Exploring Moral Values with Young Adolescents Through Process Drama

Marie Gervais
University of Alberta, Canada

Abstract

The connection between drama and moral education in young adolescence has not been widely researched. This study examines the role of process drama. In this study process drama is defined as educational drama for awareness and conflict resolution through the creation of a dramatic collective exploring the moral values of junior high school age students. Students examined their values through themes of family, friendship, and other issues of personal importance. When dramatic cognitive dissonance was followed by group discussion and reflection, students' awareness of their values articulation processes was heightened and their interpersonal problem solving skills improved. The ensuing group ethos that developed was characterized by caring, respect, and mutual commitment. This study suggests that dramatic engagement focusing on personal story can be a significant moral education tool for junior high students.

Please don't judge me by my face
By my religion or by my race
Please don't laugh at what I wear
How I look or do my hair

Please look a little deeper
Way down deep inside
Although you may not see it,
I have a lot to hide

Behind my clothes
the secrets lie
behind my smile
I softly cry

Please look a little deeper
And maybe you will see
What's inside of me
Is what's inside of you.

(From Shawna)

Shawna was 13 when she wrote this poem, sitting in the drama room of her junior high school in small town Alberta, Canada. Stage lights had been dimmed and she sat, engrossed in thought while her drama research friends put their own thoughts to paper. Sprawled around the room, the sound track from the play they had been creating playing softly in the background, it seemed as though time had stopped and nothing mattered but the turning inwards of young hearts and minds. All were engaged in scribing a personal response to the moving dramatic scene about teen suicide they had finalized only moments ago. Their scene was based on actual comments of friends from another school to a young boy who had recently committed suicide.

The realization that everyday actions and comments to friends could lead a peer to take his or her own life hung heavily in the air. I took the moment after the scene had taken shape to debrief the group of 19 young adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15. We had seen the dialogue many times, considered what would be most effective, added the sound effects, lights, visuals and music; this time it felt absolutely real:

Tori:	I'm thinking I'll just kill myself.
Jewels:	Good one! Nice joke!
Sean:	You're full of surprises.
Jewels:	You don't have the guts to kill yourself.

Sean:	And besides…who would miss you?
	(Tori looks stunned. She walks past them without commenting.)
Sean:	Hey, can't you take a joke?

Silence. Heads down, eyes filled with tears. Heavy hearts as they remember. "So what do you think about all this? Let's take some time to find a space in the room and write a poem or a letter – anything that helps you describe how you feel. We'll work in silence so everyone can really tune into what is inside for a bit. Don't worry about refining it – just write what comes to mind."

Unfolding of Drama Moral Education Research –
Description and Background

The above description is part of a four month drama research project I initiated to encourage young adolescents to examine, question, articulate, reflect, role play, brainstorm, and problem solve interpersonal relationship issues in terms of moral values. The focus of the project was to enable young teens to identify their values, dramatize values situations from their lives and ask themselves if there was congruence between what they said and what they did. I had taught drama, language arts, French, music, and social studies in their elementary/junior high public school for seven years and spent part of each year building what is known as a "collective" – where students engaged in dramatic exploration of an issue such as stereotyping of youth, racism and child slavery – to create their own play. Moral issues often came up in class and students were hungry to discuss them. It was my hunch that the objectification of learning as outside one's self and collective context was largely responsible for the apathy many of my young adolescent students demonstrated towards school. In the words of Holbrook (1987):

> Knowing is thus bound up with the whole existence of the human being. Moreover, knowledge is inevitably bound up with questions of value and meaning (p. 37)…The inner life of man, his cultural dimension, his creative power, his intentionality, his pre-occupation with the meaning of his life and with values, may be missing altogether from the syllabus as fit areas of study. (p. 55)

As an educator, I am committed to facilitating the process and developing the skills people need to learn to live together (Delors, 1996). Having observed how much our world of violence and hopelessness affects young people and within the curricular constraints in which I was bound to operate, I devoted much time and attention to empowering my students to consider their thoughts and actions in the context of the *quality* of interpersonal interactions.

> They [teachers] must favor character and conduct above the sciences and arts. Good behavior and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be

> trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy
> when it is coupled with ethical conduct and a virtuous character; otherwise it is a
> deadly poison, a frightful danger. ('Abdú'l-Baha, 1995, p. 7)

In the race for technological prowess it can become almost normal to separate one's actions from the effects of those actions. Even so we are human beings who must face each other and thoughtfully consider the terrible power of our freedom in the context of our immense responsibility towards each other and our planet. In this context, interpersonal interactions that are "healthy, sustainable, and promote human learning and the unfolding of human potential" (Bopp & Bopp, 2002, p. 15), constitute in my mind a definition for moral community which takes into account contextual factors such as culture, temperament and gender. Drama educator Joe Winston explains that there are often gray areas in moral education and very few pat answers. There are however, "better and worse ways of living" (Winston, 1998, p.118).

In moral education through drama virtues and principles are associated with emotions situated in the body. Through engaging physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual capacities simultaneously in a specific situational and cultural context, we attach moral learning to memory, thus initiating children into moral experience (Winston, 1998).

> All educators attempt to shape the world; theorists should call attention to the tools
> used for the shaping in order that the world being shaped can be more beautiful and
> just. (Huebner, 1975, p. 269)

In this research, I made it my educational desire to shape the world explicit to my research participants.

Moral Development and Young Adolescents

The young adolescent, characterized by inner confusion, requires tools to question, analyze, and re-frame moral habits in the context of much new information and a host of temptations (Feldman, 2001, pp. 502-505; Harre & Lamb, 1983, p. 8.). The youth engaged in moral education, needs to anchor his or her conceptual framework to past experience and present emotions in order for that learning to be validated and for the previously externally motivated behavior to become internalized and sensitive to situation, time, place, and location (Caine & Caine, 1997, pp. 104-115).

