigation.

Another study examining the educational experiences of at-risk youth was conducted by Dillon (1989). Specifically, Dillon studied the social organization of a high school low-track English-reading class using ethnographic methodology, including participant observation and interviews with classroom members/

informants. Data were collected over one year and were focussed on obtaining adolescents' perceptions of school, students, teacher and community. Findings indicated discrepancies in value systems about school and learning between adolescents and their parents. That is, on the one hand the adolescents were expected to be successful and achieve in school, and on the other hand the adolescents' parents de-emphasized the value of an education.

Results also indicated that, in this particular classroom, the teacher and students together constructed the social organization. The teacher worked to make connections between the students' home and school cultures, reducing resistance to learning and increasing opportunities for active participation. For the students, the teacher was a real, caring person who "spoke their language" and made school activities relevant to their lives.

These findings informed my research by emphasizing the need for making school activities relevant to the lives of the students, especially those students who were marginalized through placement in alternate programs. My study sought to achieve this by eliciting the subject matter for the drama activities from the students. That is, social issues in the contexts of the students' lives (school, home, and peer cultures) were generated as the basis for the drama activities by the adolescents themselves.

The last studies reviewed in this section examined adolescents at risk for school drop out enrolled in specific school programs or alternate schools designed to serve these adolescents. Kelly (1993) presented "voices from the hidden world of the continuation high school" (p. 2) in her book entitled Last Chance High: How Girls and Boys Drop In and Out of Alternative Schools. Gender was examined in this ethnography of the alternate school system. Through extensive discussion with the students in these schools, emerged a metaphor of the "soap opera" in which gender status informed the expectations

for boys and for girls. For example, amongst the adolescents in this investigation, girls tended to read stereotypical, gender-typed popular psychology books and romances, while boys chose books about war and gang culture. Moreover, in terms of language arts in the continuation school classrooms examined, few teachers included gender issues in their lessons. Overall, the findings indicated that at risk students, marginalized by the school environment disengaged from school and were drawn to alternative "theatres" for identity development such as romantic relationships or gangs. Within these alternative theatres, boys and girls act and improvise according to respectively different social scripts.

Farrell (1990) documented an interpretive study of three projects undertaken to gain a holistic understanding of adolescents at risk for school drop out by examining their day to day lives and experiences. Data were collected by three students/ collaborators who tape recorded interviews or discussions between themselves and adolescents about their experiences as adolescents in the contexts of home, school, and peers. Overall, the findings emphasized the importance of student-teacher bonding and meaningful, collaborative endeavors in keeping adolescents connected to school. Finally, Farrell discussed solutions by proposing structural changes in school systems, highlighting the importance of positive peer interaction and connection with caring teachers.

In these studies, as in the present study, adolescents' voices speak to issues of identity and social interaction as they relate to school contexts. Although the studies reviewed varied according to theoretical focus and methodology, there were important commonalities. Foremost, in all of the studies, qualitative methodology was a particularly useful tool with which to explore phenomena related to the lives and experiences of adolescents in school. The different methodologies included ethnography, action research, and phenomenology. In all of the studies examined, interviews and discussions with

adolescents were used so that adolescents were able to express their perceptions, beliefs, constructions, and conceptions of particular phenomena and experiences in their lives. In addition, in all of these studies, adolescent experiences were obtained so that they could be understood and inform educational practice--either on the level of individual classroom practice (Richards, 1987), or with a view to informing recommendations for changes in larger school programs (Farrell, 1990). These studies explored the experiences and identities of adolescents in the contexts of schools and beyond by going to the source and learning from adolescents themselves.

In the aforementioned studies, the voices of real adolescents emerged as a force to inform educational practice. Zaslow and Takanishi (1993) outlined priorities for research on adolescent development and proposed that in order to maximize the effectiveness of interventions and illuminate adolescent development, research is needed that attends to adolescents' own descriptions and perceptions of their experiences. Qualitative and descriptive data are especially important in terms of understanding problem behaviors, stressors and risk factors from the adolescents' perspectives to inform suitable and effective intervention strategies and to evaluate interventions (Zaslow & Takanishi, 1993). By attending to the voices--expressed experiences, meanings and perceptions--of adolescents, a deeper understanding of the social and academic needs of adolescents is possible. Programs, both curricular and extra-curricular, that facilitate social development also foster academic development (Wentzel, 1993), enhance connection with school, and thus diminish the likelihood of drop out (Finn, 1989; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997).

### Social Drama in the Classroom: An Application

One impetus for the present investigation of participation in a drama program as a means of illuminating and perhaps enhancing self- and other-understanding in adolescents emerged from my experiences working with high school students in both curricular and extra-curricular capacities. I provide this description as background for the present investigation. Specifically, it was my initial experience with drama for adolescents that both spurred and informed the present investigation.

I taught English (grade 10) and Drama (Grades nine through 12) in a high school in a northern community. I coordinated the extra-curricular program in the school. In this capacity, I organized the school drama club with students of all grade levels in the school, directed plays and travelled to regional and provincial festivals with these productions. In addition, my students and I were active in community theatre productions and activities in the town and region. Via journals I kept when I was a high school drama teacher, I reconstructed a case study, first of a social drama unit collaboratively created and practiced in a grade nine classroom, and secondly, of an extra-curricular drama project undertaken by a mixed group of students from grades nine to twelve. As a result of my experiences, I set out to illuminate changing representations of social competencies, adjustment and empathy in the participants, both adolescent and adult (teacher), as a result of participating in drama. This initial qualitative and highly personal investigation served to consolidate ideas and guide engagement in the present study in which development of self-and other-understanding was traced in collaboratively building and practicing a social drama activity from a planned rather than a retrospective field of vision.

The original ninth grade social drama activity was born from student interest in discussing social issues. "Kristy," a student had lent me a book by

Evelyn Lau, a young author who was a teen-age runaway and had lived or survived on the streets as a prostitute. Some time later, at the beginning of drama class when we were sitting in a circle and chatting before doing our regular acting warm-ups, Kristy asked me what I thought about the book she had lent me. This sparked a fascinating discussion about the many issues in the book--relationships with parents, exploitation of youth, street life, gangs, AIDS, friendship, drug use, depression, etc.

This informal discussion led the students to identify specific issues or problems that they were interested in investigating in more detail. As an assignment, they decided they would create some kind of document through which, as did Evelyn Lau through her autobiographical book, they could examine issues as they impact their own lives. The students naturally grouped themselves according to the following social issues of common interest: school conflicts (grades, relations with peers and teachers), teen pregnancy, suicide, eating disorders (this evolved into a critique of popular media), and family conflicts. Obviously, the time line of a single drama unit was not adequate to write an entire book; however, we had many ideas for alternate documentary and research forms.

Respectively, the groups (about four or five students per group) created the following documents: an improvised tabloid-type talk show complete with experts and host dealing with teacher-student conflict, a short story dealing with teen pregnancy, a series of poems dealing with suicide, a collage displaying typical media imagery of women to highlight pressures on young women to conform to unrealistic body images, and finally, a news report describing potential fates that could befall runaways. Presentations of the documents were made after three class periods of discussion, research, and work on the presentations. Not only did students bring personal experience to the research,

but also pursued the research on their own time outside of class via resources such as television, magazines, newspapers, and discussion with others.

The students had considerable freedom as to degree of planning; they could produce a complete script or prepare a general outline of action and characters. There was no pressure to perform as in following the script; the main thrust was that the students try to identify with the character or role, and seek to show this affinity through actions and words.

The role-play in the improvisations was not victim-centred; rather, roles consisted of those people impacted by the effect of the social problem on the victim. For example, roles in the runaway improv included the mother, the best friend, the sister, the counsellor, and the boyfriend of the person who has left home without warning. This convention functioned to minimize negative feelings in those that may have been personally involved in a similar situation and also encouraged empathy with varying perspectives.

Improv was performed for the class after about one week of work; discussion and peer group evaluation (concerning both depths of treatment and delivery or aesthetics) followed each contribution. Also, role reversal was undertaken by the replay of scenes with students taking different perspectives. All in all, the project was a useful learning experience. Entering the theatre during rehearsal, one may have been startled by what appeared to be chaos. As a first year teacher, this made me nervous; however, in retrospect, I came to realize that collaborative learning--especially in drama--is not always a quiet pursuit.

Students were not compelled to participate if they were uncomfortable with an issue or a particular discussion. Although a few students were initially reluctant to take an active role, everyone wanted to be and was involved in the productions. One extremely quiet girl, who became only tangentially involved in

the role-play, surprised me when she stayed after class one day and spoke to me about difficulties she had been having at home. It appeared as if the discussions in class had a therapeutic quality in providing awareness that others share similar problems. This girl was then able to seek help for a situation that she previously did not wish to or was unable to discuss openly.

Intuitively, it seems that empathy and prosocial behavior would be enhanced by participation in such a project. However, to retrospectively chart this development is a daunting if not impossible task. Certainly, the active engagement with the content areas, enhanced awareness in the students of emotions, situations and conflicts faced by others. Positive effects of active engagement in creation and ownership of a dramatic production were evident in the quality and depth of the contributions. This project occurred about one-third into the term--the students had time to get to know each other and feel reasonably comfortable. Interest and enthusiasm for the project, which students had much input in designing, continued throughout the remainder of the course. Students maintained the desire to take primary responsibility for developing ideas for class activities and for active discussion. In addition, several students subsequently became involved in extra-curricular and community theatre projects. As a result, opportunities for positive identity formation through success in activity-based social groupings (Kinney, 1993) were increased. Further, two students who at the time considered themselves unconnected with school, became active in extra-curricular drama at school and in the community and subsequently became apparently more positively connected to school (attendance and grades in English class improved). This anecdotal information was supported by Mahoney and Cairns (1997) who found that involvement in extra-curricular activities heightened engagement in school for students at risk for drop out.



Other positive social effects emerged as evident in students involved in the extra-curricular drama club in the school. Students with diverse interests and abilities worked together towards a common goal--choosing, producing, rehearsing and performing a play not only for the school audience but also for the whole community. The accomplishment of working as a team far surpassed the extrinsic reward offered by marks or grades. Further, the teacher did not function as an authority; she functioned as a team member with skills and expertise to contribute. Such an arrangement provided many opportunities for creative conflict resolution; a common vision of artistic accomplishment superseded personal squabbles and disagreements. The cast and crew (including students from grades nine to twelve, myself, a teaching assistant with a drama background, and my husband John who volunteered) operated much like a professional company.

We took the production on tour as we visited the Regional Drama Festival and were elated to be invited to the Provincial Festival. Diverse personalities managed to get along beautifully throughout the trip. Not only was much learned about the art and practice of theatre, but more importantly much was learned about human nature and interaction.

#### Statement of Purpose

A drama program has the potential to foster empathy, self-esteem, social adjustment and friendship among students by providing a flexible, integrative and collaborative setting where students are able to socialize and to practice the art of socializing through role play and perspective-taking inherent in the dramatic activity. In addition, students are able to share their skills and talents on an equal plane of respect with others including adults. Expertise is gauged by practice, not by age.

Further, in the present investigation, the students themselves chose the content matter of the role play activities. The role play and discussions centred on social issues relevant to the lives of the students, making the activities meaningful to the students. The voices of these adolescents were listened to as they constructed the experience and meaning of the drama.

The activity developed in the present project took the shape of the social drama unit but contained elements of the extra-curricular activity-based peer group. The program was built in consultation with a group of adolescents identified as "at-risk for dropout" and was informed by research in the areas of developmental empathy and social understanding. Endeavors to trace the development of self- and other-understanding throughout and after the program were accomplished through likewise informed observations, interviews and consultation with the participants themselves. The adolescents' experiences of participation in the project, their emergent conceptions and constructions of self- and other-understanding as they engaged in role play, perspective-taking and reflection on relevant social issues formed the data and informed the learning researcher.

The goal of the present project was for the participants to participate themselves (rather than just watching a produced play) in the drama and thus have optimum input creatively and in terms of what social issues are foremost in their lives. In addition, the present study does not rely upon participant self-report on questionnaires and researcher observations of discussions. Rather, the adolescents are able to describe their own experiences and voice their perspectives in interaction with the researcher and other participants. Active participation, including the exploration and discussion of relevant social issues, is supported by research in moral education (Kohlberg, 1981, 1986; Damon, 1988; Lickona, 1991). Specifically, researchers in the area of moral development and

moral education suggest programs that emphasize discussion of important social issues. Programs that emphasize discussions with peers about controversial social issues are more beneficial in promoting development than are programs that rely solely on indoctrination.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

### Rationale

This study combined both the building of experience (engaging in the collaborative drama activity based on social issues relevant to the participants) and describing and illuminating experiences (discussion and examination of these experiences from the perspectives of the participants) (Georgi, 1985). Therefore, a combination of methods was employed to trace both the dynamic conceptions and constructions of empathy among the participants and to seek understanding of the participants' experiences.

The primary objectives of this study were 1) to seek understanding of the social experiences of "at-risk" adolescents in working collaboratively in the context of a peer-based drama activity grouping, and 2) to examine the impact of this activity on the participants. To achieve this objective, a phenomenological approach was required:

Phenomenological research is not intended to test an hypothesis.

The aim is to understand a phenomenon by allowing the data to speak for themselves, and by attempting to put aside one's preconceptions as best one can. The method provides us with descriptions of experience which are then interpreted by the researcher from a particular theoretical perspective (Osborne, 1990, p. 81).

To understand the participants' experiences, it was necessary to try to get inside their subjective perspectives. Just as the participants in the activity practiced perspective-taking, so too did the researcher as she sought to understand the perspectives of the participants.

As in phenomenological research, the data were descriptions of experience obtained through interviews and group dialogue. In addition, the drama "role plays" functioned as data in the form of non-verbal personal and group expression (Osborne, 1990). Embedded in the phenomenological methodology, elements of ethnography (Ellen, 1984) were represented in the data collection through in-depth observations and field notes on the project's activities as well as through informal interactions with the participants in the school and neighborhood contexts. Further, the collection of video and audio tapes of dramatic role play activities comprised artifacts for the analysis of data. These data sources were embedded in the alternate program classroom described as well as in the school and the larger community of the inner-city neighborhood.

The subject matter of this project, namely at-risk adolescents' experiences of self- and other-understanding in and beyond the context of a collaborative interaction designed to foster perspective-taking (dramatic role play based on relevant social issues), coheres with the theoretical underpinnings of ethnographic research. Symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1978) subsumes self- and other-understanding as it is through the understanding of others that meaning is achieved. Perspective-taking, self- and other-understanding, and interaction in the telescoping contexts of project, classroom, school, and community intertwine to form a combined method and subject for the research project.

At the outset of the study, participants responded to paper and pencil questionnaires that were employed not as standardized measurements for examining differences between participants on pre- and post-test measures, but as a means of gaining insight into the social issues and events relevant to the

participants. This was useful in planning the drama and discussion activities of the project and the subsequent qualitative analyses (Creswell, 1994).

### Design

An intact group of 14 students identified as at-risk for school drop-out and enrolled in an alternative classroom program engaged in a four week drama project that focussed on social issues relevant to their lives. The activities, consisting of role play, drama related exercises designed to highlight understanding of dramatic elements (such as characterization, emotion, and improvisation), group discussions, and one-on-one discussions or interviews, took place over four weeks during 12 class periods (three per week). The project occurred during the scheduled language arts period. The aforementioned time frame for the project was chosen because of issues of practicality. Four weeks was the maximum time allowed by school officials because they perceived that a longer time period would disrupt the regular school program.

As mentioned earlier, participants responded to paper and pencil questionnaires that were designed to assess relevant social stresses and issues, and events salient to the lives of the adolescent participants. Students' responses to the questions on these measures guided the content of the role play and class discussions by providing the researcher with relevant information regarding the social experiences of the participants.

The researcher/ drama teacher was a participant as well as a guide in collaboratively building the social drama role-play activities. The researcher's husband, John, assisted and participated in the project. His skill in drama, his experience with "at-risk" adolescents (former counsellor at wilderness training camp for adolescents), and the rapport he built with the adolescent participants proved invaluable. Researchers and participants worked together to explore

experiences of social issues, stresses, coping strategies, and experiences of understanding of self and others in the context of a cohesive drama troupe. The ways in which participants constructed their experiences of perspective-taking and understanding of self and others in social relationships in the drama processes was a main focus for the data collected in this study.

### Participants

The research participants in this study were a subgroup of 14 students who were taken from a larger sample of approximately 300 students from grades 8-11 enrolled in an inner-city high school and who were taking part in an ongoing two year project investigating the concurrent effects of social, emotional, and motivational processes on academic success during early and middle adolescence (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 1994). This larger study was conducted in order to potentially identify factors that predict school dropout.

The group of 14 students were enrolled in a "transition" program in the school. Students identified as "at-risk" for school dropout were chosen for the "transition" program on the bases of poor secondary school academic records, tardiness, truancy, and behavioral problems in class and at home. "Transition" students varied widely on reading skills, were all relatively successful in elementary school, and according to psychological testing, were within normal learning ability range (Rebane & Schonert-Reichl, 1994). The "transition" program was designed to assist these students, all of whom had failed Grade 8 academic courses (science, math, social studies and language arts), to obtain some academic success in high school. Students in the "transition" program were either in grade 9 or grade 10 and took all of the aforementioned academic courses from one teacher in the same classroom.

In terms of the drama project, this group was chosen on the basis of research that suggests that they would benefit from participating in an activity-based peer group. Specifically, as adolescents move into the diverse world of high school, they are often able to find a supportive social niche via involvement in extracurricular activities (Kinney, 1993). At-risk students may have limited access to positive activity-based peer groups, such as extra-curricular activities due to academic program or financial constraints. In fact, the structure of the "transition" program restricted the students' access to elective or option courses such as drama due to scheduling constraints. Collaborative participation in this social drama activity offered these students access not only to an artistic pursuit and social activity but also provided a conduit through which their own issues, concerns, needs and insights may inform the educational system which should serve them. Bruner (1996) argues for a social curriculum in schools in which children are empowered to construct and belong to the classroom culture. Optimally, such classroom organization and activities as in the present social drama project, and indeed in the "transition" classroom itself would represent an ongoing classroom organization.

