ALL IN: INCLUSION THROUGH THE ARTS

by

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B.FA, Simon Fraser University, 2012

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CHAPTER 1: THE STRUGGLE TO INCLUDE

Artists who work in the dramatic arts have reflected the world we are living in and challenged our culture since the beginning of humanity. They have moved our hearts into transformation of thought or even challenged us to move into action. As Augusto Boal writes in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* “the purpose of art and science [is] to correct the faults of nature, by using the suggestions of nature itself” (1979, pg. 9). The arts in combination with scientific thinking can move humanity forward into new realizations and deeper philosophies on what it means to be a human. We collectively only need to look within ourselves. As I journey through my career as a drama teacher and artistic director, the power of student performance has never ceased to amaze me. It has the power to build identity through vulnerability and relationships. Still, the greatest power it has had in my life is the power to see life through different perspectives in a visceral way and build connections to the world around me. In order to begin to tell this story, I have to go back. Back to before I was a teacher and even before I was a performer. Even further – before I was a student I was a caregiver and before that I was, first and foremost, a little sister. My experience being a sister to my brother with exceptional needs rooted my passion for teaching and ultimately awoke my passion for social justice in the classroom, particularly around the problem of inclusion. My entire upbringing was in an environment of inclusion at home. At school, it was a different story. The schools appeared to struggle to include all of the students in one place and that puzzled me as a student and later as an educator. It continues to puzzle me because I see in my own classroom that the learning experiences I grew up with at home are so entirely possible to learn at school as a part of the curriculum and therefore, should be implicitly and explicitly taught. I further contend that my focus on caring for the needs of another whose needs are higher and more complex than my own, reduced any self-
reflected anxiety and self-judgement. I did not find this hunch to be justified until I discovered the research of Alina Kałużna-Wielobób. Her findings reflect that “higher community feeling people” are characterised by: “lower anxiety level, higher self-esteem and higher level of psychological well-being than people with lower level community feeling” (2017, pg. 172). In other words, my experience living in a community of people – my immediate family – who cared for one other’s needs in an exceptional and unconditional way allowed for a stronger sense of self. This is the benefit of the picture of inclusion. Inclusion - where all students no matter their background, needs or ability can have their needs met in the same space - can best be illustrated through and within the dramatic arts as a place to start. What I learned from my inclusive upbringing and as a dramatic artist informed my experiences as a friend, wife, teacher, actor, collaborator, director, singer, dancer and permeated everything I am and how I interact and treat others. It is this story; my story, that I want to share in the hopes that my life’s learning will inspire the work of other educators in my field and beyond.

My definition of inclusion, that is, all students no matter their background, needs or ability can have their needs met in the same space, is one that has been influenced by two different people. The first was primarily my mother. She fiercely believed in inclusion, not just in schools but also in the community and at home. Her number one rule in our house was that everyone should be and feel included. She also believed that inclusion was about everyone getting their needs met and you would often hear her sharing that fairness does not mean that everyone gets the same. She would say that fairness actually means everyone gets what they need. Many in different scholars and educators have quoted this philosophy in different ways, but it is my mother’s voice that I hear when it echoes through the schools. Inclusion, therefore, is what is fair for all people. Inclusion means that all together, we help meet each other’s needs.
Second, I was inspired by the writings and research of Shelley Moore, a Vancouver-based educator and researcher in the field of special education and, most passionately, inclusion. She inspired me to think about inclusion within the school system and further compelled me to see what inclusion was as defined by what it is not. It is not integration, which is what I think is the common practice in most schools. Integration means that students of all backgrounds and abilities are together in the same space but not necessarily getting their needs met, nor feeling like they belong. An example from my life where I have seen integration in action is a moment when I was in school with my brother – we only actually overlapped at the same school in elementary for a couple of years. I saw him sitting in a beanbag chair in a classroom full of children doing an activity. He was there, yes, indeed, but he was not a part of the community. He was not getting his learning needs met and I would argue that the other students were not getting the full range of their social emotional learning needs met either. Unfortunately, there were many instances throughout my lifetime when I recall my brother being planted in a space without being fully included – many of such instances were in school. In fact, on my first day of teaching, I remember reflecting to my cohort at Simon Fraser University why I became a teacher in the first place. I found myself saying with tearing eyes and a wavering voice that I didn’t want students to sit in a beanbag chair in the corner. My colleagues must have thought me to be way too emotional and abstract. All this to say, Shelley Moore’s definition of inclusion expanded my horizons and gave hope to the idea that a world of true inclusion is one where we see “one without the other” (2016, pg. 6). This world is where my brother could be seen as one of us instead of one of them. She excited a dream in me where I hoped that schools one day could potentially be so inclusive that everyone’s, differences that in the past made them “the other”, would instead be celebrated and utilized so that everyone is growing and learning together. I
sensed that if I feel it and she feels it, then there must be others who believe it too. We can make school inclusive together! It’s a big dream, but wouldn’t it be wonderful?

I dream this dream because I have seen the benefit of inclusion. The lessons I learned from inclusivity in my life have ultimately led me to understand myself better through caregiving and functioned to alleviate my anxiety. We all have anxieties in life that lead us to think very inwardly and spiral into a self-involved and often times, self-deprecating practice (Kałużna-Wielobób, 2017). In my experience, when we seek to care for others’ needs, we think beyond ourselves, which alleviates this disruptive anxiety and can be replaced with an outward, most powerful reflection that builds our self-image. I feel that it is important that we are helping students within the school system to build this positive habit of care in order to build their own self-image so that all children can grow into confident and caring adults in our communities. In order for this understanding to be realized, students need to be exposed to this kind of learning. I consistently search for opportunities in my practice to provide a means to understand inclusion, true inclusion, as a framework that develops a positive self-image through empathy. As an educator, I have wrestled consistently to understand why inclusion has been such a stretch for others in my profession. I consistently wonder what the barriers are that stop teachers from creating a truly inclusive environment. Is it that it is simply too challenging? Do we not understand why inclusion is beneficial for students? Do we even know what inclusion is or what it looks like? I pay special attention to inclusion and always have because the philosophy has been all I have ever known. To illustrate this best, I have to go back to a story from when I began kindergarten.

When I was five years old I was excited to begin school for one reason. That reason was that I got to take the small shiny yellow school bus to school. My older brother whom I admire
more than anyone in the world took the small shiny yellow school bus and I could not wait to be grown up like him. The first day of school finally rolled around and holding the hand of my big brother, we ascended the steps to go to school and got to ride the small shiny yellow school bus. It was wonderful! The bus driver was friendly and greeted us with a high five. The students welcomed us with “hellos” and “good mornings”. We even sang “Hands Up Baby” in the style of Ottawan as we rode over the train tracks and waved our hands back and forth. I just loved riding the bus with my brother. It was so much fun and I felt so connected to the team of students I got to ride with. Then one morning, my mother held me back from getting on the bus with my brother. As he rode away on our bus, my mother with a shrug told me that I had to wait to take another. This confused me terribly. I loved that bus! This was so unfair! So instead of taking the small shiny yellow school bus, I had to take the big grimy orange school bus with the big kids from the high school. I was scared to go to school after a few days of riding this bus. The bus driver didn’t give high fives. No students wished me “hello” or “good morning” and we definitely did not sing a song as we crossed the train tracks. I wanted to ride with my big brother and couldn’t understand why we had to take separate buses. I did not see why I had to be separated from the students on the small shiny yellow bus. A few years later, I came to realize why I was separated. I came to realize why my brother and I were deemed so different. We, although coming from the same family, had different labels. I did not know it at the time but I was actually riding the district designated “special needs” bus and I was not designated with this label. I instead needed to ride the bus with the typical children. The home that I lived in was inclusive and accepting but my school was not. Everyday my parents worked hard to make sure the needs of all of their three children were met and we were all learning what we needed to learn while looking after one another. This was the norm for me, until I went to school.
Later, when I became a student teacher I observed many classrooms and because of my natural inclination toward inclusion, I was drawn to analysing environments where inclusion was and was not happening. The non-inclusive classrooms appeared to me to be unnatural spaces and in all honestly, they lacked something. There was order and organization for sure, and the students could definitely find like-minded friends which, seemed to create cliques in the hallways. However, the classrooms that I could deem as inclusive had energy in the organized chaos. There was a different attitude of care and compassion and a sense of community and belonging. In my own drama classroom, I have and continue to work on building an inclusive classroom and school. The theatre or studio spaces I work in are ones where students at any level or any walk of life can learn and thrive. It is hard for me to see why any educator would not want this for their classroom.