Heightened social interaction through drama provides a social context within which to observe the possible effects of one's own actions and that of others through the buffer of drama – the imaginary social context (Needlands, 2004; Rohd, 1998; Wagner, 1976). It becomes difficult to ignore the quality of interaction with others when my own story enacted before me by my peers demonstrates incongruity between what I say and what I do. The resulting condition of cognitive dissonance is too uncomfortable to sustain, and the

tendency is either to justify my actions to align them in fictional harmony with my beliefs or to change my behavior in light of my heightened awareness of how that behavior harms or benefits myself and others (Moshman, 2004; Leshowitz, DiCerbo, & Symington, 1999; Kavanagh, 1990). Although I hoped my study would result in the latter, I realized that as relationships form in an educational setting, students say and do what they think will please their teachers, irrespective of their beliefs and/or intentions to carry their classroom words and actions into their daily lives (Winston, 1999).

The connection between drama and moral education for young adolescents has not been widely researched. There are numerous studies in the use of drama to promote creativity, problem solving, improvement of language arts test scores, increase reading comprehension and the integration of at-risk-students into society (Wilhelm & Edmiston, 1998; Berghammer, 1991; Booth, 1994; Danielson, 1992; Fransen, 1991; Frey, Hischstein & Guzzo, 2000; Rike & Wilkinson, 1990; Sweeney, 1992). Several studies used drama with a troupe of professional actors who presented scenes in schools of elementary or junior high students to encourage critical thinking or to engage reflection on personal values (Wagner, 1999). Berghammer's (1985) summary of the TIE (Theatre in Education) programs in England and the United States illustrates this approach. Two Canadian example of a drama-based, moral education study, are the work of Kelch (1992), which used role play, writing and observation to assess 14 Grade 11 students' understanding of humanistic values as experienced in three scripts and the Basourakos (1999) study which engaged high school students in moral reasoning following observation of live theatre performances.

The Role of Drama in Moral Education

> Only a person capable of autonomy is fit to take up the call to responsibility. Without the cultivation of autonomy, teaching social and moral responsiblility may well turn out to be no better than yet another measure of social conformity. (Bai, 2002, p. 1)

How is it possible for an educator to awaken a young person's inner desire to do and be "good"? Under what circumstances can the quality of relationships with others become as important as personal concerns in young adolescents? Can kindness become a natural and usual response? What is the role of drama in moral autonomy? Drama educator, Gavin Bolton (1981), referring to drama for promoting virtuous behavior in children, states that:

> One cannot teach concentration, trust, …patience, tolerance…social concern…one can only hope that education brings them about over a long term…the achievement of these admirable qualities is not intrinsic to drama; it is an important by-product of the dramatic experience. (p. 186)

Bolton further explains that in educational drama the student has an active identification with the fictional context in addition to experiencing greater awareness of his/her own personal identification (pp. 182-183).

Drama provides the opportunity to explore life situations in a non-threatening context through the intermediary of make believe. The resulting affective response allows specific learning to pass to the concept level and possibly be integrated into other life experiences over time (Wagner, 1976, pp. 214-217).

> Educational drama is profoundly effective in helping students create meaning and deepen their understanding of any subject. It provides a way for them to project themselves into the adult activities of their culture and rehearse their future roles and values. (Wagner, 1998, p. 33)

It is important to note that process drama values exploration takes a variety of forms dependent upon the age and developmental level of the child. By way of example, Winston's (1998) work with young elementary school aged children used fables to promote the aims of moral education through drama. Edmiston's (2000) work with older elementary children employed process drama with events from history to promote tolerance and understanding. Wagner (1999) cites a large number of studies using drama that intended to change attitudes towards target groups such as the elderly, the disabled or various racial groups. Although some studies showed negligible or insignificant change, the majority showed gains in a number of areas related to moral reasoning. For example, Fischer and Garrison (as cited in Wagner, 1999, p. 144) found that relationships among third grade children improved significantly after role play, group discussion and role training with regard to cooperation and communication, and inclusion of those who had previously been rejected or excluded. Wagner describes at length an interesting example of the influence of drama on adolescents diagnosed as severely socially and emotionally handicapped (Batchelor, 1981, in Wagner p. 145-146). Nine students previously described as rebellious, indifferent to commitment and cooperation, from abusive, poverty stricken and crime ridden backgrounds became helpful, caring, and committed after six months of drama. Although Wagner is quick to assert that change of attitude and behavior cannot be considered permanent, the follow-up demonstrated a number of tangible results: students attended other classes regularly with improved attitude, volunteered to help orient new students to the school, applied for and were accepted into acting camps and finally were described by their teachers as "sufficiently socialized to be accepted as regular students in other high schools" (p. 146). Although inconclusive, these findings are highly encouraging.

Young adolescents are ready to use their own lives as a springboard for values exploration because they can articulate their thought processes and make values decisions with a clear understanding of the borders of right and wrong. Edmiston (1998) explains the power for moral thought in drama comes from the simulation of possible moral acts:

Not only can students engage in *talk* about action—moral reasoning about what they *might* do if they were people in particular circumstances—in drama students take action and in imagination *do* that which in discussion they might only sketchily contemplate. (p. 59).

In summary, drama engages emotion, thought, and the body within a social context that is conducive to moral questioning because the quality of interpersonal relationships comes into play. It is with this premise that I began my research as a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta.

Research Design

The vehicle for my research was collective engagement of young adolescents in their personal stories. I informed participants that we would be embarking on a journey of exploration of their own values and the processes they went through in making values decisions. The combination of clear intent, a sense of cherishing of the participants and openness to their discoveries, flexibility of method, and embodied engagement of the personal within the collective context are perhaps the most telling underpinnings of the methodology of this project. Foundational to the methodology was a deep respect for participants, their learning processes, and mutal fostering of respect within the group. Without that kind of assurance of personal safety, values exploration could not have taken place, since mutual trust is the foundation upon which interpersonal rapport and ultimately qualitative research must build (Nicholson, 2002). An atmosphere of trust however, does not guarantee lack of conflict:

…trust alters power relations. In relation to drama education, a productive and creative environment built on an ethic of care does not mean that there will be agreement between participants; on the contrary, a political theory of trust acknowledges that a caring environment may create a robust environment in which debate, dissent, generosity and artistic experimentation might be encouraged and valued. (Nicholson, 2002, p. 90)

Research Questions
Inquiry was guided by the following questions:
1. What processes do young adolescents experience as they make values decisions in their lives?
2. Can they articulate this process?
3. What drama tools can enable young adolescents to both engage in articulating their values and make values decisions?

