

The Art and Study of Intentional Student-Centered Learning and Intrinsic
Motivation in a High School Theatre Class

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Chapter 1. Introduction

At six years old, we moved to Australia. When I was nine, we returned. After some rigorous tests, it was decided that I redo third grade. I remember feeling disappointed in myself. This was the first sign of my learning differences that went undiscovered.

When I was young and receiving education through the public school system, I didn't understand the work. I went on through the grades with comments on my report card like, "Sarah is smart if she would just apply herself," or "Sarah stares out the window all day," and I went on with grades that were good enough to pass. In 11th grade things turned for the worse. I was highly successful in the theatre department. I was in every play and the lead in most, memorizing Shakespeare, Greek tragedy, and contemporary plays. So, why night after night did I read and study and not comprehend anything? I'd do well on my assignments but failed my tests miserably. All of these events culminated in a bout of depression. My mother took me to Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) for a teen study on depression, where I attended five weeks of group therapy sessions. This is where I learned tools to negate negative thoughts. It was silently implied by faculty and society that I wasn't to make a fuss, just get through the curriculum and graduate. Eventually, Glenna Dubois, the girls' basketball coach, offered to help me. In 1990 dyslexia and learning disabilities were just being talked about. Ms. Dubois worked with me every day before school and every period off I had. She taught tools for comprehension that I still use today. That's when my education became exciting. I graduated high school and four years later went on to university, graduating with good marks. If I had just kept entertaining the community with theatre and kept quiet about my lack of understanding, I would never have imagined myself able to complete this master's program.

George Sanchez, an educator and activist, had the foundational idea that the educational system was to blame for students' lack of achievement. His studies of Mexican-American and other minority students concluded that schools failed to adapt to the linguistic needs of these students. Inevitably, this idea became the reason for further research and movements for bilingual education and culturally responsive teaching. In 1934, Sanchez wrote, "Then, who has failed - the child or the school" (Garcia, D., et al., 2012, p. 18). This argument that poor performance in school was not due to the students' intellectual restriction, but rather that the schools were failing to adapt to the needs of students.

Ms. Dubois took me on as a special project, having had some experience with special education. She witnessed the injustice that I was experiencing from my teachers; she heard them call me lazy, but she knew I wanted to learn. This created a teacher/student bond through laughter and tears. And eventually, I passed all my classes. A friend of mine also came over every afternoon to help me study for my final exams. We worked with flash cards and repetitive concepts. This is a clear example of how peer support really works. The concept of student support and modifications or accommodations was still a new idea. Once the principal and Ms. Dubois got involved, teachers began to be curious and helpful. I was finally seen and heard within a safe environment. To foster shared values and collaborative efforts, "The emphasis must be put on whatever binds people together in cooperative human pursuits and results, apart from geographical limitations" (Dewey, J., 1916, p. 103). Dewey suggested that progress lies in the bonds that we make, not in what divides us. Ms. Dubois was an adult and an athlete; I was a teen and an artist, but it did not matter when it came to education, for she was a teacher and I was a willing pupil. I now know that all I needed was extra help. I learned some important lessons from my K-12 years. Primarily, I learned not to judge. Teachers who go the extra mile and take a

human interest in students can help to create a sense of confidence. Once a student has the confidence to ask questions, to think deeper, and to apply lessons to personal life, the motivation to learn increases. My educational experience has taught me that motivation comes from within and can be inspired by teachers. All human beings have their own challenges and obstacles. As educators, we may not be able to see all of them, but we must create a classroom environment that is all-inclusive. This is why I chose to take a further look at self-determination theory and its effects on the student's educational life.

Educators have an obligation to help students understand how history has shaped our current time and to reflect upon its impact on student daily life. Connection gives students a sense of belonging and inclusivity, a space to feel safe and a voice in class. Classroom teachers have an obligation to create an environment for students to process their lived experience. A safe space for students to feel seen, heard, and respected. Students experience the state of the world. It is important that students are seen as individuals rather than representatives of their race and culture. When a teacher does not recognize a student holistically, they run the risk of misunderstanding the totality of students' needs. If students are seen as sole representatives of their race, culture, and socio-economic background, and not as individuals, it leaves room for biases to get in the way of learning. Unfortunately, this is too often the case. Instead, they need to create a safe learning environment where the student is nurtured to express themselves, ask questions and engage with learning. It seems important to connect what students are going through to create active awareness in the educational setting. If we continue to fail to acknowledge that racism is a direct connection to a lack of education, then we fail our students' future as aware human beings. By combining non-judgement with an understanding of systemic racism, teachers can dismantle these barriers that do not allow for voices to be heard. In this way

rejecting stereotypes, listening actively with empathy and creating interconnectedness helps to build relationships that foster belonging.

Whether we know it or not, we are all affected by systemic racism. Just take our educational system, for example. I feel cheated by not being taught the whole truth of history in school. This must change if we want the future to change. As Isabel Wilkerson states in her book *Caste*, “Their exclusion was used to justify their exclusion. Their degraded station justified the degradation” (pg. 129). When society casts people in roles, the system perpetuates the role in society. Instructors should not be accomplices to negative thoughts and behavior, rather provide a solid foundation of knowledge and a soft landing place for awareness.

As teachers, we all have a responsibility to implement our best pedagogical practices. Part of addressing these practices for me is to emphasize student participation. If the students can critically analyze power structures and social issues, we may be able to move forward to a democratic education. This will take some real work, “one that involves a reorientation of knowledge practices so that educators and students explore what it would take and how to invent and circulate new modes of relation and belonging – that are more inclusive and hopeful” (Zembylas, M., 2019, p. 163). Ultimately, fostering these practices empowers both the learner and the educator. Together, they can create a classroom culture that inspires critical thinking and inclusivity, which can become a foundation for a democratic education.

In teaching theatre, there’s the advantage of reaching people in the public by way of offering the community a performance of a play through students' participation and community engagement. In directing the musical last year, called *Newsies*, about the children’s newspaper strike of 1899 to a nightly sold out house of 597 was a responsibility of having something

important to say. This created an advantage to bring a voice to systemic racism and engage a whole community. By integrating literature, music, visual arts, and cultural plays into the classroom discussions and lessons, a classroom environment was created where difficult conversations could take place. Empathy and critical reflection are key components in the world of artistic expression. When students engaged with difficult subjects such as these by implementing creativity, they began to see themselves as build confidence and engage with the high school community. Knowledge that can be created in a world that is founded on inclusion. Today's society offered an abundance of material for me to bring to the students' attention. It cultivated a classroom of thinkers and doers who are aware of societal inequities; together we discussed and studied humanity, its inequalities, and the importance of equitable distribution of societal challenges. They cast and crew members learned that the arts have traditionally explored human conditions by tackling hard to talk about subjects.

To lead from the top-down continues the hierarchy system we have in place now. Administrators and districts decide how the tier works; their directives trickle down from top to bottom. But if we are to change the narrative, suddenly we have a whole new function. To lead from the bottom-up allows for transformed beings. It allows for a wholeness in education, a learning community where students and teachers unite in collaboration. Instead of relying on designed training, a teacher shares their expertise to better meet the needs of the student. The environment supplied by the teacher is imperative when working from the bottom-up. The teacher needs to create space for the student to fail and then fail again and then understand and assimilate their own lives into their education. Teachers may need to reach out to other colleagues for solutions rather than waiting for the administration to give answers. Grace Lee Boggs (2011) quotes William Shakespeare in her book, *The Next American Revolution*, writing,

“it is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are the underlings” (p. 44). This short but powerful quote from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* reminds us that we do have the strength, know-how, and intelligence to move forward and change the oppressive behaviors of society. Grace Boggs emphasizes the power of changing our mindset and lifestyle to change systemic thinking. “Therefore, we can bring an end to them by transforming the way we have been thinking and living” (Boggs, G., 2012, p. 167). I believe imagination moves us to knowledge. Knowledge is the way to create and inspire change.

When I started courses at Western Oregon University, I was unsure of the “type” of teacher I wanted to be, only knowing that I felt passionate about the art of storytelling and how I want to keep this form of art alive. Although I have confirmed this within myself, there is so much more I want to inspire the students with now. I feel I am becoming more of an inspirational artist than I had expected. It is with great desire and passion that I bring to the minds of the students the issues of society now. I’d like to bring awareness to students to start thinking on a global scale. I’d like to think of my teaching as a unique whole experience. To encumber the ideologies of our former philosophers, to express myself positively in the classroom, and to engage with the students who feel the systemic oppressive society we live in is my goal. I believe it is possible to inspire organic thinking and to motivate students to act in collaboration with others. It is imperative to me that the students feel like they are responsible for their education, with instructional guidance.

Guiding Pedagogical Theory

I find that my personal pedagogical theory naturally leads me to that of self-determination theory (SDT) for student and personal growth. According to SDT, learners have a

natural tendency to explore their environments, to grow, learn, and develop. It is a common attribute that by the time teenagers reach the high school years, many lose interest in and excitement for school. Educators may find a shift of focus from the struggle to energize and motivate all in the classroom to one of cultivating the students' inherent growth. Each teacher brings their own personality and motivation to the classroom. This approach aligns with SDT which emphasizes the importance of students' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. "As enormous amount of research in school settings ranging from elementary levels to advanced degrees and across diverse cultural contexts has confirmed SDT's position that supports for basic psychological needs facilitate students' intrinsic motivation and well-internalized motivation, and enhances their well being" (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p.9). Evidence shows that when teachers are empowered to increase their confidence and have opportunities to be creative, students benefit. Social and academic growth supports students and educators which evolves into a climate that has substantial outcomes. This SDT theory inherently connects the history of my education to my philosophy of teaching.

SDT focuses on how schools can help satisfy the basic psychological needs of both students and teachers. These environments can be a place where all people can develop intrinsic, or fully internalized extrinsic motivation. This framework of learning promises to deliver and serves to benefit parents/guardians, administrators, and policymakers as much as students and teachers.

Psychological needs have been introduced as a way to understand why some students are motivated or have controlled goals. Self-determination theory suggests students have three types of needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Empowering students to take ownership of their education gives them autonomy. "The terms student autonomy or learner autonomy may

refer to various theories of education that suggest when students take more control or responsibility over their own learning process” (The Great Schools Partnership, 2014, Paragraph 5). Autonomy is what I developed as a diverse learner. In education the concept of autonomy is commonly discussed and takes several different forms. It is “defined as the necessity of experiencing a sense of choice, willingness, and volition as one behaves” (Guay, 2022, Paragraph 4). This can relate to students, teachers, parents/guardians, and the administration of the school. Through Ms. Dubois’s guidance and discovered tools for learning, I became excited about my education once I learned that I had a voice as a student. The result was that I became an initiator of my actions that were aligned with my interests and values. I suddenly had motivation to learn all I could and took responsibility for my process.

Within the structure of SDT, “competence concerns the feeling of mastery, a sense that one can succeed and grow. The need for competence is best satisfied within well-structured environments that afford optimal challenges, positive feedback, and opportunities for growth” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 1). I have been inspired by the theatre and its studies since a young age. In the context of the study of theatre, an artist must be intrigued by human nature. Art reflects human nature. It reflects our emotions, physicality, creativity and capacity for growth. In the same way, education should nurture these primary needs. Therefore, naturally I am intrigued by how I can support the fundamentals of students' learning via SDT. One of the key elements that drives motivation is competence. Competence is the result of much study, which develops skill for the theatre, allowing students to feel confident in their ability to perform. Not only in theatre, but any student who feels they are competent enhances intrinsic motivation. Educators can empower students to take ownership of their growth by strengthening intrinsic motivation. This pertains to activities done for inherent interest and enjoyment. Sure, the theatre can be *just* a fun

and an engaging way to get to know your peers as an elective. However, if a student delves deeper into themselves and allows the process to succeed, the feeling of self-motivation or intrinsic motivation provides satisfaction, interested engagement, mastery and joy. This deepening desire and need for psychological satisfaction motivates students and teachers alike to achieve at a higher standard. SDT is appropriate to guide my studies and is connected to my own educational background by way of the result in self-concept, rather than comparison to peers.

