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Theatre education for homeschooled children

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Theatre Education for Homeschooled Children

An Honors Program Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Visual and Performance Arts
James Madison University

by Jonathan Adrian Martin

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Theatre and Dance, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work was accepted for presentation, in the
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Preface

Before you is one-third of my final Seniors Honors Thesis Project. Four years of training and three semesters of work on this specific project have resulted in a three-part thesis. Part one consisted of a theatre class that was taught to homeschooled children around the Harrisonburg area. Part one included the teaching and planning of the class, the implementation of the class structure, the affiliation of this class with JMU, the training of future teachers to take over, and the physical performance that occurred at the culmination of the class in November 2015.

Part two of this thesis consists of an electronic portfolio full of everything anyone could possibly need to know in order to run this class in the future. The primary goal of this project was not only to provide theatre education for the homeschooled community, but also to ensure that this education could be continued in the years to come. The electronic portfolio consists of everything from logistical information to financial advice, lesson plans to improv games, and registration forms to potential plays to be produced in the future.

Part three is before you now. It is the culmination of my research, with personal reflection interwoven. It is my attempt at forging together one cohesive document out of the thousands of pages of research, the hundreds of hours of practical experience, and the feedback from sixteen homeschooled students and their parents.

Although this document by no means encapsulates the full scope of this project, it is the first step at understanding this complex topic that I have focused three semesters of my life on. I hope you not only enjoy this first step, but more importantly I hope this document is your first step of many to come in the continued advocacy for greater access to arts education for all students across this country.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, this project would not have been possible without the assistance of Christine Johnson, who has been by my side since day one. Without her assistance in co-teaching and assisting with the homeschool theatre class, this project would have never gotten off the ground in the first place.

Dr. Meredith Conti has provided support, encouragement, and guidance throughout this entire process, and I am forever grateful to her.

The homeschooled theatre class would also not have been achievable without the help of several JMU Theatre students who volunteered their time and talents to make the production successful. This includes Tyler Cramer (playwright), Justin Burns (lighting designer), Isabella Scappaticci (sound designer), and our incredible teaching assistants Katie and Megan Cizek. A special thank you also goes out to Kira Gavalakis and Kylie Nelson for assisting backstage during the performance, as well as all of our ushers for the show.

We would not have been able to perform our play in a theatre if it was not for Dr. Terry Dean and Emily Becher-McKeever granted permission to use JMU's Studio Theatre, and Regan Byrne's support of this project from day one. Much appreciation is also due to the entire JMU Honors Program and the School of Theatre and Dance faculty, specifically my readers Kate Arecchi and Leah Kirkpatrick, as well as Dr. Zachary Dorsey for allowing me to talk his ear off on multiple occasions.

Last but not least, none of this would have mattered without the support and appreciation of all of the students and parents of the homeschooled community in this area. Thank you all.

Theatre Education for Homeschooled Children

In recent years, the push for theatre education from arts education advocates has been increasingly prevalent, especially in the face of substantial budget cuts from many public schools' arts programs. The recent addition of a special Tony Award for theatre educators demonstrates the push for education advocacy in the theatrical world. Scholars like Barbara Poston-Anderson, David Farmar, Sharon Grady, Howard Gardner, and countless others have spent years preparing various resources to train future theatre teachers. Licensure-granting theatre education undergraduate degrees - like the one recently added at James Madison University – are becoming more popular in universities across the nation. While there is still a long way to go before theatre education will be integral to school curricula, there are clear steps being taken to promote theatre education in the United States.

Similar to the recent push for theatre education is a rise in homeschooling in America. Homeschooling has been on the rise domestically for several years now, continuing to grow between 2% and 8% annually. It is now estimated that roughly 2.2 million students are homeschooled in the United States. While there are many valid reasons for opting to homeschool children, technological advancements and the ease of attaining information have certainly impacted the educational world and offered an alternative to traditional schooling. There has been significant scholarship done on the merits of homeschooling and effective strategies, as well as substantial scholarship that suggest homeschooling may not be beneficial after all. However, I do not intend to place any value judgment on the choice of schooling style that a parent chooses for their child.