From my previous teaching experience I knew this research context would be appealing to adolescent participants if it were "hands-on" and resulted in a tangible product mirroring their inner processes. Although process drama parameters generally exclude a final performance or written script, participants would not likely have consented to commit to the research without those performance characteristics. Even though the performance constituted only a quarter of the research time period and was not preeminent during the exploration process, I have been criticized for this aberration of process drama methodology. In support of my decision, Hughes and Wilson (2004) in their analysis of the tangible effects of youth theatre on young people's personal and social development, found that 80% of teens who committed to youth theatre did so with performance as a direct reason. Researchers were clearly surprised by this finding and made adjustments to their research design in response:

> The overwhelming focus on performance and acting in young people's responses to this question necessitated further investigation…The emphasis on performance led to looking beyond social science and psychology discourses to performance theory when drawing on theoretical frameworks that could help explain and interpret the research findings. (p. 67)

Additionally, Courtney's (1999) analysis of the efficacy of drama teaching methods used between 1919 and 1985, found that although individual proponents of various methods were convinced that their particular methodology was more effective than others, there was no difference in terms of research findings.

With these considerations in mind, my research design was bound by the following rationale:

1) I chose qualitative research because I wanted to deepen my understanding of both the individual and the collective factors influencing the values premises and choices of adolescents. In the words of Rossman and Rallis (1998):

> Qualitative researchers seek answers to their questions in the real world. . . . They do their research in natural settings . . . become part of the process, continually making choices, testing assumptions, and reshaping their questions. As the inquiry process grows from curiosity or wonder to understanding and knowledge building, the researcher is often transformed. In many cases, the participants are also changed. (p. 5)

Qualitative research is contextual and dependent upon "processes, relationships, settings and situations, systems and people" (Peshkin, 1993, p. 24), which is also typical of drama work.

2)   Within the qualitative research field, I narrowed my design to case study, focusing on one group of young adolescents within a specific context. Since I was questioning my

own ideas about moral processes in adolescents, I was the primary data collection instrument and my professional understandings of both drama and moral development of youth were critical to the study. Case study is useful in situations where "understanding is sought to improve practice" (Ellis, 1998, p. 2).

3) The context of drama for exploration of values framed my study as arts-based, insofar as the arts, specifically drama (Norris, 2000), were employed to gather data, analyze it and disseminate it while maintaining both a high academic and artistic standard (Diamond & Mullen, 1999).

4) Drama research was then narrowed further to concentrate specifically on process drama. The role of process drama, loosely defined as educational drama for community building, social awareness, and conflict resolution was used with young adolescents to explore their own values and to collaboratively create a dramatic collective expressing those findings (Rohd, 1998; Neelands, 1990).

5) A dramatic collective is the culminating result of the most evocative improvisation work of participants woven into a performance and a script with unifying themes. Both the performance and the script became concrete applications of arts-based research for data analysis and data presentation. Additionally they provided closure and a sense of pride for participants.

The research for this project can thus be described as a qualitative, arts-based case study focusing on process drama as a tool to identify young adolescent values strategies. Note that this study was a *collective* qualitative research project. Study of group interactions as pertinent to understanding moral processes between people in context was the focus of this particular research. It was not a study of several individual cases and their personal journeys, rather it was the story of a journey of individuals towards moral community.

To further narrow the general topic of values, three themes that are particularly pertinent to young adolescents were thematically addressed: *friendship, family,* and *student initiated issues.* These themes were chosen based on my experience teaching young adolescents and proved to be evocative of highly charged issues.

Definitions

Values

For the purposes of this study, "values" denote whatever is important to an individual and/or a group. Values can range in importance from chocolate to world peace and are in a constant state of flux as one grows and develops. Values can be in conflict and may unconsciously affect behavior both positively and negatively. In this study, I was concerned about uncovering the *moral* values of young adolescents and in bringing to

conscious articulation, the conflicts in values assumptions that influence their efforts towards making healthy decisions.

Belief

Underlying most clusters of personal values are complex networks of belief systems ranging from how one should treat public property to how to respond in social settings to religious convictions. Belief systems were not directly the focus of this study although their influence did shape the outcomes of decisions made in role and were occasionally articulated by individual participants during group discussions on values.

Attitude

Attitudes arise from understanding and experience about the world combined with one's sense of self within social contexts. Participants in this study possessed a variety of attitudes about school, life and their own sense of agency. Within the group a number of positive attitudes emerged through the research and will be highlighted as they are perceived to be pertinent to the values exploration project. These attitudes were often expressed by participants in terms of virtues such as courage, open mindedness, and loyalty to friends.

Identity

Moshman (2004) writes: "To have an identity is to have an explicit theory whereby I construe myself as a person…it means to construe myself as a rational agent – as a being that acts on the basis of beliefs and values of my own" (p. 86). In this study, it is assumed that participants in early adolescence were just beginning to be conscious of identity, whereas their beliefs and values have been forming since infancy (Nucci, 2004). Given this assumption, is interesting to note that identity constructs were verbalized by participants towards the end of the study. Identity has multiple attachment points, sustains conflicting principles and desires, and is in the process of becoming rather than established and fixed (Bhabha, 1996; Gervais, 2004; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Griffith, Labercane & Paul, 2004; Jacobs, 2004). Some identity attachments that became obvious as the study unfolded were gender, social class, family style, youth subculture, religion and self as moral.