The "transition" classroom operated on a democratic model with teaching practice informed by moral development theory (Kohlberg, 1975; Lickona, 1991)-an approach that empowers the students by providing them with opportunities to help construct their own learning environment (Rebane & Schonert-Reichl, 1994). Specifically, the program offered the students many democratic decision-making opportunities. Examples of this approach included class meetings (both formal and informal) in which students were given the opportunity to discuss and vote on such issues as project topics, field trips, choice of literature for English class, and facets of classroom organization, such as seating arrangements. The classroom organization was based upon the principle of empowering students by



allowing them a "voice" on issues regarding their own learning experiences in the context of a positive and supportive atmosphere.

In keeping with the democratic approach, it was important that the students reached consensus regarding their desire to participate in this project. Thus, initially, the classroom teacher discussed the project with the students to determine their thoughts on participation. After the nature of the drama project was described, students responded positively. During the next meeting with the students, the researcher discussed the social drama project in further detail. During this classroom visit, the researcher observed how the students and teacher interacted and basically obtained an understanding of the classroom climate and daily procedures.

All the students in the class were given a copy of the letter of consent describing the procedure. Consent of both the students and parents or guardians was requested (Appendix A) and permission was granted for all students.

Of the 14 participating students, six were male and eight were female. Six of the students were in a ninth grade program of academics while eight were in Grade 10. Ten participants described themselves as "white"; two were "First Nations;" one was "Filipino" and one with "Latin" background. Two of the 14 students resided in two-parent homes while six lived with their mothers, two with their fathers, and one with grandparents. Three of the students lived in blended family homes. All of the participants and the researcher and assistant lived in the inner-city neighborhood in which the school was located.

### Setting

The social drama activity took place in the "transition" classroom described in the previous section. Students in the "transition" program made numerous references to the classroom group as a "family"--a very close-knit

group of friends including their teacher. It was estimated that this familiar setting would provide a measure of safety and security, especially necessary as the project at times involved grappling with sensitive and perhaps personal social issues. Several participants commented that they felt comfortable engaging in the drama activities because of their familiarity with their classroom group.

There was a sense that the "transition" classroom was an oasis for these students in the middle of the large high school institution. This sense was not created with special lighting, furniture or material trappings, but from the warmth and affection among the class members and their regular day-to-day teacher. In fact, the students referred to their teacher as a "Mom" and to the class as a "family." The caring atmosphere was exemplified by the snack table where students shared coffee and muffins before class. The climate was one of equality tempered with fairness and security. The teacher was equal as an individual but was also perceived as an experienced guide and care giver for the students as they learned.

For the purposes of the drama project, the classroom was converted into a drama/ theatre space by moving furniture to the side, adding props or simple set pieces when required, and adjusting lighting with the use of floor lamps. Simple costume pieces (hats, scarves, etc.) and props (microphones, bottles, etc.) were found or brought in from home by participants or researcher. In short, the group operated like a mini-theatre company in the process of collaborating on a production.

As mentioned earlier, with the researcher, the researcher's husband participated as an assistant. John's experiences working in theatre, volunteering

in extra-curricular drama in public schools, and encountering school failure (he, himself dropped out of school) made him a positive choice for assistant in the project. In keeping with Kinney's methodology regarding qualitative study of adolescents in high schools (1990), the researcher and assistant were well-suited to this particular project. Specifically, Kinney asserts that researchers who can relate to the adolescent participants, show genuine interest in their views and are somewhat distanced from adult authority figures, establish a high level of rapport with the participants. This was born out in the project as many of the adolescents expressed that they felt at ease because the researchers were "normal" (i.e., it was inferred that this meant that they could relate to the adolescents and were "not typical teachers"). Kinney (1990) reflects that the researcher's ability to distance her or himself from teachers and other adults likely results in the adolescents "opening up" and responding with honesty and trust.

#### Acknowledgment of Biases and Preconceptions

As noted by Osborne (1990), because of the nature of qualitative research, it is important for researchers to acknowledge any of their own salient biases and preconceptions. As described in the preceding chapter, I was previously a drama teacher who developed and employed a similar social drama project as part of the drama curriculum with grade nine students. The success of the application of the social drama in the previous context may have impacted my ideas about salient aspects of the effects of the social drama on the

participants in the present investigation. In addition, in the present investigation, my role was three-fold. I was a facilitator for the drama activities, a researcher interviewing the adolescents about their experiences of the project, and a participant engaging in the activities and observing the context. These roles were not necessarily in conflict; nevertheless, engaging in the process in these three roles, caused a necessary shift across the varying perspectives of the roles.

### The Social Drama Project: Procedure and Methods

#### Procedure Overview

Procedures involved the combination of quantitative methodology within the predominant qualitative design. The purpose of combining methods was developmental; the quantitative method was used sequentially in order to inform the qualitative method (Creswell, 1994). Moreover, although the questionnaire data did not offer experimental pre- and post-test results, these data nevertheless served to enhance and elaborate the results of the qualitative portion of the study.

As mentioned earlier, because the objective of the project was to gain insight and understanding into the social experiences of the participants both in and beyond the context of the social drama project, a phenomenological approach was used. The main focus of the research was to seek to understand the participants' constructions--their meanings, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and actions (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989) as they occurred in the context of the process.

After the project was introduced and discussed with the participants, informed consent was obtained through a follow-up visit by the researcher. During the follow-up visit, participants signed consent forms and were given consent forms to be taken home, signed by the parent or guardian and returned

to the researcher. During the aforementioned discussion, the researcher provided a description of the proposed activities and answered the participants' questions about the project. Only the researcher, the assistant, and the classroom teacher had contact with the participants during each 50 minute class period designated for the research project.

Questionnaires were completed during the first regular meeting of the drama group and took one 50 minute class period to complete. Because of the personal and sensitive nature of the items on the questionnaire, the guarantee of confidentiality was emphasized as was the importance of each participant's own honest responses. A detailed description of the questionnaires is found in the following section.

The drama phase occurred over the next three weeks (three 50 minute periods per week). Debriefing was built into the study in the form of evaluative discussion after each phase of the activity. All data were kept entirely confidential. In order to ensure confidentiality, students' names were not recorded on questionnaires; instead, data for each student were coded with a number. Tapes of interviews and intervention were made available only to the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, and the assistant. Moreover, students' names were not used in the extensive field notes nor were individuals identifiable in the report of the research. In the presentation of results, each participant was given a fictitious name to facilitate the reader's understanding of the data and of participants as "real people" as well as to provide continuity across data examples and quotations.

The social drama activity portion of the project occurred during the next eight "B Block" class periods in the participants' time table. This block of classes was on a weekly rotation with a session every other day. The rotation of these class periods meant that our drama sessions occurred at different times of the

day from week to week. For example, during the first week, the sessions occurred during the morning, while during the next week, two of the sessions occurred in the afternoon.

The project provided a forum not only for discussion of pertinent social issues but also an opportunity for the students to take part in a drama class--a program unavailable to this class because of academic scheduling in the alternate program. Portions of these drama sessions were audio-recorded and the researcher and assistant kept notes during the activities and discussions. The students decided that the classroom teacher would remain in the classroom and take part in activities and discussion if she so wished. For the most part, her role was observer; the participants expressed comfort with her presence and interaction. Details of the thematic content of drama sessions (role play and discussions) are presented in the following chapter.

Trends in the development of self- and other-understanding were traced in the qualitative activity-based portion of the project; these data were compared with the information from the questionnaires.

#### Ongoing Analysis

Following each of the sessions, the researcher and assistant examined the field notes and the audio tapes of the drama activities and discussions. Students' reactions to activities, students' comments and views expressed in discussions, and overall themes in the discussions were documented. This process guided the drama activities and discussion topics for the following sessions. For example, the researcher, upon listening to a discussion tape in which several participants spoke of the impact of drugs on social relationships, raised this issue in the review discussion at the beginning of the next session. The participants expressed the desire to continue examination of this topic in

role play activities and validated the relevance of this topic in role play and discussion based on situations from their lives.

In addition, the reading, re-reading and fleshing out of the field notes along with listening to the audio tapes allowed the researcher and assistant to look for patterns and recurrent themes in the discussions and in the role plays. The researcher reflected on the data at this stage by writing analytic insights (Dillon, 1989). The researcher also looked for parallels between her own observations and interpretations and those of the assistant. Instances representing the categories of emerging themes were circled and color coded.

These data along with questionnaire data were organized and used to guide the interviews with each participant which followed. This was accomplished by the researcher with the assistant, compiling notes (based on the above analyzed data) for each participant with which to guide reflection in the individual interviews. In this way, participants validated concerns, issues and meaning constructed in the role play activities and group discussions.

The schedule of classroom sessions is described in some detail in the following sections, beginning with the first day when participants completed questionnaires comprised of demographic questions and questions about events and stresses in their lives. The questionnaires provided valuable information for the researcher as well as an opportunity for participants to reflect on their own perceptions and experiences.

#### Day 1: Administration of Questionnaires

Several days after the researcher and assistant were introduced to the participants in their classroom and consent forms were completed, the researcher administered questionnaires to the participants. The questionnaire booklet included questions concerning social relationships, stressful life events, and coping strategies. The focus and method of the project was not

experimental; rather, these questionnaires provided a focus for the social drama activities by giving the researcher another form of insight into the lives and social issues of the participants. In addition, the questionnaires may have served to aid the participants themselves in identifying and defining these issues.

Participants also responded to a short demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) on which they were asked for information regarding grade level, ethnicity, gender, family composition, parent's education level, and hobbies and interests. Following is a detailed description of each of the questionnaires utilized in the present investigation.

#### Assessment of Adolescent Stress

Adolescents' stress was assessed in the following study with two measures, namely (Appendix C) the Junior High Life Events Checklist (JHLEC) (with some additional events) (Swearingen & Cohen, 1985) and the Inventory of High-School Students' Recent Life Experiences (IHSSRLE) (Kohn & Milrose, 1993). The JHLEC contains 43 items which each ask the respondent to either circle "yes" or "no" when asked if a certain major event has happened to him or her since the start of the year. The respondent then rates the quality of the life change on a seven point Likert type scale ranging from very bad through neutral to very good. Space is given for the respondents to add and rate life events not on the list. The IHSSRLE asks respondents to rate the impact of daily hassles on their lives. Hassles are rated on a four-point scale which indicates how much a certain experience has been a part of the respondent's life over the past month.

#### Assessment of Empathy

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1983) (Appendix D) was used to assess different dimensions of empathy. The IRI includes 21 items scored on a five point Likert type scale running from (1--Does not describe me at



all) to (5--Describes me very well). Three subscales are included. Empathic Concern (EC) consists of seven items that reflect respondents' tendencies to react with sympathy when exposed to others in need (e.g. "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me"). Perspective Taking (PT) consists of seven items reflecting respondents' tendencies to understand the feelings and actions of others (e.g. "When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his or her shoes for a while"). The third subscale, Personal Distress (PD), consists of seven items reflecting respondents' tendencies to react with distress or anxiety when confronted with others who are in need or hurt (e.g. "I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation"). During the project, this measure served to inform the group discussions and the individual interviews. For example, the nature of the students' responses to items about friendship and peer relationships highlighted the importance of these relationships in the daily lives of the students. This information provided a basis for further group discussions and role plays focussing on social relationships.

### Day 2

The activities on the first day of the drama activities laid the foundation for the rest of the project. Specifically, we engaged in a group discussion that served as a warm-up and introduction to the activities that followed. The researcher explained the overall plan and time frame for the project and elicited input from the group to establish a basic format for each session's activities (group discussion, warm-up activities, role play activities). As a lead-in to this day's activities the researcher said:

...this is the part of the project where you will be able to share your opinions, views and knowledge and to teach and inform adults and teachers about what life is like for people your age ....

The researcher asked the group to think about important issues in their lives. As previously stated, the project was introduced as a means that the group may use to share their perspectives and understanding and to inform adults and teachers about what life is like for them. Not only was it an opportunity to work through social issues or problems as a group and learn what others think and feel, but it was also a chance to participate in creating an artistic process that may shed light on their world.

It should be noted that the principles of democracy and subsequent atmosphere of respect established in the classroom group was instrumental in the processes of discussion and activities that followed. For example, because of the democratic classroom organization and processes, the group was able to discuss difficult topics with ease. In addition, the process of reaching consensus was easily undertaken as the students engaged in these processes regularly in class.

In keeping with the democratic classroom processes, the final drama scene would take the form decided upon through group discussion. Various options such as video-taped improvised scene, radio play or rough script (to name a few) were discussed. The only requirement was that the subject matter be a social issue of relevance to the group and that the medium involve role play and perspective taking.

In order to provide the students with a more concrete portrayal of what a "social issue-based drama" is, an example of a social issue-based drama titled "Whatcha Gonna do About Hate?" was viewed by the group. This video documented a group of American inner-city youths and their production of a rap video dealing with issues of racism. After a discussion of the video, the group engaged in a discussion of relevant social issues beginning with broad-scoped brainstorming to generate ideas. A focus of the discussion was to get the

students thinking about choosing a topic that they would like to work with in a social role play. However, it was important to note that students in the group made statements indicating that such issues are interwoven and that the exploration did not need to adhere rigidly to a single issue.

The subsequent group discussion covered issues such as money problems, school life, friendship, drug use, safety and divorce. The group also discussed the adults' perceptions of adolescence and media portrayals and misconceptions about adolescent life. The group engaged in a discussion about the importance of relationships and the expression and understanding of emotions, feelings and the perspectives of others. In the end, the group decided that the broad area of relationships encompassed many other relevant social issues and would be the focus for their role play.

### Day 3

The third drama session began with a review of the last day's discussion. The focus for the session was the understanding and communication of emotions. The group next engaged in acting warm-ups which involved the participants expressing, communicating and understanding emotions with body language, posture, facial expression, etc. For the warm-up, the participants were asked to reflect upon ways that they express their feelings, thoughts, and moods without words. Input from the participants yielded a discussion of body language, posture, clothing choice, attitudes, and facial expression as indicative of inner feelings. As an exercise, one participant at a time was asked to pick a card from a hat on which a variety of different emotions were written (e.g. elated, depressed, frustrated, proud). The participant acted out and expressed that emotion without speaking while the others guessed the emotion. The next exercise, "Tableaux," involved groups of four or five participants creating a tableau or picture created out of their different postures or group pose depicting

a certain word such as "homework" or "funeral". Their still poses in interaction with the others in the group expressed the feelings involved in the situation.

Further discussion regarding communication of emotions and understanding the feelings of self and others ensued. Participant input led to the discussion of the following questions: 1) How can you tell how someone else is feeling? and 2) How do you feel when you sense someone else is sad, happy, excited, etc.? During the last part of the session, participants in groups of five, engaged in role play concerning social relationships. Each group was given a one line scenario developed by the researchers which they acted out in improvisation. The scenarios had to do with relationship issues discussed during the last day. For example, one group acted out a scenario entitled, "I can't get along with my brother or sister," in which various family members dealt with conflict.

After the drama exercises, the group discussed their own conceptions of sympathy and empathy and motivations for helping others. Participants commented on the close "family-like" nature of the classroom group. One male adolescent said, "Most everyone in this class has known everyone for more than a year so everyone knows how everyone feels." Further discussion included the concept of trying to understand why a person may be acting a certain way; this arose as the group discussed motivations for helping or not helping street people in their inner-city neighborhood.

During this discussion about empathy, students expressed conceptions of empathy associated with the three subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983). Empathic concern (EC) was expressed in the following exchange between a male student and a female student who were responding to a question of how they feel and what they would do if someone in the school hallway was obviously upset and crying:

Male adolescent: ...feel sorry for them, care about them. If your friend got hurt or something happened to them at home of course you're going to feel sympathy for them because you ... want them to come to you.

Female adolescent: It's just like listening to them. I guess if you're sympathetic you don't really understand what they're going through, you just try to listen.

Perspective taking (PT) was also expressed in the discussion by another female student: "you know how they feel cuz' either you've been in the position or can see or imagine what they're going through, how they feel ... Even if you haven't been through it, you can try." In this group discussion, most of the students expressed conceptions of empathy congruent with empathic concern and perspective taking. Still, one female student's response about how she feels when she thinks a friend is upset revealed a conception of empathy in keeping with the IRI subscale of Personal Distress (PD):

I feel like I have to do something to make them feel better and when I don't know what to do I get really scared, not scared but just ... I get nervous because I want to make her feel better.

The group discussed and reached consensus on the interrelated issues surrounding relationships as the focus for further role play.

#### Day 4

By the fourth day, it was clear that students were engaged in the drama activity. For example, before the class session began and as the kids filtered into the room, the researchers and students chatted informally and shared jokes. Participants expressed an interest in doing drama activities and appeared to be at ease and enjoying themselves interacting with the researcher and her

assistant. One girl entered the room (bubbly) and said, "I hoped we were doing drama today!" while another asked "Can we do more exercises today?"

After an acting warm-up and brief recap of last session's activities (including the group's choice of relationships as an overall subject for the final scene), the group participated in a role play activity based on improvised scenes in a "talk show" format. In each improvised scene, four or five of the participants formed the "panel" and improvised a scene around the relationships among the panel members. For example, one improv involved a group of school friends whose class-mate quit school and left home. The other participants formed the audience, host and experts who asked questions and interacted with the panel. Three separate scenes were improvised.

Most of the participants appeared to be having fun and "got into it." The talk show format, which everyone was familiar with, seemed to give the participants a sense of freedom from the anxiety of acting. Since there are many typical, familiar responses and actions on talk shows, the sense of "knowing what to do" provided a safe framework on which to improvise. This gave the kids a chance to "ham it up" and go for laughs (very motivational to get a positive audience response) while discussing real life issues. The discussion following the role play scenes revealed that some real issues and emotions emerged.