What I intend to do is offer a solution to a problem that many parents of homeschooled children face: How can we incorporate theatre education into a homeschooling environment with

limited resources, students, and knowledge of the field? This is a question that was brought up to me in the spring of 2014 when I first embarked on this mission. A Harrisonburg resident and mother of homeschooled children reached out to a JMU theatre professor regarding any opportunities for her children to get an education in theatre. After an email was sent to theatre education students regarding this inquiry, I decided to answer the call. My goal was to establish a theatre class for homeschooled children in Harrisonburg where students could gather together and learn about the theatre while simultaneously learning the inherent life skills that an arts education provides. Through my work, I quickly realized the importance of a theatre education to students from all backgrounds. While there is plenty of scholarship on alternative education, there is little existing research on the specific values of a theatrical education in a homeschooled setting. I consider theatre education to be a necessity, which is why I decided to embark on the journey of uncovering what aspects of theatre education would be most useful for homeschooled students.

I have now taught this class twice, once in the fall of 2014, then again in the fall of 2015. The 2014 class had fifteen students in it, age eight to twelve. The 2015 class had eighteen students age six to fourteen, with three of the students returning from the previous year's class. All in all, that gave me the unique opportunity to teach theatre to a total of thirty homeschoolers age seven to fourteen. As an educator who has only ever taught and been taught in a public school, this experience primed me to take a unique stance on the scholarly debate of homeschooling. My balance of research with first-hand experience working with these children has led me to believe that finding formalized theatre education for homeschoolers is incredibly useful and should be a priority for homeschooling parents.

Through my research and experience, I have come to believe in four core values that theatre education provides for homeschoolers:

1. A greater capacity to explore the stories of others.
2. Stronger interpersonal communication skills.
3. Increased confidence in an individual's personality and abilities.
4. An opportunity to find new talents and gifts.

These four values have become the cornerstone of my experience and have consequently found themselves becoming an integral part of my teaching philosophy for all students from all backgrounds. This paper will prove why these values are needed in homeschoolers, and it will validate how these merits can be acquired through theatre education.

The foundational element of this journey was unveiling the history of homeschooling in America. The term itself carries a number of challenges with it. On the online blog *Grammarphobia*, journalists, authors, and former *New York Times* editors and contributors Patricia T. O'Conner and Stewart Kellerman attempt to provide a historical context for the term. Part of the controversy over the terms is due to the fact that homeschooling is, historically speaking, a more recent development. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb "homeschool," the adjective "homeschooled," and the noun "homeschooler" only date back to the 1980s. The noun "homeschool" dates back much later, to around 1850. "Homeschool" as a noun came to refer to "a school located in a private home; the fact of educating children, esp. one's own, in the home" (O'Conner and Kellerman). This was typically used more to describe

schools that operated out of a home, as opposed to the juxtaposition of homeschooling compared to public education.

While it may appear as if homeschooling is a recent phenomena, that certainly is not the case. In July 2015, three education faculty members from the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia decided to sort through recent scholarship on homeschooling to better understanding the truth behind the practice. They analyzed eleven major studies conducted between 2011-2014. After their research, they wrote “The development of homeschooling in United States of America started since 17th and 18th century” (Jamaludin 114). Homeschooling has been around for centuries, however the recent changes in technology, as well as the increasing debates over standardized public education, may be contributing to the growing numbers of homeschoolers in the US.

Scholarship on homeschooling is quite paradoxical. It is simultaneously plentiful and limited. Many researchers have attempted to research various aspects of homeschooling and alternative education; however there is very little concrete evidence for any claims. Part of this is due to the inevitable bias in acquiring information. In order to really understand the homeschool community and gather data on their practices, one would need to converse with parents who homeschool their children. It is rather difficult to make any substantial claims on homeschooling without collecting data. Similarly, many homeschoolers do not take standardized tests in order to measure their learning. Some states in the US do not even have education laws regarding homeschooling (Zeise). The inconsistency in laws, standardized testing, and requirements makes it difficult to conduct quality research and gather viable data on homeschooling.

A significant amount of the scholarship available on homeschooling deals either with homeschooling practices or effective and healthy learning alternatives (Jamaludin 116). One

consistent goal of homeschooling, it appears, is to avoid some of the dangers found in larger school environments – such as fights, racism, or bullying. By keeping a closer eye on students, and by having fewer students in the “classroom,” parents are able to protect their children from things they do not wish their children to be exposed to. These concerns were important to keep in mind while crafting my own theatre class for homeschoolers. I had to ensure that students felt relaxed and comfortable in a learning environment while still maintaining what it is that the homeschooling parents believed to be most crucial to their children’s learning atmospheres. Once I was able to find this balance, I became capable of formulating my educational philosophy regarding the core merits of teaching theatre to homeschoolers.

