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Adaptive Theatre Techniques for Use in Autism Behavioral Intervention

Tyler Hastings

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ADAPTIVE THEATRE TECHNIQUES FOR USE IN
AUTISM BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION

By

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San Diego State University
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

This study explores effective techniques for teaching a person with autism behavioral and social skills, and shares research that suggests adaptive theatre techniques are a supportive option for people with autism. By utilizing scholarly research, the goal of this study is to: identify, analyze, and evaluate successful techniques for teaching students with autism, and prove that adaptive theatrical techniques are an effective resource for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills.

There are many successful techniques available when teaching an individual with autism. I plan to examine traditional techniques when teaching individuals with autism, analyze the many benefits that adaptive theatrical techniques offer individuals with autism, and provide examples of adaptive theatrical techniques and their efficacy for improving behavioral and social skills for people with autism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank: God, my family, friends, and colleagues for their encouragement and support in writing this thesis. I am especially thankful for UNLV, for this opportunity to research and write a thesis with the hope of advancing research for people with autism. I would like to dedicate this thesis to the autistic spectrum community, thanking this community for their kindness and compassion. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to those affected by the Covid-19/Coronavirus pandemic. This thesis has been one of the most difficult challenges, especially since most of the thesis research and writing has been done during the Covid-19/Coronavirus pandemic. Even more challenging is that as of December 1, 2021, there have been more than “782,104 Confirmed deaths in the U.S.” and “5,223,657 Confirmed deaths worldwide” (Johns Hopkins University, “Coronavirus update” 8A and 14A). As the many adjustments for the Covid-19/Coronavirus pandemic has affected our way of life in many ways, I ask that the reader might be more compassionate in their review of this thesis. I have had to make several adjustments due to the pandemic, including: limited library use due to limited library hours and location closures, sanitization requirements of material, and a lack of traditional scholarly opportunities of discussion and comradery. The Covid 19/Coronavirus pandemic has also affected theatre to such an extent that “the virus forced Broadway theaters to abruptly close on March 12, 2020,” only recently reopened, after an “eighteen month” closure, having a successful Tony awards ceremony held on September 26th, 2021 for the 2019 season (Kennedy, ““Moulin Rouge!”” and ““Aladdin””). I am thankful for this opportunity to research and compose a thesis that I hope will advance the autistic community in their endeavors.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The number of people considered autistic today is significantly larger than compared to “Kanner’s original paper on the subject...published in 1943, [when] autism was generally considered to be a rare condition, with a prevalence of about 2-4 per 10,000 children” (Goldstein 18). In a newspaper article from the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* printed on October 18th, 2021, “About 1 in 54 U.S. children have autism, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention” (Tanner). As more individuals are diagnosed to be on the autism spectrum or as being autistic, it is more essential than ever for researchers to develop new and effective treatments to better accommodate the needs of those with autism. While there are many resources available for the diagnosis of people with autism and autism spectrum disorder, treatments and interventions are limited. However, my research finds adaptive theatre techniques could offer significant impact for individuals with autism.

In *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, supplemental therapies listed under autistic disorder only include: “music therapy, art therapy, and animal therapy” (Turkington 42). The Encyclopedia does not include performing arts as a supplemental therapy or treatment, which reflects the potential for additional supplemental therapy. The advantages of theatre arts have yet to be fully shared with the autistic community.

Theatre has many healing qualities to offer the autistic spectrum community, and one of theatre’s foundational qualities was to promote bettering society by modeling the virtues of being a better citizen. The Greek people understood the benefits of theatre as early as when Aristotle wrote his “*Poetics*, probably composed around 330 B.C.E.” (Gainor 11). Aristotle even asserted

that “tragedy...served a socially therapeutic function” (Gainor 12). One of theatre’s more compelling qualities is that of plot and storytelling to share compassion and generosity, while uniting communities through healthy expression. This timeless art form is a great benefit to the autistic community. Theatre is already considered of therapeutic quality by many researchers, including Clive Holmwood, Ph.D. in *Drama Education and Dramatherapy*. Holmwood describes the therapeutic qualities of theatre by combining the disciplines of drama and therapy in his book *Drama Education and Dramatherapy*. Holmwood mentions:

Principles of Drama-Therapy (1917), published in New York by Stephen F. Austin, discusses the principles of therapeutic playwrighting...how theatre can be used to alleviate depression and suggests ways to scientifically create structures of a play that may aim towards this. (Holmwood 30)

Holmwood shares that dramatherapy has been researched since 1917, emphasizing the notion that drama-therapy has been considered a successful form of therapy for over a hundred years. The many benefits of theatre, as a therapy, have also been explored in the writings of: Robert Landy’s *Drama Therapy Concepts and Practices*, *Drama as Therapy: Theatre as Living* by Phil Jones, and Elaine and Bernard Feder’s *The Expressive Arts Therapies*. Even Aristotle explained the therapeutic qualities of theatre, stating “tragedy provided a release, a *katharsis*, of those stirred-up emotions-particularly fear and pity” (Gainor 12). By cleansing one’s emotions, Aristotle hypothesized that people were better citizens and more equipped for society after experiencing theater. If these benefits of theatre are helpful for audiences and participants in the theatre, then why wouldn’t these advantages be as favorable for people on the autism spectrum that experience theatre? If audiences and participants of theatre can have a therapeutic experience, then surely theatre would offer significant benefits for those people with autism

participating and performing theatre? There are many benefits to be researched and explored when applying the effective qualities of theatre for the autistic spectrum community, but my research will focus on people with autism, the successful strategies of teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills, and how adaptive theatre techniques support students with autism in learning and developing skills.

In chapter four I will explain successful teaching strategies for teaching students with autism. In chapter five I further discuss theatre and its benefits for students with autism, and three examples of theatre techniques for teaching students with autism behavioral and social skills. Finally, chapter six includes a: summary, conclusion, and suggestions for further research. I will first discuss the difference between people with autism spectrum disorder and people with autism, the many different characteristics and symptoms, and explain the relevance of teaching behavioral and social skills.

Before I explain autism, and how autism differs from the more popular terminology: autism spectrum disorder, I would like to first preface my research by sharing that autism, autism spectrum disorder, its causes and treatments are considered controversial topics. I hope to broach this topic with additional inclusivity and sensitivity, with no intention to offend anyone, but rather to support and empower those with autism and diagnosed on the autism spectrum. This chapter is intended to share research that defines important vocabulary and describes the concentration of my research.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER AND AUTISM

Autistic disorder is defined in *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, by Carol Turkington and Ruth Anan, Ph.D., as “[a] severe developmental disorder known popularly as *autism* that affects a person’s ability to communicate, form relationships with others, and respond appropriately to the environment” (29). Turkington and Anan also explain that autism disorder “is a spectrum disorder, which means that its symptoms and characteristics can appear in a wide variety of combinations, from mild to severe” (29). Many would agree that autism “usually appear during the first three years of childhood and continue throughout life,” and that “[t]wo children with the same diagnosis can act very differently from each other and have varying skills...some individuals who are only mildly affected may experience just slight delays in language but have more trouble with social interactions, such as problems starting or maintaining a conversation” (Turkington 29). The characteristics and severity of individuals with autism can appear differently, one reason why people with autism are often mentioned to be ‘on the spectrum.’ Autistic spectrum disorder has a different definition from autism or autism disorder.

Carol Turkington and Ruth Anan, Ph.D. have a more detailed description of autism spectrum disorders in *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, and define autism spectrum disorders as:

A relatively new term that encompasses autism and similar disorders that is gradually replacing the term pervasive developmental disorders. This group of disorders is characterized by varying degrees of problems with communication skills, social

interactions, and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior. The autism spectrum disorders include

- ASPERGER'S SYNDROME, which tends to include milder symptoms
- AUTISTIC DISORDER, which is typically a more severe disorder
- PERVASIVE DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDER–NOT OTHERWISE SPECIFIED, a condition with very minor symptoms or symptoms that otherwise do not meet the specific criteria for other autism spectrum disorders.

Two other rare, very severe disorders that are included in the autism spectrum disorders are RETT DISORDER and CHILDHOOD DISINTEGRATIVE DISORDER. (20)

Based on Turkington and Anan's definition, one can conclude that the terminology of autism spectrum disorders is more inclusive of other disorders, including people with autistic disorders or autism. Similar to people with autism, people with autism spectrum disorders might share a similar diagnosis but appear different from one another based on the individual's characteristics and severity of the disorder. Turkington and Anan write about symptoms and diagnostic paths when they say:

The existence of an autism spectrum disorder may be suspected if the child

- does not babble, point, or make meaningful gestures by one year of age
- does not speak one word by 16 months
- does not combine two words by two years
- does not respond to name
- loses language or social skills

Some other indicators include

- poor eye contact
- lack of ability to play appropriately with toys
- excessive ordering of toys or other objects
- attachment to one particular toy or object
- does not smile in response to other's smiling
- apparent hearing problems. (21)

Turkington and Anan's lists of symptoms and indicators are significant because they reaffirm that autism spectrum disorder is a larger diagnosis, with individuals ranging in a myriad of different ways. With such a wide variety of individuals, it can be hoped that there are similarly, a wide variety of treatment options to accommodate every person's needs, another reason why theatre is a great opportunity to further assist people with autism spectrum disorder. Turkington and Anan are describing the symptoms and indicators of people at an early age, some research, as in Goldstein, Naglieri, and Ozonoff's edited book *Assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, suggests a greater difference in symptoms and indicators in assessment based on people's age.

In *Assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Victoria Shea and Gary Mesibov write in chapter five, "Age-Related Issues in the Assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders," that

"[w]e begin with a discussion of the ways the focus and nature of assessment change, depending on the individual's age. As a general rule, assessments of young children tend to focus on establishing a diagnosis, whereas assessments at later ages tend to focus on measuring skills." (Goldstein 117-8)

Shea and Mesibov's research emphasize that as people age, so might identifying characteristics of people with autism spectrum disorders change. Shea and Mesibov offer age-based tools for diagnostic assessment that change based on a person with autism spectrum disorder's age, concluding that "assessing skills and behaviors are central to providing good services" (130). Shea and Mesibov also conclude that:

Individuals with ASD [autism spectrum disorder] differ greatly from one another in terms of their cognitive skills, communication ability, interests, behaviors, and social understanding, among other factors...Although the field of ASD includes a wide variety of theories and treatment strategies, it is universally agreed that the population is enormously varied in terms of skills, interests, and behaviors. The implementation of age-appropriate diagnostic and skills assessment strategies is essential for any theoretical approach to working with these students to be effective. (130)

Shea and Mesibov mention that people with autism spectrum disorder are different, and similarly require different treatments for their needs. Another difference between people with autism spectrum disorder that Shea and Mesibov accentuate is their age. As people with autism spectrum disorder grow, so do their needs and skills change. Shea and Mesibov "[f]ocus [on] Assessment [often reassessment] At Different Developmental Stages" (118-9). With a better understanding of autism spectrum disorders, and the varying characteristics of people with autism spectrum disorder, I will further discuss one autism spectrum disorder, the developmental disorder, commonly known as autism.

According to *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, the word "autism" was first "coined in 1912 by Eugen Bleuler," and "in 1944 child psychiatrist Leo KANNER, M.D....invented a new category, which he called early infantile autism" (Turkington 93).

Kanner spoke of early infantile autism different from the way we know and understand it today. Turkington also explains that “[m]ost experts believe that before the discovery of the pattern of symptoms now known as autism, most people with the syndrome were considered either to be mentally retarded or insane” (93). People with autism, before the disorder was further understood, were probably misunderstood and mistreated. Turkington and Anan mention that autism is a “pattern of symptoms,” the perspective that these are people that have patterns of symptoms is essential in better: understanding, treating, and teaching people with autism spectrum disorders (93). This is also another reason why there is a need for additional treatment options, such as theatre, to better help people with autism with certain needs for improving specific patterns or characteristics. Autistic disorder is defined in *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, defining initial warning signs as:

There are a number of warning signs that parents or teachers may notice that may indicate autistic disorder, in three basic areas: behavior, communication, and social skills.