Fostering emotional security and a sense of belonging supports the growth of students. The need for relatedness refers to the necessity for “close and secure emotional bonds with significant others and to feeling part of collectives” (Guay, 2022, Paragraph 3). This need for relatedness often satisfies the desire to belong and helps students develop their potential. It’s hard to know what your potential is when you are so distracted or consumed with your own limitations. In this way, Ms Dubois believed in me and created a shared emotional bond. When I was working with her, I’d discover something about myself and my learning style and with great excitement I would celebrate with her. She was full of positive support statements and even got teary at the self-discovery of my potential to learn and be the best human I could be. If I can inspire students through relatedness then I can convey respect and care for the student. As a student, that sense of belonging is imperative to success. Belonging gives a sense of involvement and importance. If the feeling of importance exists, students not only acquire knowledge but also develop important skills that set the tone for the future. This is inherently connected to my own education because I observe myself becoming/doing what I intended to do as a high-school student.

It may have taken years to come to this notion, but here I am reveling in relationships between autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In a “longitudinal study of Chinese students,

Yu, Ling, Wang and Zhang (2016) found that teacher autonomy support predicted engagement which was associated with lower symptoms of anxiety and depression” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 5). Had I been intrinsically motivated by teachers in the school setting, I may have found a sense of autonomy, which could have saved me from the deep depression that I experienced as a high school student. This is an appropriate approach to my guiding pedagogical theory of SDT because as far as education is concerned, I am a success story.

Connection to InTASC Standards

I believe in creating a classroom environment that is inclusive and structured to exemplify skills in supporting learners’ autonomy and interdependence. Providing a safe classroom that allows students to fail without judgment and encourages respect for the self and others. Attaining guidelines of instruction creates an experience achievement. This enables students to support student autonomy and the need for competence and relatedness. My goal in teaching includes enriching the lives of my students, and to engage in open conversation, collaboratively resulting in student autonomy, confidence, and knowledge of the arts in the world as a whole. This goal aligns with the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Standard No. 3: Learning Environments. These standards were created as a framework for teacher preparation, professional development and evaluation to outline what effective teachers should know. “The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self motivation” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 22). In order to create this safe space for all students I’d like my classroom to be a student-centered learning environment that promotes student responsibility for learning. I believe I can be a positive asset to the students by modeling how exciting knowledge is.

In collaborating with my peers and our students, to foster active engagement in the arts as a whole, it takes several people with different talents to put on a theatre production. I have been involved in collaboration with creating a team we call "Performing Arts." As a current theatre teacher and director in a rural Oregon school, my involvement in the development of the Performing Arts team has been transformative. This collaboration encourages students to engage in a meaningful way with peers while also promoting self-directed learning. Students learn to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities through the rehearsal process, problem solving and discussions. As the director of the after-school plays, I included the cast and crew in warm ups and lessons regarding development for the play, gave them each a responsibility that resulted in performance, cultivated confidence, creativity, and critical thinking. Each cast and crew member were responsible for their part of the show whether it be on stage or behind the scenes. All people involved contributed to the final production. These people included community members that volunteered time and energy to tasks that supported the production overall. With parents and support from the local newspaper all contributed to the success of the collaboration in support of the students.

When the show came together, the sense of accomplishment was realized. Using SDT theory had promoted higher thinking, resulting in confidence with self-expression. These moments of success develop into a higher sense of autonomy, reinforcing confidence and motivation. This aligns closely with the principals of SDT. The performing arts are a platform for personal growth, collaboration, and empowerment.

It is imperative as an artist to understand the importance of human connection. If the learner is motivated by positive modeled behavior in a culturally responsive classroom, one will build strength, independence and self-direction. While fully engaging in discussions with

individual responsibility for quality work, the instructor guides the development of classroom norms, creating positive peer relationships.

Summary

In sum, this introduction motivates my intent to effectively study the impact of SDT on my students. The exploration of SDT encompasses and mirrors all elements required of the study of theatre arts. It assesses my own educational experience and the struggles I encountered. Through access to resources and classroom strategies, psychological growth and integration will lead to autonomy, competence and relatedness in the educational experience. Through the study of this pedagogical theory in Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's 1985 book, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior* this research project will explore and delve into the depths of learning for the advancement of belonging as a human being. "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world" (Freire, 1970, p.88). As SDT advances in the education system, quantitative studies have identified general principles that are both reliable and predictive. I intend to provide an inspirational environment for learning through the practice of careful research and quantitative study with collaboration resulting in students' intrinsic motivation.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Knowledge is a way to create and inspire change, not just for society but also in the classroom. This is why it is important to inspire organic thinking and to motivate students to act in collaboration with others. Oppressive tendencies can be expressed in many ways, but if a

person is motivated to learn and create change, they will have a sense of awareness and value. The theatre environment can be a place of motivation that inspires holistic independence and growth. Thus, the theatre can dampen the oppression of students' inabilities and motivate them with confidence to go forward.

In recent years, the application of psychological theories in the educational setting has gained attention, particularly in the arts, such as the theatre. One theory that offers insight into student engagement and motivation is Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The three principles of SDT, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are especially relevant in the theatre classroom, where learning is experiential, collaborative, and can be deeply personal.

For the purpose of this research project, I have reviewed literature that goes alongside my philosophical pedagogy of teaching theatre. I did this review to find out what the outcomes of the study and thoughts are on this parallel idea of theatre and self-determination theory. I searched for terms like "How is the human need for motivation related to educational motivation?" Does SDT work in the theatre classroom? This includes the integration of SDT with arts-based learning. I chose these terms by starting with research about SDT and then thought about how the theatre student must be motivated on their own, which led me to looking for articles that studied integrating SDT into the theatre arts classroom environment. I located these articles by way of Western University's Library and Google.

If a student can explore deeply into learning in the theatre classroom, a sense of achievement and belonging will develop. By integrating SDT into my pedagogical practices, I, as an educator, can create environments that empower students to take ownership of their learning, build confidence in their abilities, and create meaningful connections with peers.

Annotated Bibliography

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “What” and “Why” of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

This psychological inquiry portrays the concept of needs as specified by the content of motivation. Its premise states that people have innate psychological needs that are essential for growth, integrity, and well-being. Those basic psychological needs include autonomy, feelings that actions are self-endorsed and voluntary; competence, feeling effective and capable of achieving desired outcomes; and relatedness, feeling connected and cared for by others. Deci and Ryan theorize self-determination theory as a framework for understanding human motivation and personality. The researchers break down the “what” of goals and the “why” of goal pursuits, separating goal content matters into intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Intrinsic goals are associated with greater well-being and need satisfaction. This implies that intrinsic goals are linked to personal growth, relationships, community contribution, and health. Extrinsic goals, including wealth fame and image are linked to lower well-being and less fulfillment of psychological needs. Autonomous motivation leads to better performance, persistence, and well-being. Autonomous motivation means to voluntarily act with choice. A controlled motivation is associated with poorer outcomes and has been acted on due to external pressure or obligation. The analysis distinguishes between goal content, what people strive for, and regulatory processes as to why they strive. “A lack of basic need satisfaction can lead people to develop need substitutes, which can in turn have the ill-fated consequence of continuing to interfere with attainment of the nutrients they really need” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 249). The study helps the reader to understand what happens when people’s need for relatedness is thwarted when they are

young and, in turn, the implications of compensating for the attempt of approval or sense of self-worth. In thinking critically about the article, I wonder why they only represent the mother and how she contributes to the basic needs of children through maternal nurturance. It does not mention the father and how children respond intrinsically to paternal nurturance. The article concludes that goal content and regulatory processes both matter for psychological health and ideal functioning. Environments that support autonomy, competence and relatedness foster greater intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, adaptive goal pursuits and higher psychological well-being.

Guay, F. (2022). Applying self-determination theory to education: Regulation types, psychological needs, and autonomy-supporting behaviors. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 37*(1), 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08295735211055355>

In this literature review, Frederick Guay examines how Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains student motivation and learning outcomes. This article compiles research that demonstrates autonomous forms of motivation with positive academic and psychological outcomes for students. This article highlights reviews solely on this concept for two sources: parents and teachers. Guay highlights how autonomy-supported behaviors promoted by teachers and parents foster satisfying students' basic needs, such as autonomy, competence, and motivation. Guay presented an overview of education studies, presenting a number of relevant observations based on SDT. The author concludes that the more autonomy is established in the classroom, the better the academic performance, the longer the students persist, and the better they learn. The greater the performance is, the better the emotional standing and positivity are at school. Autonomous motivation can be achieved through fostering parents'/guardians' support and the psychological wellness of students. This includes fostering a relationship with the home

environment and psychological readiness of the school environment, which implements strategies of self-determination. Guay also emphasizes that certain intervention factors, such as personalized feedback and goal setting, can be effective for students' autonomous motivation. This article was thorough in its investigation of autonomous motivation for students' learning. However, further research should be done to investigate whether this approach works for all students, including those from diverse backgrounds, such as low-income and different ethnic groups.

Mohiyeddini, C. (2024). Self-directed teaching: A holistic framework for educator autonomy. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 11, 1479885. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2024.1479885>

This article addresses how to maintain and improve the quality of teaching in a world of change and un-certainty. Mohiyeddini recognizes that a teacher's role is complex. Educators are expected to exercise academic freedom, but they also face pressure to align their research and teaching with political and social norms. Self-directed teaching (SDT) is defined and proposed as a holistic approach in which educators recognize their autonomy. SDT can provide stability, self-motivation and professional growth. It encourages flexibility by allowing teachers to adapt their strategies to educational demands and the diverse needs of students. Instead of asking, How do I want to teach, Mohiyeddini encourages educators to ask, What kind of educator do I want to be? By establishing teaching needs, setting feasible goals, and evaluating their progress, a teacher can engage in a continuous cycle of improvement. The significance of Self-directed teaching can be applied by the following six principles:- 1. Professional autonomy and intrinsic motivation. 2. Adaptability to diverse learning needs. 3. Integration of technology. 4. Staying current with pedagogical advances. 5. Lifelong learning for educators. And 6, Addressing teacher burn-out. I found this article to be very informative. I wonder, however, if it could've been possible to

expand on “teacher burnout”? This burnout that happens is an interesting occurrence to me. Simply because I’d like to understand how one goes about avoiding it, other than the theory of self-directed teaching, but the practicality of the action is what I would’ve liked to see expanded on. A question that remains is how one can maintain motivation for self-directed teaching?