Before proving the useful benefits theatre education has for the home schooling community, it is important to validate theatre education in a broader scope. Over the last several years, many public and private schools in the country has found financial support for the arts to be dwindling. While some schools still maintain active and dynamic theatre programs, many schools do not have a single drama teacher on their faculty. While budget cuts in schools have caused decreases in arts education, advocates of the arts, and theatre education in particular, have published many studies proving the value and merit of theatre education for students. Numerous studies have been done that have linked arts education to higher academic success rates (Henry). This includes higher scores on standardized tests, as well as increases in literacy, reading comprehension, and language skills.

A 2010 study of public schools in Missouri not only showed that theatre and arts education students did better in school and had higher test scores, they also had better attendance and an increased graduation rate (Scheuler). As many would expect, a common factor in

educational success is getting students excited about their learning. When students are interested and excited about the subject, and when students *want* to be in class and learn, they are more likely to not only attend school, but to stay focused, driven, and work hard in classes. This, of course, leads to the higher attendance rates, but it also directly impacts graduation rates, as proven in Leslie Scheuler's report for the Missouri Arts Council.

Theatre education has numerous practical benefits for students, which are easily accessible through the plethora of research studies done over the last several years. However, it is difficult to find scholarly research that links the importance of theatre education to the homeschooled community. Therefore, I will address the four key values of theatre education by showing why they are, at times, lacking from a home schooled education; then I will provide evidence as to why theatre education becomes the best complementary solution to these educational needs.

1. A greater capacity to explore the stories of others.

One common reason for the desire to protect children through homeschooling stems from religious beliefs. In Virginia, for example, the Department of Education states in Virginia Code 22.1-254 that “A school board shall excuse from attendance at school . . .any pupil who, together with his parents, by reason of bona fide religious training or belief is conscientiously opposed to attendance at school” (Morrison 34). Religiosity has been a driving factor of homeschooling from its inception, being described as “an alternative to cater the needs of children’s learning and religious practices” (Jamaludin 114). As public education becomes increasingly more secular, many religious parents are afraid their children will lose the fundamental beliefs of their religion or culture.

I should first make this clear: I do not intend to criticize this practice or belief in any way. My argument for theatre education for homeschoolers is not rooted in any religious belief or opposition to religious education. That being said, one major disadvantage of homeschooling can become a limited perspective on the world. When students are only exposed to one or two teachers and are taught from a specific perspective – regardless of whether they are homeschooled or not – it can become difficult for learning development to allow different perspectives into their education. Children need to be exposed to a variety of things in the world. Homeschooling parents can absolutely expose their kids to various sources and a wide array of learning materials. Attending alternative classes – like classes offered through homeschool co-ops – can continue to help expand children’s experiences of the world.

One of the major benefits of drama education is that it exposes students to a wide variety of stories. Children can learn to empathize with characters, explore different points of view, and try to understand the world through the eyes of a character that is different from themselves. One

of the four basic needs of young people is new experiences (McCammon and Østerlind 90). For any student who had never had the opportunity to take a drama class, theatre will inevitably become a new experience for them. Beyond this though, it is arguable that *every* theatre class is a new experience. Students will always have the opportunity to read a new play, meet a new character, or explore something different onstage. Theatre requires research. Theatre practitioners need to understand the world of the play, the dominant ideologies, the prevailing perspectives of that world, and how their character functions within it. Theatre gives the opportunity to explore all time periods across history from unique perspectives.

Educators Laura A. McCammon and Eva Østerlind conducted a survey of students who had ample experience with theatre education in their secondary schools in the United States as well as in Sweden. Their survey gave primary accounts of students' experience with theatre, as well as their personal justifications for taking theatre classes and what they feel they most learned from these classes. The ability to understand others came up as one of the competencies acquired from theatre education. One student wrote, "Drama teaches you how to relate to people and see that no one is a flat character" (96). Having a student make this comment shows the impact that drama education can have on not only enabling students to better understand the stories of others, but also become capable of acknowledging this understanding.

This value became especially prevalent in our theatre class this year. Our play was titled *Jackie and the Golden Comet* and featured human characters that traveled to space and met aliens. One parent informed me that her daughter would not know what an alien was. Another parent told me that this play would be acceptable as long as we did not teach anything about evolution when talking about other species. For many of our students, getting the opportunity to learn about aliens was exciting. While the instructors made sure to steer clear of any potentially

offensive content, we were still able to allow our students to explore outer space in their imaginations and begin to think about the experiences that aliens might have. While developing empathy for imaginary aliens may not seem life-changing, getting the opportunity to relate to new types of characters helps children learn how to see different perspectives.