Moral Identity

"To have a moral identity is to have an explicit theory of yourself as a moral agent - …who is committed to acting on the basis of respect and/or concern for the rights and welfare of others" (Moshman, 2004, p. 89). In Moshman's article, a number of studies were cited as evidence that most people have a moral identity and see themselves as acting in ways that are responsive to others, even if their moral reasoning clearly shows that their actions are in fact inflicting harm. To see oneself as moral appears to be, in most circumstances, an important construct in self concept. This concept became observable in participants as the research unfolded.

Interpersonal Education

The term interpersonal education has been used to cluster processes and skills of social development such as making and keeping friends, following rules and resolving conflicts. It is the premise of this paper that all interpersonal relations are dependent upon

values, attitudes, beliefs and identity constructs that are foundationally moral. Social development cannot be divorced from how the self, embedded in social context, makes better or worse decisions that help or harm interpersonal relations. "Good" interpersonal relations will be inherently fraught with moral underpinnings just as "bad" interpersonal relations will highlight questions of our moral responsibilities towards each other that have to be answered if we are to create a just society.

Foundations for Values Exploration

It may be helpful to clarify my assumptions regarding the term "values exploration". Gilligan (1979) identified the tendency of male programs of moral education as linear, rights-based, separated from body and divorced from interpersonal and societal context. Morality as the quality of interaction between people, and between people and their environments, developed from Gilligan's seminal work into Nodding's oft cited ethic of care (1984). Noddings measured human interactions in terms of how they reflected underlying attitudes of care, which can be generalized as the dominant feminist perspective in moral education. Tappan (1991) unites the positions of justice and care by showing that there are elements of reasonable decision making based on principles of equity/justice *and* relational considerations based on care in all moral actions. People move back and forth between the two moral voices in an ongoing dialogue, which has as its motivation what Kristeva (1991) calls the "quest for shareable meaning". My position within the framework of this project, is that of the shareable meaning of Kristeva.

Project Methods

Forty young adolescent students going into grades 7, 8, and 9 at "Murphy Heights" School, were approached individually in May and June of 2000 to request their participation in this project. Twenty-six students participated in an introductory meeting to explain the project, signed and agreement to participate and had their parents sign consent forms. As their former drama teacher, I had previously taught all these students and they were known to me. I selected students on the basis of past interest in drama and reliability in an attempt to insure continued participation in the project throughout its duration.[1]

The school ethnic and religious portrait was 80% Caucasian with some representation from First Nations, Asian, East Indian, African-Canadian and Arab students

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[1] This selection process could be criticized for lack of a larger sample. To be sure, a wider sampling of participants to include more resistant students may have significantly changed outcomes and findings. However, the difficulty of recruiting participants from a group who are not interested in drama and would not stay the duration of the project would have proven too much of a deterrent. There was significant enough variety in ages, personalities and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure a diverse mixture. Participants were not necessarily well-behaved or compliant, neither were they in the top academic group of the school

who were first or second generation immigrants to the rural area. Predominant religious affiliation was Protestant Christianity and agnosticism with several Muslim and Jewish families.

All students who agreed to participate in the project were accepted. 19 participants contributed to the script and performed for their peers and parents at the close of the project. Of the 19 participants, only 4 were male and over half were in grade 9 and in their final year at this school. The predominance of females in this study is an important factor and has been identified by Hatton (2003), as a world-wide phenomenon in youth drama around the world. Although gender was not the focus of this study, it is likely that the rapid development of an ethic of care in the group is a result of the high female to male ratio.

Administration and Confidentiality

In June 2000, the principal of "Murphy Heights" School approved the drama research project and gave his permission for use of the drama room and its contents every Thursday from 3:30-5:30 p.m. He also agreed to transport the junior high student population of his school to "Edge Theatre" on the day of the performance. Participants agreed to perform their collective play for parents and friends at an evening show. Following the performances, participants discussed their experience and its effects on their lives.

Confidentiality and anonymity in research were carefully addressed. I explained that anything that goes on in the dramatic process is confidential to the group and should not be talked about outside of our time together if it involved revealing private aspects of the participants' lives. Participants were also told that they should not reveal to the group anything that they felt was too personal or private to be used in our collective play. Pseudonyms chosen by participants replaced real names in all documentation.

Data collection tools

Data collection tools consisted of: private interviews, audio recorded group discussion, video recording of improvised scenes, rehearsal procedures that generated both conflict and conflict resolution, researcher reflections and notes, photographs and reflective writing, a final script, and a performance video. I began data collection prior to drama rehearsals with private interviews consisting of formal, open-ended questions based on the general themes of "family", "friends" and "issues of concern to me" (See: Appendix A). Each participant answered audio-recorded interview questions, which I transcribed. Interview comments, dramatic work, and researcher perceptions were triangulated in order to develop a basis for emergence of themes during analysis. Initial interviews tended to focus on individual concerns and judgments about how family and friends should act. Reference to issues showed concern about the environment and racism most strongly, but with vague understandings about causes. Final interview comments focused on sense of community and safety to explore issues, tended to be more understanding of the complexities of interpersonal relations, had stronger references to moral concepts and showed a more

mature understanding of both the responsibility of self towards others and of self complicity in problem creation and problem solving.

I tape recorded and transcribed all group discussions and video taped the improvised scenes. Participants viewed clips from the rehearsal process prior to finalization of the performance script and chose scenes based on what had the most impact for them. I kept extensive researcher notes and wrote my reflections about each rehearsal.

From the shared experience of participant life stories we looked for evidence of most frequently stated adolescent values and then "put them to the test" by seeing how consistently those values held up in a variety of lived contexts. I looked for increased awareness of moral values both as it was made visible through drama and as it was demonstrated in participant interactions with each other. At every rehearsal we reviewed what values had been revealed and listened to participants thoughts on their process from the previous week. At three separate intervals, we also engaged in reflective writing about participant values from which emerged a number of statements and poems, such as the one cited at the beginning of this article.