Nanda, D. S., & Susanto, S. (2021). Using drama in EFL classroom for exploring students’ knowledge and learning. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 9(2), 285–292. <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v9i2.4353>

This paper is a research project on using drama in foreign language. The exploration is aimed at understanding the students’ interests, abilities, and motivations. During the implementation of drama for students, they also studied the perceptions of teachers in the classrooms. The focus was on 10 classrooms, implementing drama pedagogy in English learning primary schools in Lampung, Indonesia. The participants were 30 teachers from primary schools, both public and private. The schools are located in the town and rural areas. The data was collected from audio-recorded interviews conducted in relaxed, open settings. The responses received were transcribed based on the themes. The research was designed using a qualitative method. Because the teachers did not have the educational background in theater study, it is noted that the teachers designed and organized the drama activities in their classrooms with some difficulty. However, they found that teachers who utilize drama-based pedagogy become aware of student mistakes. This helped them overcome their mistakes in learning the language. By introducing drama techniques in the language classroom, the teachers could focus on the verbal and non-verbal exercises. They found that these techniques could stimulate the learners by providing various stimuli and lifting up their knowledge. Utilizing drama can transform into creative dialogue in an explorative way. One of the central ideas conveys student differences, interests, abilities, and motivation in learning a foreign language. The authors propose that teachers use drama pedagogy to explore and

understand these ideas. Using this approach as a guide can draw students' attention and propel discussion among them. “The activities can speed up the learning process and enrich the classroom environment” (p. 287). It can also contribute to building the students' abilities for social interaction, engagement, and language comprehension.

This article was impactful in my thoughts about using drama in the classroom to enhance learning and creative development. The pedagogy is a beneficial alternative for teaching language skills and engagement in the classroom. The article does insinuate that English is not a core subject for students studying in Indonesia and that, unfortunately, time constraints are a problem for implementing this pedagogy in classrooms across the country. I believe that if the article was focused on language alone and not just teaching English proficiency, they may have elaborated on the study throughout all subjects to find more compelling evidence.

Carson, L. (2012). *The role of drama in task-based learning: Agency, identity and autonomy*. Scenario: A Journal of Performative Teaching, Learning, Research, 6(2), 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.6.2.6>

This article examines how drama-based tasks function in a task-based language learning context in higher education. It draws from an example of a collaborative drama task designed for postgraduates in an English for Academic Purposes program. This paper was designed and examined from an applied linguistic perspective through the concepts of agency, autonomy, and identity. The university language learners who participated in this drama task indicated how real-life communication frameworks can be referenced in the classroom. That drama allows students to connect with themselves and, in turn, others. If the students draw on their personal experiences, powerful stories create engagement with one another. With scripted communication and in the final performances of the task, learners planned, prepared, and communicated in cooperation. From this examination, it was discovered that the thoughts and ideas of autonomy,

agency, and identity are powerful indicators of where learners are stretched and continue to grow. Within the discussion of this paper, these ideas “fulfill the schema for an authentic task, apt to meet the learning needs of language students and to foster progress in second and foreign language learning” (Carson, 2012, p. 58). This leads the reader to understand that learners should be able to express their personal identity and act themselves in the language they are learning. It suggests that until students are able to express their needs and wants, they will be trapped in an artificial idea of society's representation. In thinking critically about this article, I believe it would be beneficial to the study if the article had simply focused on the use of drama through autonomy, agency, and identity to determine if it actually helps the English language learner and not the whole gamut of a second language or foreign language. I believe drama can help second language learners, but the article simply put forth the idea that longitudinal studies are underway to develop this further thought. A key question that was addressed in the program is how students' backgrounds, culture, and learning preferences have an impact on the level of involvement and group learning through drama-based tasks. Yet again, Carson suggests that further studies are needed. Still, the article reflects ideas and theories that drama can help the language learner and that it is a powerful tool in education.

Nic Fryer, Natalie Lazaroo & Adelina Ong (2025) RiDE 2056: the futures of drama education and applied theatre and performance, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 30:2, 201-208, DOI: 10.1080/13569783.2025.2589187

This article compiles journals on thoughts, notions, and future thinking for theatre in the classroom by 2056. It has been conceived and assembled in three sections: articles focusing on the past and present, practices that gesture towards the future, and articles that envision imagined futures. Given cuts in arts funding, increasing marginalization in schools, and university drama departments being shut down all over the world. It examines the world in the arts and what the

future will look like. It is not stated as to how these articles have been compiled nor the methods upon which the articles have been chosen. The authors have stated that they have corresponded with contributors who were in the process of being made redundant within institutions. This is a themed issue, where any drama educator can submit their article to this journal for analysis and consideration. This article explores the future of theatre and drama education by the year 2056. Despite political, cultural, and aesthetic threats to the theatre's existence, new modes of pedagogy may flourish. If we enable the participation of nondominant communities, the imagination can act as a tool of resistance. It suggests that even the poor should have access and capability to the arts. Guest editors advocate for drama education and how applied performance encourages hope across social critiques of problems in order to strive for a world without oppression and encourage the foundational work of Paulo Freire in order to play a part in reconfiguring power relations of the future. Technological developments suggest that the role of social media is already creating disruptions to conventional notions of the theatrical arts. However, the ritual of "unteching," meaning shedding the phones and reality devices that complicate experiences of the world, may lead to embracing and celebrating humanness and ambiguity. Although this article is conceived of three sections—articles focusing in the past and present, practices with gesture towards the future, and articles that envision imagined futures—it fails to set a clear and distinct way of proposing how the theatrical arts can survive budget cuts and social media influence. As important issues are presented, including AI in its future, it is beyond the scope of this issue to discuss the imagined details of social change.

Goble, G.H.: Van Ooyik, J.; Robertson, T. & Roberts, G.J. (2021). Effects on students' academic and non-academic outcomes and student participation in theatre arts: A research synthesis. *Educational Research: Theory and Practice*, 32(3), 1-22.

This systematic review addressed the extent to which theatre arts impacts students' outcomes and the types of theatre arts participation was associated with students' academic and non-academic learning outcomes. "Participation in the theatre strengthens development of identity, sense of belonging, builds confidence and provides an outlet for expression" (Goble, Van Ooyik, Robertson, & Roberts, 2021). The review focuses on two primary outcomes of learning. First, Theatre arts positively impact academic learning outcomes, through reading, language skills, mathematical skills, thinking skills, social skills and motivation within a positive learning environment. This study of artistic nature has been known to help students who might not traditionally succeed in school, and aids those with different learning styles. Enrollment in this class, for the theatre arts student may increase retention rates and student engagement contributing to learning outcomes. Second, theatre positively influences students' non-academic outcomes. This is by way of development of identity, emotional development, and social and personal development. These platforms provide a sense of belonging, confidence building, outlets for expression, exploration of self and emotional openness and predictability.

This review of literature was systematically conducted to identify and summarize the findings of previous literature reviews on students participation and academic or non-academic outcomes. There were three reviews that discussed the relevant literature on the outcomes. The authors identified 14 studies meeting their inclusion criteria. All participants were actively involved in drama one way or another. The findings suggest that interventions through the theatre benefit participants' academic learning outcomes, health, and social development. The authors did find, however, that "there is a need for more quantitative and qualitative research in this field; qualitative research may be the better form of research to gain insight on the process of performing arts and health. The studies lacked statistically significant effects on non-academic

learning outcomes in self-concept” (Goble, Van Ooyik, Robertson, & Roberts, 2021). In Canada, for example, through a mixed-methods survey, they studied a one-year high school theatre course. The results included that students chose theatre for diverse reasons. This study concludes that the teacher is a vital component of a productive classroom and that drama class enhances student growth. Another study of high school theatre students was measured by a case study in England. This study concluded that student personal growth increased in confidence, sense of belonging, and musical development. In Australia, a youth arts program reflecting the average age of 17 found social connection, confidence, self-knowledge/identity, interpersonal skills, improved mental health, and teamwork experiences. Research suggests students with higher levels of self-concept display signs of independence, consciousness of actions, and adaptability to social norms. All studies noted the use of a creative process. These three distinct processes include play production, theatre devising and theatre workshops or classes. Across all articles, student outcomes fit into five main themes: self-concept, positive experiences, student development, interpersonal skills, and theatre and drama skills. “Participation in a theatre production naturally promotes positive development through the process of rehearsing, performing, and reflecting. It helps youth develop identity and strengthen self-beliefs. Additionally, it promotes creative thinking and develops theatre-specific skills” (Goble, Van Ooyik, Robertson, & Roberts, 2021). The three components or processes affect social development, emotional development, self-esteem, identity, and empowerment. Although the article’s intention is not generalization but overall qualitative and quantitative research, I found that it lacks the human element of connection. A deeper understanding of the arts must be approached when talking of education in the theatre. The assessment of theatre education is movable and changeable; it derives from projecting the truth of the moment.

Lauss, J., & Helm, C. (2023). The role of arts in the classroom: Does integration of the arts promote social relationships in the classroom? *Journal of Educational Research*, 45(2), 123–135. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10>

Although research on the topic of integrating arts into the classroom is a growing interest, research still remains limited. The article's longitudinal study follows 381 students across five schools to assess different dimensions of social relationships by using standardized questionnaires. An innovative approach to achieving strengthening social interactions and cultivating a supportive classroom in the arts. Like STEM in science and technology subjects, STEM + A incorporates artistic elements to pay tribute to traditional STEM studies. This study was drawn on Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory. This article focuses on social inclusion as a factor influencing students' well-being and overall development. It reflects autonomy, competence, and relatedness for intrinsic motivation. The authors Lauss and Helm (2023) state that the arts integration in the classroom offers a unique opportunity to meet these needs, thereby enhancing pupils' social inclusion and enjoyment of the learning process. The reader goes on to learn that because of the collaborative nature of arts, which provides opportunity to cooperate and exchange information/ideas/thoughts, connectedness is created. What is essential for emotional well-being is to encompass the feeling of belonging and acceptance, which is achieved through social inclusion. Creating a safe and welcoming environment is a direct result of positive relationships, which in turn creates a supportive learning environment. In the realm of artists, they often raise existential questions that help students reflect on their own values and perspectives. Which, in turn, helps the creative skills be more meaningful and flourish. The arts also help neurodivergent students, those with autism spectrum disorders and mental health challenges. Outlined in self-determination theory, collaborative arts activities and exercises have been shown to reduce feelings of isolation and

increase a sense of belonging. These activities promote focus, which promotes impulse control as well. Theatre-based applications have been shown to enhance empathy and communication skills. When empathy is apparent, it presents itself through enhanced communication, reduces conflict and encourages a positive, collaborative environment. In this article the authors examine integration of the arts into dimensions. These hypotheses include: Cliquishness, Helpfulness, Aggression, Discrimination and competitiveness. Each is highlighted by a positive and negative attribute. In sum, this study does offer ideas about the effects of integrating the arts into the classroom. Creative collaboration is the most notable highlight, which significantly improved helpfulness and reduced discrimination among students. Inevitably, creating a stronger sense of community for a safe classroom environment. “However, the findings also revealed unintended consequences, such as increased cliquishness and heightened competitiveness, highlighting the multifaceted and complex nature of arts integration across diverse educational settings” (Lauss, J. & Helm, C., 2023). Further research is suggested, which should investigate the long-term effects of arts integration. The research also should include educators and parents/guardians to develop a more holistic understanding of its influence on social dynamics. The strengths of this article reflect positive and negative measurement of the role of arts in social relationships in the classroom environment. The results of the study highlight the need for strategies to enhance arts-based programs, maximizing the potential to incorporate arts into education for the purposes of positive social dynamics. I would suggest the article expand on how teaching the arts in regular classrooms is dynamic and fruitful to the social culture of the environment.

Chakraborty, S. (2025). Drama as a teaching method: A comprehensive literature review.

International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 13(6). 643-650.