The problem with non-inclusive classrooms is that students from all walks of life miss out on the opportunity to learn from each other; to learn compassion, kindness, empathy and caregiving because these traits are not being modeled by their leaders. What does it mean to be truly inclusive? What are the benefits of an inclusive classroom for all students from all walks of life?

I am curious about truly inclusive environments and why I feel this is so important in our schools and communities. As this is my passion, I have seen the power of inclusion in my own classroom. I have observed my student’s growth through their creative work with their peers that are regarded as different from themselves. I work in a suburban community in a Metro-Vancouver secondary school as the drama, musical theatre and film teacher for students aged thirteen to eighteen. We learn from each other everyday as we share our stories in check-ins or through explorative drama. I have observed their perspectives broaden as they listen to stories
from other lands and cultures or the struggle of a student living with muscular dystrophy to name only a few of many examples. We have cried and laughed and grown to trust one other with the stories that we produce and in turn stopped thinking solely of ourselves but of the other. This transformation from *me* to *us* surfaces a confidence as they engage in one another’s stories and works to express them on stage or on camera.

My favourite example of this engagement took place in my grade eight drama classroom during a beginning of the year assignment called “Bag O’ Things”. I ask the students to bring in three artefacts that help to tell their story. I challenge them to be vulnerable and honest and we build trust through exercises and activities throughout the days of presentations pertaining to this assignment. One particular student was new to our class and took a lot of her classes separated from these students as she had exceptional physical disabilities and learning needs. For many of the students in our classroom, this would be the first time hearing her story or why she was the way she was. On the floor in front of us, we all watched as she lay down three pictures. One was of her with her family, one was of her pet and the other was a very young girl in a hospital bed – barely recognizable – with a large bandage tied around her head. The student began to share her beginnings in this world and describe the fourteen surgeries that have brought her to this point and how her illness has made her into a fighter. Her story brought the class to near tears and as we opened the floor to questions, the other students in the class asked her meaningful and heartfelt queries about how she conjured her bravery and her life day to day. Mostly, students learned in that moment how to work with this student – how they could help support her and how much they actually had in common with some of her needs. As we continued through the assignment, students opened up more due to this particular student’s candid bravery and I watched over the term as they looked after each other and worked through understanding and
meeting each others’ needs in drama. Fear left our classroom that day and what was left was empathetic learning.

What we ultimately learn from inclusion is that we are all “diverse learners” and we all have different needs as we see in our stories. The point is that we try to celebrate everyone’s story. This is where inclusion begins: a place where everyone is celebrated (Moore, 2016) and continues to ensure that everyone’s needs are met. Where this definition can have a richer meaning is through exploration within the arts. Therefore, in my research and story I explore several questions that I seek to answer for the sake of building inclusive education systems and communities. Do theatre and drama activities create opportunities for students to develop empathy that leads to self-transformation? Is this transformation of self a result of inclusion? These questions ultimately lead me to my main problem: how can the dramatic arts embody my definition of inclusion?

Drama, the process and art of creating kinesthetic, emotive and responsive performance, has meant a great many things to me. At first, when I was a child, I was always told that I was very dramatic so I would channel my imagination and outgoing personality into pretend characters. When I played those characters, I felt free! Sometimes I could even be someone that was so opposite to me who would say or do something I would never dream of saying or doing. I think that the process of drama is all about working out the empathy muscle. In order to perform characters with integrity, the actor must seek to understand the person they are imagining to be. What is the motivation for the character? Why do they do what they do? I have found that through my extensive learning and practice as an actor and performer, I have worked that muscle for many perspectives that I never would have before. There is such power in drama because of
this fact. We cannot actually walk a mile in another’s shoes but we can role-play that we did and therefore, broaden our perspective to include someone else’s story and weave it in with our own.

I have decided to build on the three pillars of knowledge within myself - drama, my education as well as my work as an educator and my own familial philosophies– and draw on the research and experiences of others in order to help define inclusion for other educators in the field. I will begin with exploring other’s stories and studies that can rationalize my thinking and bring new understandings to my personal experiences with inclusion. I further will explore my stories, like those that I have previously shared, through writing a dramatic script in hopes that I can elicit curiosity and care around the problem of inclusion. The dramatic arts hold a history of creating changes in society through presenting characters and optional realities on stage. I hope to develop a creative script with the intent of generating discussion for the audience and a process for performers to explore mine and their definition of what inclusion looks like historically and currently, as well as what it should be in our future. I have a hunch that the dramatic arts are a powerful, yet approachable, platform for students, educators and communities to engage with inclusion as a philosophy. Throughout my journey of research and creative writing I will hold dear the problem: how can the dramatic arts embody my definition of inclusion?

Below is a glossary of terms with my own personal understanding of these terms to help guide the reader through the design project, research and findings within my journey.
Jennifer’s Glossary of Terms

**Applied Theatre:** the practice of dramatic process that approaches solutions to political, social or economic problems within the society. Often applied theatre performances do not take place exclusively within a theatre but seeks to meet their desired audience where they are.

**Auto-Ethnography:** a qualitative research method of writing one’s own story in the context of and in order to study their culture.

**Contemporary Theatre:** I use this term to describe the current trend in theatre performances. It is the focus of contemporary theatre to use abstract imagery, movement and language in order to elicit emotion and meaning on a particular theme. This is the genre of theatre I mean to describe with this term although it is fluid and could mean something entirely different to another dramatic artist.

**Disability:** An impairment of the physical body or brain in some way, which can be developmental, ambulatory, cognitive, intellectual or sensory or any combination of the five. Disability can come about through an accident, genetics, and complications at birth or as a result of certain illnesses. It is important to note that I do not use nor define “disabled” as that word can become a label that individuals with disabilities get stuck in which can be reducing of their humanity. Not to be confused with handicap (see below).

**Disability Theatre:** Dramatic performances that deal with issues around disability (see definition above) or seek to provide opportunities for dramatic artists (see definition below) with disabilities to create, produce and perform theatre.

**Dramatic Arts / Drama:** the process and art of creating kinaesthetic, emotive and responsive performances with the purpose of understanding a topic, event, characteristic(s) or theme.
Dramatic Artist: a performer who uses all of the talents and technique they possess, be it acting, singing, dancing, gymnastics, the playing of musical instruments, etc. to tell stories in a performative context.

Dramaturg / Dramaturgy: A role in a production. The dramaturg writes, edits or produces feedback to the artistic directors. They analyse the dramatic script used in a project in order to draw out and maximize meaning and implications for their audience.

Exceptional Needs: This is my choice term to describe individuals whose physical or cognitive developmental learning requires greater support than those with typical development due to impairment. This term for me replaces what was previously “special needs” as it better describes the reality. All people have special needs that are unique to them but not everyone’s needs require exceptional care and support in order to have them met. It is important to note how I use this term. I always write a person or student with exceptional needs instead of a exceptional needs person or student in order to avoid pigeonholing a person with one label. For example, I like to be called a person with dramatic tendencies rather than a dramatic person. It helps me to remain a person first and foremost just one of my many labels.

Exclusion: The action of removing or not allowing a person or group of persons into a larger group.

Handicap: A circumstance that impedes progress or makes completing a specified task difficult. Every person has a handicap that weakens them, therefore, I do not find it a fair nor an accurate description of a person to say that they are handicapped unless the circumstance is described. For an extreme example, in Shakespeare’s play Othello his jealousy handicapped his love for Desdemona, which led to his murder of her. Not to be confused with disability or disabled (see above).
**Inclusion:** The action where all students no matter their background, needs or ability can have their needs met in the same space. The action of celebrating everyone’s story.

**Inquiry:** The cyclical process of making changes within our practices and cognition by allowing one’s curiosity to guide them. The process involves scanning, focusing, developing a hunch, learning, taking action, checking and repeating. (Halbert and Kaser, 2013).

**Integration:** The action of putting different groups together in the same space. People are together in the same space but not necessarily getting their needs met, nor feeling like they belong.

**Mimetics:** A tool used in the drama process or in performance whereby one actor is mimicking or imitating another without mocking.

**Role play:** The action of creating and embodying a character using research and imagination.

**Social Justice:** The means of creating understanding, equity and equality amongst the participants within the societal structure.

**Segregation:** The action of setting something or someone apart from a larger group. Socially, this action is often based on ability, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

**Theatre for Development:** A type of applied theatre or drama that empowers a community to be the change they want to evoke and aids them in finding solutions (for an example, see page 22 of this thesis).