The performance was videotaped and used as another data tool. Needless to say, the performance for peers, teachers and family was charged with anxiety. Student participants felt very vulnerable and were worried about the effect their candid portrayals would have on their lives later on. The tremendous courage, depth of thought and quest for authenticity they demonstrated through those two performances was very evocative.

We finished the project a week later with a pizza party, performance videos, professionally printed copies of the script, a project scrapbook and a closure discussion about the significance of the project for the group and its impact on their family and friends. Final individual interviews took place the following week (See: Appendix B).

Theme Exploration Processes

Family and friends exploration

The research process began with participants working with personal stories of family and friendship. These stories were played out with variations as participants observing a particular scene would voluntarily take the place of a given character to clarify a problem or raise the stakes for tensions they were trying to portray. Changes to stories were discussed as a group following either a number of dramatic variations or after a given variation elicited a strong reaction from the group. During discussions, participants gained more and more ease with relating interpersonal difficulties to their values. About a third of the way into the project, I introduced the idea of interpersonal conflict based on needs, desires, and values. In real life, conflicts are rarely divisible into neat categories, but I perceived this narrowing of conflict focus as instrumental in enabling participants to unravel the complexities of some of the recurring problems in their lives. This can be observed in the manner participants chose to resolve the "chores" conflict in the following excerpt from one of the family values scenes of the script.

Sean: You, young lady are vacuuming the living room tonight! I have a meeting and I need it to be clean before everyone arrives!

Shawna: AND it's your night to do dishes, little sister.

Serena: I don't need this! *(stomps off to her 'room' and takes a magazine to page through. Sean enters with the vacuum cleaner.)*

Sean: Excuse me young lady. The vacuuming….

Serena: But tonight I have ballet lessons. And I have a ton of homework!

Sean: We are all busy. People are coming over in an hour. It NEEDS to be done! Can't you do it quickly? It will only take a minute if you stopped arguing and did the chore that is your responsibility to begin with!

Shawna enters stage right.

Shawna: I can do the vacuuming Dad. I wanted to go to a party tonight but it doesn't start till later.

Scenes from family conflicts initially revealed attitudes towards family roles that kept teens in a position of conflict and power struggle with their parents and siblings. After frequent role changes reflecting difference in social class, family style, and severity of issues, participants became active problem solvers in family conflict scenes. Several participants commented that their most significant learning from the research was how much capacity they had to influence family dynamics for the better. Over one-third of participants stated that they were treating their younger siblings with more respect and kindness as a direct result of the research process.

The following transcript excerpt illustrates the way participants came up with ideas. Comments in italics demonstrate how I side coached the process:

Hannah: Hey mom. Can I go out on Saturday night?

Harmonie: You'll have to talk to your father.

Hannah: Dad…can I?

D.J.:   No.

Hannah: Why not?

D.J.:   I don't know. Ask your mother.

Hannah: She said to ask you.

Stop! Advance the scene! Arguing is not interesting and doesn't move towards a climax! Identify what you want for your daughter D.J.

D.J.:   I don't want her to go.

Why?

D.J.:   Cause I said so.

Harmonie: She might take drugs. And I have another idea. I'll say "Don't you think we know our child better than that? We can trust her not to take drugs".

O.K. Move downstage and talk just father and daughter to increase the energy. Use that drugs idea.

Hannah: Can I go Dad?

D.J.:   No. I read the papers you know. I know what kids these days are getting' into. I don't want you goin' off and doin' no DRUGS.

Harmonie: Honey. Don't you think we know our child better than that?

D.J.:   You told her to ask me so she's askin' me. Now you stay out of this woman!

Everyone gasps. They all start talking at once and acting as if they were all characters in the scene doing it their way.
Me: That was excellent. Good raising of the stakes. Let's keep this going. Anyone? What do you think about the way the father and the kid are interacting?

Rose: Bad.

Aly: And the father is always talking back to his wife and is so mean to his daughter.

Erica, do that great grandmother voice from last practice when you intervened, remember? "Son listen to me, I'm your mother…" O.K? Go Erica.

Erica: Son, listen to me. I didn't bring you up to treat people like that. You should listen to her side of the story. Let her explain to you why she wants to go to this party.

D.J.:   *(reluctantly)* Fine. Why do you want to go to this party anyway?

Hannah: Everyone from school is going to be there.

D.J.:   Everyone who does DRUGS in school?

Hannah: No. Nobody does drugs in my school.

D.J.:   What happens if you go there and people are doing drugs? What then?

Hannah: I could call home and get a ride.

During the above scene development the issue of how women and men should treat each other and how fathers should treat their daughters was a hot spot for participants as was the question of why parents would worry about their teens having more freedom. The discussion that ensued focused on the latter. Participants came to realize that behaviors and statements of family members were often hiding deeper concerns and that these concerns were motivated by their values. During rehearsals when we stopped scene work to discuss what stayed with them during the dramas, I followed participants' lead, at times challenging them to go deeper or asking the group to question what individuals had stated.

Following the transcriptions of these discussions and for subsequent research rehearsals, I planned a symbol forming activity similar to the poetry writing exercise described at the beginning of this article. The crystallization of their experiences in these aesthetic moments drew participants into a clearer understanding of their moral values and an articulation of how these values impacted their decisions. For example, although many stated during initial interviews that respect was important to them, throughout the rehearsal/discussion/creation process, participants were able to see firsthand how they were treating others with varying degrees of disrespect, or that disrespect was manifested in situations they had previously not questioned. Behavior within the group became increasingly considerate and caring as this understanding developed. It is important to note that I did not direct this, but as Bolton (1981) stated earlier, these qualities emerged as a result of the drama research process. Similarly, Winston (1998) writes:

> I would argue that the thick concepts through which we grasp and understand the virtues which constitute ethical behavior, and the moral dilemmas which inevitably permeate social life, form the substance of moral knowledge in a process curriculum model. Here, teachers will not set out to measure whether attitudes have been changed or to gauge whether children have been turned into morally better people in a relatively straight forward cause and effect continuum. They will attempt to induct them into an understanding of the moral life…they will seek to provide them with frameworks for judgment and structures to sustain creative thought. (p. 90)

A similar process of exploration through issues and creative application of participants' moral values to conflict resolution characterized friendship story exploration. A recurrent theme was the problem of gossip and backbiting among friends who professed to be loyal and caring. Students complained about gossip and described its poisonous effects on relationships, yet many admitted to gossiping themselves.