Behavior

- obsession with objects, interests, or routines
- inappropriate or unusual play with toys
- repetitive body movements or unusual body postures
- attachment to unusual objects
- unusual visual interests
- insensitivity or hypersensitivity to pain, temperature, taste, touch, smell, sounds, light, and so on

Social

- abnormal eye contact
- not noticing when name is called
- preferring to be alone
- ignoring others
- limited imitation (not waving hello or good-bye)
- not initiating social games, such as patty-cake or peekaboo
- little interest in being held
- lack of attention
- limited pointing or gestures

Communication

- echolalia (repeating words or phrases)
- no babbling by 12 months
- no single words by 16 months
- no two-word spontaneous phrases by 24 months
- peculiar use of language
- lack of pretend play
- failure to attract attention
- no use of early forms of communication. (32)

The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders describes these warning signs, or characteristics, to help identify if a child might have autism. A child might exemplify only some of these characteristics, and the severity of the characteristics might be different for each child. These variations and differences are a reminder that each child is unique and might benefit from

different treatments. Turkington and Anan further clarify the characteristics of autism, by explaining that:

Diagnostic categories have changed over the years as research progresses and as new editions of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* have been issued. In general, to be diagnosed with autistic disorder, the person must have symptoms that belong to the three main areas of core features-impairment in language, impairment in social interactions, and the presence of repetitive stereotype behaviors or interests. (34)

This illustrates the importance of research progress and consulting contemporary publication, understanding that there might be new advancement made or research to be made to help the people with autism. This also emphasizes that diagnosing people with autism often requires improvement "in language [or communication skills]...social interactions [social skills], and...repetitive stereotype behaviors or interests [behavioral skills]" (34). Turkington and Anan also mention core features, which they later expand and categorize upon by saying:

A child must show at least some of these symptoms in order to meet the criteria for autistic disorder, some of which include

Problems with social skills, including

- unresponsiveness to people
- lack of attachment to parents or caretakers
- rigid or flaccid muscle tone while being held; resisting being held or cuddled
- little or no interest in human contact
- lack of attachment to parents or caretakers

- lack of response to name
- not smiling (not looking at others)
- avoiding eye contact
- lack of imaginative play
- lack of stranger anxiety
- inability to make friends
- playing alone
- lack of separation anxiety
- unprovoked aggression toward others

Communication problems

- impaired speech or language onset in childhood
- language impairment
- meaningless repetition of words or phrases
- appears deaf sometimes
- inability to maintain conversation
- unusual language
- refusal to speak
- mixing up pronouns

Behavior problems

- self-destructive behavior
- bizarre or repetitive behavior patterns, such as uncontrollable head banging, screaming fits, arm flapping

- lines things up
- very distressed by minor changes in the environment
- overreaction or under-reaction to sensory stimulus
- delayed mental and social skills
- inflexibility
- adherence to routines
- unusual or severely restricted activities
- rocking, hand flapping, hair twirling
- reduced or increased sensitivity to pain or temperature
- tantrums
- regression
- self-mutilation. (34)

An individual with autism might have challenges with only a couple or many of these different symptoms. Every symptom and characteristic is equally important but some characteristics and symptoms might be more significant than other symptoms to an individual's progress. Turkington and Anan organize these patterns into three core features, grouping them as: problems with social skills, communication problems, and behavioral problems. There are other scholars that also group characteristics, or symptoms, of autism in different categories, including in Jami Anderson and Simon Cushing's edited book *The Philosophy of Autism*. In Chapter One, "Autism: The Very Idea," Simon Cushing writes:

[T]he fourth edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*...the entry on "Autistic Disorder"...presents an alternative strategy from both the simple method of requiring *every single* characteristic and making

a distinction between a set core and an outer ring of nonessentials. The approach might be called the Cluster of Behaviors (CoB) model. (Anderson 17, 20)

By clustering the many characteristics into clusters of behaviors, Cushing emphasizes the importance of grouping these characteristics to better focus discussion and research. Cushing's cluster of behaviors narrows characteristics to three areas: "1. qualitative impairment in social interaction...2. qualitative impairments in communication...3. restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities" (21). These three clusters show a significance in the areas focusing on: social skills, communication skills, and behavioral skills, similar to the core features of people with autism in *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Cushing's grouping/coupling is also an example of how the scientific community sometimes groups similar characteristics to simplify and assist academic/scientific discussion. Both academic scholars share similar groupings and vernacular with other researchers, in identifying characteristics for improvement as: social skills, communication skills, and behavior skills. I agree with these researchers, and will concentrate my research on behavioral and social skills.

To summarize, autism spectrum disorder is a more inclusive diagnosis, including people with autism or autistic disorder. People with autism might have a variety of different symptoms and should have as many resources to accommodate their varying needs. Behavioral and social skills contain some of the most important characteristics for a person with autism's growth and development. Theatre also offers many advancements to people learning behavioral and social skills. Behavioral and social skills also encompass many different attributes and significance, which I plan to discuss in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

As Turkington and Anan write in *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, “[e]very person with autistic disorder is an individual, with a unique personality and combination of characteristics” (Turkington 29). Considering each person with autism as people and unique is significant in my research, as these people are worthy of different unique and compassionate treatment options. Theatre offers people with autism a personal treatment as special as their needs. Chapter two describes characteristics, symptoms and the diversity of individuals diagnosed, further emphasizing the need for diverse treatments. People with autism are not defined by their condition or symptoms, and every person with autism is special with individual and similarly distinctive personalities. No one symptom of autism is more important than another, but some skills might be more beneficial for the success of people with autism. The concentration of my research will be on teaching behavioral and social skills. I plan to further define the behavioral and social challenges oftentimes associated with people with autism and explain the significance of teaching behavioral and social skills.

Behavioral skills are essential in communication, and help people express themselves. There are both verbal and non-verbal behaviors, and people with autism have both positive and negative verbal and non-verbal behaviors. People with autism can sometimes have negative behaviors that might interfere with their ability to communicate or socialize. These behavioral problems are sometimes “bizarre or repetitive behavior patterns, such as uncontrollable head banging, screaming fits, arm flapping” or “self-destructive,” with some of the more concerning behavioral problems including “tantrums” and “self-mutilation” (Turkington 34). Self-injurious behaviors can be especially concerning because they might lead to harm to an individual or to

others. This is one reason why behavioral skills might be considered one of the most significant areas of improvements for people with autism.

Behavioral skills help allow a person to communicate more effectively. In *Autism Nature Diagnosis and Treatment*, edited by Geraldine Dawson, J. Gregory Olley and Susan Stevenson write about “the role that problem behaviors of children with autism play in developing social skills” (Dawson 351). Olley and Stevenson analyzed data, and found that “analysis indicated that negative behavior resulted in a negative evaluation of children by their peers” (351). They also concluded that “[t]his social validity consideration may draw us to the conclusion that reducing maladaptive behaviors of children with autism is a target demanded by peers if the children are to have positive interactions” (351). One of the most beneficial circumstances for children with autism is to integrate with their peers, to have healthy relationships. Olley and Stevenson concluded that negative behaviors directly interfered with a person with autism’s peer interactions. Depending on the behavior, non-socially acceptable behaviors might place a person with autism at further emotional risk or scrutiny by their peers, potentially leading to regression. Theatre is a great opportunity for learning and improving behavioral skills since it offers an accepting classroom environment with less risk of emotional risk or scrutiny while learning these behavioral skills. As learning behavioral skills is essential for people with autism to succeed, social skills are just as significant for their growth.

Social skills might be defined as our ability to communicate and relate with one another. Social skills are significant for building relationships and foster personal and group growth and development. A great example of some members of the autistic community demonstrating their excellent social skills is in Steven Kapp’s edited book, *Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement*. In *Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement*, “[a]ll but

two of the 21 contributors to this volume identify as autistic” (Kapp v). These authors represent accomplishments that can be made with effective social skills, especially for people with autism. Not only were the autistic contributors able to work together to publish their works, but they were also able to form a successful resource for people with autism. While these writers might make effective social skills look effortless, social skills are a challenge for many people with autism. As previously defined in, *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, social challenges might affect a person’s ability to communicate effectively or to be a part of a community or team. Lack of social skills might also hinder a person’s ability to form relationships and to find deeper connections with others. Social skills help people find commonality and encourage people to participate in healthy activities, including in play and communication, both significant goals for people with autism, and similar to the goals for people participating in theatre.

Turkington and Anan also mention the importance of social skills and social cognition as essential in “how individuals make social judgements, and how others affect an individual’s self-concept” (Turkington 145). People form meaning and identity by whom they socialize with and how they are perceived. People with autism might have challenges understanding other people. Social integration and self-concept is oftentimes a main goal of educational plans for individuals with autism. One example of the advantages of effective social skills is with the twenty-one autistic authors in *Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement*. They were able to effectively gather their shared thoughts and opinions to work together to publish a successful book to advance their causes. Theatre techniques also help people with autism gain social skills with the accomplishment of a theatrical performance, as they collaborate during rehearsals, advancing their social skills. Imagine how much progress the autistic community might

experience if more people with autism were to gain additional social skills to continue publishing academic books and performing theatre.

Behavioral and social skills are significant for people with autism to improve their communication and socialization. Theatre offers many possibilities for people with autism to develop these skills. To better teach behavioral and social skills, while utilizing theatrical techniques, one must first understand traditional teaching techniques for teaching students with autism.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

There are many techniques available when teaching students of all subjects and grade levels, but there are specific traditional techniques utilized when teaching students with autism. One such traditional technique is the concept of behavioral modification. Behavioral modification has different origins and applications, but many studies support the effectiveness of behavioral modification, especially when utilized for teaching people with autism. When teaching people with autism any subject or skill, teachers should first consider techniques that are most successful for each individual student. In order to most effectively adapt theatre techniques to teach behavioral and social skills to people with autism, teachers should first understand successful teaching strategies for teaching people with autism and utilize these strategies in their adaptive theatre techniques. I plan to explain behavioral modification and its uses for teaching people with autism, illustrate the traditional and alternative treatments available for teaching people with autism, and advocate for the many benefits theatre techniques offer people with autism.

Behavioral modification is considered one of the first traditional techniques when teaching people with autism. Behavioral modification is also a foundation for other approaches to teaching people with autism. *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders* defines behavioral modification as:

The systematic application of reinforcers (rewards) and/or punishments as a way of reducing or eliminating problem behavior, or to teach people new skills or

responses...Behavior modification is used by psychologists, social workers, teachers, and other professionals to change an individual's reaction to a situation. (Turkington 45)

Behavioral modification can be utilized for both rewarding positive or targeted behavior, to increase the frequency of the behavior, and for punishing negative behavior to help reduce or eliminate the problem behavior. Scholars' approaches and uses of behavioral modification have changed significantly, but some of the earliest methods of teaching people with autism involved utilizing behavioral modification. One can see an example of behavioral modification with O. Ivar Lovaas's work in *Behavioral Treatment of Autistic Children*. The UCLA department of psychology's work in "Early Research and Treatment in 1964-1969", with two autistic children supports the effectiveness of B.F. Skinner's behavioral modification or "operant conditioning" by presenting the growth of learning objectives from both children (*Behavioral Treatment* 00:08:33-11:09 and 00:08:10-31). While utilizing behavioral modification, the autistic children learned: "verbs...prepositions...pronouns...conversational speech...spontaneity...storytelling" and "at ages 7 and 8, [they] had made significant improvements but still had language and social skills deficits" (*Behavioral Treatment* 00:08:33-12:08). Unfortunately, when the behavioral modification treatment ended, one child "regresses" and the other child "lost most of his language skills and spontaneity" (*Behavioral Treatment* 00:13:06-14:26). It is unfortunate to learn of both of the autistic children's regression, but this emphasizes the importance of continual treatment. This also "showed the children's improvements were the result of the treatment they received rather than some other variable" (*Behavioral Treatment* 00:16:28-35). If the autistic children were in a theatre company, one might say that the continual opportunities for behavioral and social advancement might have prevented them from regressing. The UCLA study with the autistic children is also an example of a "behavioral treatment approach for

autistic children...influenced by the research of psychologist B.F. Skinner” (*Behavioral Treatment* 00:03:16-22). As *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders* further defines Behavior Modification:

There are two major approaches to behavior modification, one based on the work of the late psychologist B.F. Skinner, the other based on the work of psychologist Albert Bandura...Skinner believed that rewarded behavior is likely to be repeated, and punished behavior is likely to be avoided...Bandura’s approach emphasizes learning through imitation, believing that a person can learn to avoid an unpleasant situation without experiencing it. Individuals can also learn new skills by watching and imitating others. Bandura emphasized the effectiveness of role models who speak and act consistently, and this applies especially to young children. (Turkington 45)

Both approaches to behavioral modification are substantial techniques to understand, especially since Skinner and Bandura’s approaches to behavioral modification are still utilized today. Wendy Ashcroft, Ed.D., Sue Argiro, and Joyce Keohane explain the concepts of behavioral modification in their book *Success Strategies for Teaching Kids with Autism*. In Chapter 3, “What is ABA?,” Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane utilize behavioral modification in their concept of applied behavior analysis, which they define as “a science that allows us to analyze behavior, explain why it might be happening, and predict its patterns in the future” (Ashcroft 37). This section includes the principles for positive reinforcement and differential reinforcement, along with a detailed explanation and strategies for utilizing Bandura’s form of behavioral modification, commonly referred as modeling. Modeling is defined by Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane as:

[T]he process of teaching through demonstrations...Modeling is the process of providing an antecedent stimulus that is identical (or at least similar) to the behavior the teacher wants imitated. The term *model* often is applied to both the individual demonstrating the behavior and the behavior that is demonstrated. Models can be considered a prompt or can be considered the stimulus itself...To teach a new behavior, present demonstrations of the desired behavior and reinforce the behavior when it occurs. (45-6)

Modeling is a successful teaching technique that can be very beneficial in teaching new skills and reinforcing behaviors. We can also see an example of modeling in experiencing theatre. If theatre games or scenes are adapted to model good behavioral and social skills, students can successfully learn through adapting theatre with the educational concept of modeling. Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane also mention the benefits of videotaped self-modeling, that “has great potential for helping a child see how positive his behavior could be, especially when the video includes reinforcers like captions with the child’s name and sounds of applause” (Ashcroft 47). Videotaped self-modeling is also an effective way of incorporating performance with instruction and reinforcing positive behaviors in a meaningful way. Videotaped self-modeling should be considered both educationally and theatrically, as this type of performance is also an example of adapting a student’s theatrical performance to allow them to self-model for skills growth. Videotaped modeling is also mentioned in Josefa Ben-Arieh and Helen Miller’s book *The Educator’s Guide to Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Ben-Arieh and Miller also emphasize the benefits of combining video modeling, and self-modeling by writing:

Both forms of video modeling allow students to view and review the different elements of appropriate behavior. Although videotaping students with ASD [autism spectrum

disorders] engaging in the appropriate behavior will require more time and effort, it may be more reinforcing and therefore worth the extra effort....it is a highly effective approach to teaching social skills. (Ben-Arieh 100)

As Ben-Arieh and Miller emphasize videotaping self-modeling is an effective technique for teaching social skills for people with autism, one can already understand the potential benefits theatre techniques have to offer people with autism. Videotaped and in-person modeling are effective examples of behavioral modification, but there are other traditional teaching techniques one should understand before exploring alternative teaching techniques. Another popular technique for teaching people with autism is utilizing individual education programs or plans.

Individualized education programs or individualized education plans, commonly referred as an IEP, is another successful teaching technique that educators apply when teaching people with autism. *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders* defines an individualized education program as:

A written educational prescription developed for each child who qualifies for SPECIAL EDUCATION, describing what special education the child needs and what the school district will do to address those needs...An IEP [individualized education program] is prepared at a team meeting attended by the parents, the child, the child's teacher, a school administrator, educational specialists, other professionals who are providing services to the child (such as a speech therapist or an occupational therapist), and a representative of the public agency that oversees special education. (Turkington 97)

People with autism oftentimes have unique challenges and needs, and an individualized education plan allows each person's needs to be met and accommodated. It is especially important for someone adapting theatre techniques for teaching a student to first consider the student's individual needs and individual education program or plan. An individualized education program is created by a team of people called the individualized education program committee. The individualized education program committee "meets at least once a year, sometimes arranged to fall in the child's birthday month, to review the child's educational progress and needs, and to develop goals and objectives for the coming year" (Turkington 98). As mentioned earlier when discussing people with autism spectrum disorder in Chapter Two, in *Assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Victoria Shea and Gary Mesibov discuss the importance of reassessment, and explain that as a person with autism develops and grows older, so must their assessment develop. An individualized education plan is similar in that it also must be reassessed as goals and needs of the person with autism change. As the person with autism's individual education program changes and needs change, it is also important to employ techniques that are as adaptable, another great attribute that theatre offers. Having an individualized education program committee also emphasizes the importance of having a team of individuals working together for the person with autism's interest. This concept of having a supportive team can also be seen in theatre with the idea of forming an ensemble; the people in the ensemble work together to collectively help one another reach a goal or complete a task, as a group.

Members of the individualized education program committee work together to create an individualized education program, containing valuable information for an educator, and as Turkington and Anan write:

An IEP [individualized education program] must contain

- the child's present levels of educational performance
- annual and short-term educational goals
- the specific special education program and related services that will be provided
- the extent to which the child will participate in regular education programs with non-handicapped children
- a statement of when services will begin and how long they will last
- provisions for evaluating the effectiveness of the program and the student's performance
- statement of transition services for students 14 years of age or older. (97-8)

As the individualized education program is made with careful consideration for the person with autism, educators should follow the individualized education program's recommendation when teaching a person with autism. It is helpful to review past individualized education plans to understand a student's growth and development. Another important aspect of individual education plans is that "[i]f parents decide their child needs a change in the program, they have the right to ask the school to call an IEP [individualized education program] meeting at any time" (Turkington 98). A person with autism's growth and development might require reassessment sooner than once a year, parents are active members of the individualized education program committee who can help advocate for a person with autism's needs. There are some additional resources for helping write potential individualized education plans for students with autism, including Josefa Ben-Arieh and Helen J. Miller's book *The Educator's Guide to Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, and Wendy Ashcroft, Sue Argiro, and Joyce Keohane's book *Success Strategies for Teaching Kids with Autism*. In *The Educator's Guide to*

Teaching Students with Autism, Ben-Arieh and Miller share recommendations when writing individualized educational plan goals, and first mention:

Once you are familiar with your student's strengths and needs, you are ready to choose the specific skills you will be targeting for the IEP. As you design this program, you will want to capitalize on the student's strengths and use them to teach new skills... Typically, all students need assistance in academics, behavior (including life skills), and communication, which you would consider as the crucial core components of an educational plan. (Ben-Arieh 22)

Ben-Arieh and Miller's advice of teaching new skills as building on a student's interests and strengths is very helpful. When teaching a student with autism, this teaching technique should also be applied when selecting scenes, as having scenes that incorporate a student's interests might encourage additional participation. The imaginative and diverse nature of theatre is a great benefit to people with autism, as the many capabilities of theatre allows teachers to teach with a wide selection of possible subjects and skills. Ben-Arieh and Miller continue to give an examples of this technique with "a preschool student is fascinated by letters, teach him to read; if an elementary student is eager to be first at everything, use this desire to teach the student how to *appropriately* tell peers when it is time to move to a new activity" (Ben-Arieh 22). Ben-Arieh and Miller's recommendations for choosing goals have a common element of encouraging the student's growth through confidence and being realistic with the student's goals.

The list of guidelines that Ben-Arieh and Miller explain also includes recommendations for "[c]hoos[ing] goals that have the potential to reduce or eliminate problem behaviors. Teaching a student how to use a calculator, for example, may eliminate shouting out in frustration when doing certain problems in math class" (Ben-Arieh 22). Individualized

educational plans usually include a goal for behavioral skills for either encouraging targeted behavior or reducing problem behaviors. Behavioral skills might be considered some of the most fundamental individualized educational plans since they encourage students to be behaviorally available to work on other skills. Ben-Arieh and Miller include an example of an IEP behavioral goal when they write “Goal: By 1/30/2009, Kate will walk quietly in the school hallways 90% of the time as measured by data on five consecutive days” (Ben-Arieh 23). The behavioral skills needed to walk in the hallways quietly is essential if the student is to be able to complete their other goals during the school day. Similarly, a student must first be able to behave and listen effectively to listen to instruction and participate in a theatre rehearsal or classroom. As behavioral skills are being addressed in an individualized education plan, social skills are also commonly included.

Ben-Arieh and Miller have an example of a social skill individualized educational plan when they write: “Goal: By 1/30/2009, Kate will initiate verbal interactions with peers or respond verbally to their interactions at least five times each recess, 80% of the time, as measured during each of the three daily recess times on three consecutive data collection days” (Ben-Arieh 23). Focusing on social skills is an important objective that furthers student’s advancement towards inclusion with regular students and classes. Another example of adapting this technique when teaching people with autism theatre is by incorporating opportunities for social interaction before or after rehearsal to encourage a student’s development of social skills.

Individualized education plans can also be very specific. Specificity helps monitor progress while ensuring accuracy of education, progression, and data. Having accuracy of data helps assure the success of the individualized education plan and supports the accuracy of information. While individualized education plans are a helpful traditional technique at

advancing people with autism's behavioral and social skills, there are also other successful traditional techniques that educators utilize and can be adapted for successfully teaching behavioral and social skills to people with autism.

As behavioral skills are essential for people with autism, there are many successful traditional techniques that educators utilize. Educators of all subjects should understand these techniques while teaching a person with autism, so that the educator has a better understanding of supportive teaching practices and concepts. In *The Educator's Guide to Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Ben-Arieh and Miller explain their recommendations for teaching behavioral skills to students with autism spectrum disorders as:

First, we believe in addressing challenging behaviors from a therapeutic rather than a punitive perspective...we regard behaviors as communicative. That is, behaviors serve a purpose for the student; they communicate his or her needs or wants...whenever a student exhibits an inappropriate behavior, first look at what purpose the behavior serves...the next step is to focus on solutions that consider the root cause of the behavior and teach our student a new socially acceptable behavior to replace the maladaptive one...we address students' behaviors today through a proactive rather than a reactive approach. We analyze the students' environment to look for areas that might trigger or provoke maladaptive behaviors...And finally...When prioritizing which ones [behaviors] to address first, you will want to tackle behavior excesses before addressing behavior deficits because behavior excesses interfere more significantly with students' everyday functioning and may prevent them from learning new skills. (Ben-Arieh 65-6)

This section is especially helpful since the authors reaffirm the significance of learning behavioral skills. Learning behavior skills, especially with behavior excesses possibly

interfering more significantly with a student's everyday tasks, might prevent the student from learning new skills. This is another reason why applying traditional teaching techniques when teaching students theatre is especially important. The author also recommends viewing behavioral challenges as therapeutic, which is especially beneficial, as this helps an educator be more proactive and assess the student's environment to help in teaching the replacement behavior. Viewing challenging behaviors in an optimistic, therapeutic way seems particularly difficult, especially depending on the severity of the challenging behavior, but it is important for all educators to continue to strive for this perspective. Educators should remain open-minded and empathetic when teaching people with autism, both qualities that educators of theatre oftentimes exemplify. Instead of a teacher disciplining negative behavior or being reactive, as Ben-Arieh mentions, it is most helpful for a teacher to treat negative behaviors therapeutically, being proactive. Ben-Arieh also define the concept of positive behavioral supports as

“an approach that can be used to improve the behavior and learning of not only an individual student but can also be used with the whole class or even schoolwide. At the core of PBS [positive behavioral supports] is a respect for all students and a focus on improving their quality of life.” (67)

This strategy of behavioral supports emphasizes positive behavioral modification, also explaining that the benefits of having an optimistic approach to education could benefit not just the classroom, but also the school. Positive behavioral supports remain proactive, but the assessment process seems to rely on a large amount of data collection. Examples of data sheets and positive behavioral supports are included in *The Educator's Guide to Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (68-9).