**Vignette / Vignette Play:** A stage-play, which consists of several scenes that take place with different characters and/or settings, often to discuss a theme. The scenes within the play are called vignettes. They are a brief snapshot of a moment in time as it relates to the larger story or theme.
Please consider these particular working definitions while reading this thesis in addition to the design project vignette play in Chapter 4 entitled “Included?”.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction and Theory

The literature and research for inclusive learning in schools is a relatively new field. Most of the discussion has only risen to the surface within the last fifteen years. In fact, as I surveyed studies within the academic journals in the field of education and psychology, it came to my attention there are few, if any, empirical studies that conclusively support the practice of inclusion in schools. I believe this is because it is more of a philosophical practice and therefore, difficult to measure. In the psychology journals I was, however, able to mull over empirical research related to a need to belong, which ultimately related to my definition of inclusion. Specifically, the work of Baumeister, Morel et al. and Kałużna-Wielobób all confirmed a need for humans of all backgrounds to feel connected and a part of a group. Despite the lack of empirical study, there are many government documents and anecdotal evidence that explore the impact of inclusion. Many of these are represented in Shelley Moore’s book One Without the Other and in the new curriculum documents for British Columbia. In my own research, accounted for in this chapter, I seek to tell the story of inclusion through coming to understand the history of education for students with exceptional needs and investigate how to best serve all students. Further, there are many instances of evidence to demonstrate the results of the dramatic arts as a tool for learning and exploring social justice concepts. I found these examples in education journals related to the arts as well as in books for dramatic artists that I have collected over my time as a performer and director. I will begin here to discover how the arts impact societies’ perspectives and how the dramatic arts in particular seek to include. What do the dramatic arts do to help students better understand their world? What does inclusion look like in schools? How do the dramatic arts help build inclusive mindsets? These are my driving questions
where I seek to understand how to best serve students from all backgrounds through theatre practices. I hypothesise that the evidence will point in the direction that inclusion - that is all students learning together and celebrating one another in the same space - is the best practice for students as a means of gaining better communication and interpersonal skills through the dramatic arts.

**The Need for Arts to Better Understand Our World**

The debate over why arts education is valuable for students has been ongoing for many years. Scholars and society alike have tried to define the reasons why we need the arts or even *if* we need them at all. Ultimately, the argument can be qualified in many ways. First, the arts provide opportunities for students to develop perseverance and motivation through the development of technique (Tishman and Palley, 2009, p. 13). As a person commits to a craft within the arts, they learn to be passionate and build on their skills through feedback to master those techniques, which in turn, allows them to gain a deeper meaning of the world around them through the application of those talents. In other words, the process of developing an artistic craft strengthens the art of learning. The art of learning is strengthened and deepened through participation in the arts.

Participation in the arts, whereby one is developing talent and skill to understand story, develop perseverance and motivation in a student. According to Tishman and Palley (2009), the sheer act of imagining multiple possibilities for expression through the use of storytelling through the arts is the skill most desired by the workforce. They, as well at the C21 Canada Organization, view Canada’s current state of affairs to be “an innovation based economy” (2015). Innovation and creativity are skills that need to be structured and continually developing in order to be useful in all areas of our lives. There also needs to be structure within the learning
environment to foster motivation and perseverance. Specifically, the use of drama as an art provides a lens through which to explore content which produces powerful effects for students of all ages because it “offers a valuable facility to practice [and experiment] and also increases motivation for students to express themselves” (Batdi and Batdi, 2015, pg. 1460) because they get to choose to work on what is meaningful to them. This act, therefore, strengthens their brain’s abilities to be creative and also builds a bridge to try new ideas and make connections to themselves and the world around them (Tishman and Palley, 2009). Furthermore, this process of arts-based learning can, according to Batdi and Batdi (2015), improve academic achievement in other subjects. They go on to state that in particular, creative drama (the process of creating drama work through story, movement and rhythm) serves a great purpose in training the brain to think critically and creatively to foster engagement in scientific material. C21 Canada extends this to all units of study by stating that the motivating factor for innovation is brought about through “relationships between all agents” (2015). The motivation grows for students to build relationships because they strive for meaningful work in their creativity so much so, that they are vulnerable and seek comfort in those that are working with them.

The arts, and drama in particular, provide ample opportunity for students to explore their humanity and make relationships with the world around them. Through the intimacy of creating work together as a collective, arts educators create space for learners “to reach beyond their immediate contexts or frames of reference” and to “purposefully [explore] combinations, [try] out new juxtapositions, and [create] new and provocative relationships” (Tishman and Palley, 2009, pg. 12) in order to understand humanity. This complex, vulnerable and difficult work ultimately leads to a better understanding of the self and how one relates to others in our world. Students gain a social understanding of how to engage with one another’s stories and the stories
of the world outside their classroom in a primitive way that remoulds their previous perceptions. Where there once was prejudice and fear, there can be the beginnings of understanding and invention of a more tolerant and curious self (Tishman and Palley, 2009). Through the creative process we develop empathy and understanding for others, which is a desired trait for students according to B.C.’s new curriculum (Province of British Columbia, 2017) as I will explain. Moreover, this process of developing empathy through artistic participation is actually evident in the neural processes in our brains. According to Catteral, J. (2011), neural processes involved with art in fact have a potential to develop a capacity for empathy and prosocial behavior. This suggestion rests on neuroplasticity: the ability of the brain to change throughout an individual’s life through repetitive action. Hence, “intensive and repeated activities in the arts [such as role-play as an example] may associate with prosocial behavior because they condition empathy-related architectures in the brain” (2009, pg. 20). These prosocial behaviours include the ability “be emotional, be altruistic in relations to others, volunteer to help others, [and to] score higher on measures of moral judgment” (2009). These traits reoccur in the literature as desirable qualities in the eyes of many of the above-mentioned researchers including C21 Canada and our B.C. curriculum. All of this work to make connections within our world is provided through the opportunity to explore our thinking through the arts; however, not all of the evidence points to this prosperous effect.

Several studies that seek to find the value of arts in our society actually determine that there is a lack of substantial evidence that proves it. For instance, in 2010, Michalos and Kahlke sought to discover the impact of participation in arts-based activities on the quality of life of the participants. They attempted to measure whether partaking in the arts, as a consumer albeit, for example – going to the movies, would make a difference on the perceived quality of life of the
participants. Ultimately, through this quantitative research they discovered that “such activities and their corresponding satisfaction contributed relatively little” (pg.34) to their overall contentment with life. Furthermore, See and Kokotsaki (2016) conducted an empirical investigation of the research in the hopes of seeking scholarly proof that the arts lead to improvements in children’s learning. They discovered that “despite the huge body of work on arts education, little can be concluded about the beneficial effects of arts on children’s learning and [the] wider outcome” (2016, pg. 251). These case study examples suggest ultimately that there is a hope for the arts to be substantiated as creating a platform for learning that ultimately supports a better quality and understanding of life but that it, in fact, does not. However, there are gaps in this literature. These scholars are seeking to consume the arts where they are meant to be experienced and embodied. They also fail to take interest into account whereby Petitto, L., in her research with The Dana Foundation, discovers that interest in the art form has to be present in order for effect to take hold (2008). Therefore, the impacts of the arts are not entirely accurately quantifiable. As stated above, the results are in the experience and the work despite efforts to summarize results without considering the impact of what is only qualifiable. This is where the gaps in the impact of the arts research needs to be further explored. How does the experience of participating in arts training lead to transformative thinking?

Many artists have explored this notion of theatre transforming communities, none more famously than Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal expresses examples and empowers all citizens to be actors, or in other words active participants within the political conversation. He begins all of his work with one question: “should art educate, inform, organize, influence, incite to action, or should it simply be an object of pleasure?” (1979, pg.xiii). He proposes that “it is not the place of the theatre to show the correct path, but only to offer the
means by which all possible paths may be examined” (pg. 141) with several examples from his theatrical work in Latin America to demonstrate where new paths were forged through exploration. His most famous example, and most used technique is “Forum Theatre”. It was forged as a means for the deemed oppressed portion of the population to enact change and shift power dynamics through stepping into the presented scene and changing an aspect of the scene in hopes of a different outcome. He uses a special narrator that he calls the “joker” or “zumbi” to facilitate the implementation of audience into the theatre piece while observing where “rituals” or patterns of society are breaking or staying the same. Further along this line but in a different field, Paolo Friere in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* further developed similar ideas as Boal and expanded the principles of his techniques in the theatre and applied them to education as a political institution. For example, Friere uses the character of the joker but instead makes this character the teacher whereby they are “no longer merely the one-who teaches, but one who is [themselves] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (1979, pg. 80). This cyclical idea of learning and growing gives a voice to the typically voiceless. When one strives to shift the balance of power in theatre those that are peripheral to the problem become included in the conversation and thus the community is transformed. Friere further shows us how this theatrical principle of change can be applied in the classroom and reflects on the similarities between the classroom and a theatre. All this to say, Boal and Friere identify how co-constructing knowledge through the dramatic arts as opposed to dictating knowledge is a powerful way to evoke desired change in political structures.