Consistent with Nodding's (1984) ethic of care, students used the effects of their behavior – whether or not it was hurtful to others – as a measuring stick to evaluate their deeds. They identified shame and awareness of an inner conscience as 'feeling bad' after having hurt someone and agreed that this feeling is feedback to stop, make amends or think twice before engaging in that behavior again. Kavanaugh (1990) would call this kind of

values decision-making a demonstration of the existence of the moral emotions human beings inherently possess. She proposes that any emotion bringing us face-to-face with what we believe to be right and true becomes instrumental in the development of a personal moral code and a tendency towards moral behavior.

At the end of the project, students playing the gossip scene and those who had observed its dramatic development mentioned to me that they had made concerted efforts to change their behavior because they now perceived gossip as harmful. Examples of how attitudes towards gossip changed throughout the project can be observed in the following excerpts from the final interviews:

> **Katie:** I don't think I would gossip as much . . . and be more friendly and caring to my friends and family. Not to burst out in little things that people do to you, like people make mistakes, it's in the past so go on.

> **Michelle:** . . . knowing that gossiping . . . the scenes reminded me that it just shouldn't happen.

> **Sean:** I will think about his and when something comes up I will think more. I won't just put ideas aside, I want to think about how it matters or affects other people.

Once a sense of trust and community had been established and comfort with using conflict to identify tacit values became the norm in our research group, I felt participants were ready to engage in larger issues. Although most participants had vague concerns about problems in the world as articulated during initial interviews, they had not yet related their concerns to either personal behavior or local social problems. To engage them more directly, we began with student identified school conflicts within which students felt they would be able to generate a believable story line.

Issues of Concern in Participants' Exploration

Identifying the Issues

A teen group that had become a gang was the first context to be used. Students initially wanted to portray a high-action chase scene but, when questioned on the plausibility of that choice, decided to change their emphasis to shoplifting. While students developed this story line, two other groups worked on a prom scene and a principal/student confrontation story line respectively. When performed at the end of the rehearsal, all three stories were comical with stereotypical solutions.

Shoplifting

Upon reflection, it occurred to me that I had not, as a teacher/researcher, spent sufficient time creating the necessary context for exploration of these ideas prior to asking participants to improvise them. Discussion and clarification of the topic helped the "shoplifting" scene group to develop a more realistic story line about a boy whose recent parental divorce made him emotionally vulnerable. Participants chose to show a contrast of values that highlighted the conflict between valuing belonging to a group and not wanting to engage in what they considered wrong, namely stealing. They identified stealing as wrong but could not clarify whether this norm came from societal values, family values, religious influence, school experience or some combination of factors. Wanting to belong and valuing social experimentation to prove or disprove the validity of a rule were considered valid reasons for testing the rightness or wrongness of stealing. Eventually, stealing was considered a manifestation of deeper problems such as family dysfunction. Individuals experimented dramatically with either enabling or stopping stealing. What emerged from discussion later on was that those who enabled behavior such as stealing were considered manipulative and untrustworthy.

Drugs

The principal/student conflict was influenced by an event that happened at school outside of the research process. A group of Grade 9 students was apprehended taking drugs on school grounds, which resulted in an interrogation of most of the Grade 9 students at the school. Tori stated that we really "have to talk about drugs" during the research project so I suggested we play the principal/student scene as a drug bust and see what happened. The skit group eventually built the story line into a situation where a girl was wrongly accused of drug-taking as a diversion tactic. This conflict was not resolved, but the two girls who were the drug users in the scene had their diversion ploy uncovered by the school principal.

It was interesting to note that participants were satisfied with this ending. Congruent with previous family and friendship values exploration, when a perceived wrong-doing came to light and the perpetrators of a particular problem were unable to escape the consequences of their actions, there was a general feeling of satisfaction with the scene amongst students. Losing face is a significant fear for young adolescents. For research participants this fear outweighed the possible harmful effects of drugs and addiction. The skit used drugs as a vehicle to show peers that destruction of the reputation of another deserved public reprisal and resulted in loss of one's own reputation as a trustworthy friend.

Sexual Harassment

In contrast to the first two issues – scenes that derived their authenticity from real life – the prom scene story line was essentially a farce about jealously between two romantically involved couples. To increase the stakes and to find a believable connection with the life of a young adolescent, I decided to initiate a discussion about involvement in premarital sex, which polarized group members into those who wanted to divulge personal details and those who found the topic abhorrent. To resolve this conflict they subsequently

used the discussion to change the scene to portray sexual harassment, something they identified as a problem area in relations between adolescent males and females.

A conflict that surfaced from this scene was the girl's desire to be sexually attractive to the opposite sex but nonetheless wanting to be treated respectfully. The boys in the group were unhappy about being portrayed as sexual harassers, which prompted the girl in the scene to add the sentence, "It's a good thing not all guys are like that" to avoid sexual stereotyping. Although there was a certain amount of discomfort surrounding the topic of sexuality, students wanted to keep this scene for the final play because they felt it was a real concern to them.[2] Additionally, agreed that relations between the sexes should be characterized by mutual respect and the setting of mutually adhered-to sexual boundaries. More work in exploring the complicity of both males and females in breakdown or construction of sexual boundaries would be critical in addressing current social issues of sexually transmitted disease, HIV/AIDS, date violence and teen pregnancy.

Global Concerns

The second issue-generating rehearsal used topics from initial interviews wherein students articulated topics of personal concern. Topics from the interviews were: concern with disparity (gap between rich and poor, those who suffer needlessly while others are too comfortable, the un-fairness of poverty and lack of opportunities for the poor to advance in life), war, racism, environmental problems (pollution, rainforest depletion, global warming, extinction of animals and cruelty to animals), learning to get along with others, oppression in the world (of cultures, women) and helping others that are in need. Two participants said they were not concerned about anything.