2. Stronger interpersonal communication skills.

In a similar fashion to understanding the stories of others and relating to other characters, theatre education also helps students relate to each other. One major reported downside to homeschooling can be that there is limited interpersonal communication. In an article titled “Disadvantages of Homeschooling” posted by the online resource *Homeschool-Companion*, it is written that “one of the more serious negative effects of homeschooling is that children can miss out on the opportunity to interact with other children. This can stunt their development socially as they do not learn how to communicate or behave in group settings.” Children need to interact with other children in order to grow and develop psychologically and socially. This is why many parents sign up for homeschool co-ops or other group classes or programs. Theatre is an activity that inevitably gives children the opportunity to interact with each other while learning to collaborate.

Many students who have participated in theatre education report having a sense of family with their peers, classmates, and fellow actors. Various reports have shown that “when arts are created in schools, a sense of ‘belonging’ is generated” (McCammon and Østerlind 92). Theatre students learn to collaborate in a working environment to create the best show possible. One student from McCammon and Østerlind’s research study wrote of drama, “It teaches me to work with a team and be patient with myself and others” (McCammon and Østerlind 96). Bring in a collaborative theatrical environment can help children learn to work together, respect each other’s differences, and have deep, meaningful interactions with their peers.

In our homeschool theatre class, interpersonal communication was a skill that the children strengthened over the course of ten weeks. On the first day of class, most of the students were nervous around each other and rarely talked. By the fifth or sixth class, these children were

all joking around together and having fun. They learned to better interact with each other and work together. Various activities and lesson plans were designed to be group endeavors where students could work together in small groups to discuss the topics on hand. We were able to use theatre to foster a collaborative, creative environment where children could enhance their interpersonal communication skills. Following the completion of the class, one mother wrote, “I appreciate how well the children interacted and accepted everyone in the class. Usually my kids do not remember names of those they had just met, but, in this class they did.” This acceptance and positive interaction was something that we strived for, and knowing that this goal was achieved made the entire class worth it.

3. Increased confidence in an individual's personality and abilities.

A widespread issue across the field of education centers on what I will refer to as the “expectation effect.” Author and scholar Kathleen Cotton cites a famous 1968 publication by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson that concluded “that students' intellectual development is largely a response to what teachers expect and how those expectations are communicated” (Cotton 1). The Rosenthal/Jacobson study coined the term “Pygmalion Effect,” which is now used to refer to the idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Solomon). The basis of this philosophical and psychological belief is that people (in this case – students) will unconsciously fulfill the expectations set on them by society (or in this case – teachers). Positive expectations will lead to positive results, and negative expectations will lead to negative results. In the classroom, this plays a major role in student learning as well as educators’ teaching. Setting high expectations for students’ learning will increase their learning significantly as they will unconsciously strive to meet these expectations.

Where the issue arises is in negative expectations. Confidence has a direct impact on student learning. If students are confident in their abilities to meet expectations or achieve certain standards, they will be much more successful in doing so. If, however, students believe that they will not achieve a task or do not have high confidence in their abilities, their results will be much more negative. In a homeschooling classroom where there is often one teacher and fewer students, the expectations often come from that sole teacher (a parent). While parents may tend to have high expectations for their students, their primary ownership over their child’s education can drastically alter their child’s results of learning. If a homeschooling parent accidentally struggles to instill confidence in their child in regards to a task, their child may struggle to learn in that instance. Homeschooling parents have the immense responsibility of instilling confidence

and high expectations in their children at all times. Retired homeschool teacher/parent Kerry Mullenix was asked in a 2013 interview with the *Home School Legal Defence Association* about the biggest challenges of homeschooling her son. She responded, “If [my son] felt he was going to be a failure from the start of a task, he’d immediately decide not to complete the task. It was difficult keeping him focused and interested in learning” (Mullenix). This is a first-hand example of how a student’s lack of confidence in their ability to learn will radically impact the results of their learning.

The positive side to this however, is that theatre education can instill confidence in students on many levels. First of all, students who participate in drama often become more confident in themselves and their personalities. Some students even say that they join drama to “practice to become more confident” (McCammon and Østerlind 96). One hundred percent of parents who filled out our survey stated that one change they noticed in their child through this process was an increase in confidence. When students get the experience of putting themselves on stage and allowing an audience to experience their words, actions, and emotions, it can instill a great deal of confidence in those performers. As an actor, you learn to be secure in who you are and what you are putting forward to an audience.