Furthermore, Frowin Nyohi identified the power of theatre to transform several communities in Africa when theatre educators held workshops for children. They entitle the dramatic form “theatre for development” and found that “through [this] theatrical process they
involve the people in a self awareness process which make them realise their own strengths and weaknesses to overcome their poverty, malnutrition, hunger and other economic and social development obstacles” (2002, pg. 227). The discoveries about oneself led to an empowered community where they challenged the norms of society and were inspired to work on gaining a better quality of life. Nyohi’s work in theatre for development is one example of such a practice used in many instances around the world. It is an applied theatre technique, that is a structured exercise, which involves dramatic exploration, to involve audiences in proposed changes within their societal confines. This learning allows for vulnerability and rich learning about self and the other, which is why ultimately drama came to be a course in the educational institution at all.

Locally, in British Columbia, 1939, the decision was made to include drama and oral expression in the curriculum for language studies which further transitioned into a course of it’s own in 1951 (Carter, 2014). According to Carter the implementation of the subject as a choice to students was due to the rise in interest to develop “self-awareness, creativity, imagination and community-mindedness” and the expertise of specialized teachers who recognized the benefits from their own learning. Drama continues to be a subject that benefits students’ “sense of wonder, curiosity and engagement” and ultimately is an “integral part of becoming an educated citizen” (Province of British Columbia, 2017). The newest documents in B.C.’s curriculum on their website expresses the main goal of an educated citizen to be competent in “creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, and a positive personal and cultural identity” (Province of British Columbia, 2018) where it continues to argue that participating in the arts develops all four competencies.

Overall, the need and benefit of arts education is qualified in the research as beneficial, for those with interest in experiencing such learning, to gain greater understanding of the world
and people around them. When one engages in the dramatic arts, the skills you acquire aid your brain in developing social, creative and critical thinking skills that can transform our opinions and world views. Furthermore, many of these skills and competencies that are growing from the dramatic arts have been identified as critical in our emerging quickly changing work place environments by our governing institutions (C21 Canada, 2015). If the benefits are so vast, what are the content messages that we want to portray through these skills? Are the dramatic arts accessible to all people? How do these key messages get delivered? It is through the conversation and practice of inclusion.

Is Inclusion Beneficial for ALL Students?

Similar to arts education, special education programming did not always exist, nor was it deemed important in British Columbia’s system. However, “the first recorded legislative appropriation to provide for the education of “handicapped children” in British Columbia was made in 1890” (Siegal, 2000) which was much earlier than the arts were considered to be included in the curriculum. These curriculums however were slow to develop and were restricted. Siegal goes on to dictate that this appropriation in 1890 was “for deaf children who were sent to attend the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Winnipeg, Manitoba”. Other children with any other physical disabilities or exceptional needs were kept at home and generally excluded from society. Later in the nineteenth century the main city centres such as Vancouver and Victoria opened to support the children that were previously sent to Winnipeg. According to Siegal, it was not until 1925 that “the Putnam-Weir Survey of the School System recommended the modification of curriculum for the “mentally handicapped”, and the establishment of “opportunity classes” and special schools and facilities” and further recognized by the provincial government for funding. This funding was mostly used to provide the
appropriately trained staff to students who needed it and help “maintain students in regular classes”. It was not until parents (Jahnukainen, 2011) lobbied with the government for more equity for their children when system structures began to shift. It was then that the government began to recognize a social need for students of all walks of life to be supported and educated in the public school system.

In March 1970, the B.C. Education system transformed “when, through a newly created Special Education Division, the first guide for school districts was issued to assist school districts in the development of their programs and to assist in ensuring that programs met funding criteria” (Siegal, 2000). This further led to policy changes, which included a broader spectrum of students’ needs. A broader spectrum meant that there was a greater need to accommodate different learning needs and thus, in 1981-82 the Individual Education Plans were brought into the system. Despite these efforts, the population of students with exceptional needs were still not holistically included into the educational system until 1989 where the School Act legislation’s language reflected that “all children who were of school age and resident in the district were entitled to an educational program” (2000). From then on, students of all walks of life were integrated into the public school system with separate funding for programming and individual learning needs discovered and met. Furthermore, according to Siegal “from 1994-1996 ministry guidelines for special education were revised, and ministerial orders passed, addressing the definition of students with special needs, the need for Individual Education Plans, and the placement of students with special needs”. The history concludes here somewhat as little recorded progress was made until the current curriculum changes within the last few years.

Currently, the area of special education has shifted significantly with a change in mindset. In British Columbia full inclusion began to become recognized in the documentation as
the best practice for teachers, which led to a gradual update in curriculum beginning in 2015 (Province of British Columbia, 2018). This curriculum focuses on “competencies” which adjusts the language for individual learning as opposed to “prescribed learning outcomes”. Further to these changes, teacher education standards were changed in 2012 in B.C. to reflect the upcoming curriculum shifts and, therefore, all teachers needed to include inquiry into special and indigenous education into their learning to become a certified educator. In fact, the Standards for Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators in B.C. states that “educators are knowledgeable about how children develop as learners and as social beings, and demonstrate an understanding of individual learning differences and special needs” (2012), including the needs and inclusion of indigenous learners, before they are certified to teach in B.C. The implementations of these inquiry areas were pre-cursors to help new educators implement the new skills-based curriculum, which includes all students better than the previous content driven program. The new and current curriculum allows for individual development in the areas of communication, creative thinking, critical thinking, positive, personal and cultural identity, personal awareness and responsibility and social responsibility (Province of British Columbia, 2018). The entire point of this shift is to “provide students with an education that is still rigorous, but also flexible and innovative, one from which they gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to succeed in today’s modern world (Province of British Columbia, 2018). The key word here is “flexible”. Teachers now have the flexibility to include all students and challenge them accordingly based on the flexible and mouldable curriculum. Why was this flexibility sought after? Why is inclusion the main goal in the new curriculum? Why should it be?

In order to discuss inclusion as best practice for teachers we first need to define the terms. When discussing special education and social justice issues for students there are four terms to
define: exclusion, inclusion, integration and segregation. The below figure 1 taken from Shelley’s Moore’s book *One Without the Other* (2016, pg. 2) is a typical image that helps the brain to visually understand these terms.

![Figure 1: Moore's First Impression](image)

According to Moore, she would assign the terms to following in figure 2 (2016, pg. 3), using these images to teach her students who were teachers-in-training.

![Figure 2: Moore's Typical Answer](image)

The image of inclusion however, was pointed out to her, as a poor illustration as it still was mostly green indicating that there was a majority and several minority populations. This as
Shelley learned was still representative of a traditional model of education whereby “our job as educators (and especially special educators) was to identify students who aren’t [green] and fix them” (2016, pg 4.). The true definition and mindset of inclusion is exemplified in figure 3 (pg. 5) where there is no “other” (2016).

Figure 3: Moore's Definition of True Inclusion

So, why include all students? Why should there be no other? Why are we working away from the “traditional” view of education? It is because an inclusive school benefits all students and every one’s need to feel like they belong (Baumeister, 1995). According to Baumeister and Leary’s extensive literature empirical review, they discover that the need to belong and “social attachment” is a top motivation for all human’s behaviour. According to their work, people who feel like they belong to the groups they involve themselves in (such as families, friends and work situations) have less overall anxiety, greater emotional stability and can access their cognitive processes on tasks at hand rather than worry about interpersonal relationships. The consequence to a lack of belonging results in “decrements in health, happiness, and adjustment” (1995, pg. 508) and “higher levels of anxiety and self-esteem regression” (Kałużna-Wielobób, 2017, pg 172). If all students feel and experience a sense of belonging in their school setting they will, according to this research, be able to work hard on the tasks they are assigned. How does an educator create a sense of belonging in their classroom? In their school? It was the Nigerian poet
Ben Okri who said, “stories can conquer fear, you know. They can make the heart bigger” (1993, pg.46). Through connecting to one another and getting the opportunity to listen and learn from each other’s stories. Story creates understanding and healing because they grow empathy, which is integral in developing “prosocial” behaviour and positive overall health due to positive social engagements (Catteral, 2011). The opportunities for students to connect to one another through story to build strong self-worth within a community they feel connected to are plentiful within school walls but not without all walks of life included.