This review examines theatre as a pedagogical approach across various contexts of education. The research spanning from 2014 to 2025 explores its theoretical foundations, applications across disciplines, and implementation challenges. Drama pedagogy promotes democratic learning spaces and enhances diverse educational classrooms. Educational drama emphasizes process over product. Research shows that dramatic activities create many forms of learning and engage students cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially. Theoretical foundations include: 1) Multiple intelligence and embodied learning theories. This includes Multiple Intelligence Theory, engaging various forms of intelligence collectively with drama activities. This engages neuroscientific understandings of the brain function, emotions, and physiology that remain interconnected. 2) Constructivist and social learning framework by asking learners to be active participants in the construction of knowledge rather than passive recipients. Through these dramatic activities, students engage in processes that are individual and collective. This reflects Vygotsky's theories of social learning and proximal development. "The improvisational nature of many drama activities further reinforces constructivist principles by requiring students to actively create and test hypotheses within the safety of fictional contexts" (Chakraborty, S. 2025, p. 644). 3) Transformational learning and critical pedagogy is articulated by Mezirow, which provide opportunities for reflection and "perspective transformation." Emotional engagement and critical reflection support the development of critical consciousness and social awareness. The article highlights applications across educational contexts. Drama in language education creates true communication where students use language for purposes within meaningful contexts. Drama in STEAM education was researched by the Hungarian Educational Research journal (2024), which indicates that drama improves reasoning, creativity, and interpersonal skills necessary for collaboration in science work. A 15-week study measures

incorporating dramatic activities into lesson planning. This implementation requires both theoretical understanding and extensive experience. Drama education is particularly helpful to providing alternative pathways to accommodate diverse learning styles, such as those of neurodiverse students. The documented benefits and impacts involve academic achievement and behavioral outcomes associated with outcomes of reading comprehension, improved writing skills, character development, and narrative understanding. The outcomes for social-emotional learning increase self-confidence, which is attributed to opportunities for self-expression and risk taking within the supported environment. Communication, collaboration, and critical thinking encompass the development of 21st-century competencies. Increasing success in contemporary society and future employment. Theatre education fosters cultural and democratic engagement by creating spaces where diverse perspectives are valued and explored. Strategies of implementation include drama methodology, stressing the exploration of drama rather than the outcome. Conventions and techniques, where students are participants in problem-solving through interactive activities. As well as cross-curricular integration. This curriculum integration model involves using historical drama to integrate and explore history, language arts, and social studies. The challenges and recommendations address implementation barriers, as teacher preparation is a primary challenge with educators lacking knowledge. Professional development must be established and should be emphasized in the curricular applications. Policy and systemic recommendations include drama as a comprehensive educational tool, rather than an option of enrichment. Future research directions should be directed at longitudinal studies, comparative research, development of assessment tools, and optimal professional development. The article concludes that drama education should not just be an optional choice but a fundamental pedagogical approach.

The strengths of this article are thorough and defined as a beneficial tool in creating a safe democratic space for all learners. It reviews pedagogy as an art form, not just a philosophy of engagement. The article references drama activities and exercises that can be used to extend beyond mere engagement or entertainment value.

Wu, H. (2021). A Self-Determination Theory Perspective: How the 'Drama in Education Can Boost Students' Motivation of Learning. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, Volume 615, 698-701.

Drama in Education (DIE) is an approach to education that uses theatrical art forms to guide perception and development. This form of education is widely used in reading comprehension, writing, gender role construction, eliminating racial prejudice, and preventing substance abuse. DIE helps to create “a window to understanding human higher psychological activities, and a way to study the psychological development mechanism of psychological development” (Wu, H., 2021, p. 698). Two core points of practice are based on the French thinker Rousseau’s theory. These two core points are learning in practice and learning in drama practice. Besides drama bringing together various cultural elements, it plays a vital role in propaganda, education, and cultural entertainment. It is possible to form positive emotions, correct attitudes, and reasonable values through participants and audiences. Learning in educational theatre is more like common sense or natural learning. This learning is different from the usual classroom in that it is not repeated with a clear purpose. Self-Determination theory is a macro theory of human motivation and personality that deals with people’s intrinsic growth tendencies and innate psychological needs” (Wu, H., 2021, p. 699). Students must be competently motivated to take the initiative in learning. For this reason, DIE is a sustainable teaching method that allows guidance and initiative to support each other. This form of education

asks the learner to discover what they already know through drama and teacher guidance.

Motivation is achieved through the input of knowledge and skills and intrinsic motivation, which increases interest and makes learning more effective. The kinesthetic relationship between intrinsic motivation and teaching curricula in DIE returns us to the 'lifeworld' and to 'feel' it for ourselves. The article could have expanded on the culture of DIE in China. I did not reflect this topic in my writing because the paragraph did not have much to do with the information of the journal. The author merely states that China has a long way to go and that the author studied theatre in China. I would've liked to learn more about that.

Liu, H., Wei, H., & Yao, Z. (2024). Research on Multicultural Drama Education Based on Self-determination Theory: A Case Study of "Hamlet". *Scientific Advances and Management*, 6(2), 160-170.

This article uses the Chinese literature text Hamlet in the high school setting as a case study, applying self-determination theory as three psychological needs to various aspects of teaching. It is a framework for multicultural drama in education. Drama in education originated in Western countries, such as Europe and the United States. Rousseau advocated "learning through dramatic practice," and Dewey proposed the educational philosophy of "learning by doing." "Multiculturalism serves as the driving force that compels individuals to engage in specific behaviors and activities, manifesting as the desire to continuously strive towards achieving certain goals" (Liu, Wei, & Yao, 2024, p. 161). Multiculturalism emphasizes the diversity of cultures, helping to understand and appreciate the uniqueness of values and other cultures. This paper is a case study, using empirical findings. Using an excerpt from Hamlet, this paper constructs a multicultural framework based on SDT, applying methodologies in concrete educational practices. Drama literature, as a comprehensive artistic form, provides a space for

fulfilling the intrinsic needs of the student. The teacher prepares for the class, including set up.

The intention of this activity is to stimulate students' interest in learning, create a context suitable for teaching content, spark students' imagination, ignite their enthusiasm for learning, and enhance their active participation. Teachers can observe students' expressions and engagement to understand their level of interest in the created scenario (Liu, Wei, & Yao, 2024, p. 164).

Students watch Hamlet, prepare costumes, role-play emotions, and then write down their feelings within the context of the play based on their initial thoughts. Students have the opportunity to evaluate each other's group work, highlighting strengths and ideas needing improvement.

Following independent exploration of the text, students are encouraged to participate in classroom discussions. "By exchanging diverse viewpoints, students can broaden their perspectives and deepen their understanding of the text" (Liu, Wei, & Yao, 2024, p. 166). This approach facilitates the holistic advancement of drama instruction and processes multicultural perspectives to compare differences and similarities between Chinese and Western dramatic works. The endeavor aims to enhance self-efficacy. Autonomous learning grounded in SDT boosts students' self-efficacy, instilling in them the belief in their capability to master more challenging knowledge. Role-playing and deep discussion foster an increase in confidence building goals and motivation for learning. This fosters awareness for multiculturalism by laying a foundation for future learning and communication. This pedagogical approach enhanced students' abilities in teamwork and articulation. The article suggests that in light of the impacts SDT has on learning and multiculturalism, future pedagogical practices need more research. Research to optimize instructional design, the need for more targeted guidance, and a greater investment in the development of educational resources.

The strengths of the article were profound in philosophy and the actual intent of the purpose of the case study. It breaks down the preparation, classroom setup, student activity, design intent, teacher activities, and finally, students' activities. This piece is a great lesson template for a guided instructional approach to the study of Hamlet using SDT.

Gray, C., & Pascoe, R. (2025). "*When Brian acted his way out of a wet paper bag*": *The transformational qualities of drama education*. **Australian Journal of Education**, 0(0), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441251390647>

The purpose of this article is to explore drama teachers' perceptions of transformation in the drama space. Gray and Pascoe used evidence from Western Australia. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, they analyzed data from interviews with 8 drama teachers and 22 pre-service drama teachers. Their research utilized Mezirow's Transformative Learning framework as a starting point to investigate understanding transformation in the drama classroom. Participants describe drama as capable of fostering changes in self-confidence, personal values, and willingness to take creative risks. The research indicates that transformation often emerges through learning, collaboration, and reflective practice rather than through traditional learning styles. The findings show that positioning drama as a subject that not only fosters artistic skills but also supports personal, social and emotional growth. In Gray and Pascoe's evaluation of four Australian school-based art programs from year four to year ten reported that arts enrich environments with enhanced writing, problem-solving, and communication skills. Further, participation was associated with gains in imagination, self-confidence, social interaction, and a sense of school belonging. By examining who is transformed, what is transformed, and how transformation occurs, this study helps the reader to deepen their understanding of theatre to transform lives. This study also highlights the experiences drama educators create to stimulate empathy, self-awareness, and resilience through

risk-taking. "Drama does not just teach performance skills; it enables students to better understand themselves and others, offering lasting benefits that extend well beyond the classroom" (Gray & Pascoe, 2025, p. 14). Drama education does not just teach skills; it teaches about life and how to approach it with self-confidence and empathy. This article was very helpful in understanding that arts and education really do have an impact. Not just for the theatre student but for transformation in education and how this field affects the future. The authors argue that these outcomes put drama in a performance-based subject, but instead, it functions as a powerful educational practice with goals of transformative educational experience.

Ferrell, A., Levstek, M., & Banerjee, R. (2023). *"We have a voice. We exist": Value of basic needs satisfaction for well-being and goal development in inclusive theater spaces for young people*. **Journal of Creative Behavior**, 57(4), 674–689. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.608>

In this article, Levstek and Banerjee research how creative arts programs have the potential for creating psychological well-being amongst the youth. They look at the trends that suggest the highest level of basic needs satisfaction having a positive impact on the association of well-being, over and above the effects of basic needs satisfaction at home and at school. Using the self-determination theory of relatedness, autonomy, and competence allowed the youth to develop positive self-awareness and future aspirations. The study also aimed to examine the individual's experience from different perspectives, which allowed for a holistic investigation of the changes associated with the individual. They worked with a youth theatre in North London, UK, that was focused on engaging marginalized young people. Members of the company were nominated for the project. They met once per week for workshops. Performances were created by the youth themselves through play, which was developed into shows. The quantitative sample consisted of 49 young people. With two separate visits for questionnaire completion, they received 42 (86% response rate) completed questionnaires. There were 21 females, 18 male

participants, and 3 who did not specify gender. One year later, three young people, three parents/guardians, three drama teachers, and the Artistic Director of the theatre company were interviewed for a qualitative investigation. The youth consisted of one 16-year-old and two 15-year-olds who were interviewed. Interviews were conducted one-on-one and took place at a convenient time at the theatre site before or after their usual session. School teachers were interviewed and conducted at the schools. The interview with the Artistic Director took place at the theatre site in North London. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The three themes of relatedness, autonomy, and competence were measured. As far as relatedness is concerned, a connection was formed by working together to perform a show, as the students wrote the show, edited the show, and performed together. In autonomy building, the theme involved the importance of giving the youth a place where they could be comfortable to be themselves through building trust. Because relatedness was established through the space, autonomy was explored by encouraging participants to explore who they are and what future they can create for themselves. By offering support and showing the young people they are important in the space, this creative environment enabled participants to feel empowered and confident in their abilities and identity for competence through confidence building and empowerment. All three contexts of these themes showed a contribution to well-being. This creative activity allowed young people to feel empowered through a safe space that was different than other environments in their lives. A strong sense of belonging and secure bonds with staff, aligned with their feelings of possible goals for the future and hopeful aspirations. Self-Determination theory was shown through how people can create a meaningful relationship in a safe way while relating to others. In this study, the three youth that were interviewed described the theatre as a place that allowed for trust in fostering autonomy in learning and creating. It was

clear in the reading that by creating and keeping engagement through making meaning, the work was significant in its findings of theatre as a safe base. Interviewees described a sense of self-worth from creating something with their peers and a sense of accomplishment from watching others perform. Thus, the results from both the qualitative and quantitative studies suggest engagement in the theatre could have a contribution to psychological well-being. This paper is a clear and concise analysis of research done by way of self-determination theory and the effects it has combined with the theatrical arts. It provides evidence through qualitative and quantitative studies that theatre can help the student to conjure self-awareness, create goals, and take value in the self by way of participation. Additionally, a sense of positive modeling creates a desire to learn, as the creativity needs to start with the instructor. However, more data is clearly needed. It could be possible that the parents of the youth who volunteered in the study have an affection for positive effects on their students through the theatre arts. Further research should focus on theatre in the educational setting. It is suggested in the article that testing on the mechanisms therein should be described within a longitudinal design. I agree with this thought, because when I was reading, I couldn't help but think, "What are the long-term effects of the study?" Furthermore, none of the studies compared basic needs satisfaction in the arts with experiences in other contexts, such as home and school, to influence well-being.