Discussion followed concerning the activities and the plans for the final scene. Elements such as scripting, character, and plot development were discussed.

#### Day 5

After a review discussion and acting skills warm-up, the group engaged in activities focussing on character and plot development. Small group role plays were improvised and presented surrounding social situations involving relationship issues.

The goal was for the participants to convey the characters (including motivations, perspectives, emotional state, personality traits), the situation, plot and setting. Following the presentation of each improvised role play or scene, the entire group discussed the plot and character elements.

The content of these role play scenes reflected the participants' concerns as expressed in discussion and in the questionnaires. For example, the topic of one of the group role plays was "divorce." The group discussed issues such as child care--who looks after the kids after the parents break up, anger, infidelity, and missing a parent who has moved out. After the role play, the participants discussed the believability of the characters. One female participant who played a daughter who was angry at her mother was asked by another participant: "Do you actually think that two kids would not give their mother a hug good-bye?" In explaining the actions of the role or character she played she replied, "Maybe they had mixed feelings, I was expecting her to come and give me a hug."

#### Days 6, 7, and 8

After a warm-up and a discussion of the progress of the role plays, the group worked on generating ideas and developing the final scene. The group decided to develop a video-taped talk show with three separate panel groups involved in relationship situations. The group concurred that the primary theme for the role plays would be interpersonal relationships with drug abuse emerging as a secondary theme. The class formed three small groups (4-6 people) and each small group decided upon a different twist to the issue.

The groups worked separately, developing characters, plot, and role play surrounding the social issue and topics previously discussed. Technical aspects such as props, costumes, and keeping notes were undertaken by the students in each of the groups.

At the beginning of each session, the entire group engaged in brief warm-ups designed to improve acting skills and involving perspective-taking. For example, students engaged in short improvisations in pairs in which a short scene was built on the basis of a particular situation (what) and characters (who). This activity began with the researcher asking the students to brain-storm situations and characters. The researcher jotted down the responses on small cards which were later drawn from two different hats. For example, the first two cards drawn by the first pair were "boyfriend and girlfriend" (characters) and "breaking up" (situation). The pair then improvised a brief role play around these parameters.

Discussions preceded and followed each day's drama work. The group discussed both subject matter and the techniques used in improvisation and role play. For example, following a role play about divorce and family conflict, the discussion involved an examination of the believability of the characters and action. The participants discussed their experiences of the role play. Finally, the discussion evolved into an examination of divorce and surrounding issues.

On Day 6, the groups worked on development of plot and general story line for their improvs. Groups recorded general notes on the plot or what will happen in the improv. On Day 7, the groups worked on characterization including motivations for actions. On Day 8, the group discussed the perspectives of the character roles. On this, the last day of drama activities, the entire group engaged in the video-taped talk show production. Earlier in the rehearsal process, the students decided that the three groups would merge into two groups, each engaging in a role play surrounding issues of the impact of drug use on social relationships. As earlier stated, this subject matter was viewed as particularly salient in the lives of these students. The following is an excerpt from the audio-recorded role play about the effects of drug use on a friendship:



Female adolescent #1: Of course I'm worried about her and she's gotten me to try it a couple times and I don't want to get sucked in but to be her friend, I feel like I have to do it with her.

Female adolescent #2: Do you feel she has to do it too to be her friend?

Female adolescent #3: Not really it's just that we're always on a different level because she's always straight and we don't bond as much anymore and I don't know if she's high with me we can bond.

Female adolescent #2: You feel that if you're both high you can bond better and your friend feels if you're not you can get along better. I just want to ask the person that's been off for 6 months, do you think that affected your friendships. Are your friendships better now or ... what's been going on that way?

Female adolescent #1: Well, the first three months it was hard. We weren't getting along I hated her pretty much but I think now our relationships are better like we can, we're not distracted by the fact of like oh no, what are we going to do when we come down, where are we going to get it? We just go out and do things and it's just funner. Cuz we feel better about yourself and you know where you are.

Female adolescent #2: So does that mean anything to you guys that....

Female adolescent #1: I used to be really ignorant inconsistent, like one second I'll say to myself I'll never do it again and then as soon as it's there it's like oh, I do it, but I don't know if I'm addicted I can't tell (Day 8, Group 2).

### Day 9

The discussion or group interview following the talk show production included the thoughts and feelings of the participants on the perspectives of their characters in the role play as well as their own experiences working on the project. During the discussion, participants shared their own life experiences in relation to the issues in the drama activities. Issues discussed included the participants' conceptions of peer pressure, popularity, important relationships in

their own lives, a critique of the inaccuracy of the portrayal of adolescents in the media, and the differences between school life, home life and life with friends.

#### Individual Interviews: Days 10 and 11

Each participant engaged in an individual interview with either the researcher or assistant (Appendix E). The interviews were audio-taped for later transcription and each lasted an average of 10 minutes. The questions for the interview were developed taking into account the overall purpose of the present investigation. Specifically, each participant was asked to reflect on what he or she was thinking and feeling at various stages of the activities. Questions concerning the nature of the participants' experiences, effects of the activities, social relationships, understanding of self and others in the role plays and in life were included.

#### Day 12

As a gesture of thanks to the participants and in keeping with theatre traditions, we celebrated the end of the project with a pizza and pop "wrap party." The researchers presented thank you cards and small gifts (chocolates) to the students and the classroom teacher.

#### Summary of Analyses

Four groups of data were used in the analysis: 1) the initial questionnaire data which served as a springboard to the qualitative data, 2) transcripts of drama sessions (group discussions and role play activities) including the social drama document or videotape of the final scene, 3) transcripts of the individual interviews containing the thoughts and feelings of the participants gathered four days following the last day of drama activities, and 4) the extensive observations and field notes taken by the researcher and assistant on the process of collaboratively constructing experience during the entire research process.

Questionnaire data were examined and quantified in order to describe the participants and their social concerns, events and "hassles" in their lives. In particular, the demographic data were useful in gaining an understanding of the participants' school lives, home lives and social lives. This understanding of the participants' lives enabled the researchers to interact positively with the participants with sensitivity to them as well as making activities meaningful and relevant to them.

The qualitative data were used as a means of identifying themes which describe and reflect the experiences of this group of adolescents. The main analysis of the activity occurred in two phases: 1) the preliminary researcher-guided analysis of the transcripts of the role play activities and group discussions; and 2) the validation of preliminary analyses via the interviews and subsequent in-depth analyses of the transcripts of the individual interviews with participants.

The focus for the analysis comprised the participants' thoughts, feelings and perspectives from the interviews both as members of the group constructing experience and upon the experiences of taking the perspective of another during the role play activities.

As mentioned earlier, the qualitative analysis combined elements of phenomenology, ethnography, and qualitative ethology. Each qualitative data set sought to answer a research question grounded in one of these qualitative perspectives. These connections are delineated below.

First, participant reflections and observations and field notes addressed ethnographic questions such as 1) what was the process of evolving the social drama like for the participants? and 2) what were the experiences of the participants as they engaged in role play and perspective-taking?

Second, interview data addressed phenomenological questions. These data were instrumental in understanding the meanings of the participants' experiences of perspective-taking in the social role play. Questions included 1) What were the participants' constructions of perspective-taking in the experiences of perspective-taking, 2) what were the participants' experiences of empathy including their constructions of self- and other-understanding both in the role play and in their lives, and 3) what were the conceptions and constructions of prosocial behaviors of the participants?

Third, the role plays and scenes--the social drama documents--and the following discussions facilitated an ethological understanding. What was the social drama activity that has emerged? How did the group's goals merge to construct or create the document?

As in the preliminary phase of analysis as previously outlined, the transcripts of the individual interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes emerging around the research questions. First, intact copies of each transcript were read in order to keep in mind the "overall picture" of each interview. The process of reflection on the data involved writing extensive notes comprised of analytic insights (Dillon, 1989) and linking findings to theory. As in the preliminary analysis, parallels were sought between the observations, reflections and interpretations of both researcher and assistant. The next step involved looking for patterns and recurrent themes in the interviews. Categories of themes for each topic in every interview were gleaned from the analysis of the themes. Examples from the data for each theme in each category were circled, color coded, and counted.

In an effort to provide some credibility for the coding categories that were generated by the researcher and her assistant, an independent rater who was not involved in the data collection for the study was extensively trained in the

categories and the coding procedures. The rater was provided with a random sample of 20 statements along with a list of the coding categories. The number of statements accurately coded by the rater was divided by the total number of statements coded (18 statements coded correctly out of 20) yielding 90 per cent consensus. This independent rating along with the consensual validation of the researcher and assistant in the process of analysis contributed to the reliability and credibility of the data.

Connections between the findings in the interview data and observations of participants in the context of the project were noted. During the course of the project the researcher was able to engage in informal debriefing sessions with peers also working on qualitative research projects. This process aided the refining of procedures regarding data collection and analysis.

### CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

This chapter presents the experiences of the participants in the social drama project. Themes regarding these experiences emerged from the drama and role play activities, group discussions, individual interviews with each participant, and from informal interaction among the researchers and participants in and out of the class.

The theoretical approach of phenomenology informed the ways that themes in the data were identified. The first step of the process was the transcription of group discussions and individual interviews. As previously stated, these transcripts were analyzed for themes emerging around the research questions. Both the researcher and assistant read intact copies of each transcript to obtain an holistic sense of each document. Notes comprised of analytic insights (Dillon, 1989) were recorded and parallels were sought between the reflections and interpretations of both the researcher and assistant. Next, the researcher and assistant looked for patterns and recurrent themes in the transcripts of the interviews and group discussions, and recorded and color-coded categories of themes from the analyses. Agreement between the two independent raters was 90 per cent.

In this chapter, results are presented in four separate sections. In the first section, I "set the stage" by describing my initial impressions of the "transition" classroom. Included in this section are descriptions regarding the "real lives" of these adolescents obtained from their responses to the demographic and stress assessment questionnaires. In the second section, I present a description of the content matter as it emerged from the group in the initial discussions. This refers to the social issues discussed and raised by the participants during the course of the project. In the third section, themes identified by content analyses that relate

specifically to the role play activities and processes therein are put forth. In the fourth section, themes that emerged from discussions and interviews pertaining to the effects of the project on the participants and the participants' experiences of the drama project are described. This refers to the participants' experiences of the project and constructions and conceptions of the phenomena described therein.

### Part One: Setting the Stage

#### Researcher's Impressions

I looked at the 14 people in the room, sitting on school-board-issue chairs. The classroom was like any I'd been in as a small child, a high school student, a teacher. Desks with green metal legs and carved skin-color arborite tops, windows, a big round clock; the floor tiles were blotchy shades of green and red.

Some of the kids were out of place on the small chairs. They seemed mature, adult, sophisticated. One boy had blond hair and freckles and looked his age. Two others wore backwards ball caps, impossibly baggy jeans and cool slouches. One girl was wearing a gym suit, long hair pulled back tight on top of her head, dark lip-liner, like a gang-girl from American TV. One boy liked to talk. He talked to me and John before we started the discussion. He's best friends with one of the girls who teases him and sometimes rolls her eyes at him, joking around. Two of the kids were quiet--didn't want to talk, didn't want to be there. One left for an appointment with a social worker.

I made a decision to be myself with the group. John is always himself. I was glad that John, my husband, was my research assistant. His presence helped me lose my "stage fright." The two of us live in the same downtown neighborhood as these kids. We walk down the same streets, shop at the same grocery stores, recognize the same street people, wait for the same buses.

I looked at the 14 people in the room in the circle of school-board-issue chairs and I forgot the chairs, the desks, the big round clock, the floor tiles. As we talked, the school receded and the people emerged.

In the following section, the real lives of these 14 adolescents are illuminated in the examination of their responses on the questionnaires and by their contributions to the discussions and activities in the project.

#### "Real Life:" Background Characteristics of Participants

Demographic questionnaires revealed that, of the 14 participating students, six were male and eight were female. Six of the students were in a ninth grade program of academics while eight were in Grade 10. Ten participants described themselves as "white"; two were "First Nations"; one was "Filipino," and one with "Latin" background. Two of the 14 students resided in two-parent homes while six lived with their mothers, two with their fathers, and one with grandparents. Three of the students lived in blended family homes. All of the participants and the researcher and assistant lived in the inner-city neighborhood in which the school was located.

As previously stated, participants responded to a set of questionnaires that focussed on the occurrence and impact of events in the lives of adolescents. The questionnaires were not quantified for the purpose of statistical analyses. Rather, the participants' responses guided the pursuant discussions on social issues and allowed the participants to reflect on aspects of their own lives. The questionnaires (see Appendix C) revealed participants' recent life experiences and the salience of these events. By simply tallying the number of responses on the IHSSRLE (Kohn & Milrose, 1993) rated as either "definitely" or "very much" part of the participants' lives, insight was obtained into the daily life events of the students in the "transition" classroom. Foremost, from the compilation of responses, these adolescents reported difficulties related to having too many



things to do at once and a lot of responsibilities. Related to this was the lack of sufficient time for sleeping. School related issues such as dissatisfaction with grades, struggling to meet one's own standards at school, disagreements with teachers, and making important educational and career related decisions were rated as prevalent in the lives of the participants. Experiences related to relationships were reported as common hassles. These included disagreements with family and friends, making decisions about romantic relationships, and concerns about disliking fellow students. Money problems including family disagreements around financial matters were also among the responses rated as most salient by the participants.

Participants reported and rated the positive or negative impact of major life events experienced in the last six months in response to the JHLEC (Swearingen & Cohen, 1985). Changes seen as negative in the lives of the participants included flunking a class, getting poor grades, being seriously ill or injured, self or family member being the victim of a violent crime, and serious financial trouble in the family. Changes rated by some as positive and others as negative included a parent losing or changing employment, and the adolescent her or himself starting to use drugs or alcohol during the past six months. Positive changes were making a new friend, and achieving a personal success, such as an award.

The above aspects of these adolescents' lives were reflected in the discussions and role plays that followed. During the discussion in which the 14 adolescents sought to choose the subject matter for the drama, they shed light on social issues of relevance in their lives. One adolescent emphasized the importance of the true voice of adolescents being heard in research. In explaining why she believes it is important for adults and researchers to listen to adolescents in order to learn about adolescence she said: "everyone knows how

to deal with it and is going through it or been through it and I don't think we need to do research. We look at it from our points of view."

## Part Two: Subject Matter for the Role Play

In this next section, the data presented are those that focus specifically on the subject matter or topics chosen for the role play by the adolescents. As recalled from chapter two, the adolescents were asked to identify a topic for the role play activities. The adolescents were able to choose the social issues that would be the subject matter for the role play. The process of choosing a topic began in the initial discussion with the participants in which they ultimately identified relationship issues (friendship, family, romantic) as most relevant in their lives. In this section, I present a description of the subject matter as it emerged from the group in discussion. The group identified relationships as a broad topic encompassing virtually all aspects of their lives. In keeping with this broad conception, the participants' perceptions of salient aspects of relationships precede the aforementioned content analyses of the participants' descriptions of their relationships.

### What Matters?: Relationship Issues Raised in the Initial Discussion

During the initial discussion, the adolescents identified and illuminated salient aspects of relationships in their lives. The importance of confiding in someone else arose when we discussed conflict in relationships.

Researcher: Who do you usually talk to about worries or concerns?

FA<sup>1</sup>: Not counsellors

Group: No....

Researcher: Why not?

MA: They meddle too much in your business

FA: a close friend

FA: My boyfriend or my Mom

FA: My sister

MA: Anyone who won't tell on you

MA: Anyone you think is understanding

FA: we do journals

FA: I just write it all in there

MA: I had a probation officer and I told her the truth and I ended up getting a longer uh like probation period than I should have so I've learned not to tell the truth to like authority.

The participants expressed that it was very important that the drama they were to create accurately portrayed the authentic lives and experiences of them as adolescents. They spurned what they described as the sugar-coated and stereotypical view of adolescents that they saw portrayed by largely adult-created popular media. They described the drama project as an opportunity for the adolescent voice--their voices--to be heard.

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<sup>1</sup> Group discussions and role plays were transcribed from audio tape recordings. Because it was impossible to accurately identify each individual from this medium, the participants are designated as either a female adolescent (FA) or male adolescent (MA) for the purposes of presentation.

FA: Sometimes shows [about adolescents] stereotype relationships. Like they all have the same kind of moral to it. It all has to turn out good.

MA: Like "Full House"--every show is "I love you Daddy" but that's not real life.

By way of group discussion, the participants agreed that their drama project would focus on interpersonal relationships. This discussion included examination of such issues as racism (which they concurred was not an issue in their school), peer pressure, gossip, money problems, safety, and drug use. They decided that the issue of interpersonal relationships is woven throughout all aspects of life; other issues such as listed above are intertwined throughout the relationships in their lives. In the following excerpt from this group discussion, the participants express their agreement on basing their drama activities on relationships:

FA: Everything's a relationship. You go to the store, the guy who's selling you something, that's a relationship. Everyone you see.

Researcher: That's a really good point.

MA: Everyone we deal with--Your dog if you have one.

FA: Different things like drugs, family support, money can affect how you relate to other people.

FA: and relationships with friends totally affects your school.

FA: I know if I've had a fight with my boyfriend or something I'm just like not focussed on school. I'm focussed on my own.

Researcher: So do you think relationships as a broad topic is something that you'd be interested in doing role plays on and um making a scene?

FA: Everything has to do with relationships.

FA: money is, drugs are, support, popularity.

MA: all intertwined.

FA: pressure, friends, girlfriend, boyfriend, even just guy friends.

Researcher: Think there's enough material to work with?

MA: Maybe too much.

Researcher: Too much--make a feature film. We can work with. Start doing some role play the next day um around that.