The problem with non-inclusive activities in schools is that students can miss out on the opportunity to learn from each other in a powerful way. They can miss out on learning compassion, kindness, empathy and caregiving because these traits are not being modeled or fostered by their leaders and the opportunity to share in one another’s stories isn’t allowed. There are some students with certain exceptional needs who may not seem cognitively invested in whether they are included, but their inclusion gives so much to many others through the experience of building belonging that everyone’s need for belonging is met in a way it can not through integration alone (Moore, 2016). The B.C. Special Education Policy Manuel states “the practice of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with full integration in regular classrooms and goes beyond placement to include meaningful participation and the promotion of interaction with others” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2016). What determines whether participation is meaningful or not? It is whether the student is learning and growing in a place where one knows they belong (Moore, 2016). It is the teacher’s job to ensure that there is ample opportunity for all to belong without feeling like or appearing to be “the other”.

However, full inclusion within our schools doesn’t come without its challenges. In Downing’s extensive observational research in the field, she outlines the many trials of including
students with exceptional needs specifically at the high school level. She first outlines “curriculum modification” as the largest challenge in that the fast pace of most high school general education classes, as well as the highly abstract curriculum and emphasis on complex verbal skills, can create learning environments that, initially, may appear at odds with the learning skills and styles of students with severe intellectual and multiple impairments. (2005, pg. 134)

Therefore, this perspective argues that none of the students are getting what they need in the classroom unless they are separated by communication skill level. Students who are, in fact, able to engage in this curriculum at this pace may not be appropriately challenged with the inclusion of students who may not be able to. Therefore, in order for teachers to include students of all abilities, it requires more preparation on the part of the teacher to be able to differentiate the lesson, pace and task for individuals. In order to differentiate the learning as well, that is tailor the lessons, pace and tasks to individual students to suit their learning goals, this also requires a great deal of time in collaboration with the team of special educators, and in some cases health professionals, to be most effective. Furthermore, educators and peers need patience with potential Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) (Downing, 2005, pg. 134) methods for certain students which can feel impossible within the constraints of a scheduled timetable because it necessitates a great deal of attention and time to listen to students’ needs. By extension, these communication needs “may be perceived as being too late for older students to acquire these skills” (2005, pg. 135) and that if they are not able to engage in the abstract and nuanced content at an “adequate” communication level they have to be excluded in order for the “typical” students to achieve their curricular goals.
It is this mindset that develops alienation and exclusive mindsets in the first place. There is typical brain development, which is deemed “normal” and therefore, any variations of that should be dealt with separately and apart from the “normal” group in order to benefit both or catch the latter up to pace. We know now from the research that this mindset needs to be met with understanding of the greater impact inclusion has on the entire student body. However, we see this mindset everywhere – especially between cultures and races or anything that is different from ones’ own lens. It is the educators’ lens that holds the power for change as they make the choice which mindset to hold and teach through. We also see here through the above perspective that, without explicit pursuit of care and understanding, educators and students will still seek to alienate themselves and others by ability and like-mindedness because it is easier for our brain to process memory and reflection related to the self (Morel, et al, 2014). It is harder for our brains to engage with material or people that is “other” and involves a more complex process. Inclusion is more difficult than integration or exclusion but it is best practice. So, inclusion in the classroom boils down to a choice. The research supports the benefits as overcoming the challenges, but it is in fact a challenge. Where do we even begin?

The Dramatic Arts Build Inclusive Mindsets

We begin in the drama classroom. There are few dramatic artists who take the risk to discuss the inclusion of what are typically marginalized people as it can be controversial. At the core of the controversy lies three questions. How do we best honour stories of people with exceptional needs? What terminology to we use? Why should we share inclusive mindsets with the public? Few stories have been told from the perspectives of people with exceptional needs in order to deem the topic easily accepted. However, there is great power in the dramatic arts to
reflect changes needed in our societies, after all, drama is meant to create aesthetic learning, that is a knowledge other than that which concerns objective facts but is based in a sensate experience (Kempe, 2011). Dramatic artists around the world have begun to break down this aesthetic learning within the field of disability theatre, wherein, the dramatic performance deals with issues around disability or seeks to provide opportunities for dramatic artists with disabilities to create, produce and perform theatre. It is through undergoing the dramatic process and undergoing aesthetic learning that artists have discovered how inclusive mindsets can be developed and how this mindset benefits all of the participants.

For example, Andy Kempe in London, England researched the impact of “relaxed performances” on students with autism. He deems relaxed performances as a performance where “adjustments are made to sound and lighting effects and the operating conditions of the auditorium in order to reduce surprises or tensions that may trigger adverse reactions in children who are especially sensitive to sensate experiences” in order to “give those who otherwise might feel excluded the chance to experience live theatre” (2014, pg. 262). His qualitative research demonstrated that allowing for children on the autism spectrum to be themselves in a space and engage in a pantomime performance without all of the stresses of feeling disapproved of when the children “act out”. The relaxed environment the theatre companies that participated (the Prince’s Foundation for Children and the Arts, the Society of London Theatres and the Theatrical Management Association) created, front-loaded performances with what was to be expected in the audience so there were no surprises and during the production allowed for stimulatory behaviour without consequence. Some examples he gives as stimulatory behaviour would be shifting in ones chair, calling out, fidgeting, standing up and sitting down repetitively to name a few that occurred in their performances. Stimulatory behaviour is generally diverse in nature
depending on the individual needs. The results from this study varied due to the spectrum of opinions from parents based on their differing parenting philosophies. In one way, the discoveries from these performances in 2012-13 were inclusive to a community that was previously excluded but not entirely inclusive in its full definition as it was directed toward a targeted audience. The implications of “relaxed theatre” as an art form, however, is large in considering how all people with varying needs could require this relaxed environment.

This is precisely what Kristy Johnson seeks to discover in her research. Johnson compiled a study, Stage Turns: Canadian Disability Theatre, that examines three decades of disability theatre in Canada. She looks closely at Canadian Theatre scene and sets out to begin discussions of accessibility for all to the arts as both a creator (performer) and patron (audience participant). She lists many instances in Canada where what she deems as “disability theatre” arises to create powerful theatrical performances. These instances she lists are “not content simply to find or lobby for accessible audience seating, [the theatre companies which include actors with disabilities] have created and performed in their own theatres…on a range of themes” (2012, pg.3). For example, “a twenty-five year old theatre company in Vancouver [, Theatre Terrific,] recently explored the place of disability in classical tragedy in the context of celebrated playwright Arthur Miller’s decisions concerning his disabled son, Daniel” (2012), to name one. The movement of disability theatre seeks to, yes, be reformation and revolutionary in that the participants hope to invoke change, but, more than that they seek to “re-imagin[e] disability as a valued human condition” (2012, pg 5) and not simply a “handicap”.

Two individuals who upheld this philosophy to explore inclusion through the arts as beneficial to all participants are Lenakakis and Koltsida. In their qualitative research, they seek to gain perspective on the impact of inclusionary theatre by studying the “En Dynamei artistic
group, which is based in Thessaloniki [, Greece,] and is made up of disabled and non-disabled young people, parents and other volunteers” (2017). They discovered that the largest most prominent impact was to the participants with disabilities’ behaviour. With explicit and implicit modeling from the directors and participants, “as months lapsed, disabled members started to get their most erratic and extreme forms of behaving or expressing feelings under control, as they realised that they belonged to a mixed group giving them safety” to be able to express themselves through the perimeters of the art as opposed to “acting out”. This was the result of thoughtful instruction and environment creation on the part of the director for the project. They worked hard to build trust and communication methods in their ensemble through “mimetics” or the process of “copying and imitation”. Another researcher, Trowsdale and Haayhow, further studied this method as a means to include actors with disabilities. In his study, he discovers that “mimetics provides a lived and dynamic process through which children can practice self-actualising” (2013). He further concludes from his study that for students with disabilities that this process of mimetics realized “unrecognised capabilities” and allowed for these new abilities to be developed in the repetitive process of rehearsal. Back in Thessaloniki, this modeling tool of mimetics developed a common language and tool to use to create dramatic work. It further created stability in the group and a feeling of belonging for all of the group members through their agency and interdependence. They all needed each other to meet the goals of the completed performance. According to the researchers, “by partnering with each other within their mixed whole, through dialogue and through their common project, members built strong relations among themselves while following group rules and familiarising themselves with the ‘other’, with what is unfamiliar and different” (2013). This example of teamwork to meet a larger goal is precisely what all classrooms are trying to do. Teachers provide the goal and the steps to get
there as individuals but what the new curriculum beautifully sets up is that the goal is a skill. This ultimately means that learning is about the process, which can happen socially and inclusively as Lenakakis and Koltsida teaches us.