Summary

The research collectively accentuates the transformative potential of theatre education when integrated with motivational substructures like Self-Determination Theory (SDT). At the core, SDT infers that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential psychological needs for fostering intrinsic motivation and well-being. When applied to the theatre classroom, these principles create a safe environment where students feel empowered to take ownership of their

learning, building confidence with skill mastery and forming meaningful relationships with their peers. This collaborative approach not only enhances academic outcomes but also nurtures identity, emotional maturity/regulation, and social inclusion.

The theatre environment serves as a unique democratic antidote to cultural oppression by promoting organic thinking in a holistic way. Through incorporating practice, creative inquiry, and multicultural perspectives, theatre pedagogy cultivates democratic spaces that value diverse voices and create critical reflection. Research highlights that these environments reduce feelings of isolation and increase engagement. Students from neurodiverse backgrounds are also compellingly affected by the positive reinforcement and holistic development of the content put forth. Ultimately, a life in the theatre full of education and learning integrated with self-determination theory transforms education into a process of self-directed growth where motivation is rooted in joy, purpose, and the authentic reality of human connection.

Chapter 3: Methods Guideline

Introduction

Designed to help practitioners study their own practice, generate knowledge, and take action on information-based evidence, action research projects investigate questions that come directly from professional concerns. This research conducted by educators with the goal of improving teaching and learning is meant to support instructors in making meaningful changes that lead to

student success. Teachers should be able to examine the effectiveness of their strategies designed to address real problems in classrooms.

With selecting a focus in which teachers choose a specific area of concern, the action research project process follows a particular outline. It is a process that guides educators from identifying a problem to taking action. The seven-step process follows Sagor (2000) and is summarized as such: Selecting a focus, clarifying theories, identifying research questions, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting results, and taking informed action. Following the development of research questions, educators can collect data used in the classroom. Teachers can then take those findings, implement them, and build on them for ongoing inquiry.

Action research is an appropriate method of study in this context because it allows for the teacher who is also the researcher to examine an issue within their own classroom. It is good for educators who specifically would like to improve student learning through reflective, data-driven decision making. Because this study focuses on improving life in the classroom for a specific group of students, using it within the theatre classroom as a practical framework of study seems to be appropriate. Additionally, action research empowers teachers to take ownership of their instructional improvement. Instead of relying on outside research, educators can look within to analyze data and implement changes.

Based on the literature reviewed in chapter 2 and self-determination theory to guide this study included here, the stated intent is to study the impact of SDT on students. Motivation will be emphasized as inspiration by teachers, the classroom culture, and the environment. The following question is spelled out to guide the study.

- 1) How does the intentional use of self-determination theory, aligned with theatre practices in the classroom, affect students' engagement and intrinsic motivation?

Using theatre as a voice for identity and expression to gain motivation, competence, relatedness, and belonging in the culture of the classroom is inherently the identifying question. Does it work?

Participants and Setting

I student teach in a rural town of Oregon, in a high school theatre class. The class takes place within a Black Box theatre. There are 19 students in the classroom. There are 14 females, 4 males and 1 non-binary. There is 1 ninth grader, 7 tenth graders, 3 eleventh graders, and 8 twelfth graders. Each class runs 46 minutes long. There are 2 students with a 504 plan and 2 students in the TAG program. There are 18 White students and 1 Hispanic student. One student speaks Spanish at home. Several students are religious, ranging from Catholic to Russian, Christian and Atheist. There is one student who is hard of hearing, another who experiences anxiety, and one other with modifications and accommodations, reason unknown.

In order to accurately review data regarding student social/emotional needs, I first needed to research the profile details of every student in the classroom. To do this, I accessed Synergy, a software program, which consists of data on the school's student portfolio and population. I reviewed each and every student enrolled in Advanced Theatre. I studied the students' SEL needs, accommodations and modifications, cultural heritage/background, TAG endorsements, health notifications, age, year in school, town in which they live, and current high school grade scores. On the first day of class, I asked the students to complete a questionnaire called "About Me." From this, I learned about siblings, adults in the home, any additional languages spoken,

favorite holidays/celebrations/traditions, and what I need to know in order to teach the student well. Each and every student completed this to the best of their ability.

I have been involved with some of these students for the past two years in the theatre department at this school, some the whole year through in introduction to theatre, and some of them, however, I just met two months ago for the beginning of advanced theatre. Because I have worked with some of the students for the past two years, there is a trusted bond that has been established with many of them. I have had the opportunity through the culture of the classroom to get to know the students on a daily basis in the educational classroom and in the rehearsal space. This has allowed for almost total engagement by all.

Classroom discussions were open and lively and always filled with a desire to express and learn more. Collaboration in classroom activities has created a sense of belonging and confidence. Students have been willing to collaborate with peers due to modeling this engagement by listening actively, encouraging dialogue, and validating contributions. Promoting classroom culture through opening the class with a physical circle of active dialogue and demonstration of each individual's tone/energy for the day has created a positive, trusting, inclusive, and supportive environment. It has helped to be an actively engaged teacher, becoming aware of each other socially and diversely at the start of every class. By encouraging independence and growth through supportive activities and exercises students have been offered the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning. This approach has resulted in engagement and continuous building of positive relationships with success in the context of learning.

There is always room for growth and improvement. Because classroom discussions are so engaging, time tends to slip away. Often as a class we will expand on a topic after a performance

or exercise, and I struggle with a way to end the conversation and transition to the next topic or unit of the class. There are days when a few certain individuals tend to get distracted or are less than participatory. Getting those students back in the hype of the culture of the classroom is sometimes difficult, I find myself searching for better tools to help them re-engage. We are all learning together.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since I want to know students' ideas of motivation in the classroom, I have needed to collect qualitative data. I have done this primarily by observation and class work. During rehearsals and class time, I have taken notes of observations such as responses to positive feedback, excitement at the moment of discovery, and responses to participation in activities. I held interviews with colleagues in the performing arts department to further understand what motivates their students. I have broken the different types of stimuli up into smaller parts to get a clear picture. Through activities and exercises of inclusion, connection, empathy, and relatedness, I have worked to identify if SDT does motivate the learner in the theatre classroom. Notes, exit tickets, conversations, one-minute jots, observations, takeaways, and literature helped in looking for common themes amongst students. Using data such as unit plans, curricula, teaching reflection journals, both formative and summative assessments, feedback from mentors, and observations of student engagement has helped in my findings. I have studied and connected with students who seem to be disengaged and lack the ability or desire to participate and then become motivated to further themselves. This has all helped to inform me as to my research questions and their connection to motivation.

The purpose of this study is to examine student motivation in the theatrical classroom through the lens of self-determination theory. In the theatre environment, a qualitative data analysis approach was used to allow for an in-depth examination of students' engagement and motivation. Identifying patterns and meanings emerging directly from participant responses in classroom assignments and discussions has been a primary resource.

Open coding was used as the initial stage of the qualitative data analysis. Interviews, student reflections, and observational notes were examined. Code emerged directly from the data and not from predetermined categories. To honor the goal of reaching student voices, this approach allowed student perspectives to guide the analysis. Constant comparison of memos to examine similarities and differences across coding to ensure consistency in research was used. This was done to make sure that multiple strategies were implemented while self-determination theory informed the overall framework of the study. By grounding themes in codes, the analysis maintained alignment with action research and supported meaningful translation of student motivation in the theatre classroom culture.

In this action research project, triangulation is used conceptually. Theoretical perspectives, personal education history, and existing literature are brought into the text to ensure that themes remain conceptually congruent with the guiding framework of the study. Self-determination theory provides the primary lens of analysis, while insights from critical pedagogy, theatre education, and democratic learning inform the explanation, or the how, if you will. Themes identified in the analysis are examined for cohesiveness across all sources to allow for patterns of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Lived experiences and researched literature frame this project to ensure that results align with the classroom data.

I asked colleagues and fellow teachers to review this data analysis, which informed and improved the sustainability of my analysis. This approach helped to solidify my study in the collection of qualitative data and inform the writing of this paper.

Researcher Positionality

I approach this action research project as a theatre educator, artist, and learner whose personal educational experiences strongly inform my pedagogical beliefs and research commitment. As a student who grew up struggling in traditional academics, particularly with learning difficulties, my positionality is shaped by my experiences in K12 education. I often felt misunderstood, disengaged, and unsupported in the classroom environment. In contrast, my participation in the theatre provided a safe space where I experienced success, belonging, and motivation through collaboration and creativity.

These life experiences have deeply influenced my perspective as both an educator and researcher. I have benefited from individualized support, collaboration, and teacher/student relationships. I have a strong belief that students feel autonomy when fostered with positivity, excitement, and motivating circumstances. Self-determination theory supports this belief, which serves as the guiding foundation for this project through competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Because I have lived experiences of thriving in education without the traditional academic setting, I am predisposed to see the theatre classroom as a place of student agency, confidence, and intrinsic motivation through the practice of the art, including peer collaboration.

I acknowledge that this role of researcher and teacher presents strengths and weaknesses. I have developed close relationships with students, and I do have a deep understanding of life in the theatre, which allows for dynamic classroom culture. At the same time, my commitment to

self-determination theory, motivation, and student autonomy reflects the relationship between cause and effect. Meaning, I'd rather that student experiences be represented transparently and not by my premises or predispositions. To deter this, I engaged in reflective practices, like taking notes and studying reflections of my work/teaching with careful examination. My intention was to fully honor the student voices who engaged with and represent this work.

Chapter 4: Findings

Three major themes emerged from the data collection and analysis. The emerging themes were developing student driven acting practices, intentional performance decision making, and meaningful collaboration. Each theme is discussed below with data to support it.

Developing Student Driven Acting Practices - Autonomy

Konstantin Stanislavski's theories and the *Magic If*, was developed to aid in student autonomy and the students' approach to their acting process. A goal that requires not only the acquisition of performance skills but also disciplined understanding of how to translate theory into practice. Students were introduced to a range of foundational acting tools intended to support their development in this practice. Among these tools was Stanislavski's *Magic If*, often described as part of the art experience, which encourages actors to explore the justifications for their character's actions through imagination. By engaging deeply with their characters' given circumstances, students were guided toward a more truthful, emotional, and physical response grounded in lived possibility.