During the preliminary group discussion, several participants raised drug use as a relevant issue, prevalent in their school:

Researcher: So those kind of things are inter-related. Are there any issues mentioned that you're interested in discussing exploring in more detail through role play

FA: Relationships.

FA: drugs, what would we do....

MA: everyone knows about drugs....

FA: Well everyone knows everything about drugs around here.

MA: Everyone's experimented.

FA: like in role play there's only a certain amount of ways you could do something. Everyone's seen the after school specials, we know. There aren't that many things you can do about drugs. There are but they all basically turn out the same thing.

Here again, the point was raised that portrayals of adolescent life in the media (e.g., after-school specials) are perceived as inauthentic. Role plays were constructed around issues of interpersonal relationships with drug use emerging as a secondary theme (Appendix F). The following section illuminates themes that emerged from the discussion of interpersonal relationships and related issues examined in the role plays.

### Relationships: Friends, Family, Peers

As noted earlier, participants discussed social issues surrounding relationships in the social drama project. Indeed, the role plays were based on relationships and related issues relevant to the lives of the participants. During the individual interviews at the end of the drama project, participants expressed their perspectives and ideas on the relationships in their lives. Among the themes that emerged from these discussions were: the importance of friends (peer group, boyfriend/ girlfriend), qualities of relationships within the family, relationships as support, the theme of trust and mutual respect, companionship, and working through relationship problems.

Several of the participants described friendships as the most important relationships in their lives. Jesse<sup>2</sup> reported that his relationships with friends were more salient than parental relationships because "you can talk to [friends], you can't talk to your parents that often." He elaborated by stating that his parents have a "choke hold" on him and that he is more likely to confide in his friends than his parents because of his perception of their control in his life. Shannon echoed this theme as she explained why, to her, friends are the most important relationships: "they're just the people that ... have been there and will be there when you need them." Samantha expressed a belief that friendships are especially important to adolescents. Of her own friendship relationships, Samantha explained:

That's the biggest thing for me right now .... They're just there for you when you need them. When they're not there it's just like part of you is missing. I don't know, friends are just everything .... I'm with my friends more than I'm with my family because at this age ...

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<sup>2</sup> Individual participants were identifiable from the transcriptions of the individual interviews. For reasons of confidentiality and to facilitate presentation of the data, participants are designated with pseudonyms.

Two of the participants described the function of friendships in terms of spending time together and "hanging out" together. Andy described a friend as someone with whom he spends a lot of time while Des described going out with girls and "partying" as the main activities in his social relationships.

Other participants expressed the importance of friendships, family and other relationships, such as teachers, as providing support. Samantha said that her family "sticks together cuz we don't have very much money so we've got to help each other out, care about each other cuz we live together." Judy's comments reiterated this as she described the importance of family as supportive in "decision-making and stuff (and I look up to them)."

The theme of trust and mutual respect in relationships extended the expressions of friends being "there when you need them." Zoe described her views on mutual respect:

I mean if one person is not giving you respect so you know the other person's getting dumped on you know it's not fair to them so people have, when they have respect, mutual respect then it works out .... Thinking of the other person not before yourself, but thinking how they would feel you know. Like say if I was seeing someone but I wasn't going out with them, just them having the respect to not mention other girls around me. They should just know that right, that's respect to me .... To respect the fact that I have my own space and they have their own space and not to be nagged at and that's just common sense. I think that if you show respect then you deserve it back. And I'm not a person to be rude to people that are walking down the street and stuff. If you're a nice and cheerful person then obviously you'll get respect back ....

Other participants echoed the importance of reciprocal honesty and respect as necessary for meaningful relationships. Participants discussed these aspects of

relationships in regards to boyfriend and girlfriend relationships, friendships, and family relationships.

In the interviews and discussions, participants described the qualities of their family relationships. Samantha's description of her family as supportive of each other, especially during difficulties such as times of financial need, speaks to the support and caring within the family. Maxine also described the importance of her relationship with her mother and sisters:

I love her lots. I like to make her happy and everything. My sisters, I don't know, me and my sister we're just like really really good friends like we're not only sisters we're friends, you know. Like she's my best friend so it's like I don't know. Like if she gets mad at me then I get uptight right. Then I just turn it around to her and make like its her fault (laughs).

The theme of working through difficulties, conflict, or other problems in relationships is illustrated by Maxine as she continues the description of important relationships in her life:

With my friends it's just hard to actually get in a fight with my friends cuz we all hang around the same people. So then if you're in a fight with one person then you feel so awkward and I have to hang around her so there's no point .... it's actually annoying and sometimes you don't really want to [get involved] but you feel like you have to.

In the role plays, the adolescent participants explored the issues in interpersonal relationships in which conflict was expressed and resolved and in which issues such as drug use in the neighborhood were explored. In the following section, themes that emerged regarding participants' descriptions of the processes involved in the role play activities, including their conceptions and constructions of self- and other-understanding, are presented.



### Part Three: Processes of Role-Play as Perceived by the Adolescents

#### Construction of Roles: Themes in the Process of Role Play

The themes reported in this section refer specifically to the experiences of the adolescents with regard to their construction of roles in the role plays. The themes were identified by content analyses that relate specifically to the activities undertaken in the role plays.

Robert Cohen (1978) in Acting Power, describes the actor's process in constructing a character role as one of emergence out of the self and into the realm of the other. Constructing a role encompasses an understanding of the thoughts, feelings, motivations and behaviors of the character in interaction with others. In order to take on the roles in the role play they needed to "get inside" the characters they played. This process of becoming a character could be described as being transformed from the self to the other. This is clearly what happened to the adolescents in the present investigation, as they immersed themselves in the drama project.

Four themes emerged from the data regarding the construction of roles in the role play activities. (a) Eleven of the 14 participants described their process in the role play as including the technique of relating the role to their own personal experiences. Participants referred to having similar experiences to the character in the role play. Three of these participants constructed a role specifically by drawing on their experience via relating experiences of their friends to the role. Statements of this construction began with "I have a friend who ...." (b) Seven of the participants constructed a role by perspective-taking or "getting into the shoes" of the character role. (c) The third theme grouping that emerged involved statements of constructing the role through guessing or assuming the thoughts, feelings, or motivations of the character. One of the

three participants whose constructions formed this theme grouping stated that "you can't really know for sure" how someone else would think, feel or behave in a given situation. (d) The final theme that emerged involved participants' construction of the roles via feeding on other participants' reactions to them in the role play. This theme involved drawing on the interpersonal experiences in the role play to understand or to construct the thoughts and feelings of the character. Three participants referred to this construction. Each of these processes, along with the emergent themes are now presented.

#### Process: Relating to One's Own Experiences

The majority of participants described the process of constructing a character role as including the use of their own experiences as a basis for understanding the "other's" perspective [that of the character/ role]. Danielle described her role in the drama activity as a person who did not get along with her sister with whom she was arguing. She elaborated on her process of informing her role by drawing on her own family experience with her own sisters:

I have sisters and I know how it is and everything. We always fight like that but maybe about different issues .... I'm a middle child, so I understand my older sister because I'm sort of playing both roles ... so I can see my little sister's view sometimes and I can understand my older sister sometimes.

Likewise, Judy stated that her role as a counsellor in the role play was very similar to her role with her friends: "if my friends have something to tell me they'll ask me cuz I don't really gossip .... Like the person here is what I'd normally do." Shannon said that the role she played (a concerned friend) was "easy" because that is the role she "play[s] in life most of the time." Fiona expressed difficulty relating to her character role--a sister worried about her brother who ran away--because she has no siblings.

Joanne also related the subject matter and her character in the role play to her own life. She played the role of a drug dealer's girlfriend who was benefiting financially from his ill-begotten wealth. In this role play, her boyfriend admitted that he had begun selling drugs to her friends. Joanne described her character's motivation as "to get money out of her boyfriend because he makes lots of money." She related this motivation to herself and then to larger beliefs about society:

So she could get tons of stuff like clothes .... as a girl my age. I go nuts when I go to the mall, like I want it all. And with that money I could, if I was in that position in life--actually I never would be--but the girl could get whatever she wants, money, a car, money makes the world go round.

Joanne continued by further explaining the character's motivations in terms of her own life experience:

If I was in that position ... I probably would [stay with the boyfriend] if I really liked the guy and we started going out before he started [dealing drugs] then I would maybe fall in love with him and once he started doing it then I wouldn't know what to do .... I'd have to deal with it because I love him, right....

She discussed the inner conflict she experienced as the character. She applied her own sensibilities to the situation in the role play. In summary, she stated, "when we were talking about the relationships ... I kinda got more into it because I've got a boyfriend now." In addition, Joanne constructed the role by relating to the experiences of a friend in "the same situation" as the character; she described this process as "looking at it from her point of view."

A sub-group of this theme group involved participants (like Joanne in the previous passage) drawing on experiences from their lives, specifically by drawing on the experiences of a friend to construct the role. Typically, a

participant would describe her or his process in the role play with words like "I have a friend who...." Kevin stated that he first drew on his own experiences and expanded on the role development by relating it to the experiences of a friend. He commented that playing the role in the scene about drug addiction was "kind of weird" as he has a friend he described as a drug addict. He described the role play as a "reality check" because he gained insight into this friend's life by "thinking like his friend." When the other participants in the role play asked "why don't you quit [drugs]?" his response was based on his understanding of his friend's life and attitudes--"that's how I think she feels, she's in a rut and can't get out .... It's really sad." An aspect of this theme also included statements of difficulty in constructing a role with which the participant has little or no life experience. For example, Shannon described another of the roles she played in the project as very difficult. She said it was hard to relate to the role of an abusive step-mother: "I couldn't relate to that one at all cuz my Mom's great."

#### Process: Perspective-Taking--"Putting Yourself in Someone Else's Shoes"

A majority of participants employed perspective-taking as defined by Davis (1983) in the role plays in order to understand the role or the character. Six of the participants referred to the process in terms of putting themselves directly into the role by looking at the other's point of view, position or feelings. Kevin stated that in the role play he "really was" the character. As a result he stated that he became "more intimate with [the character's] feelings. I felt as if I was them." Fiona described her process as thinking about what the character would do which led to her ability to "just act like them." Other participants said that thinking about how the character feels rather than just what the character would do was integral in constructing a believable role. Joanne and Shannon both represented this theme by stating that "taking the role seriously" or "really getting

into it" helped them to understand what the characters would feel and how they would behave.

Two participants commented upon their experiences in trying to understand the perspectives of character roles that were very different from their own perspectives. Des stated that in the role play he felt very different from himself "because when people asked [me] questions I said different answers than I would say." He continued that he felt "embarrassed to be that part of society" describing the role as someone who sold drugs to his own friend. Joanne stated that taking the perspective of a character very different from herself resulted in a feeling of "freedom" which facilitated understanding of the character role.

#### Process: Assuming or Guessing How Someone Else Might Feel

In a related theme emerging from the data, participants discussed the subjective nature of another's perspective; therefore, these participants expressed the belief that it is ultimately impossible to entirely understand another's perspective. Joanne who constructed her role through perspective-taking expressed the belief that at some point "you have to guess and assume what their point of view is, you try. Like some things you can't know for sure, you have to assume or guess." Zoe echoed this in her comment regarding knowing what another has gone through in life: "... maybe they can feel what it would be like but they could not know exactly what it would be like." She expressed that it is possible to relate to another to an extent but it is ultimately impossible to understand absolutely his or her perspective. Leanne expressed the belief that one "can't think for other people."

Another participant described his experience of playing the role of a drug dealer in the role play. In describing his process of portraying that particular role he commented:

I didn't really feel anything cuz I knew it wasn't real, so I didn't get into the character that much cuz I just thought of things ... I just thought of what a drug dealer would do from movies that I saw ... It was fun to be something you're not.

In this way, this participant based the role play on assumptions made from seeing similar characters on television or in movies.

The discussion surrounding this theme continued with participants stating that "you have to be very open minded" to play the role of another because "if you've never been in that position, you have to think--I've seen this so maybe I'll do this."

#### Process: Acting to the Reactions of the Other

The actor Anthony Quinn says of acting: "the closest thing to acting is bullfighting or boxing. It's a matter of adjusting to the other man's blows. You're so busy adjusting it's difficult to think of anything else" (Cohen, 1978, p. 51). This is what appears to have happened for many of the adolescents as they attempted to take on roles in the drama activity. In constructing the role plays, participants referred to the interactive nature of the process. Specifically, they described that they constructed the character role by processing other characters' actions toward them and reactions to them in the role play. That is, it was in the context of the interaction of role play that the adolescents were able to form the understanding of a character role by processing another's reactions to the character. The behaviors of the characters form the process of communication (Cohen, 1978). For an example from the data, Samantha explained why her character responded with anger and frustration in the role play:

... when I was the crack head I felt like I really was a crack head because one of the other people said something ... offensive to me, even though it was just acting and I took it seriously.

In another role play, one participant described his reaction of "embarrassment" when confronted by other characters who told him he was "doing the wrong thing" by not helping a friend with a drug problem. Another participant reported that she "felt good" when other characters congratulated her for quitting drug use. Clearly, perspective-taking in role play is an interactive process in which participants move between understanding of self and other.

#### Construction of Self-and Other-Understanding: Themes in the Processes of Empathy

Once the adolescents had constructed roles, the opportunity for developing self- and other-understanding became salient. Indeed, in the individual interviews and group discussions, participants described their experiences and processes of developing self- and other-understanding. For the most part, participants discussed empathy in terms of understanding the feelings of others. From this data, several themes emerged including: (a) extrapolation of internal states from external cues such as body language or facial expression; (b) seeking to understand the feelings of another by perspective-taking (putting oneself in another's shoes); (c) being able to sense others' internal states (described as "getting a vibe" about what another is feeling); and (d) understanding what another is feeling by knowing that person well (close friends understand each other). In the individual interviews, all of the participants described at least one of these themes as part of their processes of self- and other-understanding. These themes were also echoed in the group discussions.

### Process: Reading External Cues

All of the participants concurred that understanding others' feelings is accomplished (at least partially) through observation of external cues; a person's posture, facial expression, body language, even the way he or she is dressed offers clues as to his or her internal state and attitude. One participant explained: "body language and if they're not saying anything or if they're yelling" function as clues to the feelings of someone else.

In a group discussion on understanding external cues, the point was raised that it is easier to read external cues given by someone well known or a close friend. The following excerpt from this discussion illustrates the processes involved in inferring internal states from external cues:

FA1<sup>3</sup>: If you're walking down the hall and you're not talking--if I walk down the hall and have my face down, I bet a million people would come up to me and say what's wrong, what's wrong, because I'm not talking and I always talk.

FA2: If you're quiet, they'll think you're sad.

FA3: Most likely you are though.

MA1: It depends how you are. If you're silent and that's usual for you

Researcher: everybody has their own personality

FA3: Like [him, he] doesn't talk

MA1: I blow up

FA2: If you were to walk down the hall not saying anything it wouldn't be weird.

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<sup>3</sup> From the transcriptions of group discussions, individuals were designated by combining the designation of female or male adolescent (FA or MA) with a number signifying the speech of a different individual.



MA2: when you know someone you can predict how they're feeling by how they're acting.

The process of inferring the internal state of another by interpreting external cues such as body language, attitude, and behaviors uncharacteristic of the patterns of someone who is well known, was an important aspect of character development in the role play activities.

#### Process: Perspective-Taking

Eight of the participants discussed employing perspective-taking techniques in trying to understand the feelings of others. This theme also emerged regarding the participants' processes of role construction. Here, this theme extends beyond the context of the role play. For example, Kevin discussed perspective-taking in terms of trying to understand and help a friend: "... if you haven't tried to look at their perspective it's not going to work trying to help them because you don't know how they're feeling, but if you've been in it or tried to put yourself in it ... it's like, now I understand." Andy explained his understanding of perspective-taking in terms of trying to figure out a person's reasons for behaviors: "I was just thinking of that ... TV show Columbo ... he always puts himself into the burglar or the murderer's shoes to see their motive or to catch them." Several participants stated a belief that role play could facilitate perspective-taking. For example, Shannon explained:

I think it's a lot easier to put yourself in another person's shoes after you've done a role play of them, after you've tried to like act it out. If you can really get into it then you can almost figure out how they'd feel, figure out how the people would feel.

Maxine added that she does not always engage in perspective-taking on a daily basis. Rather, one has the choice to try to see someone else's point of view. Of the role play exercises she stated: "you don't see that everyday. Like you don't

see it in that person's perspective." Two other participants mentioned that it is ultimately impossible to totally understand another person's perspective--"like some things you can't know for sure, you have to assume or guess."

Process: "Getting a Vibe" or Reading Nonverbal Cues

In discussion about understanding the feelings of friends in certain situations, participants noted that at times it is possible to sense how the other feels. Jesse expressed this as being able to "just see it basically." Shannon elaborated on this theme:

You can just tell, like their tone of voice, just...they talk different things.

There are a lot of signs, you kind of get a vibe from them almost that if there's something wrong you can tell what it is just by listening to them for a little while.

Clearly, this understanding includes elements of other themes such as observation of external cues. These cues are more accurately interpreted by "close friends." Participants noted that being "open-minded" facilitates the ability to sense and understand others' feelings.

Process: Understanding the Feelings of Close Friends

Participants elaborated upon their processes of understanding the feelings of close friends. They expressed that an important function of friendship is confiding in each other about problems and emotional issues. Close friends are better able to read and interpret the external cues to close friends' internal states. Judy extended this theme: "It depends on the person. Like if they're a really happy person and they're feeling bad then you can obviously tell. But if they're just a calm person then you can't really tell unless they're a close friend." Maxine agreed and added: "normally I don't have to ask, they'll just tell me right away."

Participants agreed that different people express emotions in different ways. Therefore, knowing someone "really well" facilitates understanding the inner states of that other person. One participant explained her understanding:

If you're quiet and you're not normally quiet [they'll] think you're sad .... It depends how you are. If you're silent and that's usual for you ....