On the same token however, being in front of an audience can be terrifying for some students. This can become even more applicable to students who are homeschooled and rarely get the opportunity to speak in front of large groups of people, specifically people they do not know. Stage fright and fear of public speaking are not unique to homeschoolers, of course. But drama education can help relieve some of these fears. Study after study has shown that students who have studied drama “overcame these anxieties and became confident and competent speakers” (McCammon and Østerlind 96). Theatre education provides students the experience of

speaking in front of large groups in a secure and confident way. One of the parents from our homeschool theatre class said her son “gained confidence being in front of others.” Drama students tend to be more confident public speakers; they also tend to be confident in front of others in any everyday situation as they have confidence instilled in their personalities.

4. An opportunity to find new talents and gifts.

Many homeschooling parents and organizations advocate for new experiences for their children. Co-ops are created to allow homeschooling parents resources to come together and get their children involved in various classes with other students. They also sometimes plan field trips and other outings in order to provide new experiences for students. This is a great idea in an educational sense, because students need to be free to explore and create and experience new things. In fact, “new experiences” is one of the four significant developmental needs put forth in Mia Kellmer Pringle’s influential educational philosophy (Smith 26). Allowing students to find these new experiences is crucial for their growth and development.

While field trips and co-ops can be great resources to give homeschooled children new experiences, it can sometimes become difficult to fully integrate new experiences into a curriculum due to the time and finances often required to provide these experiences. Arts education, therefore, becomes an incredibly beneficial alternative to constant field trips and larger classes. Many aspects of arts education, including theatre education, can be incorporated into curricula at home. Arts education is beneficial to student learning overall, but can sometimes be difficult to provide for students, especially in a homeschool classroom where parents may not feel they have the necessary prerequisite qualifications to teach theatre.

Research suggests that “within each student there are unique psychological barriers which impede creative interactions” (McCammon and Østerlind 93). This means that every student has the capacity to create art, but it requires a consistent effort to break down these barriers which impede the imaginative and explorative processes. Theatre is actually one of the strongest forces at breaking down these psychological barriers. McCammon and Østerlind’s research shows that “through play and fantasy, young people not only develop cognitive skills,

but also their imaginations” (93). Theatre education, therefore, does more than simply allow for a creative outlet of fantastical play. It also develops cognitive skills *and* the imagination, which both help demolish the aforementioned “psychological barriers” that can restrict creative work and discoveries. In a homeschool classroom, parents are able to give more unique and individual attention to each student. This can lead to more active and consistent breaking down of these creative barriers, which can actually sometimes make it easier for homeschoolers to access their imaginations and their capacity for creative endeavors.

One of the parents from our homeschool theatre class commented that the theatre education her son received “made him come alive.” She also noted that he discovered one of his gifts. This student believes that acting is a gift of his and at a young age now is excited by the prospect of performing for others and exploring the theatrical practice. This new experience for him, coupled with his increase in confidence, has made him “come alive.” Every student is different, and every child is a unique individual learner. By providing students with a theatre education – as well as any other new experiences they can be exposed to – we, as educators, will have a higher chance of finding what works best for our students. In a homeschool classroom, exposing children to arts education, and specifically theatre education, can provide them with a different and new experience that could have potentially life-changing results for their learning, as well as their cognitive and psychological development.

Having now taught this class twice, I have learned first-hand how beneficial the class can be for students, as well as how to make the class most accessible and successful for the students. The major factors in the class’ success have been location, play selection, structure, and course

content. All of these factors greatly influence student learning, and all of these factors had specific challenges and benefits when relating to the home schooled community.

As far as location is concerned, the affiliation of this class with James Madison University had much to do with location concerns. In our first year of the class, we met at Our Community Place, a local recreation and community center that offers a variety of programs. The space was reserved for us weekly and had ample space for activities and theatre games. We also had access to the “backyard” of the center, where there was a volleyball court and swing set that our students had access to during their break period. The downside to this space was the fact that it did not resemble any sort of classroom structure. We did not have access to a whiteboard, desks, or chairs. It became difficult for us as teachers to write anything down for the students to copy, which made any sort of visual learning near impossible. Additionally, the space was too small to hold the final performance in, so we held the final performance of the play in a local church. This removed the potential for set pieces, lighting design, or sound effects. We became limited in terms of design and technical theatre, which was something many students were excited to explore.