This approach encouraged students to construct performances rooted in authenticity, moving away from generalized or mimicked emotional expression. Instead, students were asked to engage in objective-driven analysis, focusing on what their character wanted and how that pursuit shaped behavior. Through this process, students began to understand that emotion is not the starting point of performance, but rather the result of purposeful action within specific circumstances.

To support this development, students completed exit tickets following exercises in character discovery, rehearsal, and performance. These exit tickets included two questions as prompts. The first, “How is acting with an objective different from just showing emotion?” And the second, “What was one idea someone shared today that helped you understand Stanislavski better?” This prompted students to evaluate whether they had employed specific acting tools in their work. This reflective practice required students to think critically about their process and assess their own success, fostering a sense of accountability for their artistic choices and their level of engagement.

Below is a copy of student work in which this particular learner distinguished between *showing* emotion and acting with *intention*. This demonstrated autonomy because students independently discovered and prioritized why a character acts the way they do, not just how they feel. This work exemplified proficiency across both autonomy and character building indicators. The student has articulated, “*Objective gives genuine purpose . . . a reason for emotions,*” which demonstrated a clear understanding of the relationship between action and emotional outcome.

Exit Ticket
Advanced Theatre
Name: _____

LESSON 2

Answer the two following questions based on the Stanislavski videos we watched

1. How is "acting with an objective" different from just "showing emotions"?

When you act with an objective it gives your character a genuine purpose and gives you a reason to be doing things while "showing emotions" is more like pretending. If you just show emotions with no reason behind it, it won't feel as genuine and believable.

2. What was one idea someone shared today that helped you understand Stanislavski better?

Someone talked about how time is very important and has lots of different implications (time passed time of day ago, etc) and that helped me understand the 5 W's.

Handwritten notes on the left:

Thoughtful & insightful!

- AS ACTORS, it is our RESPONSIBILITY TO IDENTIFY THESE FACTORS & ALLOW THEM TO INFORM EVERY ASPECT OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT.

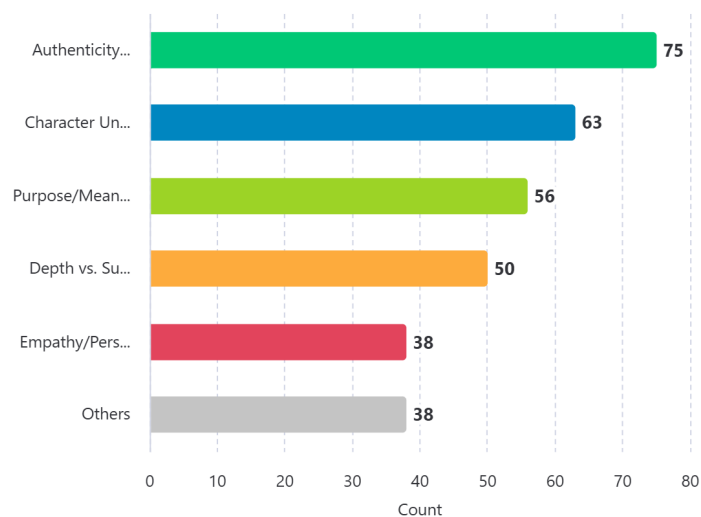
MS.S.

100% GREAT WORK!

This data reflected 19 students who deliberated that the integration of foundational acting skills, combined with structured reflection, supported the development of student autonomy. As students repeatedly engaged with Stanislavski's methods, they began to take greater ownership of their learning, demonstrating increased independence in both their analytical and creative decision making. Deductive analysis framework: 75% authenticity and believability. When students prioritized authenticity, they understood that character autonomy stemmed from genuine internal motivation. The evidence showed that students emphasized objectives, creating "believable," "real," and "accurate" portrayals, implying a high comprehension level of professional acting standards. Character Understanding Deduction: 63% understanding of character perspective is a prerequisite for autonomous character development. Evidence of this was noted by students' objectives, saying that it helped them to understand what the character wanted and empathize with the character. Purpose & Meaning: 56% deduction, stated autonomous characters required clear motivation that drive action. The students recognized

objectives provide “meaning and purpose” beyond emotional display, implying there is movement from reactive to proactive character work. In the deduction of Depths vs. Surface, meaning character autonomy existed in layers beneath visible emotion, students have distinguished between just showing emotions and creating depth, which implied they were critically thinking about performance quality. Finally, Empathy and Perspective a 38% deduction of autonomy, required seeing through the characters' eyes, not imposing a view. Multiple students highlighted “understanding someone else's point of view.” This implied 38% of the class are still developing empathy skills.

Character Building & Autonomy Themes - Student Understanding



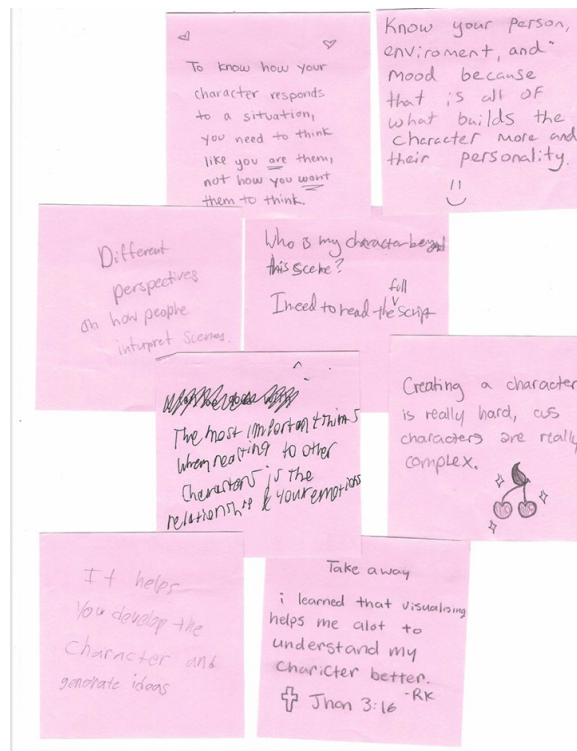
In evaluation of students' growth, two categories came to the forefront: autonomy in acting and character building. Autonomy was observed through students' ability to distinguish between objective and emotion. Meaning, how to apply acting tools independently and also demonstrate agency through self-directed choices. Character building was assessed through students' perspectives, their understanding of given circumstances, and their ability to produce truthful and believable performances.

This content analysis has been conducted by the use of qualitative data. Findings show increased student discipline as students evaluated the effectiveness of their choices without relying solely on instructor feedback. Students took ownership of their learning process and artistic decisions. A clear understanding of adaptive thinking was displayed as students demonstrated the ability to revise choices based on whether their actions served the character's objective. The development of autonomy was particularly evident in students' ability to self-correct. Rather than waiting for external direction, students assessed whether their choices aligned with the given circumstances and could adjust accordingly. The students claimed ownership of their techniques; they generated choice from personal truth. The responses reflected a strong distinction between objective and emotion, independent application of tools, depth of character understanding, and a commitment to truthful realism. The student's growth illustrated how a consistent application of these methodologies led to a sophisticated and self-sustained acting process.

At the beginning of the course, many students relied heavily on emotion as the entry point into their work. However, analysis of exit tickets revealed a noticeable shift in their approach over the semester. Students began to ground their performances on objective and given circumstances, demonstrating a more sophisticated and process-oriented understanding of acting. They increasingly engaged in critical thinking, examining how their character's environment and context shaped behavior and emotional life.

This shift was further evidenced through a formative classroom activity in which students responded to prompts using a takeaway thought on sticky notes. Students were asked how the situation influenced their character behavior, how these tools supported their work, and whether their choices led to truthful performance outcomes. The collected responses revealed recurring

patterns: students frequently referenced empathy, personal experience, and visualization as primary entry points into their work. Many responses indicated an emerging awareness of purpose, with students articulating not only how to develop the character but also why and how different perspectives influenced those choices.



The sticky note takeaway analysis demonstrated that students were beginning to internalize the language of the acting process. Rather than offering vague or generalized reflections, students used specific terminology such as "objective," "given circumstances," and "intention." This shift in language reflected a deeper conceptual understanding, as students moved from intuitive or surface-level responses toward more analytical and intentional engagement. Additionally, several students noted when a particular choice "did not feel truthful," followed by a description of how they adjusted their approach. This pattern suggested the development of self-monitoring skills and an increased capacity for independent problem-solving. As this shift occurred, students demonstrated growing independence in their approach.

Rather than relying on instructor feedback or side coaching, they began to make informed decisions about which tools to apply in their work. Students actively assessed whether a particular choice brought them closer to a truthful performance, and when it did not, they explored alternative strategies. This ability to evaluate and adjust their process reflected a developing autonomy, as students assumed responsibility for their creative decision-making. Reflective practices played a significant role in this development.

Through consistent self-evaluation, students began to cultivate self-discipline and a sense of ownership over their work. They also developed an awareness of how specific tools could support future performances, indicating a growing ability to transfer knowledge across contexts. This iterative cycle of action and reflection strengthened both their technical skills and their metacognitive awareness. Over time, students began to internalize key questions such as why, how, and if in relation to their character's circumstances and actions. This repetition fostered a form of metacognition, enabling students to monitor their performance in real time. They became increasingly capable of recognizing when a choice was effective and when it was not, adjusting accordingly without external prompting.

This shift represented a significant step toward autonomy, as students demonstrated an understanding of the actor's responsibility in bringing a character to life. A clear example of this growth is displayed in the Stanislavski exit ticket. In the written reflection, the student stated, "Objective gives genuine purpose... a reason for emotions," demonstrating a strong understanding of the relationship between action and emotional outcome. The response illustrated a clear distinction between objective and emotion, which aligned with the autonomy indicators established in this study.

Further analysis of the student responses revealed the ability to independently apply multiple acting tools in a cohesive manner. It referenced given circumstances and demonstrated an awareness of how context influences a character's behavior. Additionally, the work reflected a thoughtful engagement with the *Magic If*, as the student connected personal understanding to imagined scenarios in order to produce believable responses.

This integration of tools suggested not only comprehension but also intentional application. The student also demonstrated strength in character-building indicators. Reflections indicate depth of perspective, as the student considered the character's motivations within a broader context. This student consistently evaluated whether the choices were truthful and adjusted accordingly, reflecting a commitment to realism and disciplined exploration. Importantly, the work showed evidence of self-assessment, as the student identified which strategies were effective and which required revision. The progress exemplified the broader trends observed across the class. The ability to articulate the process, apply tools independently, and refine the work based on reflection illustrated the development of a self-sustained acting practice. The student is not relying on external validation but instead engaging in an ongoing internal dialogue about choices and their effectiveness.

Across the broader body of student work, recurring themes of empathy, objective, and given circumstances suggested that students developed a strong sense of responsibility for their choices. They were no longer approaching acting as a performance of emotion but as an intentional and thoughtful process grounded in analysis and exploration. Ultimately, the integration of theory into practice created a learning framework that empowered students to take ownership of their artistic development. Through the consistent use of reflective practices and

acting tools, students developed the skills necessary to independently construct truthful performances, demonstrating both autonomy and a deeper commitment to their craft.

Intentional Performance Decision Making - Competence

The closer the connection to the units taught, the more engagement as intrinsic motivation was observed. Students consistently captured specific actionable scene objectives rather than purely imitating what they thought was an appropriate emotional condition of the character. Students are able to apply vocabulary and conceptual understanding independently as well as collaboratively. This suggests a growing sense of competence, as defined by self-determination theory. Students felt capable of meeting the demands of creating character and understanding what successful performance entails.