Everybody has their own personality.

Discussion of understanding the feelings of close friends led into discussion of participants motivations to help others (prosocial behavior).

### Construction of Prosocial Behavior: Themes in the Processes of "Doing the Right Thing"

Throughout the role plays, issues surrounding "helping others" emerged. In discussing their own motivations for trying to help those they feel are in need (prosocial behavior), participants described feelings of responsibility to help, awareness of others' feelings, others' distress affecting their own feelings, and treating others as one wishes to be treated her or himself. The themes that emerged from the data reflected aspects of the dimensions of empathy as described by Davis (1983)--empathic concern, personal distress, and perspective-taking.

#### Process: Reacting to Feelings of Distress

Samantha explained her reasons for helping when someone she knows has a problem:

I feel like I have to do something to make them feel better and when I don't know what to do I get really scared, not just scared but just, I get nervous because I want to make her feel better.

She described feelings of tension when others have problems. Tension increases when one does not know how to help a friend with a problem. Another

participant continued: "If [friends] are happy then we'll all be in a good mood, but if there's something really going on in their life then you've really got to help them, something like that."

#### Process: Attaining Positive Feelings from Helping Others

Another female participant described her own positive feelings upon helping another as well as positive effects on the relationship:

I just feel good about myself when I do that for other people ... It makes me feel better when [friends] come up to me and tell me what's wrong cuz if I don't know and they hold it in and they just blow it up at me.

Judy echoed this in her comment: "if friends are happy then we'll all be in a good mood, but if there's something really going on in their life then you've got to help them."

#### Process: Being Aware of Others' Feelings

Besides awareness of their own feelings, participants expressed that awareness of other's feelings affects decisions to try to help the other. For example, Jesse stated that "if someone doesn't feel like talking, you give them space." Others described that being able to understand an other person's feelings leads to being able to help. Kevin discussed how role playing helped him see his friend's perspective. He stated, "you can only help if you understand or have been in it." Role playing helped him see his friend's perspective. This benefit of role play is echoed in the group discussion by another participant who said: "so if you're really fighting with someone and you have a disagreement you can see where they're coming from and see why they made that decision and why you guys don't agree."

#### Process: Valuing Reciprocity

A theme of "doing unto others" or treating others how one wishes to be treated emerged from the data. For example, in the following quote, Samantha

expressed an integration of the themes surrounding motivation for prosocial behavior:

I still feel bad cuz I'm curious what's wrong. Sometimes if I see someone in the hallway crying and I don't know them I'll ask what's wrong, can I help you? I just feel good about myself when I do that for people .... Cuz if I'm in pain I wouldn't want someone looking at me, just walking by. I wouldn't want a whole bunch of people coming up to me, though....

In the preceding passage, the value of reciprocity in interaction with others was clearly represented in terms of being able to understand the perspective of another.

In summary, the participants' descriptions of their constructions of prosocial behavior reflected Davis' (1983) dimensions of empathy. Participants expressed that experiences of personal distress in reaction to the distress of others, feelings of sympathy induced by concern for others in need, and the ability to understand the feelings and actions of others are instrumental in the construction of prosocial behavior.

#### Part Four: Effects and Experiences

As described in the previous chapter, the participants engaged in a variety of drama exercises and role play activities during the project. Each day's session began with drama warm-up exercises and exercises designed to enhance the dramatic skills of the participants in order to prepare them to engage in the more in-depth role plays based on relevant social issues. Much discussion about social issues in the lives of the participants revealed that interpersonal relationships was of prime relevance. The group decided that the role plays would focus on interpersonal relationships with the theme of drug use emerging as a sub-topic. After engaging in a warm-up role play constructed around the

framework of a popular television talk show, the participants discussed and decided that their final role play project would employ the talk show format. Participants expressed that they enjoyed this format because it was fun and provided a familiar framework within which to engage in role play. Participants expressed that this format helped to reduce the anxiety they felt performing or acting. A complete transcript of the final role play "talk show" is included in Appendix F.

Group discussions occurred during every session as a means of planning and focussing role play activities to follow. These discussions also provided a means of reflecting upon and understanding the experiences of the preceding activities. Topics examined in the group discussions focussed on interpersonal relationships, school life, home life, and life in the neighborhood. In terms of interpersonal relationships, the group discussed various aspects of peer culture such as peer pressure, gossip at school, drug use, and romantic relationships. Social issues also raised included poverty, the homeless, and employment. These issues were raised as concerns by the participants and were followed by further discussion relating the social issues to their conceptions and constructions of empathy, understanding the situations, and the perspectives and emotional states of self and others. For example, while discussing issues surrounding poverty and the homeless in their neighborhood, the participants engaged in examining their motivations for helping or not helping (giving or not giving spare change to) homeless people on the street. This particular topic included an examination of various possible situations leading to homelessness.

In the individual interviews and in the group discussion directly following the role plays, participants were asked to recount their experiences of the activities. Individual interviews included discussion of what the participants were thinking and feeling during various activities (role play, group discussion,

exercises, etc.). Interviews also included discussion of the participants' overall experiences of and their views about the project. Participants were also asked for their feedback and suggestions for improving the project. The researcher emphasized that the participants' views were extremely important in refining this activity for future use in classrooms.

In summary, the themes described in this chapter emerged from the general framework of the questions that guided the interviews and discussions.

### Themes in the Participants' Experiences of the Social Drama Activities

In this section, I present the themes expressed by the adolescents in regard to their experiences of the entire drama project. Emergent themes included the experience of fun engaging in the drama activities, the experience of comfort during the project, the experience of relaxation and stress relief during the activities, and the experience of learning. A description of each thematic experience follows.

#### Experience of Fun

The data informing the theme of the experience of fun emerged mainly from the individual interviews in which participants were asked to describe and reflect on the nature of their experiences of the project. In addition, data for this theme emerged from group discussions as participants described their experiences and opinions of the activities in a more informal manner.

The majority of participants described the project as fun and enjoyable. Reasons for their responses ranged from enjoyment of new and interesting activities, engaging in drama activities, getting a break from everyday school activities, and working collaboratively with friends. Jesse commented, "It was fun, it was educational, interesting ... we got to act. I found that more fun than sitting

and writing." Likewise, Zoe positively evaluated the opportunity to engage in drama:

I enjoyed it. It was a good learning experience because the first time I took drama I was in grade 8 and I didn't take it cuz I didn't like it--playing games and passing balls .... Here we were relaxing, I think we had a chance to do what we wanted--play characters and fun things.

Most participants commented on enjoying the talk show role play activities because of the relevance of the content and the familiarity of the format. The familiar and therefore "safe" format allowed the participants freedom in improvising; since they already knew some typical aspects of the format (question and answer, audience participation, certain ways of addressing the host or panel members) it facilitated acting and reduced anxiety. One female student commented "I really enjoyed it ... It was basically just fun. I had a lot of fun doing it. I liked doing the talk shows. That was really fun because we just went with the flow." Another female participant commented about the researcher's role as a well known talk show character--the cranky audience member:

I liked it when you were acting like one of those try-to-be-cool people at the back, you know, "Yeah, I really really love your show!" (group laughter).

Participants reported having fun playing warm-up games such as charades, acting like different characters, having discussions, and improvising. Shannon emphasized that engaging in drama activities was very enjoyable:

It was a lot of fun. I liked the warm-ups and the actual drama things more than the talking and stuff. It was more fun doing the skits and the talk show things, the improv was fun.



Participants described the activities as "interesting," "new," and "different".

Nevertheless, most students commented that any anxiety about performing was overcome by being comfortable in the classroom group of friends.

### Experience of Comfort

During discussions of their experiences of the project, participants commented upon the level of comfort experienced during the drama activities. Two dimensions of this theme emerged. First, the classroom atmosphere helped reduce anxiety and create comfort. Specifically, the class members viewed themselves as a group of friends or even as a "family." Secondly, participants commented that the researchers themselves--their personalities and ways of interacting with the participants--helped make the participants comfortable in the project.

Comfort in the classroom environment. Many of the participants mentioned being somewhat nervous or embarrassed acting or doing drama exercises in front of the rest of the class. However, most described the supportive class setting as reducing the level of anxiety and increasing the comfort level. Joanne said, "I wouldn't really get that embarrassed cuz I know everybody in the class." Of the group work, Zoe stated, "I like the people that I worked with, they were funny, like they really helped me, if I got stuck they could help me." Here, Zoe refers specifically to the improvisational work (acting without a script) which was a major component of the role play practice. Many of the participants were apprehensive about engaging in the improv. Reasons for this included: not knowing what to do, fear of "messing up," fear of being criticized, and stage fright. Kevin commented on how the supportive and close-knit peer group in the class mediated the anxiety of doing the drama activities:

....[it was] very fun but I was a bit embarrassed because I've never acted before so I don't know how to act really but I watched other people and

got good ideas from them because some of them have [gone] through acting school.

The supportive atmosphere established and practiced through democratic classroom processes, a caring and highly-esteemed teacher, and the close-knit peer group seemingly contributed to the participants' experiences of comfort in the project.

Comfort with the researchers. Participants also commented on the nature of the researchers themselves in creating a comfortable atmosphere for the project. Joanne elaborated on why she felt comfortable during the project:

I enjoyed working with you two because you guys made me feel comfortable .... Ms. R. (classroom teacher) said before you came, this girl's great, she's a nice lady ... she said she's really fun and outgoing so I said yeah okay and then we thought cuz she said "lady" that you were going to be an old drama teacher. And then it was like on the first day, yeah she's nice, everyone felt comfortable and we really enjoyed it, meeting you.

Danielle described the nature of the researchers as being instrumental in facilitating "openness" in the activities: "Well, actually the fact that well you're normal ... like instead of weird teachers or something like that you guys are normal."

As previously stated, the non-threatening, caring atmosphere created and sustained in the existing democratic classroom contributed to the positive comfort level of the participants during the project. A female adolescent expressed her views on the classroom:

I'm not as shy as I used to be. I guess I'm not shy cuz it's like a really big family in this room. If it was more like a normal classroom with people I

didn't know as much it'd be different because I'd be different cuz I'd be shy and nervous.

The participants were able to engage comfortably in largely unfamiliar drama activities--with two researchers they knew for a very short period of time--without the benefit of considerable background learning in drama. This reality of the project proved consistent with research describing students who develop in moral reasoning facilitated by means of processes in the democratic classroom. In the "transition" program the participants engaged consistently in activities which enhance moral development (discussion of dilemmas, decision making opportunities, fairness discussions, and achieving a sense of community in the classroom). The participants' abilities to take risks in engaging in these new activities, to meet the challenges in learning something new, and to be reflective are consistent with the profile of people who develop in moral reasoning (Rest, 1986).

#### Experience of Relaxation and Stress Relief

From the data a theme emerged that extended the idea of comfort in the project. Besides being comfortable during the various activities, participants expressed that aspects of the project contributed to the relief of stress or provided an opportunity for relaxation.

Several participants described the project as providing opportunities for relieving stress. They also described this part of the process as "relaxing." Maxine echoed these ideas in her comments about the acting process: "you don't always have to be the same person. You can let everything out. If you've had a bad week, if your character's like that then you can just take it out like that." Kevin added, "if [I] act something about anger it gets rid of my anger." These experiences of emotional release through role play are echoed in the participants' statements of the effects of the project.

Other aspects of this theme focus more on relaxation as enjoyment with positive effects on emotional well-being. Danielle described the group discussions as relaxing. She stated: "they were really good ... and we could be really open." Participants made connections between the setting in which they could express themselves openly and sincerely and relaxation--even stress relief.

In the next section, descriptions of the participants' experiences are extended from the affective (fun, comfort, stress relief) to the cognitive. Indeed, although the participants all expressed that the drama activity was fun or stress relieving, many of the participants also indicated that they believed that the drama activity provided an opportunity to learn.

#### Experience of Learning

In describing their learning experiences in the project, the participants provided a critique of the activities therein. Four of the participants described the activities as providing positive learning experiences as they learned from others in the class and had the opportunity to learn new skills in drama. Two other of the participants commented upon the usefulness of drama warm-up and improvisation activities:

FA: You had to think quick ... make things up as you go along.

MA: [the warm-ups] were funny, but they did help. Like the one where you yelled "stop".

The adolescents also noted that the comfort level in the group, the relevant and interesting material, and the chance to engage in enjoyable activities facilitated the experience of learning in the project.

In addition to describing positive learning experiences, participants also provided insight into aspects of the project which hindered their experiences of learning. Two of the participants commented that the activities were easier to

participate in for those who "liked to talk" or "aren't shy." Judy felt that participation was not equal among all participants: "it was good except if you weren't into talking then you couldn't say what you wanted to say."

Another participant commented upon the difficulty of learning new acting skills, especially since the project was only four weeks long. She referred to a warm-up exercise in which the participants had to make spontaneous and improvised decisions:

... when we were walking around the room and stopping and doing things, sometimes I'd be like--oh... and I couldn't think and didn't know. I'd just pose, oh well.

During a group discussion, participants suggested that if the project was longer it would allow for more drama skills development. They agreed that more time would allow for everyone in the class to "get to the same level [of acting skills]" before the actual role play activities began.

From these descriptions, it is clear that participants' reflections on their own learning yielded many insights into the potential benefits and drawbacks of such a project. In the next section, participants' perceptions of the effects of the project are further examined.

#### Themes in the Effects of the Social Drama Project as Expressed by Participants

In the discussion with the researcher after the completion of the drama portion of the project participants expressed perceived effects of the social drama activities. In these discussions, participants referred to the role play activities in which they took various roles in situations involving social issues of relevance to them. From the data four theme groups emerged: (a) statement of enhanced empathy, specifically perspective-taking; (b) statement of a therapeutic effect; (c) benefits of participation including skill enhancement and

personal development; and (d) participants' reflections on possible effects.

These themes are presented in more detail in the following sections.

#### Effect: Empathy Enhanced

Six of the participants expressed that the activities in the project enhanced perspective-taking and self- and other-understanding. Variations on this theme included becoming more open-minded, seeing things in a different way or from another's point of view, and being able to better understand and relate to other people.

Maxine played the role of a person who had quit taking drugs "for good" in a role play about drug addiction. She expressed that she gained insight into the motivations of friends who are involved in drug use: "I think it did good cuz I see things in a different way ... to put myself in somebody's shoes and see from their view ... it was weird." Referring to a different role play, Zoe commented on her experience playing a character role she described as extremely different from herself. This role play focussed on the issue of family conflict. Zoe's role was that of a girl she described as "naive" who, out of concern, reported her friend's drug use to the authorities. Zoe stated that this role was difficult because she "didn't really know" what the character was feeling "because I've never been concerned about that." She continued: "I've been concerned but I haven't been that extreme, that good and behaved ... It was hard to relate." She continued that trying to relate to this character resulted in insight into someone different from the self: "It totally makes me relate to some people who are just totally in the dark about something ... maybe just the way they were brought up..."

Several other participants stated that the role play activities encouraged them to better relate to others and that they could better understand others. Kevin, in a role play about the effects of drug abuse on relationships, related the role play and characters to situations and friends in his life. He elaborated on his

insight into the actions of a friend who was in a similar situation to Kevin's role in the role play. He stated, "it helped but it is kind of disturbing being in the other person's position ... I know how they feel and what they mean when they say these things. They're not saying it out of anger at me, they're saying it out of anger at themselves."

Another participant, Danielle, explained that she gained understanding about her friends and her community through the discussions and drama activities about social issues. She commented, "I kind of understand some of my friends better .... We were doing the discussions, most of the time I found out how important some issues are to all of us--drugs--cuz drugs kept on getting brought up affecting relationships. I didn't realize it was."

Samantha, is another participant who explained her experience in the role plays as enabling her to relate better to others. She explained why she herself felt angry and defensive in a role play in response to another character's behaviors toward her. She relates the role play to her own life and experiences:

It's not as if I'm actually a crack-head, but one of my friends is and I'm really good friends with her. [In the role play the other character said] maybe I don't want to hang out with you anymore because you're a crack-head.

By relating the interaction in the role play to real life, Danielle was able to understand what her real life friend may have been going through.

#### Effect: Therapeutic

Several of the participants commented on the therapeutic effects of the project. Two of the participants directly expressed the benefits of the activities in providing an opportunity to express problems and to work through problems of an interpersonal nature. Kevin related the subject matter of a role play and subsequent group discussions about the effects of drug use to an interpersonal

relationship in his life. In the following quote he expressed the effects of the group discussion with his peers in the class group regarding his relationship with his close friend. He expressed that his understanding of the feelings and motivations of others has been enhanced:

... I guess my friend with the drugs ... it's kind of upset me but it's kind of relieved me too because I've talked to the whole group about it and acted it out and probably me and a couple of friends are going to talk with this person tonight. It's going to be like a group intervention sort of thing .... It helped but it is kind of disturbing a bit being in the other person's position .... I know how they feel and what they mean when they say these things. They're not saying it out of anger at me, they're saying it out of anger at themselves .... I think it helps even if it is a bit disturbing or upsetting it helps. Like um say a rape victim it helps them to talk about it. If they keep to themselves in the dark they're just eating at themselves but when they talk they feel a bit better, more confident.

Kevin not only expressed insight into the thoughts and feelings of his friend, he stated that the group discussion of the issue had prompted him to try and help his friend--indicative of prosocial behavior.

Samantha discussed the relationship of the role play to her real life. Taking the role of another helped her to relate better to her friend going through a similar situation, and also helped her deal with the interpersonal relationship:

It actually helped me express problems because we got to talk about things that actually happened in my life. We did that thing on drugs and it's all around me nowadays because a lot of my friends are into it and it's just in my face all the time .... It was good in a way and that's probably why I was like so mad when [other participant in the context of the role



play] said that to me .... It's not as if I'm actually a crack-head but one of my friends is .... I just talked to her and she's got to help herself about it. Samantha stated that the opportunity to express and work through issues or problems in the group setting helped inform her future actions in an interpersonal relationship.