Another successful teaching technique that teachers utilize while teaching behavioral skills to people with autism is a behavior intervention plan. Ben-Arieh and Miller share, a behavior intervention plan:

Describe the replacement behavior that your student will learn...Describe the behavior in positive terms...Describe the intervention procedures in detail so they are clear to everyone working with the student...Describe what consequences should follow the student's behavior...Determine the criterion for mastery of the skill that you are working on...[and] Decide how often the team will meet to monitor progress. (71-2)

Ben-Arieh and Miller's explanation of behavior intervention plans is particularly helpful when responding to problem behaviors. Problem behaviors oftentimes indicate that the student is upset, and the negative behavior might affect other students, along with the teacher. When teaching a person with autism theatre, it is also essential to adapt the theatre technique for a student's behavior intervention plan, as to not encourage problem behaviors, and to be aware of appropriate intervention procedures should the student have a problem behavior during class or rehearsal. Having a behavior intervention plan is an effective strategy to teach a person with autism behavioral skills and to communicate what the teacher's response should be to a particular problem behavior. Ben-Arieh and Miller further explain behavior intervention strategies when they share:

Some of these interventions are considered positive behavioral strategies, such as differential reinforcement of alternative (DRA) or incompatible (DRI) behaviors, extinction, contingency contracting, modeling, and redirection. Others are considered punitive (behavior reduction procedures-BRPs), such as reprimands, response cost, overcorrection, time-out, and seclusion.

- *DRA or DRI [Differential reinforcement of alternative behaviors or differential reinforcement incompatible behaviors]* weakens an unwanted behavior by reinforcing an appropriate one...Therefore, by reinforcing compliance, noncompliant behavior will decrease, because a student cannot perform both activities at the same time...
- *Extinction* occurs when a behavior is extinguished by eliminating the trigger that maintains the behavior...
- *Contingency contracting* is an agreement written by a student and teacher that states the expectations required from the student in order to earn a specific reward.
- *Contingency mapping*...involves the use of a graphic representation to show students the consequences of the choices they make...
- *Modeling* is teaching a new skill by showing a student the expected behavior and expecting him or her to imitate it. Modeling is a common technique used to teach social skills in particular. Students typically learn through observation and repeated practices of the skill.
- *Redirection* is the act of refocusing a student's attention on a different task...
- *Reduce expectations* on days or times when the student experiences more stress...
- *Reprimands* involve telling a student that his or her behavior is unacceptable, such as "Please stop talking."
- *Response cost* refers to taking away a privilege as a consequence of an inappropriate behavior...

- *Overcorrection* involves the restoration of an environment to its initial state or engaging in a repeated practice of a socially acceptable skill that is incompatible with the behavior demonstrated by the student. For example, an overcorrection occurs when a student who ran halfway down the hall is then asked to walk all the way back to the end of the hall and then back again.
- *Time-out and seclusion* occurs when attention is withdrawn from the student. This can be done by either temporarily withdrawing eye contact (turning your head away), by removing ourselves and others from the student's immediate environment, or by placing the student in isolation. The recommended length of time for seclusion is a maximum of one minute for each year of a student's age...be careful because this intervention often backfires with students with autism...students are likely to engage in an inappropriate behavior to escape an unpleasant situation, such as a task that is too difficult or too demanding. (73-5)

Some of these behavior intervention strategies are considered traditional techniques for teaching behavioral skills to people with autism. These techniques are frequently used within the educational community and might also be a part of the educational communities vocabulary. When adapting theatre techniques to teach people with autism, it is important to familiarize oneself with these techniques to better collaborate with the student's support team of professionals and to understand what teaching techniques work best for the student. Ben-Arieh and Miller continue emphasizing successful strategies for teaching students with autism by emphasizing "[w]e strongly encourage the use of positive behavioral strategies that reinforce our students with autism for appropriate behaviors rather than using aversives that punish them for behavioral infractions" (Ben-Arieh 75). The approaches of teaching people with autism

behavioral and social skills has changed from traditional approaches to teaching people with autism. Rather than employing positive and negative behavioral modification, it is now more acceptable to utilize positive behavioral modification, with limited negative behavioral modification. As Ben-Arieh and Miller mention, consider it better to emphasize “positive behavioral strategies...rather than using aversives that punish them” (75). Ben-Arieh and Miller continue to explain that “if you should find yourself in a discussion regarding a punitive strategy please insist that positive supports also be included” some other strategies mentioned include:

- The intervention should be part of a BIP [behavioral intervention plan] so that due process is followed and parents’ consent is obtained.
- Before using a punishment intervention, demonstrate and document that other positive behavior supports were tried first and failed to produce results.
- The maladaptive behavior you choose to target should have social or academic significance for the student...
- Choose the least intrusive or aversive intervention that can achieve the same results.
- Punishments that block a student’s access to his or her educational rights, such as extended periods of time-out, should be avoided.
- Continuously monitor the target behavior to document efficacy of intervention.

(75)

These strategies and techniques support the notion that negative behavioral strategies should be limited, and if negative behavioral strategies are necessary for teaching behavioral skills, then a teacher should use these teaching techniques with care. Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane share successful teaching techniques in their book *Success Strategies for Teaching Kids*

with Autism. Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane agree with Ben-Arieh and Miller about the significance of positive behavioral modification or positive reinforcement while also explaining successful strategies of prompting:

A prompt is an added stimulus used to help the child achieve a desired response (Alberston & Troutman, 2009)...To help elicit a correct response, help the learner by providing a verbal or physical hint...Prompts gradually are faded until the child can perform the task independently. Wolery and Gast (1984) listed the seven types of prompts below. For each prompt, a description and examples are provided.

- A *physical prompt* involves guiding the child to perform the behavior. It is the most intrusive type of prompt as it involves actually touching the child. Physical prompts could include hand-over-hand assistance to write, cut with scissors, or put pieces in a puzzle. Physical prompting could involve placing a hand on the child's back to encourage him to walk down the hall or lifting a child's foot to assist in putting on a shoe.
- A *visual prompt* provides a picture, a written word(s), or an object to assist the learner in providing the correct response. Simple visual prompts might include a word such as "stop" on the door or perhaps pictures of footprints on the floor indicating where to stand in line. More complex visual prompts could include a checklist of tasks to do to complete an assignment...
- A *gestural prompt* involves actions such as pointing, nodding, looking in the direction of the correct answer, and shrugging. Common gestural prompts include pointing to a chair while saying, "Sit down, please," or pairing a "Come here" sign when calling the class. Other gestural prompts might include pointing

to the correct answer on a worksheet or pairing the sign for “stop” with a verbal command to wait at the door.

- A *positional prompt* involves the placement of items or objects to increase the chance that children will perform a task correctly. The chance that children will use soap for washing their hands increases when the soap is positioned in reach, and children are more likely to remember to take home their backpacks that are placed on their desks when it’s time to go. In errorless learning procedures, the correct answer in a field of objects or pictures can be placed closest to a child, providing an increased chance that he or she will choose the correct item when directed.
- A *verbal prompt* involves the use of expressive language to cue the behavior. It may be a word, phrase, or sentence used to direct or model the expected answer...As the prompt is faded, it may consist of only the first word or sound. Verbal prompts might be used to prompt interaction (“Say ‘Hi!’”), to cue requests (“Ask your friend to play”), or to provide correct answers (“It’s blue”).
- *Demonstration prompts* (or modeling) involve performing the desired behavior in order to obtain an imitative response of that behavior. For example, in teaching shoe tying, the initial instruction might be “cross the laces” accompanied by a demonstration of the action.
- An *instructional prompt* uses previously mastered responses to prompt a new one by building positive behavior momentum. When a child has difficulty finding the color red, the teacher may say “An apple is also red. Find red,” giving an added stimulus to help her choose the correct color. (Ashcroft 47-8)

The traditional technique of prompting, along with the different types of prompting, help teachers accommodate the needs of their students for learning. Teachers adapting theatrical techniques to accommodate students' needs can employ appropriate prompting when teaching a student theatre. Prompting can be considered a traditional technique for teaching people with autism both behavioral and social skills, and an effective strategy for utilizing prompting in the classroom is by also fading prompts. Fading is defined by Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane as "the process of gradually removing prompts until the child performs the behavior independently" (51). Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane share the procedures used to fade prompts, including:

- *Decreasing assistance* (most-to-least prompts) describes the process of starting with full prompts and fading to partial and minimal prompts before eliminating prompts entirely...
- *Increasing assistance* (least-to-most prompts) describes the process of letting children attempt to respond without prompts and providing the least amount of prompting necessary for a successful response...
- *Time delay* fading describes the process of adjusting the timing, rather than the form, of delivering the prompt...
- *Graduated guidance* is used when fading physical prompts. As much physical assistance as necessary is provided...

Continually prompting children without proper fading procedures can produce prompt-dependent behavior. With children who are prone to prompt dependence, it may be more effective to begin prompting with the least intrusive prompt possible. (52-3)

The teaching technique of fading is as significant as prompting, since prompts have different levels of educator assistance and require fading between those levels of educator

assistance. When teaching students theatre techniques, it is important to utilize proper prompting and fading techniques for your students. As the student continues to develop the skills and theatrical technique being taught, fade the prompting to encourage student development towards independence. The student is not considered to have mastered the skill until they are “able to perform the skill without any prompts” (53). Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane also share advice about fading, when they write “Tips for Providing Prompts” as:

- Fading should occur gradually to avoid a disruption in the desired behavior.
- Make certain that all team members are aware of the prompt level for a particular skill so that the intensity of assistance is consistent.
- Systematically fade the prompts before considering that the skill is mastered...
- Take care to fade verbal prompts as quickly as possible as they often are the most difficult to fade. (49)

These tips for prompting and fading emphasize the importance of gradually fading the prompts, to encourage student learning, and reemphasize the importance of communication between team members (or educators). This type of collaboration and teamwork is also significant in theatre ensembles, another reason why theatre artists, that have these skills, are a great addition to any team of educators. Fading is another essential teaching technique for educators as it accommodates the student’s needs, while encouraging a student towards independence and mastery of a skill.

Another traditional technique that Roger Pierangelo and George Guiliani explain in their book *A Step-by-Step Guide for Educators Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*

emphasizes the importance of structuring the environment. Pierangelo and Guiliani define the concept of structuring the environment when they explain:

Although all students thrive on routine and predictability, students with ASD [autism spectrum disorder] are especially sensitive to changes in the environment or routine. Structuring the environment for students with ASD [autism spectrum disorder] increases calm, attention, and responsiveness to learning. Although the level of structure needed for each student will vary based on their age, diagnosis, and ability level, research has revealed that effective educational programs have structured environments that include the following:

- ...Physical structure refers to the way each area in the classroom or school is set up and organized. To the student with ASD [autism spectrum disorder], who perceives the world differently or has unique sensory impairments, the school or classroom can be a confusing and overwhelming environment. Thus, the environment should be set up and organized with clear physical and visual boundaries...
- Routines...Students with ASD [autism spectrum disorder] are more socially responsive and attentive to learning and the environment when information is presented in a highly predictable and routine manner. Conversely, students with ASD can become easily overwhelmed by even minimal changes in their daily schedule or routine. To build independent work skills and to create a comfortable environment in which the student is ready to learn, develop routines and teach within them...