**Conclusions from the Research**

Overall, inclusive learning comes with its challenges. It begins with a mindset shift whereby all members of the classroom are seen as valued contributors to the work at hand. Inclusion requires and is best executed with thoughtful and strategic planning for a curricular goal being a learned skill rather than memorized content. The dramatic arts facilitate inclusion well because it engages the whole body in process with purpose. They build understandings through participation and make connections to the larger world through sharing stories in a visceral way that engages multiple senses. If educators are able to commit to altering their mindsets to include everyone and explicitly and implicitly teach inclusion through the pedagogies adapted through the dramatic arts, perhaps our schools would produce students better equipped to engage in our communities economically and socially because their mindsets will be eased with compassion and caring for others without judgement. However impactful inclusion through the dramatic arts has proven to be, further study is needed to understand inclusion within other subject areas in addition to its effect on the greater community and well-being of all people.
CHAPTER 3: THE DESIGN PROCESS AND RATIONALE

The Process

The process of this design project was grounded first in inquiry. I was curious about how my story impacted the way I taught and how it would impact others as they seek to understand inclusion. This curiosity began long before I became an educator but grew into an itch that I needed to scratch with some research into the field of special education. To help me understand my own story, I also felt that it was important to try to express my innate thinking through my art. I have always loved how drama has had the power in my life to transform my thinking. I have experienced my opinions and prejudices change through engaging in stories on stage as a viewer and also as a participant. So naturally, as I inquired further into my questions around the impact of inclusion in my story, I found that my connection to the dramatic arts helped me to find avenues and connections to teach inclusion and deepen my understanding.

My inquiry began with a reflection on my life generally. In my personal life, I have always tried to be inclusive. As I have grown up, I would include my brother and sister in my friend’s activities and teach my friends about my siblings so that they know how to communicate with them. In most situations, I have been especially tuned in to making sure that everyone feels like they belong and I can often be found speaking to people sitting on the outskirts of conversations or sitting on the bench. I somehow have found a way to bring them into the game. So naturally, I realized that this desire within in and this particular gift of mine would be best used in the field of education where my obsession with inclusion could blossom.

Consequently, in my own classroom, it was always my main goal to be inclusive. I have done so not out of necessity but out of natural habit. It wasn’t until I became a teacher that I fully realized why I was a passionate includer. It was my upbringing where I was inclusive of my
brother with exceptional needs in many different scenarios and environments that triggered my instinct to look for ways to include others in any situation. Therefore, naturally, as a high school teacher, I have worked to pursue a learning environment where all students are learning in the same space together and celebrating one another regardless of ability or background. Before my inquiry work began, I did so without really thinking about why or how. My inclusion model followed a lot of the research that I now have done. For instance, my model did not always mean that students were learning the exact same thing or working on the exact same thing at the same time. It meant that I worked to tailor the content and skills to the individuals and in strategic groupings so that they could learn from each other. Now, this year as I have been thinking more critically about inclusion, my inclusive classroom environment held challenges. I, at times, have had students who I work to include who in fact don’t want to be included. They do not like drama and want to take other classes. In these circumstances I tried so hard for these certain students to feel a part of the community but they simply did not want to be a part of it. It is here where I saw that inclusion has to be what the student wants too. Principally, inclusion also means that students are getting their needs met and sometimes the need is not to be included but to have some alone time or have their needs met elsewhere. For some, my definition of “everyone learning in the same space” sometimes needs to expand to the greater school community or the family and not just the classroom community for a short time. Inclusion can mean a visit to the counsellor or another teacher or some time at home in order for their needs to be met enough to continue to have other needs met in my classroom by their peers. I can honestly say, after looking through the research, I have not included students perfectly, in the past. Where I am encouraged though is that I have stuck to what I feel is most important. We always have come back together at the end of class to establish that we all belong in the class together.
Continuing the story, here I was two years ago teaching inclusively without knowing really what I was doing explicitly. I then started to notice that I had many teachers, parents and formal leaders come through my classroom and they would comment on how my classroom was so inclusive. They would praise me and then say that it is so wonderful that this is possible in drama because inclusion is not possible in all subject areas. This was where I laid on the brakes and pursued my curiosity. I had so many questions! Questions like, why do I care so much about inclusion? Who does inclusion benefit? Is it only those with exceptional needs or those without? Or, is it what I think and do all students benefit? Do I only find inclusion possible because I teach drama? Could drama act as a vessel through which to teach students about inclusion? Could it teach educators too? Is inclusion even possible for all subjects? Does our curriculum allow for inclusion? Does our system? It was these questions like this that led me, ultimately, to my research question: How can the dramatic arts embody my definition of inclusion?

As I sought to relieve the struggle for classrooms to be inclusive, I have strived to do so with an appreciative lens. That is, I assume that educators only want what is best for their students and are already doing many amazing things to support inclusion in their classrooms and schools. With this lens I actively seek to turn my initial judgemental reaction of the education system into curiosity. This appreciative lens allows me to find solutions as opposed to find complaint. Furthermore, I am also appreciative that, like my story, everyone has had a different experience with school and inclusion that they bring to their actions and teachings. That said, “the view of culture inside people’s mind helps people see themselves as active agents of culture” (Chang, 2008, pg. 20) and thus, I have chosen to be an active agent in creating culture through sharing my story. I am also appreciative that my story does not hold all the answers to
inclusion. I needed to turn to the empirical research to fully understand how to include students through the use of the dramatic arts.

To get started on my research journey for my project-based thesis, I started exploring my stories surrounding inclusion. I wanted to analyse and deconstruct of my sense of self in the context of culture within my family, community and within the education system. Therefore, I applied the methodology of auto-ethnography, that is, the qualitative research method of writing one’s own story in the context of and in order to study their culture. As I began to write down my memories from home and school growing up, I would discuss them with critical friends in my life, including my family members and friends who could help confirm or deny details of the past that I may have been fuzzy on or misconstruing.

This auto-ethnographical journey then led me to compose a scripted theatre piece through the use of dramaturgy; that is, to take my journey “off the page and onto the stage” (Irelan, Fletcher & Dubiner, 2010, p. xi). Dramaturgy has developed greatly over the years as a profession; however, it has always been associated with the process of writing and revising dramatic work (Luckhurst et al, 2006). In today’s theatre world, dramaturgy differs from purely playwriting in that it considers the play on stage from all angles of performance and seeks to challenge the norms of theatre. It further views the writing process as a means to explore concepts from multiple perspectives and therefore, allows for the writing to challenge the main purpose. From my exploration of research on inclusion and dramaturgical practices, I constructed a play that can be workshopped, performed or read as a means to share and explore my stories and the research. It is my hope that this play will be used by drama teachers as a means to create inclusion in their classrooms as well as be shared for performance so that audiences can also gain perspectives from this piece. I hope that through this exploration, I can also embody the First
People’s Principles of Learning which states that “learning is embedded in memory, history, and story” (FNESC, n.d.). We are all apart of a vaster web of stories. I ultimately hope that my vignette play can become a launching pad for other stories of inclusion to get airtime and allow for others to analyze their experiences.

To truly embody this principle of learning, I needed to properly honour stories of inclusion that came before me. I needed to pursue the research of other artists who were like me and wanted to effect change through the arts. I set out to fully understand why arts education is important in understanding social justice issues. I started there because I wanted to start broad before I made my case for inclusion through the dramatic arts. Why am I pulled towards the arts? What impact do they have as a spectator and a participant? Why teach drama in schools? These conclusions then flipped me into investigating the history, methods for and reasons for inclusion in schools. I also, conversely, looked at the reasons why inclusion is a challenge. Finally, I pulled the two worlds of drama and special education together to consider how the dramatic arts can and do include students. I researched other artists who had embarked on projects to include populations of people who were typically marginalized and in particular looked at theatre companies who included actors with disabilities. All of my research amounted to a greater sense of first of all, where the gaps were in the full implementation of inclusion and second, what strategies to apply to my playwriting project in order to best include all potential actors. After I conducted my literary research, I was ready to take my stories and expose them in a dramatic context.