Several other participants related the subject matter of the role play activities to real life situations and discussed interpersonal issues in the interviews. Discussions included issues surrounding interpersonal relationships in friendship, peer groups and with family members.

#### Effect: Skills Developed

The next theme involved personal development or enhancement of skills (communication, acting techniques, etc.) via participation in the activities. Included in this theme was the opportunity to participate in drama. Shannon stated, "I wanted to take drama this year but I couldn't cuz it couldn't fit my schedule so this is just lucky that you came to this class. Because I want to be an actor."

Three other participants described that the drama activities resulted in reduced anxiety or "shyness" in group presentation or acting in role plays.

Samantha said:

It just made me more myself around everyone and ... I'm not so scared anymore to act in front of people .... It makes me feel better cuz I've always loved to make scenes for people, joke around, make people laugh and stuff .... I don't feel so uncomfortable anymore.

She expressed her interest in drama and that the activities have provided practice in this interest area. Kevin also described the experience of becoming more comfortable with performing and expressing himself in front of the class:

I had a sort of a fear of standing up in front of the class and it sort of helped me overcome it because I see everybody else doing it--I'm like hey they messed up so if I mess up it doesn't matter. So when I get up there and if I mess up it's not like everyone is going to shun me or anything .... It's going to be a laugh for two minutes and that kind of helps.

Fiona, who stated that she felt nervous doing the unfamiliar drama activities, described the supportive classroom group as instrumental in her overcoming her nervousness. In group discussions as well as in the individual interviews, the participants referred to the supportive family-like nature of their classroom group. Undoubtedly, the supportive and safe environment of the "transition" classroom facilitated active and meaningful participation in the project.

#### Participants' Reflections on the Effects

In response to an interview question focussed on understanding the effects of the project, participants provided not only insight into the difficulty of describing effects, but also a critique of the project in which limitations to the potential effects were described.

Participants expressed uncertainty of the effects of the project for a variety of reasons. Des said that the project "may affect [him] later" but that he was unsure. Fiona felt uncertain of any effects because the project was "too short" and that "it felt like we just got started". In fact, in response to a discussion question regarding participant feedback for improving the project, most participants suggested that the project should be longer, providing more time to "get into drama."

Two of participants stated that the effect of the project was limited because their participation was limited--one because of absences (3 of the drama sessions) for appointments. Leanne expressed "[she] tried" to participate but felt that it was very difficult for her because she was uncomfortable

participating in group activities especially speaking in front of the class. Both participants were assured that their input in the project was very important and that they were not being evaluated either for performance or for attendance. Moreover, the researcher took care to emphasize the importance and appreciation of their input in the individual discussions.

As in the themes in the participants' experiences of the project, the theme emerged in which the project was viewed as part of school--business as usual--and therefore was not seen as meaningful. This is best expressed by Andy's responses in the interview. Andy stated that the drama activities had no particular effect as the project was "just a part of school." In further discussion, Andy expressed "that school is something that he has to do." Since the drama project was seen by him as part of school, he participated but expected no effects--positive or otherwise. This view of the school activity fits with the sense of alienation from school evidenced in adolescents at-risk for dropping out (Finn, 1989). Whatever the source of alienation, Andy expressed the belief that any part of school would not have any effect on him or would not relate to him. It is interesting to note that despite this view, Andy participated enthusiastically in the role play and discussions with much energy and apparent interest. Perhaps this is because the subject matter of the role play came from issues relevant to the real lives of the participants.

Included in this theme was discussion of the interrelation between the activities in the project and regular school activities. Two of the participants described the study as similar to a regular part of school--"business as usual." One male adolescent commented that "it got me out of class... I gave it a try to see what it was like."

Further discussion around this theme described the impact of the time of day and what school activities preceded the drama session on the participants' ability to role play and get involved in other drama activities:

Researcher: Does the day or time of day have an effect?

FA1: Monday and Tuesday are just really bad days.

MA1: The worst.

FA2: Yeah, cuz I didn't have a spare today.

FA3: The morning and the end of the day, bad.

MA2: every block of school is bad! (The group shares a joke about stress)

Researcher: But seriously, folks...

When asked how they would improve the drama project, the participants agreed that a "real theatre" setting or an actual drama space or classroom set up exclusively for drama activities would facilitate the process. One participant mentioned that "it's hard with all the chairs;" the traditional classroom with desks and chairs rather than an open stage space caused minor difficulties.

Another participant commented that he "wouldn't change anything but I would want it longer, a longer period of time." Another participant agreed that "maybe two blocks instead of one, cuz it's always--we have to clean up now, put the chairs back." The participants agreed that both a longer class period and a longer time frame (in terms of weeks) would enhance the benefits of the project.

In summary, participants described factors they perceived as limiting positive effects of the project. Participants also illuminated the difficulty of perceiving, describing or indeed experiencing the effects of such a project and provided feedback for improving the project.

As previously stated, the presentation of results was envisioned in four separate sections--initial reflections, the subject matter, processes that emerged, and the description of experience and effects of the project. The themes that

emerged from the social issues formed the basis both for the role plays and discussions and were determined by the participants because of the relevance to their lives.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will restate the study's purpose, explain its limitations, discuss its findings, and close by discussing implications for educational practice and for further research.

### Re-statement of Purpose

The purposes of this project were two-fold. First, I sought to understand the social experiences of "at-risk" adolescents by constructing and collaboratively participating with a group of at-risk adolescents in a drama project employing role-play and discussion and based on social issues of relevance to the participants. The second objective was to examine the impact of the activities in the drama project on the participants by employing a phenomenological approach (Osborne, 1990).

Fourteen adolescents who were enrolled in an alternate classroom program for adolescents at risk for drop out, along with the researcher and assistant engaged in discussion around relevant social issues. The adolescents articulated issues of interpersonal relationships and engaged in role play activities that involved perspective-taking. In subsequent group discussion and individual interviews the adolescents illuminated their experiences of the project and of the social phenomena examined therein.

### Discussion of Results

The phenomenological design of the present study was applied to two main areas, namely the topics that adolescents identified as salient social issues for themselves and the experiences that the adolescents described. Discussion of the social issues deemed relevant by the adolescent participants revealed for example, that issues surrounding interpersonal relationships were of prime concern. Topics raised in discussion included drug use in the school, breaking

up with a girlfriend or boyfriend, the effects of divorce, peer pressure, and the effects of gossip on friendship. The participants described their experiences in the contexts of peer groups, family, and school. These emergent issues provided the basis or subject matter for the subsequent role plays and discussions. The second area of phenomenological inquiry was applied to the participants' experiences of the role play activities and the related discussions of their experiences of self- and other-understanding in and beyond the context of the study. The findings of the present investigation are indeed comprehensive. Therefore, I will highlight the key findings in the discussion of the results.

Emergent themes were analyzed in terms of issues and questions raised in the group discussions and individual interviews. These were guided by the purposes of the study, illuminated by guiding questions in the interviews, and reflected in the role plays based on relevant social issues.

### Social Realities

The first discussion with the adolescents, which was designed to ascertain the social issues relevant to them, illuminated several important ideas that arose in the literature (Adams, 1983; Brown, 1990; Brown & Lohr, 1987; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Yussen, 1977). Specifically, during this initial group discussion, the adolescents almost immediately identified issues of interpersonal relationships of most concern in their lives. Participants agreed that "everything is a relationship." Drug use also emerged as a sub-issue; the adolescents agreed that "everyone has experimented....we all know about [drugs] here....definitely part of life." The relevance of these issues corresponded with the responses on the stress assessment portion of the questionnaires used in the present study.

During this first day's discussion, the group also talked about issues of help seeking in times of a problem, stress, or crisis. One male adolescent

described an incident in which he confided in his probation officer; this resulted in an extension of his probation period. The group agreed that it is best not to "tell your troubles" to authority figures or school counsellors. This speaks to at-risk students' sense of and experience of disconnection from school (Dillon, 1989; Farrell, 1990; Finn, 1989); those who need resources most are alienated from access to those very resources. However, because of the caring atmosphere nurtured in this particular classroom over time, these adolescents felt free to discuss their problems with their teacher via journals. The conditions of confidentiality ("anyone who won't tell on you") and attentive caring ("anyone you think is understanding") were paramount for these adolescents to seek help. Indeed, they described their teacher as a "mom" they could trust.

### Authentic Voices

Research on adolescents and popular media suggests that adolescents may use television shows and movies as a starting point for reflection upon real life social issues and relationships (Steele & Brown, 1995). In the present study, analysis of the themes suggests that this is true for the "at risk" adolescent participants. For example, the adolescents in the "transition" program defined a discrepancy between the adolescents represented in the media and themselves in terms of life experiences. The participants expressed cynicism about the "sugar-coated" or "stereotyped" images of adolescents in the media. A key idea that emerged very clearly during the first day's discussion was the desire within these adolescents to be understood. As stated above, they expressed concern about inauthentic and stereotypical images of adolescents that abound in the media. In a sense, they sought to debunk myths about adolescents by "telling it like it is." The opportunity to create a drama about their own authentic experiences as adolescents was appealing to them. Further, the opportunity to inform teachers through being part of the research process may have been



viewed as a means of being heard and understood. In terms of the research project, the group agreed that they "are the research"--themselves recognizing the need for research attentive to their authentic voice and their real lives. If "at-risk" adolescents are to be served effectively by programs and interventions, it is necessary for research to address their concerns and perspectives (Zaslow & Takanishi, 1993) and to draw upon their expertise.

### Relationships with Peers and Friends

One of the primary themes emerging from the data gathered was the salience of interpersonal relationships in the lives of the adolescent participants. Overall, the salience of interpersonal relationships was supported by data gathered via the "quantitative" questionnaires on which issues surrounding family, peer, and teacher relationships were reported by the adolescents as common "daily hassles" or "stresses." Nevertheless, not all issues noted by the adolescents were negative in nature. For example, all of the participants reported making a new friend since the beginning of the year--an event seen as making a positive impact. In addition, half of the group reported having started dating (viewed as a positive change) since the beginning of the school year.

The adolescents described their friendships with peers as most salient in terms of being able "to talk [about] important stuff....they understand." Trust and reciprocity were viewed vital to friendship. In accord with previous research, the adolescents reported that they spent a lot of time "hanging out" with friends or with peers in a variety of contexts (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). As noted by researchers, the peer group is the social context in which reinforcement for facilitating prosocial behavior occurs (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Moreover, the strategy of confiding in and seeking advice from friends in order to deal with problems is associated with positive social adjustment (Ebata & Moos, 1994;

Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996). Therefore, programs that enhance positive interpersonal interaction within peer groups, like the drama program described in the present investigation, are likely to be well-received and beneficial.

### Relationships with Family

One issue frequently noted by the adolescents was the high levels of stress they experienced as a result of their families' financial difficulties. One female adolescent expressed that because they "don't have much" they have to "stick together." In terms of the demographic data regarding family status and parental education level, many of the adolescents reported that their families struggled with issues of economic survival. Many of these adolescents also described risk factors associated with poverty in terms of home life. From the data, it appears that it is vital that educators take into account the family contexts of their students (Dillon, 1989; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994).

In the present investigation, the adolescents described and discussed issues in their family relationships and in so doing illuminated much about their lives across contexts. The social drama project represents a strategy for making school relevant to at-risk adolescents not only because the subject matter is student driven, but also because the adolescents are consulted in terms of making school relevant. Indeed, as Zaslow and Takanishi (1993) have noted, it is necessary to obtain adolescents' perspectives to inform potential interventions and programs.

### The Drama of Self and Other

With regard to the construction of the role plays, the adolescents described several of the processes involved in developing an understanding of self and others. Processes involved in understanding the internal states of others included the following: reading external cues, such as body language;

perspective-taking--"putting yourself in another's position;" and sensing or "getting a vibe" about what the other is feeling. In addition, the adolescents agreed that knowing another well--as a close friend--facilitates an understanding of another individual's inner states.

They described their reasons for helping another who they perceived was in a state of need (prosocial behavior) into one of the following three categories: feelings of personal distress when faced with another's (especially a friend's) distress; feeling good about oneself as a result of helping another; and valuing reciprocity--doing unto others as they would do unto us. The participants agreed that it was necessary to be aware of the other's feelings in order to want to help him or her. It may be through these opportunities for reflection and perspective-taking that the quality of social relationships in the adolescent peer group may be enhanced (Downey & Walker, 1989; Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley, & Shea, 1991).

As a complement to processes employed in seeking to understand the internal states of another, the adolescents illuminated the processes involved in constructing the role play. In playing a role, adolescents related their own life experiences to the role, employed perspective-taking, made guesses or assumptions about the feelings of another, and constructed the understanding of the role by interpreting and reacting to the actions of others toward the "self" in the role play.

### Dramatic Experiences

In terms of the adolescents' perceptions of the experiences participating in the social drama project, four themes emerged. First, the participants reported having fun during the project. Indeed, they were able to engage in new and interesting drama activities unavailable to them in their regular school program.

The project also provided exposure to a type of extra-curricular activity. That is, although the project occurred in school time, it involved many aspects of an extra-curricular drama program and, as one participant said: "it was great 'cuz I always wanted to be an actor." Involvement in the project may have paralleled involvement in extra-curricular activities, thereby fostering a sense of connection to school in these at-risk adolescents (Kinney, 1993; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997).

A second theme that emerged with regard to the adolescents' experiences of participating in the social drama project concerned their experiences of feeling comfortable while engaging in the drama project. These adolescents attributed their experiences of comfort to both the sense of "family" in the "transition" classroom and to the nature of the researcher and assistant. For example, the adolescents described the researcher and assistant as "normal," meaning different from what they described as the "typical" teacher. In effect, the researcher and assistant were not perceived negatively as authority figures by the participants. Not only did this enhance the quality of the research by maximizing honest responses from the participants (Ellen, 1984; Kinney, 1990), but it also enhanced the positive connection between the students and the researchers or facilitators (Dillon, 1989; Farrell, 1990). Moreover, the same adolescents who declared mistrust of authorities and counsellors, freely discussed sensitive issues in confidence with both the researcher and assistant. This finding is in accord with the findings of Dillon's (1989) study in which a teacher of a low-track English class gained his students' trust by speaking their language and sincerely expressing a sense of care about them. Because social adjustment is associated with the ability to seek help from individuals in one's social sphere (Ebata & Moos, 1994; Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996), it is vital for caring educators to make connections with at-risk adolescents who are among

the marginalized and alienated from the very resources they most need (Farrell, 1990; Finn, 1989).

A third theme that emerged from the experience described by the students included learning new skills and engaging in activities that relieved stress or were relaxing. Finally, the fourth theme reflected the adolescents' remarks about the opportunities for feedback and criticism of the project. This furnished further opportunity for the voices of the adolescents to be heard in terms of school activities in which they are involved. It is noted by Farrell (1990) that at-risk adolescents often do not articulate criticisms of the school system because of their alienation from school and feelings of powerlessness. The present investigation provided a means for adolescents to impact an aspect of their school experience (namely the drama project itself) through their input and feedback, thereby providing a means in which the adolescents could feel empowered and thus connected to school.

#### Dramatic Effects

Positive social outcomes are often associated with engaging in drama activities across a variety of contexts (Beales & Zemel, 1990; Bieber-Schut, 1991; Miller & Rynders, 1993; Spencer & Gillespie, 1983). The adolescents in the present study expressed what they believed to be the effects of the project in terms of understanding of self and others. Specifically, participants expressed that engaging in the role play activities helped them to "see the other person's perspective better." In short, the role play activities facilitated the ability to relate to others and to understand the experiences of others (Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley, & Shea, 1991). The role play also provided an opportunity to, as one adolescent put it, "go through it yourself." Others described this ability to understand the situation of another as enhancing the ability to deal positively with real life issues by providing them with opportunities to engage in effective

problem-solving strategies (Wentzel & Erdley, 1993). Kevin, one of the adolescents in the present study, described how his role play of a person who was unsuccessful in trying to get off drugs helped him to understand the motivations and feelings of a friend in a similar plight. Moreover, he felt that the role play experience motivated him to try to help his friend. Kevin's experience provides support for the contention that increased interpersonal understanding may promote prosocial behavior (Eisenberg, 1991).

#### Limitations of the Study

Primarily, this study was structured as a phenomenological research design that relied upon the self-reports adolescents, with group discussions and individual interviews serving as the main data sources. In this way, the design was limited by its focus on what was specifically recalled by the participants regarding their experiences. That is, because the time span of the entire project was only approximately one month in total, the adolescents' recollections and descriptions of their experiences of the activities therein may have been more accessible and therefore, information regarding other time periods in their lives was not addressed.

Another limitation of this study regards the identification of the themes of the participants' experiences of the drama project and their perceptions of its effects. Difficulties in defining thematic experiences abound because of the small number of participants. In addition, issues around the subjective nature of interpretation limited this investigation. This limitation could have been reduced by going back to the adolescents to ask them if these data truly reflected their

"voices." Indeed, the data would have been given more credibility and validity if the adolescents themselves had an opportunity to acknowledge that the themes were an accurate description of their experiences.

The next limitation of the present study is the lack of generalizability to the larger population of adolescents at-risk for drop out. Indeed, researchers have criticized qualitative approaches because of the subjectivity inherent in the methodology (Creswell, 1994). Qualitative data refers to a limited number of participants. Nevertheless, as stated by Dey (1993), qualitative investigation: "gives the researcher an opportunity to do a thorough analysis, thereby providing a solid base for inference" (p. 263).

#### Limiting the Impact of the Limitations: Strategies

The effects of the first limitation of reliance on participants' self-reports may have been ameliorated by use of a combination of strategies that complemented the phenomenological design. Ethnographic techniques were employed, such as participant-observation, by researcher and assistant during the drama activities resulting in field notes that were used to inform the analysis of themes. In addition, the recording and comparative interpretations of both researcher and assistant of analytic insights (Ellen, 1984) during the ongoing analysis of taped daily discussions enriched the understanding obtained from the main data sources. Furthermore, the review discussions at the outset and end of each session provided a chance for participants to reflect upon their experiences and to fully describe their experiences and perceptions. Moreover, the guiding

questions used for the discussions and interviews were designed to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences.