- Visual Supports...Students with ASD have strong visual skills. Visual organization of instruction and materials allows the student to utilize these visual learning strengths. Examples of helpful visual supports may include activity schedules and calendars, posted rules, choice boards, and other organizational methods as appropriate for individual students. (Pierangelo 59-61)

These are proactive successful techniques for structuring the environment of the classroom or rehearsal space to teach students with autism both behavioral and social skills. Being proactive and aware of the environment, and creating an environment for both the student's and teacher's success is helpful when teaching people with autism, and something to be considered before class or a rehearsal. After preparing the classroom, there might be a need to make further adjustments to accommodate for a student's needs. Pierangelo and Giuliani clarify another effective teaching strategies by describing the importance of providing opportunities for choice, when they write:

Because students with ASD [autism spectrum disorder] may be frequently frustrated by their inability to make themselves understood, they need instruction and practice in making good choices for themselves...Sometimes students continue to choose one activity or object because they do not know how to choose another...Direct teaching of making choices may be helpful. Choice should be limited to one or two preferred activities until the students grasp the concept of choice. (88)

The teaching technique of choice is an effective strategy, as choice guides the student towards independence, while encouraging play and creativity. When adapting theatre techniques for people with autism, it might be helpful to be aware of the importance of choice. Limiting choices to one or two items or activities might encourage students in a proactive way that does

not overwhelm the students with possibilities, leading them to not make a choice. While many of these strategies are especially beneficial to teaching both behavioral and social skills, there are some additional strategies that might be utilized when teaching social skills to a person with autism.

Social skills are beneficial to people with autism for many reasons, and improving social skills also has many advantages for improving their lives. Pierangelo and Giuliani describe the importance of social skills and some helpful tactics in teaching social skills to people with autism when they write:

Most students with ASD [autism spectrum disorder] want to have friends, fit in, and be an active member of the social world. However, they have difficulty reading, understanding, and responding to social cues...Because of their deficits in social understanding, students with ASD often develop, and then act upon, false beliefs or misperceptions about the social world, leading them to say or do things that inadvertently irritate and offend other people...Helping students with ASD to develop social understanding requires both systematic instruction as well as opportunities to practice the skills within naturally occurring routines. Rules, social stories, role-playing and scripts, cue cards and checklists, coaching, modeling, and friendship groups are all effective strategies for systematically teaching social skills. (57)

Pierangelo first mentions the importance of social skills and indicates the connection between behavioral skills and social skills by explaining that some social deficits might lead those with autism to behave socially inappropriate. Pierangelo also mentions different effective strategies for teaching people with autism social skills; many of these strategies seem especially beneficial when adapting theatre techniques with these activities or strategies. The strategy of

modeling social stories seems connected with the theatre technique of improvisation.

Improvisation offers opportunities for students to role-play in a safe environment, a theatre classroom, where students are comfortable making choices. Similar to social stories and role-playing and scripts, coaching also seems similar to improvisation, where teachers can utilize the theatre technique of side-coaching. Ben-Arieh and Miller explain additional traditional strategies when teaching students with autism by also clarifying that

Wing and Gould (1979) describe autism as a triad of social impairments to emphasize the social nature of the three linked areas of difficulty:

- Impairment of social interaction
- Impairment of social communication
- Impairment of social imagination, flexible thinking, and imaginative play. (Ben-Arieh 93)

As these different skill improvements are equally important, one should find successful strategies that accommodate the different social skills that a person with autism might need to learn and improve. Ben-Arieh and Miller mention some strategies when they write:

Bellini (2006) suggests following this 5-step model for helping students build social relationships:

1. Assess social functioning: Collect information through interviews, observations, rating scales, and the autism social skills profile (Bellini, 2006).
2. Distinguish between skill acquisition (learning a new skill) and performance deficits (student has the skill, but is not using it).

3. Select intervention strategies to promote skill acquisition and strategies to promote performance.
4. Implement interventions (select peer models, gather resources, find a time and place, and develop a schedule for intervention).
5. Monitor progress using interviews with teachers and parents and rating scales. (94)

These steps are helpful in assessing and teaching people with autism social skills, and can also be utilized by teachers of theatre to successfully teach people with autism social skills. Ben-Arieh also share various interventions that are effective when teaching a person with autism social skills, including: “Social Stories...Power Cards...Rule Cards...Circle of Friends...The Five-Point Scale...Role-Playing...Video Modeling...[and] Play” (95-101). These are great resources for teaching people with autism social skills. Ben-Arieh and Miller explain these strategies in greater detail in their book, but similar to the choices that Pierangelo and Giuliani mentioned for teaching students social skills, theatre is a great option for teaching utilizing these strategies in a fun manner. Both lists of activities to teach social skills are examples of some of the many different strategies for teaching people with autism. The many traditional techniques for teaching students with autism behavioral and social skills offer great opportunity, but there are many people that find success with alternative techniques or therapies.

The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders by Carol Turkington and Dr. Ruth Anan describe supplemental therapy for people with autistic disorder as:

Additional supplemental therapies include music therapy, art therapy, and animal therapy. Some children with autistic disorder do seem to respond to these treatments, although they should be considered a supplementary intervention rather than a primary mode of treatment. (42)

When considering adaptive theatre, it is important to consider this as a supplementary intervention, rather than a replacement or a primary treatment for people with autism. It is reassuring that music, art, and animal therapies are considered supplemental therapies and that some people with autism have responded well to these treatments. The many benefits that supplemental therapies offer the autistic community is supported by Eric Hallander, Randi Hagerman, and Dr. Deborah Fein in their book *Autism Spectrum Disorders*. In chapter eleven, Hendren, Widjja and Lawton list treatments for people with autism, including: “Massage...Meditation...Exercise...Environmental/Sensorimotor Enrichment...Music Therapy...Animal-Assisted/Equine Therapy...Neurofeedback...[and] Other CIM [complementary and integrative medicine] therapies” (Hollander 319-21). Both academic works include music therapy as an alternative treatment for people with autism, and *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders* also mentions art therapy as a successful supplemental therapy. Again, there is much research that shares the therapeutic benefits of art, including: *Arts Therapies in Schools: Research and Practice*, edited by Vicky Karkou, and the Second Edition of *Handbook of Art Therapy*, edited by Cathy A. Malchiodi. The benefits of music therapy is another widely explored topic with such prominent works by scholars, including: William Davis, Kate Gfeller, and Michael Thaut’s book *An Introduction to Music Therapy: Theory and Practice*; the second edition of Juliette Alvin and Auriel Warwick’s book *Music Therapy for the Autistic Child*, and Amelia Oldfield’s book *Interactive Music Therapy – A Positive Approach: Music Therapy at a Child Development Centre*. One thing to notice about the lists of supplementary treatments from both *The Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders* and *Autism Spectrum Disorders* is that both sources do not include dramatherapy or theatre therapy. As mentioned in Chapter One, there is an abundance of information and research indicating the therapeutic

qualities and benefits theatre has to offer people, and additional opportunity for future research and benefits for people with autism.

There are many traditional techniques for teaching students with autism, including some that seem similar to theatre techniques. It is important to familiarize oneself with these techniques to best accommodate the needs of students and to utilize the most effective strategy to improve student's behavioral and social skills. Adaptive theatre techniques offer additional opportunities for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills. In chapter five, I will explore the efficacy of adaptive theatre techniques as interventions and educational tools for autistic students.

CHAPTER FIVE

ADAPTIVE THEATRE TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

Since teaching people with autism requires specific teaching strategies, it is essential that teachers planning on teaching theatre techniques to people with autism familiarize themselves with traditional teaching techniques and adapt their lessons to accommodate for their student's needs. By first teaching lessons and directing rehearsals while utilizing traditional teaching techniques for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills, a teacher will be able to not only support their students in learning theatre techniques, but also encourage further behavioral and social skills growth for their students. Adaptive theatre techniques compliment these proven strategies for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills, and better accommodate student's needs. Theatre offers additional support for people with autism, especially when adapting the theatre techniques of: Improvisation, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*, and Michael Lugering's *The Expressive Actor: Integrated Voice, Movement and Acting Training*. First, I will explain why theatre enhances teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills, then I will clarify each acting technique and how each technique can be adapted to accommodate teaching behavioral and social skills to people with autism, and last I will express the need for additional studies and research in adapting theatre techniques for teaching students with autism.

There are many traditional techniques for teaching people with autism; adapting theatre to compliment these traditional techniques is a great resource for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills. Many researchers and scholars emphasize the benefits that music therapy and art therapy have for people with autism. Since drama therapy is another performing art known for its healing qualities, perhaps theatre also has many benefits to offer people with

autism. The definition and benefits drama therapy have for people with autism is further explained in chapter fourteen of Loretta Gallo-Lopez and Lawrence C. Rubin's edited book: *Play-Based Interventions for Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. In "The ACT Project: Enhancing Social Competence Through Drama Therapy and Performance," written by Lisa Powers Tricomi and Loretta Gallo-Lopez, they write:

Drama therapy is the practical and intentional use of drama and theater practices, such as plays, rituals, and stories, for therapeutic purposes...The All Community Theatre (ACT) Project is a drama therapy and performance program for children and teens with autism spectrum disorders. The ACT Project was founded by registered drama therapist Loretta Gallo-Lopez...Each group develops, scripts, and performs two plays per year. The weekly one and one-half hour sessions involve specific drama therapy exercises to develop social skills and relationship-building, improve communication and relatedness, and enhance spontaneity and creativity. (Gallo-Lopez 271, 272, 278)

The All Community Theatre Project is an excellent example of the success that drama therapy has when teaching people with autism various skills. Tricomi and Gallo-Lopez further explain specific participant's successes, especially when the theatre group:

[F]ocus on each individual's strengths and interests, participants use characteristics that may typically be viewed as deficits in a more positive manner. An obsession for scripting dialogue from television shows or movies, for example, can be a skill that supports the memorizing of dialogue. Some participants have actually memorized the entire script in a week, including every actor's lines and all the stage directions. (283)

The All Community Theatre Project apply some traditional techniques for teaching people with autism, such as the techniques utilized in individual education plans that recommend

to “capitalize on the student’s strengths and use them to teach new skills” (Ben-Arieh 22).

Tricomi and Gallo-Lopez also emphasize the success of drama therapy when teaching people with autism spectrum disorder by sharing that “[t]he flexibility of drama therapy and its capacity to adjust to the special interests and ability levels of clients make it an ideal treatment modality for use with children and teens diagnosed with ASD [autism spectrum disorders]” (Gallo-Lopez 274). Traditional techniques for teaching people with autism emphasize the need for personalization, and unique teaching techniques for each person with autism, especially since the needs of those with autism can vary so greatly. Tricomi and Gallo-Lopez further emphasize the benefits of drama therapy for people with autism spectrum disorder by explaining:

Drama therapy techniques are ideal for enhancing identification and appropriate expression of emotions for children and teens diagnosed with ASD [autism spectrum disorders]...Drama therapy provides sensory integration through the use of costuming, music, movement, and visual arts with set and prop building. The use of script development, storytelling, and drama games increases the clients’ ability for planning, synthesizing, and organizing...The use of abstract thought, critical to the development of ToM [theory of mind] and the ability to “put oneself in another’s shoes,” is developed in drama therapy through the use of humor, joke-telling, character development, role-taking, and plot development. These techniques help to improve the clients’ ability to understand and express language. Visual spatial and motor coordination are also targeted using drama therapy exercises such as mirroring, space walking, and other theater warm-ups. (Gallo-Lopez 277)

Tricomi and Gallo-Lopez emphasize the many benefits that drama therapy offers people with autism spectrum disorder, including the success drama therapy has for teaching many skills,

including behavioral and social skills. Tricomi and Gallo-Lopez also explain how the All Community Theatre Project structures their classes, or rehearsals, and explain the many benefits that utilizing improvisation has for their class, or ensemble. Improvisation is one of the most successful adaptive theatre techniques. As Norma Saldivar, chair of Theatre at University of Nevada, Las Vegas and Executive Director at the Nevada Conservatory Theatre says:

[I]mprov is utilized by many people in many non-theatrical situations to promote collaboration, cooperation, and address particular issues. This is used in places from business settings, to HR settings, to campus wide events to build understanding across groups of people. If non-theatrical organizations have adapted improv, why not therapists for autistic individuals? (11 Mar. 2022.)