To identify and differentiate internal and external obstacles that require an actor's pursuit of character objectives is a key marker of competence in theatre practice. The students demonstrated this skill repeatedly. Naming fear, moral conflict, differences in approach, self-doubt, external barriers, social pressure, and environmental challenges. As far as character development for the students' exploration, it reflected not only comprehension but also deeper reflective thinking. This level of analysis indicated that the students were operating beyond surface level understanding.

This evidence spanned across a wide range of material. This included contemporary plays, monologues, and line readings of original and less familiar text. Despite the several given assignments that required the foundation of creating a character for believable performance, students consistently used the same analytical structure. This consisted of given circumstances, objectives, and obstacles, which demonstrated a transfer of learning. Students consistently

suggested that they have internalized theatrical tools and could competently apply them regardless of the material put forth. Within the classroom environment, this was a strong indicator of perceived and actual competence.

Intentional performance choices have been depicted through written text, actionable reflection, and given feedback. Teacher feedback embedded in the written work reflects beats, physicality, vocal variation, the moment before work, and emotional commitment. While the feedback itself was evaluative, it consistently suggested that learners were successfully translating these analytical performances into truthful, believable choices for character development, inevitably learning to deepen their perspectives. "Education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated" (Freire, 2000, p. 93). That is to say, if the traditional opposition between student and teacher disappears, good happens as they are both understanding the subject matter. If learning was a one way transfer of knowledge, the student would not simply be motivated to learn more. The competence in student learning comes when teacher and student relate to each other through shared focus. Education works better when teachers and students learn together by engaging with the subject itself. In this research, competence emerged through shared examination of character, text, and intention, not teacher correction. Students' willingness to take risks reflected trust in the learning process. This reinforced classroom culture.

The ability to connect conceptual understanding to physical and vocal interpretation to core theatrical skill is evidence alone that students were meeting and exceeding the performance expectations of the course. However, not just the expectations of performance are being met, but students were inevitably and inherently meeting the expectation of critical thinking.

I received a personal reflection from my cooperating teacher stating that I was “making high-level concepts accessible to them through art and conversation.” When I explored an activity where I had the students walk the room to observe how humans move, behave, and communicate in everyday life—I had them stop when I clapped and turn to talk to their nearest neighbor. The prompts included questions such as “What’s an odd noise you do not like?” “When is the last time you danced to a song with no one looking, or what do you do when you get information that you do not want?” I observed students thinking and exploring human behavior. This fed their comprehension of real understanding that we are all connected, that we all have a different perspective and explore life in different ways as we accomplish the same daily tasks.

From self-determination theory, competence supports intrinsic motivation when students experience success in challenging tasks. The high level of sophistication that was required of students when asked to respond to emotionally complex situations showed that students were willing to engage deeply with challenging material. This willingness showed that students are capable within this safe classroom culture, which reinforces engagement and effort not because of external rewards but because they are experiencing themselves as skilled and effective participants in the theatrical process.

The following is a student example of clear understanding and competence in the practice of identifying character subtext and comprehension of deeper analysis. It is representative rather than exceptional, which illustrates patterns of analysis consistently observed across assignments and discussions. The example is an alignment between analysis and how action influences perceptual decision making.

Advanced Theatre

Advanced Character Objective – Worksheet

Actor Name: [REDACTED]

Character Name: Mia gregory

Play / Scene / Monologue: The inexplicable

Chaos factor of Mia gregory

100% 

HUGE EMOTIONAL LIFE! I COULD FEEL WHAT YOU WERE GOING THROUGH. POWERFUL BEATS!! SO MUCH LIFE IN THE SILENCE!

1. Given Circumstances

(Who am I? Where am I? When is this happening? What is happening just before the scene begins? Why is this moment important?)

 I am Mia gregory, a normal high schooler. I am chaotic, excitable, friendly and high-spirited. I am quieter right now, because I am in pain. I am in the hospital right now, after my suicide attempt.

 This moment is kind of when it all clicks for me, and everything falls into place.

3. Scene Objective (super-objective = whole play)

What does my character want in THIS specific scene? (This should be active and specific.)

I'm seeing how everything comes together in my own life. I want to be OK and I want Liv to understand me and what is happening inside my head. I want her to see it too, and I want to be understood.

4. Obstacles

What is standing in the way of my character getting what they want?

Internal Obstacles (thoughts, fears, beliefs):

My pain, my struggle to verbalize things, self doubt.

External Obstacles (other characters, circumstances, environment):

Liv is super intelligent, but she struggles to understand me.

Analysis of this student's work, amongst others, indicated intentional theatre practices aligned with self-determination theory are seen through the student's competence. This student independently demonstrates the ability to identify clear objectives, analyze internal and external obstacles, and apply this understanding to a purposeful performance choice. This growing competence appeared to contribute to an increased awareness of collaborative efforts and engagement, as students willingly undertook the complex emotional and analytical challenges to perform truthful, believable characters within a safe classroom environment.

Indicators of competence:

- Consistent use of theatre specific analytical language
- Clear differentiation between internal and external obstacles
- Application of analysis across varied texts

- Evidence of purposeful performance choices

Evidence from student work:

- Students articulated active, scene specific objectives, rather than generalized emotions
- Students identified psychological, emotional, relational, and environmental challenges affecting character choices
- Analytical thoughts and ideas were applied consistently across material
- Written analysis aligned with observed performance feedback

Because ownership of intention is evident across the scene work, student growth was identified in motivation, obstacles, and performance choices. These competencies suggested SDT-aligned theatrical study and practices supported students' feelings of effectiveness and mastery, contributing to increased engagement and intrinsic motivation.

As students experienced themselves as competent decision makers within complex tasks of emotion and analytics, the motivation shifts from external peer and teacher validation to internal understanding, leading to long term education. Within the theatrical classroom, competence was not merely demonstrated but experienced, encapsulated, and shared.

Meaningful Collaboration - Relatedness

Meaningful collaboration was a consistent theme identified throughout the course of the research. Relatedness is especially apparent in collaboration and empathetic peer feedback that was assigned through an exit ticket after scene work. Students noticed each other's risk taking within class activities, creating emotional availability and responsiveness with their scene

partners. The students have asked curious, supportive questions about character choices and development.

The unit began with the concept of acting truthfully through play. With the introduction of Uta Hagen's nine questions—Who am I? What time is it? Where am I? What surrounds me? What are my given circumstances? What are my relationships? What do I want? What is in my way? And what do I do to get what I want? —the students began to build characters by critically thinking of character development. By working together to create truthful, believable characters through scene work that spoke to the audience, in this case the audience was the class of students, they were able to reenact, through exploratory work, a simple activity that happens in daily life. In order to do this, the students explored the above nine questions with an understanding of inner objective. In the classroom, I defined an inner objective as the inner voice that exists in the back of the head, the one that speaks to you as you are going through life. I explained this was happening as I was talking to them in that present moment. The students' assignment was to be aware of the inner object as they performed a simple daily activity from their real lives. This activity is an adaptation of Uta Hagen's Physical Destination exercise. I explained to the students that every day we may do the same task but think/behave differently about it. This impacts our physical, mental, and emotional selves. I gave the students an example: "Every day I brush my teeth, but is it always done at the same time in the same way with the same behavior around it?" The room was silent. The students were thinking, and as I let time stand still for 30 seconds, suddenly a hand went up. I called on the student, and she exclaimed, "No, what about the environment?" Another claimed, "No, what about what time it is?" "Yes!" I exclaimed. That is correct. All nine of Hagen's questions should be thought of and addressed as actors'. I observed the students' moments of discovery. Turning from curiosity and

wonder to ability and delight. Suddenly, they could relate to a character they could contrive all on their own, which prior was a simple idea. The students could observe each other under realistic, even genuinely personal, circumstances and relate to each other. At this stage in the semester, the students had been through all kinds of team building, trust exercises, and connection activities, which I intentionally used to form a safe classroom environment encouraging a sense of belonging. They have found comfort and respect for one another through various peer groupings in lessons. They now greet each other in the hallways and join one another for lunch.

The data for this paper showed that when students are given a voice and structure to express themselves truthfully and engage in meaningful collaboration, they engage more deeply in the work by taking artistic risks and demonstrating motivation through interest and growth indicators. The above example of Uta Hagen's Physical Destination exercise, in its recognition of interconnectedness amongst peers in the classroom, is supported by Oregon's Transformative SEL Framework and Standards. The significance of the following standard is used to affirm the positive social-emotional connection between the students in the classroom and the growth they have made throughout our time together. After all, the students come from varied homes, with different social statuses and cultural differences.

Standard 1: Self-Awareness & Identity

Standard 1: Identify and reflect upon one's thoughts, emotions, behaviors, intersectional identity, and capabilities across situations and environments.

Practice 1C: Reflect on and evaluate how one's emotions, thoughts, and perspectives (including values, biases, and prejudices) can influence behavior.

Growth Indicator 1C

Identify one's emotions, thoughts, perspectives, and	Infer causes of one's emotions, thoughts, perspectives, and	Assess consequences of behaviors based on one's emotions,	Analyze patterns of behavior based on one's emotions,
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behaviors.	behaviors.	thoughts, and perspectives.	thoughts, and perspectives over time.
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Given the text within the boxes of this framework of standards, I have assessed through observation and writing from student work such as the above students' inherent understanding as learners began with themselves. If the students could identify and analyze patterns based on emotions, thoughts, perspectives, and behaviors, they begin the growth pattern. That is why I began the unit with the modified physical destination exercise. Following, I had the class move on to experimenting through play and finally into scene work.

In the classroom environment, through collaboration, there has been a mixture of finding emotional truth and relational engagement as to student performance and development. Learners consistently demonstrated the development of emotional truth and risk taking in performance. Of course, challenges still existed. These challenges take the form of physical, vocal, and technical implementation of acting. Along with truth and engagement come skills that take years to develop.

After the collaborative scenes were performed, I asked the students to complete an exit ticket, which gave them an opportunity to reflect. Through self & peer evaluations, I asked the students to evaluate themselves as an assessment and have their scene partner give them feedback as to what they noticed and what they wondered about, a question, a suggestion, or an idea for growth. See the following example.

SELF-PEER REFLECTION
Advanced Theatre

100% GOOD WORK!

Name: [REDACTED] I encourage you to continue exploring every role with intention & curiosity. Each character represents a complete human experience.

Exit Ticket—Self & Peer Evaluation

Self Assessment (You complete this section)
(Rate yourself in each area with an X) IT IS THE GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES THAT SHAPE HOW THE ENERGY IS

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Clear Objective		EXHIBITED	✓	✓
Truthful Behavior			✓	✓
Emotional Shift			✓	✓
Collaboration				✓

One strength I noticed in my work:
memorizing and overall setting tone

One thing I want to keep working on:
ACCENT + I can help you w/ this.

Peer Feedback (Your partner completes this section)

I noticed
(something the performer did truthfully, clearly, boldly or with risk)
lots of energy & projection. VAWABLE STRENGTHS
Able to change/adjust to show IN PERFORMANCE WORK!

I wonder ...
(A question, suggestion, or idea for growth)
Would you be interested in playing a sex loving character?
Exploring a wide range of character types will continue to expand your versatility as an actor.