Careful methods of analysis were employed because of the nature of the process of identifying themes. Interpreting salient themes in the data was systematically undertaken. This process included discussion regarding the interpretations and insights between the researcher and her assistant. The researcher and assistant essayed to achieve clarity and agreement upon the accuracy of these themes. As mentioned earlier, agreement between the two raters was 90 percent. Emergent themes reflected shared experiences that were also supported by the experiences reported by the adolescents on the preliminary questionnaires.

Although context specificity limits the generalizability of the findings, much was learned about these adolescents in this particular context. What was learned represents important information about the importance of the drama activities for general classroom practices.

#### Implications for Practice

The findings of the present investigation point to the importance of classroom practices that enhance the connection to school for at-risk adolescents via the implementation of relevant programs that employ role play and drama as means of exploring social issues. Three facets of enhancing connections to school in these at-risk adolescents are evident: connection to caring and understanding teachers or facilitators (Dillon, 1989; Farrell, 1990); connection to an extra-curricular style pursuit (drama)(Kinney, 1993; Mahoney & Cairns); and, connection to socially relevant, student driven subject matter in a



school-based endeavor featuring engagement in activities that provide a safe forum for dealing with concerns and problems (Richards, 1987). Moreover, the drama project comprised processes of role play and social discussion that combined to foster development of perspective-taking and empathy--factors associated with positive social development (Eisenberg, 1991).

The adolescents in the "transition" program provided insight into the success of the alternate classroom program, specifically in terms of teacher-student bonding. They described their teacher as a "mom" and the class as a "family." In this way, the adolescents were receptive to the drama project as in many ways the activities therein were similar to aspects of the existing democratic classroom (discussion, student-driven decisions). Findings indicate that the adolescents enjoyed engaging in the activities due in part to feeling comfortable in the group and with the researchers. These issues are supported by field notes based on informal interactions with the adolescents outside of the class and in the neighborhood after the end of the study. For example, John and I have, on various occasions, met up with several of the adolescents in the neighborhood and have shared friendly conversations. Although these adolescents all reported "flunking a class" and "having disagreements with teachers" as amongst negative life events in their school careers, they also described the positive connection with their teacher and peers in the "transition" program.

Farrell (1990) points to inadequate bonding between students and teacher as one factor leading to the path toward drop out. In the structured institutional environment of the school, it is vital that adolescents (especially those at risk) are cared for as human beings by teachers (Farrell, 1990; Galbo, 1994). Educators need be a vital part of the network that cares for children--especially those children that lack the social supports in the family or community (Morton, 1996).

Like "Appleby," the teacher in Dillon's (1989) ethnography, it is vital that teachers inform their teaching of students by actually knowing the students and being sensitive to their needs. This sounds obvious, but knowing students does not happen by osmosis. "Appleby" visited the homes of each of his students in the low-track English classroom, and became involved in community contexts of his students.

In my own experience as a drama teacher, I had success in involving adolescents identified as at-risk in both extra-curricular and curricular drama at school. Other teachers at the school in which I worked expressed surprise that "these kids" became involved in drama. I believe that this was in part due to my attempts to reach out to "these kids," to get to know them in community contexts as well as school. From my teaching journal, I recall one student, Rob, who dropped by my theatre classroom at noon hour where we were holding an informal rehearsal. He had been suspended earlier that year, and was not in the drama class. He was a big, "heavy metal" kid. He sat in a theatre seat and watched the rehearsal and afterwards talked to me about drama and music (we shared a favorite band). He "signed up" to be an understudy for a main role in the play that we were rehearsing to go to the regional drama festival. In the next few weeks, Rob faithfully attended rehearsals and learned the role. It turned out that the actor in that role was sick during the festival and Rob shone in the role. Later that year, he became involved in community theatre. Four years later, I found out that Rob was enrolled in a university program to become a teacher. Perhaps this chance involvement in the extra-curricular activities, as Mahoney and Cairns (1997) point out, provided a bridge or connection to school for Rob, and therefore facilitated his success.

Further, fostering positive connections to the school environment is a way in which to help adolescents perceive the relevance of school to their lives.

Findings in the present study indicate that the adolescent participants desired to be listened to and understood. Their expressed dismay at the inauthenticity of the portrayal of adolescents in the media (television, movies, etc.) is testament to this desire to be understood. They expressed the view that the best way to inform knowledge about adolescents is to talk to the adolescents themselves to "find out what we are thinking." As relevance was valued by the adolescents in terms of the research project, so is relevance of school activities to their lives. The drama project in the present study was based on issues chosen by the adolescents, and was a forum for dealing with these relevant social issues. As research on adolescence needs to be informed by the "voices of adolescents" (Zaslow & Takanishi, 1993), the subject matter of classroom activities must also be informed by adolescents. Opportunities for adolescents to provide feedback about the activities in the project and to inform understanding of at-risk adolescents and their lives were aspects of the project valued by the participants.

The adolescents chose to structure the role plays around issues of interpersonal relationships. Findings indicated that this process provided release of stress for many of the adolescents. During the course of the project, much of the role play focussed on friendship, issues of trust and working through conflict situations such as friendship breakup. Phrases such as "it helped me understand my friend better" arose in discussion after the role play. The role play provided opportunity for adolescents to engage in and reflect upon processes of perspective taking, of self- and other-understanding, and prosocial behavior. Though not empirically tested, the voices of these adolescents indicate that practicing perspective-taking through engaging in drama and role play may foster self- and other-understanding. One adolescent described a situation in the

school in which one of his friends was upset and was comforted by their classroom teacher:

.... a girl in our class, in the program last year, was really upset.

Ms. R. ("transition" classroom teacher) went out there and talked to her for half an hour and helped her through it, that's what I think is great, a teacher can help....I wish she could have been in the drama thing, because it would have helped her too.

The present project created opportunities for discussing interpersonal relationships and for creating a positive "theatre" for peer relations and social emotional development along with residual benefits of artistic expression and learning the ensemble craft of drama. Implications of the previously described findings point to implications for further research. These will be discussed in the following section.

#### Implications for Further Research

The results of the present investigation may provide a springboard to further research. Further replications in conjunction with quantitative examination would further generalizability of these results in determining the accuracy of the emergent themes in describing the social experiences of at-risk adolescents. Further investigation into the effects of the processes of the role play in the drama project is needed in order to determine whether this type of project truly fosters self- and other-understanding in at-risk adolescents. A systematic approach of inquiry involving pre-test, "intervention," and post-test in comparative groups of at-risk adolescents would perhaps complement the qualitative data obtained in the present investigation and thus provide a more complete understanding the effects of such a project. As Zaslow and Takanishi (1993)

point out, systematic program evaluation is necessary if at-risk adolescents are to be well served by interventions and programs.

Certainly, the adolescents' positive and genuine responses to the aspects of the project in which they expressed their experiences, perspectives, and expertise supports the benefits of research seeking to understand the adolescents' perspectives. The goal of much research on at-risk adolescents is to illuminate their development, experiences, and understandings in order to maximize the effectiveness of educational practices or interventions. It is important to understand the stresses and concerns of adolescents by obtaining their perspectives rather than seeing how they match up to "a priori listings of stressors" (Zaslow & Takanishi, 1993, p. 190). By understanding the functions and meanings of risk behaviors from the adolescents' perspectives, it is possible to define new and appropriate strategies for intervention and teaching practices. An example from the present study illuminates this implication. Specifically, in a role play about the effects of drug abuse on interpersonal relationships (a topic chosen by the adolescent participants), the following dialogue arose in which one friend describes her concern over her friend's use of drugs:

Female adolescent #1: Of course I'm worried about her and she's gotten me to try it a couple times and I don't want to get sucked in but to be her friend I feel like I have to do it to be with her.

Researcher: Do you feel she has to do it too to be her friend

Female adolescent #2: Not really, it's just that we're always on a different level because she's always straight and we don't bond as much anymore and I don't know if she's high with me we can bond.

Researcher: ...I just want to ask the person that's been off [drugs] for six months....do you think that affected your friendships...

Female adolescent #1: Well, the first three months it was hard. We weren't getting along. I hated her pretty much but I think now our relationships are better, like we can...we're not distracted by the fact of ... what are we going to do when we come down, where are we going to get it. We can just go out and do things and it's just funner. Cuz we feel better about yourself and you know where you are.

Upon examining several textbooks on adolescent development--resources for pre-service teachers--I realized that these real adolescents' views on the motivations for drug use did not fit with those in the texts. According to one text, peer pressure, wanting to fit in with the crowd, getting kicks, and relieving stress are among the reasons driving kids to drug use (Rice, 1987). In a more current text, social risk factors are outlined (Santrock, 1996). True, the adolescents in the present study were burdened with risk factors for drug use. However, the use of drugs to connect intimately with friends emerged from discussions with the adolescents themselves. In further discussion the adolescents concurred that the "adult view" of peer pressure was not true to their experience. It is important neither to discount established research and data in understanding real adolescents, nor to rely upon it solely in serving and caring for the adolescents we teach. We must seek to further our understanding of adolescents and their development by utilizing a variety of research methods and multidisciplinary approaches in order to provide a more comprehensive portrayal of adolescent life.

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Appendix A  
Consent Letters

Dear Parent or Guardian:

We are writing to request your permission for your son or daughter to participate in a research project that we are conducting in the XXXXX High School "Transition" classroom entitled " Social Drama in an Activity-based peer group: A Theatre for fostering Self- and Other-Understanding." The purpose of the study is to understand the ways that adolescents understand and discuss relevant social issues and relationships. It is hoped that the results of this study will help educators better understand students and therefore be better equipped to design appropriate educational activities in this area. Listed below are several aspects of this project that you need to know. It is important to note that during the past year Dr. Kim Schonert-Reichl has been working with staff and students of XXXXX School on projects addressing issues related to improving social responsibility among students and building a sense of community within the school. This current project represents one component of this work. In addition, part of the data collected will be for Ms. Novak's graduate thesis.

The project will involve one class period in which the students will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. Questionnaires will comprise demographic/ background questions and questions about events and social issues that are relevant to the students. The remainder of the project will involve the students participating in a drama unit (3 class periods per week for 3 weeks). Activities in the drama unit will include role play, discussion, and the creating, rehearsal and production of a "play" by the students with the researcher/ drama teacher. The subject matter of the drama activities will be important social issues that are relevant to the students. The drama unit is an excellent opportunity for students to develop curricular communication and drama skills. In addition, the project provides an opportunity to learn about and understand important social issues as well as working through and perhaps discovering positive solutions to some of the issues that students today face. Students will be interviewed about their participation in the drama unit. Interviews and the drama production will be video and audio taped so that the students' insights can be transcribed later. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and withdrawal from the study or refusal to participate will not jeopardize class standing in any way. All information

collected will be strictly confidential and will not be available to students' teachers, parents or other school personnel. Students who do not participate will be given an activity related to a topic being covered in their regular class.

Needless to say, we would be extremely pleased if your son/ daughter does decide to participate and, if you are willing, to give him or her permission to do so. If you have any questions and wish to further discuss this project, feel free to call Helen Novak at XXX-XXXX or Dr. Kim Schonert-Reichl at XXX-XXXX. Please keep a copy of this request for your records. We would appreciate it if you would indicate on the slip provided below whether or not your son/ daughter has permission to participate. Would you then kindly sign and date the slip and have your son/ daughter return it to school as soon as possible. Thank you very much for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Helen Novak, B.A., B.Ed.  
Graduate Student

Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor

Educational Psychology and Special  
Education  
University of British Columbia

Educational Psychology and Special  
Education  
University of British Columbia

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# PARENT CONSENT FORM

I have read and I understand the attached letter regarding the study entitled "Social Drama in an Activity-based Peer Group: A Theatre for Self- and Other-understanding"

I have also kept copies of both the letter describing the study and the permission slip.

\_\_\_\_ Yes, my son/ daughter has permission to participate.

\_\_\_\_ No, my son/ daughter does not have permission to participate.

Parent's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Son or Daughter's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Student:

You have been selected to be a participant in a research project that we are conducting at XXXXX Secondary School entitled "Social Drama in a Peer-based Activity Group: A Theatre for Self- and Other-Understanding." This study is being organized by Helen Novak and her advisor from the University of British Columbia, Dr. Kim Schonert-Reichl. The data collected will be for Helen's graduate thesis. The purpose of this study is to investigate your ideas and opinions about important social issues and relationships. It is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers--just your answers. There is very little research about Canadian students. More research is needed and you can help us understand Canadian adolescents better by being a participant.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire, you will participate in a drama unit in which your class group creates and produces a drama or a documentary about social issues that are important to you. You will also be interviewed and will participate in group discussions about the activity. Your name will not be kept with your answers and the video and audio tapes of the interviews and discussions will not be seen by anyone but the researchers. All the information will be completely confidential.

In order for you to participate in the drama project, you need to take home the attached permission slip and give it to your parent/ guardian so they may sign it and so you may return it as soon as possible. Thank you for considering the request. We hope you agree to participate.

Sincerely,

Helen Novak, B.A., B.Ed.  
Graduate Student

Educational Psychology and Special  
Education  
University of British Columbia

Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor

Educational Psychology and Special  
Education  
University of British Columbia



**STUDENT CONSENT FORM**

I have read and understand the attached letter.

☐ Yes, I wish to participate in the drama project.

☐ No, I do not wish to participate in the project.

Student's signature and

date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B  
Demographic Questionnaire

**TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF**

We are interested in learning about your background. Please answer all of the questions below. REMEMBER, YOUR ANSWERS WILL REMAIN PRIVATE AND WILL BE SEEN ONLY BY THE RESEARCHERS.

1. Are you male or female? (Check one)

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

2. What GRADE are you in this year? (Check one)

- ☐ 8th ☐ 9th ☐ 10th ☐ 11th

3. Which of these adults do you live with MOST OF THE TIME? (Check all the adults that you live with.)

- ☐ Both my parents  
☐ My mother only  
☐ My father only  
☐ My mother and a stepfather  
☐ My father and a stepmother  
☐ Grandparents  
☐ Other adults (describe) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What languages are spoken in your home? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How much education does your father (stepfather or male guardian) have? (Check one)

- ☐ Some high school  
☐ Graduated from high school  
☐ Vocational school or technical school  
☐ Some college or university courses  
☐ Graduated from university  
☐ Attended graduate or professional school (for example to be a doctor, lawyer, or teacher)  
☐ Don't know

6. How much education does your mother (stepmother or female guardian) have? (Check one)

- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ Graduated from high school
- ☐ Vocational school or technical school
- ☐ Some college or university courses
- ☐ Graduated from university
- ☐ Attended graduate or professional school (for example to be a doctor, lawyer, or teacher)
- ☐ Don't know

7. How do you describe yourself in terms of ethnic or cultural heritage?

- ☐ White (Anglo, Caucasian, European descent, etc.)
- ☐ Latin (Spanish, Mexican, South American, etc.)
- ☐ Black (African, Haitian, Jamaican, etc.)
- ☐ Indo-Canadian
- ☐ First Nation
- ☐ Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Other (If you would describe your ethnic or cultural heritage in some way that it is not listed above, please describe in the space below.

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8. Please list any hobbies or activities you enjoy in the space below.

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## Appendix C

### Assessment of Adolescent Stress

This is a list of experiences which many students have some time or other. Please indicate for each experience how much it has been a part of your life OVER THE PAST MONTH.

1=NOT AT ALL a part of my life

2=ONLY SLIGHTLY part of my life

3=DEFINITELY part of my life

4=VERY MUCH part of my life

Remember, there are no wrong answers, only your answers. Thank you for answering honestly.

Choose the number that best describes how much a part of you life each experience has been OVER THE PAST MONTH. Place this number to the right of each question (on the short line)

1. Being let down or disappointed by friends \_\_\_\_\_
2. Disagreements with teachers \_\_\_\_\_
3. Being left out of things by people \_\_\_\_\_
4. Too many things to do at once \_\_\_\_\_
5. Being taken for granted \_\_\_\_\_
6. Disagreements with family members about money \_\_\_\_\_
7. Having your trust betrayed by a friend \_\_\_\_\_
8. Separation from people you care about \_\_\_\_\_
9. Having your ideas or efforts overlooked \_\_\_\_\_
10. Struggling to meet your own standards of performance at school \_\_\_\_\_
11. Being taken advantage of \_\_\_\_\_
12. Not enough time to do the things you enjoy \_\_\_\_\_
13. Struggling to meet other people's standards at school \_\_\_\_\_
14. A lot of responsibilities \_\_\_\_\_
15. Dissatisfaction about romantic relationship(s) \_\_\_\_\_

16. Decisions about romantic relationship(s) \_\_\_\_\_
17. Not enough time to meet your responsibilities \_\_\_\_\_
18. Dissatisfaction with your mathematical ability \_\_\_\_\_
19. Important decisions about your future career \_\_\_\_\_
20. Money problems \_\_\_\_\_
21. Important decisions about your education \_\_\_\_\_
22. Loneliness \_\_\_\_\_
23. Lower grades than you hoped for \_\_\_\_\_
24. Not enough time for sleep \_\_\_\_\_
25. Disagreements with your family \_\_\_\_\_
26. Finding subjects at school too demanding \_\_\_\_\_
27. Disagreements with friends \_\_\_\_\_
28. Hard effort to get ahead \_\_\_\_\_
29. Poor health of a friend \_\_\_\_\_
30. Disliking your studies \_\_\_\_\_
31. Getting "ripped off" or cheated in the purchase of services \_\_\_\_\_
32. Social disagreements about smoking \_\_\_\_\_
33. Disliking fellow student(s) \_\_\_\_\_
34. Disagreements with boyfriend/ girlfriend \_\_\_\_\_
35. Dissatisfaction with your ability at written expression \_\_\_\_\_
36. Interruptions of your schoolwork \_\_\_\_\_
37. Being without company \_\_\_\_\_
38. Being ignored \_\_\_\_\_
39. Dissatisfaction with your looks \_\_\_\_\_
40. Gossip concerning someone you care about \_\_\_\_\_
41. Dissatisfaction with your athletic skills \_\_\_\_\_

In the following spaces list and rate any other experiences that have been a part of your life over the past month.