Improvisation is an example of an effective theatre technique for teaching skills in the classroom or rehearsal space can be as effective when teaching students with autism. Katherine S. McKnight and Mary Scruggs explain the effectiveness of improvisation in their book *The Second City Guide to Improv in the Classroom: Using Improvisation to Teach Skills and Boost Learning*, and Carrie Lobman and Matthew Lundquist further propose additional improvisational effectiveness and activities for the classroom in their book: *Unscripted Learning: Using Improv Activities Across the K-8 Curriculum*. In Lobman and Lundquist's book, the basic principles of improv are explained as:

- The Giving and Receiving of Offers...The basic unit of improve [improvisation] is the offer. Everything that any participant says or does in a scene is an offer. They can be movements, sounds, words, or ideas. Improv scenes are created by the giving and receiving of those offers. For example, if one improviser gets up onstage and shrugs her shoulders, that shrug is an offer and is now available for

the ensemble to use. Another improviser might respond by saying, “I’ll help you get that monster off your back...”

- Don’t negate...When improvisers do not accept an offer it is called a negation, and as any improviser will tell you, the rule in improv is *don’t negate*. Negating, or blocking, is challenging, disagreeing with, or otherwise denying the reality of what has been presented so far in the scene...
- Make the Ensemble Look Good...Professional improvisers often say, “Your partner is a genius.” Being funny and talented in improv is actually about making the ensemble look good. Just as in team sports, improvisers work at “having one another’s backs...”
- “Yes, and”...Successful improv is more than just seeing or accepting offers. In order for the activity to develop, the ensemble has to add to the offers that have already been made. In improv, building on offers is called “Yes, and.” If players accept one another’s offers but don’t add any new action or information, the improv activity will not develop beyond its starting point. With “Yes, and,” an improviser goes beyond what is offered and adds something new. (Lobman 13-6)

These fundamental principles of improvisation are significant in performing improvisation, and can be adapted for the classroom. Already, the premise of improvisation encourages groups to come together to accept one another and to work together to accomplish a similar goal, a very proactive and therapeutic approach, similar to what is recommended to teachers when teaching people with autism. Lobman and Lundquist explain the benefits of utilizing improvisation as:

Doing improv comedy exercises and scene work in the classroom is a wonderful tool for creating a positive learning environment. In order to learn, human beings have to do what we don't yet know how to do-in other words, we have to take risks. Improv is about learning to take risks and, even more important, it's about learning how to support other people to take risks...Improv is also about learning how to work as an ensemble-as a group. (Lobman 1)

Lobman explains that improvisation helps students take risks and that improvisation also helps students support one another, working as an ensemble. Taking risks might also mean, to a person with autism, trying new socially acceptable behaviors, and working as an ensemble, to a person with autism, might mean finding appropriate ways to socialize with others. Lobman further explains the advantages of utilizing improvisational techniques within the classroom by explaining 20th century Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's concept of "the Zones of Proximal Development," expressing:

[S]ocial environments where people can go beyond their current level of development.

He called them Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky argued that if people only focus on what the child can do independently, then they will only see what has already developed and they will miss what is developing. (Lobman 6)

Lobman and Lundquist imply that by encouraging children to learn through improvisation, an encouraging and safe environment to make social and educational risks, the child's level of development can grow and develop past what is already expected. Both of these books are excellent resources for teachers adapting improvisation, to their classrooms, further validating the notion that improvisation is a successful and acceptable technique for teaching and developing a student's skills. I hope to encourage additional potential for improvisational skills

by explaining the many benefits of adapting improvisation for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills.

As previously mentioned, behavioral skills might be one of the most helpful skills to improve when teaching people with autism skills. Before one considers lesson plans or the adapted improvisational lessons to teach behavioral skills to people with autism, one should first consider the students and their individual educational plans and behavioral intervention plans, maintaining a therapeutic and proactive approach by also considering the environment (Ben-Arieh 66). Some examples of proactive questions educators might want to ask themselves are: are there any elements of the classroom or rehearsal space that could lead to problem behaviors or are there proactive approaches that can be made to limit the chances of negative behaviors. Ben-Arieh and Miller also emphasize the importance of considering the classroom or rehearsal environment by explaining “[o]ur experience from working with students with ASD [autism spectrum disorders] has taught us that learning and behavior can be greatly enhanced by environmental supports, such as visual aids, the structuring of space and time, and sensory interventions” (Ben-Arieh 32). By taking additional consideration of the classroom or rehearsal space, the teacher might be able to minimize stress in the classroom, leading to fewer negative behaviors. Ashcroft, Argiro, and Keohane mention techniques for improving the characteristic of “Hypersensitivity, Hyposensitivity, And Atypical Reactions To The Five Senses” by offering advice in “creating a safe area...relaxation training...stress thermometers, and...crisis management” (Ashcroft 190-1). These different techniques and the amount of attention a teacher must consider for each technique depends on the student and their needs.

The All Community Theatre Project also consider the importance of the classroom or rehearsal environment when they mention “environment should include opportunities for

nondirective play and play that is spontaneous and varied” (Gallo-Lopez 274). Some additional considerations can also be made for physical structures, routines, and visual supports, as mentioned in chapter four, Pierangelo had emphasized these considerations in creating a structured environment for success (Pierangelo 59-61). Once a successful environment is created for the classroom or rehearsal space, maintaining a consistent space and routine is especially helpful, except if flexibility and versatility is a skill being developed. It might encourage student confidence and creativity to have the students decide how they would enjoy the classroom or rehearsal space, remembering that if choice is an element of an individualized education plan, then offering fewer choices might be helpful.

After considering the student’s individualized education plans and behavioral intervention plans, and the classroom environment, the next component to consider when adapting improvisation for teaching people with special needs behavioral and social skills is the lesson plan or the plan of activities. The All Community Theatre Project first utilizes a warm-up, mentioning:

All drama therapy sessions begin with a warm-up. The warm-up is preparation for the session and is multifunctional. It provides emotional distancing for the participant, from either a more distanced to a less distanced state, and it can also serve as a means to elicit a sense of calm from a previously anxious or excitable state. The warm-up engages the creative imagination, brain connection, as it uses the body, feelings, senses, thoughts, and intuition (Bailey, 1994). (Gallo-Lopez 273)

Warm-ups are especially significant since they start the improvisational activities, and can help with transitions for people with autism. Ian McCurrach and Barbara Darnley also mention the importance of improvisational warm-ups in their book: *Special Talents, Special*

Needs: Drama for People with Learning Disabilities. McCurrach and Darnley mention using improvisational warm-ups, including a “Physical warm-up [and] Vocal warm-up” (McCurrach 72-3). If focusing on behavioral skills, the warm-ups might be adapted to reinforce the targeted behavior, but warm-ups oftentimes help students transitioning to the class and begin thinking about theatre and the theatre technique being taught such as improvisation. One example of a successful improvisational game that encourages: ensemble building, collaboration, patience, and the behavioral skill of silence, is the game “Counting, How High?” (Lobman 41). Lobman and Lundquist explain the game as:

Students sit or stand in a tight circle. They are told that they are going to try to count to 10 together. The teacher explains that someone will start by saying “one,” and then anyone can call out the next consecutive number until they reach 10. The catch is that if two people speak at once, the group must return to 1 and begin again. (41)

This game is great for encouraging teamwork and teaching students the behavioral and social skills of: taking turns (as in conversations) and listening to one another. This improvisational game might also be beneficial for a student that has frequent tantrums, as this activity requires the group to sit quietly and to focus on listening. Depending on the student’s abilities, it might be necessary for a teacher to adapt the number that the group is counting to a lower number, so the goal is more achievable. As in developing individual education plans, it is most beneficial for the student to have goals that are realistic and achievable, and it is better for a student to become bored of an improvisational exercise than to feel discouraged from an overly ambitious goal.

Another great example of an improvisational warm-up mentioned by Lobman and Lundquist is “Yes, Let’s” (44). Lobman and Lundquist describe the game as:

Students begin by walking about the room in a random pattern. At any point, anyone can call out an instruction, for example “Let’s all swim like fish,” and everyone must respond, “Yes, let’s!” and then move around the room pretending to swim like fish until someone calls out a new idea. The game continues with lots of suggestions. Often it will end after much movement and silliness when someone gets the bright idea to say, “Let’s all lie down and go to sleep!” (44)

Yes, Let’s! can help build confidence for students and help encourage creativity and interest (44). As Lobman and Lundquist add, Yes, Let’s! also includes the option of “[i]nstead of physical activities, have students call out emotional states: “Let’s all be sad.”...occupations or animals they’re studying may be incorporated in the game” (44). By playing this game with emotional states, the students are able to develop additional behavioral and social skills of identifying emotions and gaining empathy, as well as being models to one another of what positive emotions might look like. The other option of Yes, Let’s! is by adapting this improv game with topics, this option might be an excellent opportunity to engage students that isolate or feel uncomfortable, being able to incorporate their interests to help encourage their participation and social interaction with the classroom.

Similar to the importance that warm-ups have for improvisational actors, warm-ups might also help students engage in social interaction, gaining and developing behavioral and social skills. After a successful warm-up the students will most likely be more engaged, energetic, and collaborative. Tricomi and Gallo-Lopez describe that:

Following the warm-up, a drama therapy session moves into the action phase. This is a deeper level of enactment that the warm-up facilitates. The participants are warmed up to their roles and feelings and begin connecting with others. The action is the actual

dramatization that occurs within the session. This is where the development of space, characters, plot, conflict, and resolution takes place. The children are encouraged to create ideas from “their own imagination” rather than stories or movies that are well known or mainstream. This requires spontaneous and creative interaction as well as abstract thinking. This form of play is where the script and play shaping begin to take form...the goal of developing and enhancing skills including group interaction, collaboration and compromise, spontaneous reciprocal conversation, emotional flexibility, social interaction and social competence, creative thinking and problem solving, and frustration tolerance and relationship building. (Gallo-Lopez 273, 280)

After the warm-up, the All Community Theatre Project group and develop their scenes, eventually rejoining as a group to present their scenes (Gallo-Lopez 280). This ‘action phase’ is where the All Community Theatre Project teachers are able to focus on each student’s individual needs, adapting improvisational techniques to accommodate the student’s needs. After a group oriented improvisational warm-up, this can be the same warm-up for different rehearsals and classes to assist with transitioning, one might continue to the next portion of the class that utilizes improvisation, but with games that encourage story. This portion of the class might teach students theatre concepts of ““who what, when, and where” of a story” or teach beginning, middle, and end (Gallo-Lopez 280). One example of an improvisational game is ““Yes, and” Collective Story and Other “Yes, and” Extensions” (Lobman 69). Lobman and Lundquist share the directions:

The class sits in a circle. The teacher explains that they are going to tell a story together. Each person will contribute one sentence and everyone (except the first person) will start their sentence with the words “Yes, and.” The story should be told in the third person

(avoid *I, me, we, us*), and the characters should be given names. The teacher solicits suggestions for a title from the class. The teacher then repeats the title and begins the story by saying the first sentence. The person to the teacher's right continues the story, starting his or her sentence with the words "Yes, and" and adding a sentence. The story proceeds with each consecutive person adding one sentence beginning with "Yes, and" to the story. Students should be encouraged not to try to move the story along too quickly or to steer it in their own direction, but instead to build gradually on what has been said. A successful story might not "go" very far but might still be very satisfying. The story ends whenever the teacher, or anyone in the class, feels it has reached a conclusion, or time has run out. (69)

This improvisational activity is a great way to begin storytelling, especially collectively, and encourages group interaction and comradery. Important things to consider when adapting this exercise for people with autism are modeling the exercise first to help with the student's understanding of the improvisational activity, and modifying the expectations of the amount of time for a student's response. Some students might require additional time to respond with their sentence. Lobman and Lundquist also mentions various ways of adapting the improvisational game by:

- *Full Body "Yes, and."* Have each student create and hold a pose that represents his or her addition to the story. Each student holds his or her pose until every student has had a chance to add a line.
- *"Yes, and" Song.* Creates a "Yes, and" collective song where each student improvises a new line for the song.