The play itself combines several different dramatic styles. It is a vignette play meaning that it is a collection of short scenes that are all exploring a theme but aren’t necessarily dependent on one another to tell the story as a whole. This fact makes the piece a flexible
theatrical production in that directors can use scenes separately for education or performance purposes or show the piece as a whole to broaden the perspectives. This approach also made it possible to me to take myself as a character and create multiple characters at different ages with different names. My reason for this was two fold. It allowed for some anonymity as to which characters are me in any of the scenarios and it also metaphorically represents the multi-faceted nature of an individual. That is to say, one person is not just one label but rather many labels put together. Further, I drew on inspiration from dramatists such as Jonathan Neelands, Tony Goode, Lindsay Price, Augusto Boal, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht and many more who have influenced my style of writing and informed my technique as a performance artist. Specifically, my training in theatre for change has brought about new ways to write. Most of these techniques I have taken from Brecht work in “epic theatre”. Brecht’s theory was quite simple. His form was grounded in the fact that theatre is both kinesthetic and verbal not necessarily literary (Lehmann, 2006) and that the abstraction of the literal can be effective in allowing the audience to choose a stance. Particularly, from him I considered how rhythm can be made and broken to elicit emotion and break expectations. I used this Brechtian method in my opening and closing scene through the repetition of pronouns performed in a rhythm that accelerates and then breaks with one character crying out in angst. Brecht is one example of how I used contemporary theatre practices to deconstruct the stories I was trying to tell.

The contemporary theatre world has become cloudy with different meanings and language. The word drama, for example, has come to be understood as more of a genre of film or the stage opposite to comedy. This term, however, deepen to mean more in the context of my project. I mean drama to be the process (Lehmann, 2006). Performance in any case is all about process in order to find meaning and nuance so that the audience can interpret those aspects.
Also, the word script tends to be interpreted as a fixed document wherein the production follows the text and stage directions verbatim. In the contemporary theatre community, dramaturgs and playwrights are leaving more space in the text for interpretation and allow for flexibility. So, my completed dramatic script is more about the actors playing with process and applying techniques of contemporary theatre and theatre for change to bring themselves and their audience on a journey of understanding inclusion. Furthermore, I formatted the piece so that there was lots of room for “mimetics” to transpire – that is, for actors with exceptional reading and memorization challenges to have the opportunity to mimic another who is able. From the research on inclusivity within the dramatic arts, I discovered that this tool was used most often as a means to make students of all abilities comfortable and able to participate with dignity. These intentions are stated in the production notes as well as suggested in the stage directions. It is through these notes that I leave a guide for teachers and directors to see ways of how to include. Moreover, the casting is flexible and not gender, ability or race specific as way to further include all communities. This was important to me that I keep the casting open as another way to make the script accessible to anyone and any production company, school group or class.

I was selective in which stories of mine to include. I tried to tie a memory with each of the potential stakeholders in the inclusion equation. I used a story from a peer to peer perspective, a parent view, from the eyes of a student with disabilities and the resistant teacher perspective to name the main characters. The monologues aren’t reflective so much of my memories but of my attempts over the years to get inside the brain of my brother and understand how he would feel in certain situations. I wanted to try to give him a voice that he has not necessary had. I tried in all of the viewpoints not to be debative but instead to present inclusion as honestly as possible. Once complete, I gave my script to my parents to read. This was an
important step for me to take to ensure that I was honouring their stories as well. Everyone person’s journey is always pollinated with another’s, particularly in my case seeing as my stories arise from my family and school life. There is one scene in particular that I chose to keep which was my story but I was more a witness to the encounter than anything else. With my mother’s permission and blessing to include her experience with my brother’s teacher that I had witnessed I could be satisfied with the result. It is my honour to be able to tell these stories in such a way that furthers the work that my parents began in the school system in the 1980s when my brother entered the school system.

**Rationale**

Inclusion is important because it is what we all desire. The research demonstrates that we all desire to belong and feel a part of a community (Baumeister, 1995; Kałużna-Wielobób, 2017). It further demonstrates that when people feel connected to a community and feel like they belong, they are successful in pursuing learning goals because they are motivated by their community (Catterall, 2011; Morel et al, 2014; Johnston, 2012). In my opinion, the schools are not there yet as most educators I interact with are still finding the challenges outweigh the benefits (Downing, 2005). There are hints at inclusion and educators are doing their best to be inclusive but there is a need for practical and theoretical social change in the education system. The dramatic arts are an effective way to illustrate social change because that is what they have done for centuries. It’s as Oscar Wilde once said so beautifully: “Life imitates art far more than art imitates Life”.

The artists historically have pushed social changes along – particularly in the theatre and more modernly on the screen – as actors project the society they want and reflect how we are not
there yet but light the way through modeling. For example, Wilde in his extremely popular 1894 play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, created comedic characters that took themselves very seriously but were at the core reflecting the absurdity of the Victorian social system. Specifically, he furthered society by projecting how women could behave if they were permitted to be more candid. He critiques the aristocracy with appreciative integrity while also allowing the audience to laugh at their own behavior that is innately human. Playwrights, as early as the Greek writers in 400 B.C.E., reflected and changed Greek communities with their performances. They wrote the character “chorus” as a group of actors who spoke in unison as commenters on the action of the main characters to deliberately discuss injustices within Greek society. This form within dramatic performance has shaped theatre and by extension, culture, for all time with the creation of the Greek chorus. There are too many examples to name here where performance artists instigate change in their society through their choices of what to present on a stage or screen. All of these artists recognize the power of story to change perceptions. Generations of artists were pivotal in making those transformations happen. I strive to join them in the quest to challenge our culture through storytelling on the stage.

What I mostly feel is important to share is why inclusion is imperative for students without exceptional needs. I have personally fit into the box of what educators have traditionally considered a “typical” learner and because of that I have not be marginalized. I am able-bodied, and I learned to read and write at a typical pace. I was creative, sure, which was a handful at times but that ultimately allowed me to learn critical thinking and problem-solving well. I was able to make friends quickly and communicate my needs and wants to them and the adults in my life. I am a woman but come from a Caucasian background with blonde hair and brown eyes. I generally have felt included into most situations I have walked into on my own. Where that has
been different is when I am with my brother. He was not considered a typical learner in school. He is very similar to me in many ways. He is creative and has several musical talents. He is able bodied when supported properly. He communicates his needs and wants but only if you know how to listen for them. He makes friends easily so long as they are patient and can give of themselves to care for him. Him and I have a lot in common but were treated very differently in school. He was mostly told that he could not and I was told that I could. The point is that I believe he could too with a little patience. I learned how to be patient because of my relationship with him. I also learned about acceptance, bravery, curiosity and creativity from looking after and spending time with him. I mostly noticed that he is not “the other” he is simply my brother.

The greatest thing I learned from him if to be present and not anxious about things we cannot do anything about. These are things that are innately who he is that I have adapted but also what I have learned from looking after him. I find it is nearly impossible to be anxious and self-conscious while caregiving for him. My mindfulness of caring for those in my family have ultimately led to positive mental health whereby I do not struggle with anxiety and have a high self-esteem. This has developed as I have worked to take care of my brother’s needs and as others in my family have worked to take care of mine. So in these ways, my upbringing has embodied Kałużna-Wielobób’s research around creating community feeling. One creates a community feeling when everyone’s physical, social and emotional needs are being met in an environment where our job is to look after one another. Inclusion is important because it is the first step in creating such an environment.

This environment is possible in schools. It is possible because I have seen it happen in my theatre for every production we put on. In particular, this year, we produced a rendition of *High School Musical: On Stage* where I cast several students with exceptional needs in the show.
The students were forced to look after one another in a very real way. To support one another’s performances, make sure everyone had their costume, snacks, water, knew where to be when, knew the words and the movement, the lighting cues, etc. It was a lot that I asked of them. After the show, I asked what stood out to them about this show. They surprised us, my directing team, by answering that they all felt like they belonged – that this was their home at school now with their family around them. It was not the thing that we were doing – the show – that made an impression. It was not even what the adults were doing to meet their needs. It was peer-to-peer support. It was the process of doing a show where it was about getting the show done while having everyone’s needs met. School is like a show. We are all working toward this thing called education and would it not be amazing if every student could say that their school family felt like home? We all want to belong. It is up to the educators to create the environment where inclusion is possible so that students learn to do the including. It is in all in their best interest to be the best citizens they can be.
CHAPTER 4: THE PLAY PROJECT

Please see the PDF document with the stage play entitled “Included?”
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Main Learnings

The biggest take away from my journey has been to ultimately trust what I already knew. The foundation of inclusion begins with the recognition that we are all diverse learners and we all have different needs and unique stories. As Shelley Moore stresses, we need to try to celebrate everyone’s story (Moore, 2016). This is the where inclusion begins: a place where everyone is celebrated and continues to ensure that everyone’s needs are met. I have discovered along with Augusto Boal, Kirsty Johnson, Andy Kempe and many others that the dramatic arts have the capacity to celebrate everyone’s story. Now to circle back and answer the questions of my project: do theatre and drama activities create opportunities for students to develop empathy that leads to self-transformation? Is this transformation of self a result of inclusion? What about my main problem: how can the dramatic arts embody my definition of inclusion?