By affiliating this program with JMU this past year, we were able to secure an on-campus classroom to hold the class in. This gave us access to a whiteboard, projector, chairs, and a larger space that was actually built for acting classes. The whiteboard and projector access enabled us to expand our course curriculum this year to include a lesson on design so as to not solely focus on acting and offer a broader perspective on theatre. Additionally, our new affiliation enabled us to use JMU’s Studio Theatre for the final performance. We were able to partner with a lighting designer and a sound designer to have a much more complete theatrical experience for the students. It was the first time many of these students have ever performed on a stage, which can

be a very significant moment for them in their growth as theatre students and as young performers.

Once we secured a class location as well as a performance venue, we needed to select a play for the students to rehearse and perform at the end of the class session. Last year, I wrote the play, along with my co-teacher, a theatre education major who also helped direct the play. This was beneficial because we were able to edit the play after the first meeting with the students, and we could adapt the play once it was cast to adjust according to the skills and needs of each student performer. However, neither of us are playwrights studying to be playwrights, and ultimately the play ended up only running about fifteen minutes. This time around, we wanted to extend the script to ensure that we had a final performance of approximately thirty minutes. Additionally, because we were given a grant by JMU for this project, we had funds this year to support the project. We were able to put out a notice requesting student submissions for plays that we could produce, and we were able to offer a small stipend to whichever playwright was selected. A senior theatre major was selected from our submissions, and he was graciously willing to adapt the play slightly as we went along. This enabled us to keep the benefits from writing our own script, while allowing someone with more prerequisite skills to write a longer one act for the students.

After selecting the play, we worked on designing the structure of the class. Due to our location last year, we were able to have a longer class period each day. We met one day a week for ten weeks, and each meeting lasted two hours. We would do a fifty five minute lesson, followed by a ten minute break, then a fifty five minute rehearsal. This year, we were only able to reserve the room for an hour and a half per class meeting. We still met once a week for ten weeks (due to scheduling conflicts with students, we could not meet more frequently), but we

were only there for ninety minutes per class. We ended up needing to eliminate our break time and drastically shorten our lessons in order to retain the time necessary to rehearse for the play. In the future, I would certainly work to either have two hour classes like our first year, or I would extend the class to meet twice per week.

Finally, we began to work on the content for the course. The content of the course was similar both years that we taught it. The only major difference was, as previously mentioned, that we were able to teach more about design and technical theatre in our second year due to the increased space and classroom resources provided by our affiliation with JMU. The biggest challenge that we faced each year was quickly establishing an ensemble that could successfully perform the plays. The fact that our students were home schooled provided unique advantages, as well as unique challenges. On one hand, many of the students came into the class previously knowing each other from various home school cooperative organizations in the area. Many of their families were friends, and so these students felt more comfortable playing and exploring together. On the other hand, some of these students had never met a single person in the room before and were used to learning in a small classroom wither alone or with their siblings. Being in a newer environment with new faces was difficult for some students to adapt to. As teachers, it fell on us to work to establish a safe learning community where all students felt valued, accepted, and appreciated for their unique skills, abilities, and talents. Because of this, we ended up spending large portions of the first few classes both years on group improvisational games and relationship based activities. We would start with games that involved the students' names; sometimes, half the battle is getting students to remember each others' names and refer to people by name. We also would play games that required teamwork and collaboration for success, such as the "human knot." This is a game where students stand in a circle, grab hands with people

across from them, and then have to unwind themselves without letting go of anyone's hand. This game immediately helps the students learn how to trust each other and communicate effectively, while also allowing them to have fun together as a group. Activities like this became more useful than I ever could have imagined because getting the students to trust each other and be willing to adapt to this new environment proved to be one of the biggest and most crucial challenges of the project.

Throughout this project, I reaffirmed my belief that theatre education is an invaluable experience for students. There are so many results and experience that come from a theatre education that are intangible and impossible to quantitatively measure. However, the benefits of a theatre education can not be debated. Students gain a greater capacity to explore others' stories, demonstrate stronger interpersonal communication skills, increase confidence, and access new experience which can open up their creative minds. While homeschooling certainly has many benefits, many homeschooling teachers, parents, and advocates have acknowledged that these four values may sometimes be lacking in a homeschool education and require specific attention to be incorporated into curricula. Theatre education, through integrating it into previously existing lessons *or* by providing and attending theatre classes like the one now offered through James Madison University, clearly rises to the top of the list of ways to provide these values for a homeschooling education. By incorporating theatre education into the lives of these children, we can help them grow and develop in ways like never before, providing a more well-rounded and fully encompassing educational experience.

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