Here you'll see a student has rated themselves advanced in clear objectivity and collaboration and proficient in truthful behavior and emotional shifts with scene work. This exit ticket identified evidence of interconnectedness as demonstrated by meaningful collaboration in regard to relatedness. Relatedness referred to feelings of connection, belonging, and responsiveness to others. In this context, relatedness was evident when students reflected on the scene partner's emotions or actions. They described a connection or shared emotional experience and offered constructive and respectful peer feedback. Through careful study, I have found students frequently express strengths connected to authentic emotion. They have developed a true connection with scene partners. Students' willingness to take risks and show commitment to character development is essential to the development of an actor.

Summary Data Chart: Evidence of Relatedness

Relatedness Indicator	Description	Student Evidence
Scene Partner connection	Students note emotional connection with partner.	"To connect with my scene partner." - "Our emotional connection was really good."

		- “Big, sincere energy.” - "Her emotional shifts from moment to moment were excellent."
Responsiveness	Students notice adapting behavior in response to others	“Able to change/adapt to story”—"Not freaking out so much." - “Physical portrayal of character.”
Empathetic Peer Feedback	Peers acknowledge emotional risk, effort, and/or vulnerability	“Fearless . . . you threw yourself into working with a new partner. - “The shift in emotion, where he became angry was very good and believable.” - “She did great at making things natural and is good with emotion work.”
Collaborative Awareness	Students identify with collaboration as a strength	Collaboration was marked as proficient/advanced repeatedly. - “Good teamwork!” “It was very charged and fun to watch!” - “Being in the moment together.”
Depth in Character	Students recognize depth and shared humanity in characters	Showing her character isn’t just closed off . . . she’s human too.” - “Facial expressions and tone!”
Invitations to grow together	Peers pose reflective questions rather than judgments	“What were you thinking or imagining during the pause after our fight?” - “Was it hard to use the accent sometimes, inflections, etc.?” - “What would it feel like if you trusted yourself?”

A scene partner's emotional connection is very important in the theatre. At times, unnerving, as the actors must be vulnerable and transparent in their exploratory work, and then to be able to take that to the stage can be terrifying. But with a real connection and ability to sense,

understand, and respond to one another through relating, listening, and knowing you belong, interpersonal safety begins to take effect.

Mutual responsiveness in performance signals relatedness. The students may look at the performance as co-created rather than individual. Together as a group, they have formed strong bonding relationships founded on trust. This creates a sense of power. To perform with empathy, risk-taking, and psychological safety, an actor/student must have some semblance of validation of the vulnerability, which reinforces safety and trust within the collaborative group. The data showed a classroom culture where students matter to one another, which is a core foundation for a sense of relatedness through self-determination theory. If students feel as if they matter and are encouraged to be who they are, data shows their inner core value goes up, and so does the motivation factor within the classroom.

Standard 3: Social-Awareness & Belonging

Standard 3: Develop social awareness that fosters a sense of belonging and leads to co-constructing equitable, thriving communities and a vibrant society.

Practice 3A: Demonstrate awareness and understanding of the similarities and differences that define, influence, and affirm personal and collective identities.

Growth Indicators 3A

Recognize and identify factors that define and influence personal and collective identities.	Distinguish between similarities and differences that define and influence personal and collective identities.	Formulate and assess strategies used to affirm personal and collective identities.	Analyze and critique why factors influence personal and collective identities.
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This standard taken from Oregon's Transformative Social and Emotional Learning Standards shows the evidence of growth from Standard 1 to Growth Indicators Standard 3. I use this growth indicator to confirm the data within my findings. My core findings adhere to relatedness

through meaningful collaboration, which encourages an understanding of one another, emotional risk taking and engagement. I have found that students engage more deeply with structure, which helps them express themselves truthfully in collaboration with peers.

To break that engagement down into concrete actions, I have identified emotions, thoughts, and behaviors and causes thereof while assessing patterns over time. Through exit tickets, peer feedback, and scene observations, I can claim what I saw was evidence of developmental growth by all, not just specific moments of discovery but progression in learning. In tracking developmental movement of growth over time, I began with self-awareness, reflection of inner objectives, daily activities, and emotional recognition. Through exit tickets and self-assessments I have reflected on how emotions and thoughts influence behavior, which applied to awareness within relationships. This all moved the learner to empathy and mutual trust, moving towards social awareness and a sense of belonging. These growth indicators proved my findings because they confirmed what I observed reflected a developmental trajectory, not just an outcome of fun activities, because my students were not just experiencing artistic choices but expanding their educational reality. This was because they were reflecting on emotional states and adjusting their behavior based on responses to others. Students were naming their emotional shifts and intentions and asking reflective, nonjudgmental questions. This means students are reflecting motivation in their collaborative scene work, functioning as a way of social-emotional learning.

Triangulation for my data included multiple sources of study; observation, student self-reflection, peer feedback, and performance behavior. These behaviors aligned with standard growth of student motivation in the classroom, as I have strengthened my findings by confirming

consistency across autonomy, competence, and relatedness of self determination theory by what students did, what they said, and what I observed.

I began with the study of inner objective as a means to discover self-awareness. This included my observations through self-reflections, through real lived experiences, where students were able to identify similarities and differences amongst each other. The above growth indicators confirmed my framework of pedagogy with the foresight that in understanding others, one must begin with understanding the self. "Children need to be given a sense of the unique capacity of human beings to shape and create reality in accordance with conscious purposes and plans" (Boggs, 2012, p. 137). Here, Grace Boggs reminds us that if students are given the opportunity to become self-aware and feel that success as they consciously make purposeful choices.

The alignment between student behaviors and the mentioned growth indicators informed me the observed collaboration was indicative of measurable social-emotional growth and development. This progressed, from self-awareness to social awareness, inevitably reflecting movement toward engagement in classroom activities, resulting in student motivation for learning.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Limitations & Conclusion

Discussion

Theatre based education and self-determination theory aligned, as evidenced by schoolwork data. Through autonomy, competence, and relatedness, student motivation was driven toward improvement and student centered and collaborative learning. Through group discussions, interactive activities, critical thinking exercises, and performance driven art, students showed

engagement and empathy, and together we have created a safe space where all felt they belonged.

To think critically about learning through connection and belonging as opposed to individual practice from text to paper and then testing for memory is different than exposing the learner to total physical response by doing. This doing is referenced by Liu, Wei, and Yao in their article *Research on Multicultural Drama Education Based on Self-determination Theory: A Case Study of Hamlet*, which is referred to in Chapter 2 of this paper. “Rousseau once advocated learning through dramatic practice, and Dewey proposed the educational philosophy of learning by doing” (Liu et al., 2024, 161). With this innovative teaching method, students were stimulated with the initiative of creativity in learning. I’ve found through study and practice time to sit and think and then to respond as a collective with feedback has proved to be a technique which generated relatedness through learning.

As an educator, it was important to be aware of one’s self. For example, if I am asked my students to believe in their own autonomy, which meant to understand and recognize their own strength and motivation to go after their goals, I better have been aware and understood my own autonomy. Deci and Ryan highlighted “autonomy awareness fosters the intrinsic motivation necessary for intentional and goal-directed behavior and is a fundamental prerequisite for self-determination” (Mohiyeddini, 2024, p. 3). After all, if I was determined to be a good, informative, effective teacher, I needed to know how to be engaging. To be engaging was to be aware of the self. Students in my classroom seemed to learn best when they felt choice, ownership, and determination. By offering choice in tasks, roles, and goals, I am persuaded the students to critically think for themselves. Rather than always giving directives, I asked reflective questions. This increased intrinsic motivation, persistence, and well-being amongst the

students in class. Frederick Guay states in the Canadian Journal of School Psychology, “an impressive number of SDT-based intervention programs have emerged in recent years, and the research has demonstrated their overall effectiveness in helping students to develop more autonomous school motivation” (Guay, 2022, p. 85). Furthermore, interventions to promote autonomy are shown to be effective across grade levels and people with disabilities. This showed itself to be true in my own work with and amongst the students. Self-determination theory allowed educators to meet the diverse needs of students, which helped call an end to the oppression of some students' differences in learning.

Throughout this research I have had the opportunity to work with learners in real time. I have observed human growth and examined difficult situations and proposed a solution. I have talked with my students, not at them. I was pleased to be visited and honored to spend time with other students on lunch breaks. I say all of this because connection through collaboration showed student growth and learning can happen with student-centered teaching practices. Through competence building instruction, students should feel capable and effective in their learning. In scaffolded learning, structured skill-building and feedback activities that emphasize progress with performance based learning. I have encouraged students to be the best they can be. To fail, try again, and fail again as a moment of discovery in their progress of learning, which built self-efficacy. In drama pedagogy, as Nanda and Susanto suggest, teachers should identify student mistakes and then guide the improvement. This aligns with my pedagogy, as I feel making mistakes are a revelation of discovery. To guide the students to take risks in the theatre is to instill critical thinking. This all leads to learning through competence. If the student is competent to critically think about how to improve, the more resilient they become.

My pedagogical theories enhanced my practice as an educator. Student written work, intentional observations, interviews, collaboration with peers and guided performance practices have led to further thinking on the matter of self-determination theory as a motivator in the theatrical classroom.

Limitations

Theoretical limitations of psychology and its determination of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of self-determination theory exist here within this paper. While my focus has primarily been on autonomy, competence, and relatedness, these are not the only foundations of psychology that SDT adheres to. For example, personality and well-being also are represented when adhering to SDT. Linking motivation to psychological health by way of support for mental health and resilience has not been approached within this study. Theatre practices alone help students to engage with their inner selves. The constant question of "Who am I?" is an ongoing thought in the study of theatre. To examine oneself gives the opportunity to engage with the deeper self, allowing a sense of human understanding from within. When a person begins to understand themselves, acceptance takes place, and therefore motivation occurs; value and confidence occur, improving one's mental health. This study lacks the contribution to mental health improvement possibilities that can be lent from SDT in the theatrical classroom.

While I've had the privilege of working with high school students these past few years, my deliberate and critical engagement with teaching has only developed in the past year. This recent shift in perspective presents a limitation in my study, as it means my approach to teaching and assessment strategies is still forming. With a longer period of intentional reflection and implementation, I would have been positioned to conduct and gather more comprehensive data on student learning outcomes. I have worked with many groups of students over time, although

my study involves one group. If I had more time with this particular group of students, it may have led to a more meaningful assessment of growth, consistency, and long-term impact of comprehension, alongside lifelong skills. The limited duration of time dedicated to focused inquiry affected the depth and reliance of my research findings. Therefore, the study should continue to grow and highlight the importance of practice and research with ongoing critical evaluation for theatre arts, SDT, and educational research.

Most of my students took this course because they genuinely wanted to be in a class studying the topic of theatre, as an elective. This had its practical limitations for the purpose of this research paper, in which I rarely experienced behavioral issues because of this particular group. In order to get a full perspective on how the intentional use of self-determination theory, aligned with theatre practices in the classroom, affected students' engagement and intrinsic motivation, I, as a researcher, would need a younger, less engaged group to begin with. This would have given me an alternative perspective as the researcher, offering more insight.

Conclusion

As SDT advances in the education system, quantitative studies have identified general principles that are both reliable and predictive. I have done my best to provide an inspirational environment for learning through the practice of careful research and study. This paper provides a framework for understanding and enhancing motivation within the theatre classroom. By intentionally cultivating an environment to support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, teachers can nurture students' intrinsic motivation, capturing deeper engagement in the educational process of learning. From my personal experience and pedagogical research, this work highlights how intentional thoughtful instruction, peer collaboration, and student-centered

approaches creates a sense of belonging. Ultimately, the integration of SDT into the theatrical classroom encourages engagement and belonging. In addition, it also adheres to the artistic need for expression and empowers students to feel confident, proud and goal-oriented individuals.

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