- *Nonfiction “Yes, and.”* The class tells a nonfiction story about something that the whole class experienced together.
- *Three-Word (or One-Word) “Yes, and.”* Each person says only three words or one word (depending on the variation you’re playing). Little words like “I,” “the,” and “an” count. Remind students to end sentences by the inflection in their voice. While no one says, “Yes, and,” it is implied.
- *Written “Yes, and.”* The teacher starts a story and leaves it on a clipboard in front of the room. Students can add to it as they wish, as long as they don’t negate what other students have said. The teacher can make inputs as often as necessary to add structure to the story. (70)

These different versions of the improvisational game are especially helpful in providing options for teaching a specific behavioral or social skill. These variations can be useful in: continuing playwriting of a script, utilizing a similar theme for different stories, or adding to a scene of a favorite classroom or rehearsal story. As with most improvisational exercises, one should observe what activities the students enjoy, and build the student’s interests to help develop and gain behavioral and social skills and an interest in theatre. The teacher of improvisational activities, is also considered the director, coach or side coach, and should remember to employ theatrical techniques of storytelling, encouraging students to advance in their artistic expression, because a student who succeeds artistically might also have greater behavioral and social skills.

One great opportunity that theatre offers students with autism is to explore social stories, modeling what appropriate social behavior is for a particular situation. For example, students might be able to improvise a scene about going to the grocery store or ordering food at a

restaurant. Another important improvisational technique for teaching people with autism is called sidecoaching. McKnight and Scruggs define sidecoaching and offer some helpful ways to effectively sidecoach to student's work when they write:

Most teachers are familiar with the technique of sidecoaching, although they may not refer to it by name. Sidecoaching is simply making suggestions to students while they are engaged in the exercise. At its best, sidecoaching is short and specific and keeps teachers and students focused on the work and solving problems. At its worst, sidecoaching is narrative and intrusive. Effective sidecoaching is objective and nonjudgmental, and it avoids the language of success and failure. Of course, good sidecoaching is as positive as possible.

Better Sidecoaching: Instead of...

Try...

“Don't say no.”

“Say, ‘Yes, and...’”

“That's a funny face!”

“Show how you're feeling.”

“Don't stand so close to each other.”

“Use the whole playing area!”

“Stop mumbling!”

“Share your voice with us.”

“Don't turn your back.”

“Stage picture!”

“Be more specific with that basket.”

“How heavy is the basket?”

“Don't be so silly.”

“Work together.”

“Great! Great!”

“Keep exploring that!” (McKnight 46)

Some of McKnight's examples of effective sidecoaching could be phrased differently, but effective sidecoaching for people with autism is also short, specific, and avoids language of success and failure. Maintaining a therapeutic and proactive approach encourages and guides students in success for their improvisational and skills goals, while encouraging a safe environment. Another helpful improvisational activity is called "Freeze," Lobman and Lundquist describe freeze as:

Two students begin a scene. After a few minutes, another student can call, "Freeze!" and replace one of the performers by tapping her on the shoulder. The new performer then situates himself in the exact same position as the performer he is replacing. Once he is in place, the old performer calls out, "Action!" and a new scene begins. (Lobman 169)

This activity is helpful for students' creativity, collaboration, and learning to take turns. There might be many different scenes created in this activity, and a teacher might be able to encourage social skills of inclusion and participation by modeling scenes that incorporate a student's interests or to continuing a subject or topic that students have positively responded, utilizing behavioral modification to encourage students. Improvisation can also be adapted to use the effective techniques for teaching social skills that Roger Pierangelo and George Giuliani recommend, including: "Rules, social stories, role-playing and scripts, cue cards and checklists, coaching, modeling, and friendship groups are all effective strategies for systematically teaching social skills" (Pierangelo 57). Social stories can model proper behavior for social situations, and can accommodate specific student needs. The students are given a safe opportunity for learning an appropriate reaction to a social situation, and can model good behaviors to other students. Philip Bernardi's book *Improvisation Starters: A Collection of 900 Improvisation Situations for*

the Theater is a great resource for additional improvisation scenarios or social interactions, for beginning improvisation scenes.

Teachers should adapt their improvisational techniques, with attention to the traditional skills of teaching people with autism. While encouraging artistic techniques for more advanced students, the teacher is both an educator and theatre director having a classroom and theatrical goal. The All Community Theatre Project finds success using their theatre work for drama therapy and for producing original work. The All Community Theatre Project concludes their classes or rehearsals with a closure experience, detailing:

Drama therapy sessions always end with a closure experience. Closure in this instance is not necessarily about resolving the issue of the client or participant but rather about providing a centering or grounding, a transition from action back into the everyday world of the client (Landy, 1994). (Gallo-Lopez 273)

As Tricomi and Gallo-Lopez write, a shared closure experience is beneficial for people with autism for many reasons, including transitional purposes. The closing portion of an improvisational class or rehearsal might be an excellent opportunity to ask the students about their experiences. Students might want to discuss what activities they enjoyed, this is an example of positive reinforcement for healthy forms of communication, and a great opportunity to structure future classes or rehearsals for additional success. Understanding the needs of the classroom is important, as this also might be a great opportunity for a relaxation activity, such as yoga or stretching, or for an energetic activity, such as exercising or dancing (Hollander 319-21). After the class or rehearsal has ended, teachers then have a good opportunity to take notes of students' progress, also considering the theatrical progress of the work and activities, and to plan for the next class.

Adapting to the needs of your students and directing the improvisational activities for behavioral and social skills will help students grow in their individualized education plans and hopefully limit the amount of negative behaviors the students experience. Remembering that some individualized education plans include data for specific skill goals, and that monitoring the progression of growth helps in better understanding the student's development. Remember to also focus on theatrical or artistic goals, such as performing an original work, like the All Community Theatre Project produces, is also helpful for the class's artistic success. The artistic success of the class encourages student social participation and individual confidence. Being able to work towards an objective and achieve that objective is very encouraging for student growth and application of skills. It might be helpful to select improvisational activities that will build on stories that students enjoy, possibly culminating in a full length production.

Additional resources for improvisational games, activities, and strategies, include: Philip Bernardi's book *Improvisation Starters: A Collection of 900 Improvisation Situations for the Theater*, Justine Jones and Mary Ann Kelly's book *Improv Ideas: A Book of Games and Lists*, Lynda A. Topper's book *Theatre Games & Activities: Games for Building Confidence and Creativity*, Kelly Leonard and Tom Yorton's book *Lessons from The Second City Yes, And: How Improvisation Reverses "No, But" Thinking and Improves Creativity and Collaboration*, Rod Martin's book *Drama Games and Acting Exercises: 177 Games and Activities*, John Hodgson and Ernest Richards's book *Improvisation: Discovery and Creativity in Drama*, and Gavin Levy's book *275 Acting Games: Connected: A Comprehensive Workbook of Theatre Games for Developing Acting Skills*.

If producing an original work is an objective of the class, then there are many different theatrical techniques that offer growth in creating original works. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau

explain their techniques in *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*. This next section will explain what viewpoints are, how they might be adapted for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills, and how they are an excellent resource for creating original works for people with autism. Viewpoints and composition are defined by Bogart and Landau in chapter 2 of *The Viewpoints Book*, writing:

Viewpoints, Composition: What do these terms mean? The following definitions reflect *our* understanding and use of them. Even in the context of the work of such pioneers as Mary Overlie and Aileen Passloff, it is impossible to say where these ideas actually originated, because they are timeless and belong to the natural principles of movement, time and space. Over the years, we have simply articulated a set of names for things that already exist, things that we do naturally and have always done, with greater or lesser degrees of consciousness and emphasis...

- Viewpoints is a philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage.
- Viewpoints is a set of names given to certain principles of movement through time and space; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens onstage.
- Viewpoints is points of awareness that a performer or creator makes use of while working...

Composition

- Composition is a method for creating new work.

- Composition is the practice of selecting and arranging the separate components of theatrical language into a cohesive work of art for the stage...
- Composition is a method for generating, defining and developing the theater vocabulary that will be used for any given piece. In Composition, we make pieces so that we can point to them and say: “That worked,” and ask: “Why?” so that we can then articulate which ideas, moments, images, etc., we will include in our production.
- Composition is a method for revealing to ourselves our hidden thoughts and feelings about the material...
- Composition is an assignment given to an ensemble so that it can create short, specific theater pieces addressing a particular aspect of the work...
- Composition is a method for being in dialogue with other art forms, as it borrows from and reflects the other arts. In Composition work, we study and use principles from other disciplines translated for the stage...
- Composition is to the creator (whether director, writer, performer, designer, etc.) what Viewpoints is to the actor: a method for practicing the art. (Bogart 7-13)

The artistic potential that Bogart and Landau describe is extensively explored in *The Viewpoints Book*, including helpful exercises and suggestions for creating an ensemble by exploring viewpoints theatre training and composing original works with composition or “writing as a group, in time and space, using the language of the theater” (137). Viewpoints training might seem more abstract than the previously discussed theatre technique of improvisation, but these two different theatre techniques have many similarities, especially for

helping people with autism that are learning behavioral and social skills. Bogart and Landau even mention the improvisational concept of “*Yes, and...*,” describing how “[o]ne of the gifts of Composition is the way in which it asks us to become authentic collaborators, to work with a spirit of generosity” (139). Most of *The Viewpoints Book* utilizes collaborative exercises and techniques similar to improvisation, but it also emphasizes composition as a means of developing work unique for the theatre members. As viewpoints develop compositions unique to the performers, similarly these techniques might be able to develop compositions or scenes unique for the student’s developing skills. I will be discussing the effectiveness viewpoints might have when teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills.

Some theatre scholars might consider viewpoints training more experimental theatre. Art can appear in many different forms and styles, especially depending on the artist creating the work. In Jami L. Anderson and Simon Cushing’s edited book, *The Philosophy of Autism*, Jami L. Anderson shares that:

Joseph Straus claims that recent contributions made by autistic writers, artists and musicians make talking of “autistic culture” coherent. Straus argues that autistic culture has three characteristics:

Local Coherence: Although typically pathologized as “obsessive compulsive” or “getting lost in the details and an inability to attend to the whole,” Strauss describes the autistic artist (whether he or she is a musician or painter, say) as one who *attends to minute detail* and preference for complexity rather than confusion.

Fixity of Focus: In medical models, autistics will be described as ritualistic if not bordering on being paralyzed by rigidity or sameness. Strauss describes artists as

expressing this as a preference for a neatness and orderliness in style and design, often providing them with a capacity to engage in a calm constancy that allows them to engage in repetitive activities over and over again-which may be necessary for completing complicated craft or artistry that requires a tremendous attention to detail.

Private Meanings: Autistic thinking is usually described as idiosyncratic. Autistic artists are often very private, not only in the way they think but also in how they think. Because they are not “caught up in social niceties” they are free to defy social conventions, often with profoundly liberating ways. Autistic art, comedy, literature, and music is *avant garde*, though not self-consciously so. As Gunilla Gerland writes, “This apparent disregard for the convention appears to be brave. In fact, I had absolutely no idea that there were such things as conventions.” (Anderson 127)

Anderson explains how people with autism might express themselves differently in art, how their art might look different, and how we should respect their art as any other individual’s art. As people with autism might share a more abstract or avant garde style, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s *The Viewpoints Book* might be an excellent theatre technique for students that enjoy a more abstract style of theatre. As mentioned earlier with improvisation, it is always best to consult an individualized education plan and behavioral intervention plan to adapt a theatre technique for the student. If an exercise becomes overwhelming for a student, then one can use appropriate prompting and fading, and having environmental considerations of a relaxation area might also be helpful for students. Bogart and Landau offer their preparations for a rehearsal, including:

Participants should be barefoot. Sneakers are second best when there are reasons for not being barefoot...Clothing should not restrict movement. Hair should be pulled back and

jewelry removed. Start on time. Beginning and ending work sessions with punctuality shows a respect for one another and adds a sense of order which, paradoxically, allows for more complexity and abandon inside the allotted time. Everyone accepts responsibility for her/his individual safety and the safety of the group. This responsibility is shared. People's safety should not be put in danger: make sure that people aren't throwing themselves around carelessly, that they respect any past injuries. Bruises should not result from this work. (21-2)

These preparations for the classroom or rehearsal help create structure for the class, while encouraging students to respect one another and the classroom or environment. Bogart and Landau's emphasis on respecting the theater and space might be especially beneficial for people with autism that struggle with tantrums or have negative behaviors from environmental concerns. Being barefoot might help or distract students, as the added sensation of feeling the floor might be too distracting for students, but the benefits of imaginative play encouraged through being barefoot is helpful for students.