Students identified their group scene topics and began improvising story lines. Stories changed from the abstract to the particular. War – with which they had no direct experience – became teen suicide, a topic many students had personal knowledge about since there had been a suicide at their school and one at a nearby school. The poverty topic became an ethical dilemma between a street person asking for money and a bystander wondering what to do.

At the close of these rehearsal sessions, students chose scenes they most closely identified with, or felt accurately portrayed our values exploration process for inclusion into the final collective for performance. This marked the end of our open-ended scene exploration and the beginning of decision-making and rehearsal for a final script and performance. The issues scenes students chose for the play were: "Shoplifting", "Sexual harassment", "Drugs", and "Teen suicide".

Each of the issues scenes demonstrated conflicting inner and interpersonal needs, desires, and values amongst young adolescents and either offered a variety of ethical responses or left the conflict resolution up to the viewer after having investigated possible

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[2] Young adolescent interest in and confusion surrounding sexual roles, stereotypes and behaviors warrants further study with regard to moral decision making and its complexity exceeds the boundaries of this study.

points of view. A further development was the gravity participants brought to their dramatic work following both the exploration of the teen suicide issue and its echo in the life of one of the participants whose father died of cancer during our research project. The following excerpt from the final debriefing after the performance shows the effect of the dramatic experience on participants' sense of themselves as moral agents:

"Our words, actions and attitudes towards others are very important. The young man from _____ school who took his life last year experienced exactly what our suicide scene portrayed. The words "You don't have the guts to kill yourself" and "Nobody would miss you anyway" were the last words he heard from his peers before he took his life." Any thoughts about that suicide issue?

(everyone is very quiet for a moment)

Tori: I want to know who laughed at that part in the play. I seriously do.

Rose: So do I. I'm gonna' rat him out.

Katie: And even that person who told Tori to go kill herself. That was so…

Tori: It made me so mad.

It's cruel. Don't you think it's mean-spirited to do something like that?

Rose: Somebody committed suicide at the high school last year and I went to his funeral and it broke a lot of people's hearts. It was so sad. Tori, if somebody says anything like that to you I think you should say "this is serious. Get a life".

(everyone nods and agrees at the same time)

Jewels: About the junior high school, I knew the guy who killed himself and I know his best friend and he can't even go to school. He's like, doing 'Outreach' because he can't handle anything. He hasn't come back from the death of his friend.

Shawna: We should take this play to the one act drama festival. It's really important for other kids to see this play. I mean everyone is asking these questions, you know.

D.J.:   I think we should go to the festival with this play, too.

Harmonie: Ya.

Rose: Me too.

Discussion

Participant understanding of context in moral decision-making decreased their judgementalism and increased their sense of personal complicity in social problems. Continuous examination of values assumptions in context appeared to increase participant capacity to articulate underlying moral principles of trustworthiness, respect for human dignity and an evolving sense of caring which as well as consistently appearing across all data collection tools, became observable characteristics of the group ethos. By way of example, insults, swearing, put-downs and derogatory comments that had been prominent at the project inception, were completely absent from all recorded transcripts from the fifth rehearsal onwards.

From the family and friend scenes, research participants showed increased commitment to their own moral responses in the context of whether their behavior was harmful or helpful for others. They also showed increased confidence in dealing with conflict and showed greater clarity of thought in responding to behaviors initiated by peers both inside and outside of the research experience. Young adolescents were better able to understand the larger issues of war, and the injustice of racism through their own direct experience with sexual harassment, shoplifting and teen suicide and concurrent awareness of their own complicity in those social issues.

Roxan: I think these are really good topics to show conflict. I learned a lot about resolving conflict in a civilized way. I feel this is a very good way to discuss real life stories.

Michelle: I feel that these scenes have taught me a lot about the point of view of the other person.

Generally, topics of concern began superficially but increased in understanding and complexity as personal stake and direct experience became anchored to the issues. Once an issue appeared too complex to resolve, one or two moral principles emerged as focal points through both dramatic improvisation and group discussion. These focal points often helped participants to either generate more creative problem solving strategies or to request longer listening time to all stakeholders for deepened understanding. The suicide scene is an example of this process. Participants identified practicing inclusivity and caring as essential prerequisites in dealing with adolescent alienation and eventual suicide, but wanted to keep

the scene unresolved to shock the audience into considering their own complicity in the suicide of a peer.

Researcher Conclusions

> Constructing a moral identity is not just a matter of discovering that you are a moral person but also of deciding, at a fundamental level, that this is the sort of person you want to be. Thus, you create an identity in which moral commitment plays a central role. (Moshman, 2004, p. 91)

The focus of this research was to enable young adolescents to identify and articulate their moral values. This involved bringing the tacit to the explicit through collaborative exploration of personal stories. It also involved observing the process by which process drama and the development of moral community could unfold with a group of young adolescents. Once participants experienced their lives enacted before them, they engaged in the process of cognitive dissonance, meaning they realized that what they said about their values did not always translate into what they did in their lives. This was an evocative experience, moving moral knowledge into moral volition: the desire to make retribution, to stop harmful practices and replace them with healthy ones, to stand up for what would help others and to engage in personal transformation. From knowledge and volition, participants moved into action by creating a dramatic work they could perform for others embodying their values processing.