My journey has enlightened many paths to inclusion beginning with celebrating everyone’s story. Some of these paths I discovered within my story and others within the research. So, how can the dramatic arts embody my definition of inclusion? First, to answer my leading question, yes indeed, the dramatic arts evoke and develop empathy. This is achieved primarily through role-play. Through the creation within roles that are different from our own perspective, performers themselves are able to see life through another’s eyes and therefore appreciate their story. I have experienced this myself and seen the impact from the research on drama education. There are few environments where this degree of empathy is encouraged but the results are empowering to the actor in role because it challenges them to see beyond their own worldview. Role-play must be approached with integrity, however, and not mockery or stereotypical representations in order for it to truly deepen understanding. I always encourage my actors to
work hard to honour the story they are telling. Further to this fact, the dramatic arts create a
platform for a specific tool for including those with exceptional learning needs through the use of
mimetics or imitation. Mimetics is an imitation tool that is particularly useful in creating
dramatic performances but can also be useful in reiterating content learning to students without
disabilities but also draw those without into the conversation. When one student is imitating or
mimicking another in order to communicate, both students are learning how to meet each other’s
needs which in turn gives them a tool to include one another with. Mimetics further acts as a
metaphorical device depending on its uses. For example, in my play, “Included?” mimetics is
used to demonstrate a character’s feeling of entrapment (scene 4). In this way, it is both a
communication device for the actor and the audience. It is also through this type of teamwork,
that performers care for one another and look out for one another. This ultimately, alleviates
anxiety and self-judgement because they are thinking of the other instead of themselves
(Kałużna-Wielobób, 2017). Theatre can be powerful when role-play and mimetics are applied to
evoke empathy, which make for an exemplary example of how inclusion is mutually beneficial.

Moreover, to address my second leading question: is self-transformation a result of
inclusion? The dramatic arts make an outstanding platform for learning about inclusion because
it allows for students to showcase and explore their thinking in a safe environment. This
exploration ultimately, grows performer’s confidence both individually and as a group. As
previously mentioned, when performance artists are developing work they first strive to create a
trusting and cooperative space. They do so through sharing each other’s stories, playing together,
challenging one another and through making performance choices together. I saw this first-hand
early in my journey through my master’s research when I worked through a spiral of inquiry
(Halbert and Kaser, 2013) to unlock how confidence was built in students. It was through this
structured inquiry that I developed the skills to conduct an auto-ethnographical study and follow my curiosities around inclusion. This particular inquiry led me into a curiosity toward inclusion because I could see in my own classroom how an environment of inclusion ultimately alleviated anxiety and self-doubt leaving confidence in its wake. It was during this time that I wrestled with the question about self-transformation and it’s link to inclusive environments. In my findings, confidence developed in my classroom from their collective agreement to include everyone. Through overcoming challenges together and making choices within their curriculum which challenged everyone where they were at, they began to grow a confidence in themselves individually, which they could then give to their neighbour because they all had a collective goal: to grow each other’s confidence. In other words, their self-transformations into confidence developed as a result of their inclusion of others. Their journey toward confidence was only a starting point for my curiosities as I saw that their journey, ultimately, was only possible because they felt a sense of belonging to their classmates, their work and to the space we worked in. They had included everyone, which developed an environment of safety, where each student was allowed and encouraged to pursue their goals in performance and explore their thinking around complex subjects. Through the process of preparing and developing dramatic work inclusively, candid idea sharing and critical thinking develops as performers seek to convey meaning to an audience. Therefore, they together strive to offer new ways to create theatrical work and when guided so, this can also mean discovering new ways to be inclusive.

Therefore, the impact is cyclical. My definition of inclusion, whereby everyone is learning together in the same space to have their needs met and everyone is celebrated, is achieved through the dramatic arts because they seek to be inclusive. In order for performers to perform well, they must work together well; therefore, they must seek for everyone to feel a sense of
belonging to the performance. They must feel needed and useful to the project. In the process of developing a space where everyone is celebrated and their needs are met, students begin to transform into confident individuals as a result of feeling included and by including others. Consequently, it is through pursuing inclusion that inclusion happens and then the real power shines through. We should want inclusive environments because they produce self-assured people working together to meet the needs of the group. Is that not what our schools, businesses and communities should look like? It is for this reason that the dramatic arts can guide the way but, ultimately, inclusion is possible in all subject areas because the power comes from the process of including.

**Limitations**

Inclusion is possible but my research alone is not the missing piece. I am limited. I am first and foremost limited by my biases. First, my contexts have skewed my interests and focuses through my project. I teach high school students so the majority of my thinking and research has naturally alluded to that age group although I do believe the principles could apply to all ages. Furthermore, my story and relationship to my brother also has made me very comfortable working with individuals with exceptional needs or disabilities. This experience with my brother and many others whom I have made acquaintance has made inclusion easier for me. I do understand that this experience is an advantage in the world of inclusive learning and recognize that some of my tools and techniques for inclusion may be a result of my “teaching who I am” and may not be entirely possible for all educators. I also feel that the entire project is biased with my belief that inclusion is solely the right thing to do.
One of the biggest limits to my project is that not everyone is open to doing the work to include everyone in their classroom. Inclusion requires a mindset change and thoughtful preparation which can take time and learning. Educators need to be handed and shown the tools to include all students, particularly those with exceptional needs. Ultimately, educators need to see the benefit of belonging; they need to see inclusion as best practice. In British Columbia, in order for this change to happen, districts need to demonstrate how the new curriculum has freed them to adapt their mindsets. This can begin in the theatre as a tool for demonstration as I have worked to do but in order for transformative change in our communities it must go further. To this end, my work is limited in that not everyone is connected to the dramatic arts community nor do all teachers have the training to embed dramatic arts techniques into their discipline. The message can be powerful but only to those who allow themselves to engage with the material presented or explored in professional development. Also, contemporary styles of theatre can inhibit understanding because it contains elements of newness in genre and style. Abstract notions can fly over one’s head if one is not willing to engage. Further research would allow me to pursue other avenues such as lesson plans that could be adapted to other subject areas. Perhaps another avenue to teach a wider audience would be to adapt the stage play to a screenplay so that the final product is a film. A film would be more widely accessible, shareable and is more of a growing literacy in our society than stage. This would emphasize a product rather than a process, however, which was not my original intention. Nevertheless, further study may reveal that a product is more transformative in today’s society.

My project further could be expanded. I have focused my attention on the inclusion of individuals with exceptional learning needs and disabilities, as this is what I saw as the biggest challenge in our schools. I also focused my research to mostly consider the education system as
it is established in British Columbia, Canada. The study could be expanded to other historically marginalized groups or involve further quantitative research to discover which groups of students are segregated, integrated or excluded from our education system. It further could be expanded to explore other provinces in Canada or places in the world. Alternately, the study could be furthered to see how the principles of including those with exceptional needs apply to those, for example, from the LGBTQ2IA (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Questioning, Two Spirited, Intersex and Asexual) community. I am curious as to how the principles of inclusion for those with exceptional needs are truly what is best for all human beings.

One further limitation to the timeline of this particular project was that I was not able direct this particular play to report on its’ impact. It is my hope that the opportunity should arise. I actually would like to offer the project to another director and their dramatic artists to explore and be allowed the opportunity to observe the process unfold and allow time for my coaching as the dramaturg. I think that this would be the best way to analyse the impact and understandings that the stage play as written offers a group. This next step would also make way for changes and adaptations to other mediums for the greater public.

Conclusion: The Big Connection

Schools reflect our society. If we can teach inclusion in schools, our communities will be more inclusive because everyone knows how. We need to teach our students how to include one another, particularly those with exceptional needs, as it is what is in the best interest of their social emotional learning and mental health. We now know that students succeed when they all feel like they belong and when all of their needs are met. These needs can be physical, emotional, social or spiritual but, but when not met, learning cannot transpire. If the adult leaders
can create environments and introduce tools for their students to arrive with some needs met but further allow for their students to care for each other, powerful impacts are made. If these environments are created, all students become less judgemental of self and therefore, less anxious which reveals a collective and individual confidence to produce success.

This care giving and taking can start in the theatre. Artists can demonstrate and explore for themselves to make for meaningful changes within their ensembles and with their teachers. The impact and meaning can stir within the dramatic artists hearts but it simply must go beyond in order for true transformation to take place within our schools. The dramatic arts inspire and provoke in order to retract fear through storytelling but the messages are kicked aside when they remain on the stage and not in the hearts and minds of the receivers. The research reflects inclusion as best practice, the dramatic arts can expose this but it is up to our schools to open their minds and hearts to the power of inclusion.
REFERENCES


http://www.featbc.org/downloads/review.pdf