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Here is a list of events which sometimes bring about changes in the lives of young people who experience them. The events are on the left side. Circle "YES" beside each event that has happened to you since the beginning of this school year. If an event has not happened to you since the start of the school year, circle "NO".

For each event that you circle "YES", also rate how good or bad the change was at the time the event happened. Use the numbers to the right of the event. Circle the number which shows how good or bad the change was for you. A rating of -3 means the event made a very bad change in your life. A rating of 0 means the change was neither good nor bad. A rating of +3 means a very good change.

	If the event has happened to you, was the change....									
	this event happened to me	very bad	pretty bad	slightly bad	neither good or bad	slightly good	pretty good	very good		
1. A new brother or sister was born in my family.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		
2. I was suspended from school.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		
3. I broke up with my boyfriend or girlfriend.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		
4. I made a new friend.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		
5. I broke up with a close friend.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		
6. I began drinking alcohol or taking drugs.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		
7. I began to date.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		
8. I was seriously ill or injured.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		
9. My mother or father was seriously ill or injured.	YES NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3		

10. My brother or sister was seriously ill or injured.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
11. I changed schools.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
12. I received academic honors (for example, got an award).	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
13. A new person joined our household (for example, a grandparent, a stepbrother or stepsister).	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
14. I was accepted into an important activity (for example, a band, a play, a team, etc.).	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
15. I was <u>not</u> accepted into an important activity (for example, a band, a play, a team, etc.).	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
16. My mother or father lost a job.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
17. My favorite pet died.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
18. I ran away from home.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
19. I flunked a class.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
20. My brother or sister had serious trouble (for example, dropped out or flunked out of school, got arrested, became pregnant, etc.)	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
21. I started wearing braces or glasses.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

22. I was assaulted, robbed, or a victim or some other violent crime.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
23. A family member of mine was a victim of a violent crime.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
24. My mother or father remarried.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
25. I had an outstanding personal achievement (I won an award, an athletic competition, succeeded at a very hard task, etc.).	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
26. A close family member died									
My mother or father died.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
My brother or sister died.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
My grandparent, aunt, uncle, or cousin died.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
27. I argued <u>more</u> with my parents.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
28. I argued <u>less</u> with my parents.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
29 My family had serious financial trouble.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
30. My brother or sister left our household.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
31. I gained a lot of weight.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
32. I got poor grades in school.	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

33. Because of a job change or other reason, your mother or father spent much more time away from home.

YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
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YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
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34. I've grown much taller.

YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
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If other events have happened to you since the start of the school year that you think are stressful, you can describe them here.

Also rate the amount of change caused by this event.

35. _____	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
36. _____	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
37. _____	YES	NO	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

Appendix D  
Assessment of Empathy

The following sentences ask about your thoughts and feelings in different situations. For each sentence, INDICATE HOW WELL IT DESCRIBES YOU by choosing the appropriate number on the scale at the top of the page. READ EACH SENTENCE CAREFULLY BEFORE ANSWERING. Answer honestly. Thank you.

- 1=does not describe me at all
- 2=describes me a little
- 3=describes me somewhat
- 4=describes me pretty well
- 5=describes me very well

\_\_\_\_ 1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.

\_\_\_\_ 2. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view.

\_\_\_\_ 3. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.

\_\_\_\_ 4. In emergency situation, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease.

\_\_\_\_ 5. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

\_\_\_\_ 6. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.

\_\_\_\_ 7. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation.

\_\_\_\_ 8. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.

\_\_\_\_ 9. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm.

\_\_\_\_ 10. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.

\_\_\_\_ 11. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments.

\_\_\_\_ 12. Being in tense emotional situations scares me.

\_\_\_\_ 13. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.

\_\_\_\_ 14. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies.

\_\_\_\_ 15. I'm often quite touched by things I see happen.

\_\_\_\_ 16. I believe that there are two sides to every question and I try to look at them both.

\_\_\_\_ 17. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.

\_\_\_\_ 18. I tend to lose control during emergencies.

\_\_\_\_ 19. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his or her shoes" for a while.

\_\_\_\_ 20. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces.

\_\_\_\_ 21. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

Appendix E  
Interview Questions



What you have to say about relationships and your feedback on the drama project is very important. There are no right or wrong answers, only **your** answers. I'll be asking you questions about social relationships, emotions, and the drama project. It's really important to get your understanding so we will be asking you "why" you think a certain way. This discussion will be audio-recorded so we can hear everything you say. It is private and your name will not be on the tape.

These questions are about your experiences in the drama activities and about your thoughts on relationships and emotions.

1. Describe your experiences as a participant in the drama activity. What was it like for you to participate in the drama project? Explain.  
What did you like about it? Why?  
What did you dislike about it? Why?
2. Describe your role in the scene. What was it like for you to be that character? How did you feel being that person? Can you describe what you were thinking and feeling (at various points in the scene)?
3. What do you think others (refer to specific role plays) in the scene were thinking and feeling (at various points in the scene)? How can you tell what someone else is thinking and feeling? What are the ways you understand what someone else is thinking and feeling?
4. Describe the situation in the scene? the background to the scene? the relationships in the scene?  
What were you trying to do in the scene? What were your goals?(as yourself and as your character or role) What do you think others were trying to do or accomplish?
5. Did the drama project affect you in any way? Describe. Why or why not?
6. What relationships are important in your life? Explain. Why are they important? Do you ever know how (person) is feeling? Describe.
7. Is there anything left unfinished or unresolved for you as a result of the activities or discussions? Anything that is upsetting you that you would like to discuss further or need to talk more about?
8. Thank you for participating. Do you have any other questions or anything else you would like to say?

Appendix F  
Sample Role Play

RESEARCHER: Today on the Joey show we're discussing relationships and the first topic is how drugs have affected these people's relationships in some way. I'd like the panel to introduce themselves and I'll be asking them a few questions about what's really going on in their lives.

W<sup>1</sup>: Hi I'm Rob.

RESEARCHER: What's your situation

W: Well, I deal drugs, I hate to say it. That's me. That's how I make my money

RESEARCHER: That's how you make your money

W: Yeah

RESEARCHER: You hate to say it but why do you hate to say it

W: Cuz it's embarrassing to have to do that to deal to young people. And anyway my girlfriend here she wants me to stop dealing drugs

RESEARCHER: So Rob's girlfriend introduce yourself please

J: My names Virginia. He's been dealing drugs for a couple years now and he makes a lot of money off of it and I thank the lord he doesn't do it himself that ... I don't like him selling it to my friends. He can sell it to anyone else in the world, I could care less, but my friends that's different because it reflects on me and our relationship as a ... I don't like being around it. And the drug is cocaine

RESEARCHER: and your friend

N: I'm Lisa. I'm the one who called in to the show about uh Chris, he's just way out of control

RESEARCHER: So do you all know each other

S: I buy from him

RESEARCHER: So your friend says you're out of control. What , how are you out of control

S: I wouldn't say I'm out of control, I'd just say

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<sup>1</sup> First initials are used to signify the different players in the role play. All full names referred to in the role play are fictitious character names.

N: oh

S: I'm into it. I'm not

N: You're in denial

S: I'm not out of control. I know when to stop myself and I love it too much

W: If he likes it and it's making him happy why don't you just let him do it?

N: Because I ....

S: He gives me good deals and I don't mind

W: I know I give good deals. He's my regular customer

S: I don't hang out with her anymore because she doesn't connect with me

N: I don't connect with you because I'm not a druggie that's why. Look at your face look at you

RESEARCHER: Lisa, why did you call the show?

N: I'm concerned

S: She wants me to stop

RESEARCHER: You're concerned

S: That she wants me to stop and she wants them to stop dealing too

RESEARCHER: How is affecting your relationship

N: I don't care if they're selling drugs but they shouldn't be selling to their friends

W: I sell it to my friends and I sell it to your friends too. I'm a business man okay

N: Yeah but you shouldn't be selling to your friends, find other customers

RESEARCHER: Rob, you say you're a business man, how does this business you're in make you feel. How do you feel when you get up in the morning?

W: Well, when I get up in the morning, at first, you know, I don't feel too good. Sometimes, and then I look at all my things and I think, look at what this little white powder has done for me. I live in downtown New York, I have an apartment

there, I have two Mercedes Benz, and my lovely girlfriend. I don't know how life could get better.

RESEARCHER: So the money you have makes you happy?

W: It also makes her happy.

J: It does but ....

RESEARCHER: Do you have any other feelings about that, you're happy with the material stuff cars

J: I love all of it every single thing. I don't like the fact that he deals. I wish as he gets older he could start going into business like a real business but I wish he's stop selling to my friends cuz I just don't like it I don't like being around them when they're on that stuff. I don't like dealing with them when they're coming down. Maybe I don't have to be just don't hang around with them but they're my friends so I want to be with them.

RESEARCHER: So you two have been friends for a long time, Chris?

S: Three years

N: Three years

RESEARCHER: So it's affecting your relationship

S: Yeah but ...

N: At the beginning we were fine but

S: I didn't do drugs back then

J: It's been in the past year

N: Well I see him more often than you do so that's ... he's a total mess

S: I'm not a total mess

N: Yes you are, you do drugs

S: I can control myself

RESEARCHER: So Chris, why do you get high

S: It's fun

RESEARCHER: fun

S: I can relate to people better

RESEARCHER: How do you mean

S: As a um, you feel like a bond between you when you're high. You just feel, you're attracted to the person not sexually but friendship wise, you just talk a lot and you bond. It's a good feeling.

RESEARCHER: But it seems like you and Lisa aren't bonding now because of it.

S: She's so against it I don't know why

N: It's not the fact that I'm against drugs altogether or anything, you can do drugs but within reason, not like every single day

S: I don't do it every single day

N: Yes you do

S: Yes but it's not that bad

N: I mean like you're phoning him at 8:30 in the morning, first thing when you wake up

J: It wakes me up

S: I'm so sorry, I'm just so sorry, I need to support my habit

N: Yeah, no doubt

J: Where are you going to get the money for it

W: Well he does owe me a couple thousand dollars

N: Look at this you're in debt

RESEARCHER: You have money problems added to it. Are there any audience questions

K: Chris, how does your body feel when you're on cocaine

S: Numb, it feels great, energetic, well not energetic just ....

K: Is your nose screwed up

S: I get sinus pain now. It and I have to go to the doctor, I don't know what it is

RESEARCHER: question, yes

A: forget all this pain and everything, it seems like you're losing your best friend. Why don't you quit why don't you try cutting down or would you risk losing your only friend to a drug that lasts 10 minutes

N: And it's not just that, he's also getting himself into debt, he's gonna have to owe people so much money that should be a hint to quit

S: Well I want to quit sort of because I don't have the money to support it and I realize that I'm losing friends but I don't see what the big hype is about, it's fine

RESEARCHER: Question

H: Yeah, I was just wondering how did you get started

S: Uh a couple friends asked me one night and I said sure no problem and then a month later they asked me again and I said sure and it just felt great so I did it again and again and again

RESEARCHER: Question

RESEARCHER 2: Chris you say you owe a few thousand dollars to Rob here

S: Yeah

RESEARCHER: You're giving him how long to get this and are you prepared to help him get the money

N: forget it

S: I would never ask for help cuz I don't need it I have a cheque coming in from work that I did so I can pay it off

RESEARCHER: Has he ever welshed on his money yet

RESEARCHER: Not Chris he's been a good customer, he's always paid his debts

RESEARCHER 2: What happens when he cannot pay this

RESEARCHER 2: We'll see when we get there

S: He knows I'm paying

RESEARCHER 2: So problems are mounting. Lisa, you've got a lot of concern for your buddy, Chris. Why do you think he's doing this?

N: I think maybe he's a little bit um I think he's probably really self-conscious about himself and he doesn't feel complete because this is wrong. And I really think he's a great person and he doesn't need it to be the great person that he is.

RESEARCHER: Another question

RESEARCHER 2: for the gangster's girlfriend here ... Virginia, you say you don't care if your boyfriend deals to other people but you care if he deals to your friends. SO you'll just leach off him if it doesn't affect your friends?

J: No

RESEARCHER 2: SO why is it okay for him to sell to other people but not your friends

J: Cuz I don't care about other people, just my friends

S: She's a good friends

RESEARCHER: So she's a good friend

S: Yes she is. All of these people are great friends to me. It's not their fault they sell to me. It's just I asked for it I know they want me to quit. If I could get the help then I would. I know they want to help but I don't know if I'm ready

N: Maybe Betty Ford or something. I think that would work

RESEARCHER: Question

S: Hi, if you're Rob's friend no if you're Chris's friend then why do you sell him drugs, you know he's addicted

W: We're not that much of friends he's just

J: He's a customer

W: Yep

S: I think if I stopped buying from him then he wouldn't be friend because



N: that was the only relationship

S: But with his girlfriend I've known her for quite a bit longer and we have a friendship relationship. But I don't know if I'm ready to quit though

N: Well, I've known Rob for 6 years and he's changed a lot. He doesn't care as long as he's making money

RESEARCHER: Rob, would you sell to your best friend

W: My best friend. I'd have to say I'm making enough money right now and I wouldn't have to. I probably would

RESEARCHER: Why don't you use yourself?

W: Well as you can see, I've seen what it's done to people and their lives. If I start using then I'll have to support my habit with most of my money

L: If you see how much damage it does to people then why do you give it to them?

W: The money that's the only reason I'm in it

S: He doesn't need an education, he just needs the drugs to make a ton of money

L: How long have you been doing it

W: Since I'm seventeen

\*\*\*\*\*

Group 2.

RESEARCHER: Now we've got a big group on , this group is facing a similar problem to the last group. I'll just have the panel introduce themselves and we'll discuss it and let the audience ask questions

\*<sup>2</sup>: I'm Shelly and she's my sister

\*. I'm Laura and I'm on drugs

\*. Betty, and she's my friend

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<sup>2</sup> Due to poor sound quality of the audio tape, changes of speaker are signified by an asterisk.

\*. Lisa and I'm her drug dealer

\*. Kelly and I've been clean for 6 months

RESEARCHER: We have these people here because a friend was concerned about another friend and called in the show and thought that maybe by coming on the show a few things might get solved. That was you Betty, is that what happened. How did you want to help her

\*: I moved away about 6 months ago and when I did, she wrote me a letter and told me she tried it once and she wrote again saying she's doing it all the time and now she's trying to get me into it and I don't want that to happen. I don't want to get into it myself so I'm trying to get rid of this problem

RESEARCHER: You're worried about your friends habit. How does that make you feel

\*: Of course I'm worried about her and she's gotten me to try it a couple times and I don't want to get sucked in but to be her friend I feel like I have to do it with her

RESEARCHER: Laura, do you feel she has to do it too to be her friend

\*: Not really it's just that we're always on a different level because she's always straight and we don't bond as much anymore and I don't know if she's high with me we can bond

RESEARCHER: You feel that if you're both high you can bond better and your friend feels if you're not you can get along better. I just want to ask the person that's been off for 6 months, do you think that affected your friendships. Are your friendships better now or ... what's been going on that way

\*: Well, the first three months it was hard. We weren't getting along I hated her pretty much but I think now our relationships are better like we can, we're not distracted by the fact of like oh no, what are we going to do when we come down, where are we going to get it. We just go out and do things and it's just funner. Cuz we feel better about yourself and you know where you are

RESEARCHER: So does that mean anything to you guys that

\*: I used to be really ignorant inconsistent, like one second I'll say to myself I'll never do it again and then as soon as it's there it's like oh I do it but I don't know if I'm addicted I can't tell

RESEARCHER: The counsellor, you've been working with the two friends

\*: Yes

RESEARCHER: Do you have any advice

\*: I think Laura needs to stop doing drugs and the girl on the end I think she should start hanging out with Laura

RESEARCHER: Where does that leave the other friend

\*: I think she needs to stand by and don't lend her money for it

\* Well you only lend it to me cuz you're my friend and I need it and I always pay you back

\* Yeah why should she pay for your habit

\* Cuz she's my friend

\* I'd rather her borrow it from me than some sort of drug dealer that would beat her up if she doesn't pay up

\* Where's the drug dealer

RESEARCHER: How does the little sister, how does it affect your life. Are you worried about your sister

\* Yeah it hurts my feelings and I don't know what to do My brother's not a good role model at home

Aud: I was wondering are you friends with her?

\* Yeah

\* why are you so close

\* I don't know, cuz she knows

Aud: I think that the psychologist was totally wrong for her to start hanging out with her because she might go back into drugs

\* that's why I said if she believes in herself and has willpower

Aud: One of you said you were on a different level when you were high, why not be not high and be on the same level

\* because she's in an awful mood, she can't be in a good mood unless she's high

\* and I don't need prozac cuz that's another addicting drug

\* but it would help

\* well, I'm not going to listen to her

Aud: Do you like being high

\* well yeah, but I know what it does I can see what she's doing and I don't want to get into it myself. We used to get along so well I just want to get that bond back that we used to have

Aud: I think she should ditch her

\* Excuse me

\* She's only got one friend

Aud: the sister, have you ever done drugs

\* No> I never have

\* It's a lie

\* I don't want to end up like that

Aud: Do you plan on quitting ever

\* I'm getting crabby now .... yeah but just not right now cuz I'm a teenager now I think I should be able to have ....When I'm 30 I won't be on it. Well, you can believe whatever you want to believe but