They also began making changes in their personal lives of their own volition independently of the drama research project. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to illustrate from the data all significant moral decisions made by participants during the project, across all data some of the most frequently observed and articulated changes participants made were:

1) Making conscious decisions not to gossip or backbite and stopping gossip or backbiting of others;

2) "dropping" friends that they felt were a harmful influence on their lives and telling their close friends why they were cherished;

3) including into their circle of friends those who had previously been excluded;

4) consciously treating younger siblings with increased care and respect;

5) telling family members that they loved them and cared about them;

6)   collectively planning to raise money for causes they believed would make the world a better place;

7)   collectively planning to address the issue of sexism in their school;

8)   directly intervening to stop peer racial, sexual, homophobic comments and actions;

9)   supporting each other through encouraging comments and vocabulary that honored rather than criticized their peers (such as using a language of virtue and values with each other during rehearsals);

10) listening carefully to the opinions of others and gathering facts prior to making interpersonal decisions;

11) using conflict resolution strategies from the project with their friends and family;

12) becoming aware of themselves as agents of change with the capacity to make the world a better place;

13) deeper commitment (or in some cases beginning commitment) to social justice issues or religious values; and

14) awareness of world issues as the result of unhealthy interpersonal interactions and increased desire to learn about those issues.

A number of factors influenced the values decision-making processes of my research participants and as such may not be transferable to other contexts. These factors were: family patterns including in some cases religious affiliation, the influence of friends, critical thinking through collaborative conversation and reflective dramatic work, practicing simulated conflict resolution and intervention strategies, and finally tragedy – the death of the father of one of the participants and the suicide of a teen who was known to participants.

It is important to note the above observations of moral attitudes and behaviors are tied to the context of the research and cannot be considered permanent changes. Further study is required to determine which aspects of the research experience have been carried forward into participants' lives over the span of several years. Although signs of increasingly autonomous moral action were certainly evident during the research, it is not possible to measure the sustainability of these signs.

Another interesting outcome of the research was that through the dramatic process, participants were able to view not only their own lives in a social context, but also the structural oppression of the society in which they lived and learned. Family, friendship and school structures that were oppressive became visible to participants through dramatic exploration of values. In intervening in family structures that had previously seemed closed, participants became aware of themselves as change agents. The importance of community, of belonging and being cherished were heightened by the lived experience of our dramatic community while the absence of belonging, of hope, of any sense of purposeful contribution to community was seen to ultimately result in suicide. During the final rehearsal prior to performance participants in this project stated that they have not had the chance to talk about, much less explore, their values in school prior to their involvement in our collaborative research. They were universally appreciative of this opportunity, which they credited as a significant and memorable learning experience for them.

In summary, the dominant process young adolescents appeared to experience individually and collectively as they made values decisions through process drama can be identified as *increased awareness of human interconnectedness and the impact of one's words and deeds upon others.* In this study, awareness came about partly as a result of:

1. telling personal stories,
2. viewing those stories collectively,
3. experiencing discomfort with discrepancy between word and deed and then making increasingly ethical dramatic and life decisions,
4. learning to differentiate between need, desire and value,
5. realizing through dramatic exploration of fictional intervention the personal power to influence family, friends and issues of concern,
6. developing a sense of complicity which replaced previous tendencies to criticize and judge others, and
7. naming and re-naming personal values continuously over time.

In comparing data sources, the drama tools that best engaged the processes of values decision making and articulation of moral processing in this research were:

1. direct focus on conflict to generate improvisation and discussion about values,
2. the conceptual separation of needs, desires and values in understanding interpersonal conflict,
3. the collaborative act of choosing scenes and perfecting them for a script and a performance, and
4. my own overt and often articulated valuing of my participants personal lives, knowledge of their world and belief in their capacity to eventually engage in meaningful change.

In conclusion, I contend that the collective experience of process drama focused on participant stories and concerns has the power to engage, at the very least, an initiation into autonomous moral thought and action in a manner particularly significant for young adolescents. Surely this is at least one critical aspect of what is required to place meaning and values into "the syllabus as fit areas of study" (Holbrook, 1987, p. 55).

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About the Author

Marie Gervais is a doctoral candidate in Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, Canada. She has a Masters in Drama Education and currently focuses her research in arts-based methodology to uncover the relationship between teacher cultural identity and practice. Marie has published in the areas of drama, arts-based research, cultural identity and peace education. She currently works as the educational coordinator for the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, a non-governmental organization striving to eliminate racial prejudice. In her spare time, Marie directs a youth drama troupe "Daystar Theatre" and a multi-sacred, multi-cultural choir "Ocean of Light Chorale".

Appendix A

Interview Questions at Start of Research Project

1. Explain your idea of what you think this drama research project is about and what you think we will be doing during rehearsals.

2. Please talk about why you decided to participate in this project.

3. What are some of your concerns or worries about participating in this project?

4. Have you ever worked on a project in a multi-grade situation before?

5. Tell me about what is important to you in a friendship.

6. Tell me how you think the ideal family should be. Is this similar to the family situation you have now or different?

7. I define 'values' as whatever is so important to you that it affects how you live, how you act and how you make decisions. What are some of those values for you in your life?

8. What are some of the world problems or issues that you are personally concerned or worried about? (for example: the environment, poverty, prejudice etc.)

Appendix B
Final Interview Questions

1. After having participated in this project for five months, what experiences stand out in your memory as being important to you personally?

2. Do you think we should have stopped the project after examining the three research areas of family, friends and issues as a group in December or was the process of putting together a performance valuable to the total experience? Please explain.

3. What did you notice about working with all three grade levels?

4. Now that we have examined values decision-making through drama, can you define for me what is important to you in a friendship and a family?

5. Please tell me about issues that concern or worry you.

6. You answered the last two questions in September for this project. Do you think anything has changed in what you value in family, friends and issues since we started this project?

7. Would you say the improvisations were more useful in working through values dilemmas or was the group discussion more useful to you?

8. What do you think are important values for me if you had to guess about that right now? Do you think that your perception of what my values are has influenced how you present yourself and your ideas or how you acted throughout the project? Would you have talked or acted differently with another teacher?

9. Do you feel that anything we did during this project will be useful to you in your daily life? If so, what and how?

10. Are you happy with the play we ended up with or would you have changed anything?

11. How do you feel about your performance? About the performance of the group?

12. Do you have anything you would like to recommend to me or tell me about working with drama and values and young adolescents that you think I missed or should do differently?

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