Bogart and Landau offer many exercises with detailed instructions; some warm-up techniques include stretching and yoga (22-25). It might be helpful to repeat the same warm-up routine if students need help with transitions, or to change warm-up techniques gradually to encourage student creativity and confidence. After a warm-up, Bogart and Landau mention different exercises for developing each viewpoint; these are especially helpful in creating a shared vocabulary and understanding of each viewpoint. Adaptations might need to be made to limit the chance of negative behaviors and to encourage behavioral and social skill development, including incorporating additional moments of relaxation or breaks to offer students opportunities to share their experience and develop relationships.

Bogart and Landau explain that there are “nine Physical Viewpoints (Spatial Relationship, Kinesthetic Response, Shape, Gesture, Repetition, Architecture, Tempo, Duration and Topography) and Vocal Viewpoints (Pitch, Dynamic, Acceleration/Deceleration, Silence and Timbre)” (6). Bogart and Landau describe that “[t]he individual Viewpoints should be introduced separately” and instruct that many of the viewpoints be introduced “[o]n a grid” (35, 39). They describe a grid as “[i]magine a series of straight lines, crisscrossing each other at ninety-degree angles on the ground, like a giant piece of graph paper on the floor. The angles correspond to the walls of the room, eliminating all curves and diagonals” (Bogart 39). Working on the grid helps students safely explore the different viewpoints, with fewer chances of bumping into one another. When adapting this theatrical technique to accommodate for people with autism, it is beneficial to utilize prompting and fading according to your students’ needs, and to model walking on the grid. After the viewpoints are introduced and explored, Bogart and Landau mention the many benefits that viewpoints offer rehearsals and composition.

After developing and exploring viewpoints with your class, viewpoints have many advantages for rehearsals and in creating original content. Viewpoints can benefit rehearsals in many ways, including:

- During the *first stages of rehearsal* it can be used to (1) create an ensemble and (2) develop a physical vocabulary for the world of the play
- In the *second stages of rehearsal* it can be used to (1) deepen character, (2) find the physical life for the play and (3) apply directly to the staging of scenes or transitions.
- During the *running of a show* it can be used to (1) provide a company warm-up and (2) maintain freshness and spontaneity in performance. (Bogart 121)

Viewpoints offer specificity and a shared vocabulary between students and the teacher or director, and if the discovery of viewpoints continues with rehearsal, the transitional similarities might encourage fewer negative behaviors. Viewpoints that encourage positive behaviors and social skills for students should be encouraged and reinforced. The exercises imply an amount of concentration on tasks or exercises that can benefit students with autism in different ways, including physical exercise, and positively reinforcing an interest in theatre by developing viewpoints and the student's behavior and social skills. One might consider viewpoints training more abstract, but after practice, there is a great potential for utilizing viewpoints in composition or creating original work. Bogart and Landau also recommend steps for creating original work while utilizing viewpoints, including:

In the creation of original work, it is helpful for the process to be grounded in three basic components upon which a production can be constructed:

- The *question*
- The *anchor*
- The *structure*

The *question* (or theme) motivates the entire process. This central driving force should be big enough, interesting enough and relevant enough to be attractive and contagious to many people...The *anchor* is a person (or event) that can serve as a vehicle to get to the *question*...The *structure* is the skeleton upon which the event hangs. It is a way to organize time, information, text and imagery. (154)

Most of the original work and compositions are developed through the previous exercises and exploration of the various viewpoints. It might be encouraging to ask students what scenes

and moments they enjoyed most, and then incorporate those moments with the original work. Original works and scenes can improve the student's behavioral and social skills by incorporating student goals and lessons to enhance student education. It might also be less stressful for students if the teacher reflects after classes or rehearsals about what scenes or moments to include in an original work or production. Another important aspect of rehearsals and creating new work is shared by Anne Bogart in her book *What's the Story: Essays about Art, Theater, and Storytelling* when she explains that:

When the flow finally happens, enjoy it. Ride it. Your hard work and digressions have paid off...To experience flow, a great deal of experience in a chosen field is necessary. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell proposes that 10,000 hours of practice is needed before this brain state can be achieved...Collaboration requires generosity, openness, a sense of adventure, a love of active culture, tenacity, truth telling, interest in others, decisiveness and willingness, at any moment, to give up attachment to the final result.

(121-2)

As Bogart mentions, these moments of flow occur with practice and rehearsal work; hopefully by exercising viewpoints and teaching behavioral and social skills, students will have their own success. Teaching people with autism offers its own moments of flow, moments when the student is able to accomplish his or her behavioral and social goals. These are reasons to remain proactive and therapeutic minded with classes and rehearsals, for moments of success for students and group or ensemble.

After rehearsing with viewpoints, it might be beneficial to end rehearsal with a cooling down or relaxation group activity. This could be an activity utilizing silence or a moment for students to socialize and share their experiences. Routines help students with autism transition.

A moment to reflect on the rehearsal or class will offer the students additional opportunities to engage in healthy social behavior. If transitioning after class or rehearsal becomes a challenge, utilizing prompts and fading might assist the students in developing this skill. One of the most helpful characteristic of viewpoints is that a classroom or ensemble can grow together artistically, with a shared artistic vocabulary. Another effective theatre technique that utilizes a shared vocabulary is Michael Luger's *The Expressive Actor: Integrated Voice, Movement, and Actor Training*.

Michael Luger offers many helpful exercises and training techniques for integrating voice, movement and actor training with his expressive actor training. As Anne Bogart and Tina Landau detail specific exercises intended for students and actors to learn viewpoints, Luger also utilizes specific exercises to help actors "unite the actor's physical and psychological training...the actor will not study the parts-voice, movement, acting-but a single integrated discipline-expression itself" (Luger 10). Luger writes about:

Expressive action...First and second functions...Physical properties...Integration...Stacking...[including] Moving...Breathing...Sounding...[and] Speaking...Voice and body exercises...[and] Language and character exercises.
(Luger v-vii)

One of Luger's most integrative concepts is his idea of an expressive action. Luger first explains that expressive actions are:

[A] flexible, adaptable, specialized, and structured weight shift that makes human expression possible...

- An expressive action is an integrated activity that reflects a synthesis of the *feeling, thinking, and doing* components of the human person...
- An expressive action is the smallest unit of human communication...
- An expressive action is commonly described in the infinitive verb form such as: “to bluff,” “to amaze,” “to hound” or “to sprout”-though the verbal label of an expressive action may take many forms...
- An expressive action, though rooted in action and activity, is not merely a physical task...
- Expressive actions are the building blocks of the actor’s art and craft. (19)

Lugering integrates voice, movement and actor training with his concept of expressive action. By consolidating these actor trainings into one concept, an expressive action, this might make teaching acting to people with special needs easier to understand and communicate. After defining expressive actions, Lugering then defines what first and second functions are as:

The terms *first function* and *second function* are borrowed from the philosopher F.S.C. Northrop (1946, 306-11). He asserts that there are two *simultaneous* ways of knowing and experiencing our world-a *sensing way* (first function) and a *thinking way* (second function)...we need both *sensing information* (first function) and *thinking information* (second function) to create meaning and understanding, and ultimately, to make informed decisions...Actors need both *sensing information* and *thinking information* to create meaning and understanding, and additionally, to successfully direct and shape the creative process. (30)

Teaching people with autism to act by sensing and thinking allows teachers to encourage students to sense their environment, an excellent grounding and calming technique that might lead to fewer negative behaviors, and consider their own thoughts and the thoughts of others (including the characters they are portraying.) Luger's techniques of first and second functions might also be adapted for people with autism to encourage aesthetic acting techniques and considering the idea of thoughts. Teachers are able to teach social skills that might address healthy ways students can express their emotions and teach empathy of other's feelings and emotions (or theory of mind.)

Lugering continues to explore his method of acting by teaching physical properties. Lugering defines physical properties as:

[F]ive interrelated major physical properties-*energy* [charge/release], *orientation* [contact/withdraw], *size* [expand/contract], *progression* [center/periphery], and *flow* [free/bound]...The minor physical properties of an expressive action-*direction* [direct/indirect], *speed* [fast/slow], *weight* [heavy/light], *control* [stable/unstable], and *focus* [sharp/diffused]. (42-50)

The physical properties technique can also be helpful when teaching people with autism acting, offering specificity in instruction that helps students understand theatrical notes and acting principles. One can use the expression continuum to encourage actors to act with a specific physical property. Lugering also explains that expressive actions have a cycle, writing:

The wave-like action of the expressive cycle is experienced in three stages:

- The *initiation phase* is characterized by an internal imbalance or agitation, which prompts and prepares the body for action.

- The *development phase* is the substantive portion, characterized by outward action and physical activity.
- The *resolution phase* is characterized by feelings of satisfaction and gratification or frustration and discomfort, depending on whether the expressive action was successful or unsuccessful. (42)

This expressive cycle helps actors understand that actions in a play or scene have a beginning, middle and end. When teaching people with autism, it might be helpful to avoid confusion, by either using the terminology: (beginning, middle, and end) or (initiate, develop, resolve.) Utilizing both vocabularies might confuse students, but both of these concepts allow teachers choice between vocabulary options, and teachers can ask students which concepts they prefer to decide which vocabulary is best for the student's success. Luger also uses improvisation and what he refers to as stacking, explaining that:

[I]mprovisation builds an expressive action "from the ground up," progressing sequentially through four stages: they begin with a *weight shift(s)* (1), which collaborates with a corresponding *breath-shift* (2), which collaborates with a corresponding *sound-shift* (3), which collaborates with a corresponding *speech-shift* (4). Paradoxically when all assembled, these shifting-actions appear to happen *in that order and all at once*.

Stacking is a method of training in which through the exploration of physical action the moving, breathing, sounding, and speaking centers become integrated and fully embodied. (73)

Luger emphasizes the progression of expressive action, which incorporates voice, movement, and actor training, and allows teachers to also teach acting with these principles. Again, it might be helpful to limit the amount of vocabulary until students have gained the skills

of acting with previous concepts of acting. Once the students are comfortable acting with certain concepts and vocabulary, they can then begin mastering other techniques of acting, including stacking. Teaching Luger's: (weight shift(s), breath-shift, sound-shift, speech-shift) and (initiate, develop, resolve) techniques, might be helpful for also teaching students to understand their emotions and express their emotions through healthy behaviors. Luger also shares various voice and body exercises and language and character exercises that can be helpful for warm-ups or for classroom expressive action exploration.

Luger's *The Expressive Actor* is an effective technique for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills because it teaches students to analyze a character's expressive actions from a specific perspective, and might be additionally successful at helping students with autism to recognize their own emotions and physical actions, learning healthier emotions and socially acceptable physical actions. Teachers planning on utilizing Luger's techniques should first understand their students individualized education plans and behavioral intervention plans, while also choosing appropriate prompting and fading techniques for their students. Warm-ups might include physical and vocal exercises, such as "Vowel tuning," explained by Luger as:

Select any comfortable pitch in the middle of your vocal range, not too high and not too low. Sustain an "ee" vowel for several seconds but not longer than you are able to comfortably support and sound. Direct the vibration forward into the front of your mouth. Make any necessary adjustments in the vowel space to produce a vibrant forward tone. Sense the vibrations directly on your lips, teeth, and hard palate. Let the vibrations play freely in your head and face. Rest and repeat.

Next, sustain an “ah” vowel on the same pitch for several seconds but not longer than you are able to comfortably support the sound. Encourage a sense of openness and expansiveness in your mouth and throat. The “ah” vowel should travel freely and fluidly through the resonating spaces. Make any necessary adjustments in the vowel space to produce a free and open tone. Rest and repeat.

Now sustain an “oo” vowel for several seconds but not longer than you are able to comfortably support the sound. Enjoy the warmth, weight, depth, and richness of this vowel sound. Make any necessary adjustments in the vowel space to produce a rich and full tone. Let the vibrations play freely in your chest cavity. Rest and repeat...

Now progress through this three-vowel sequence, from the forward “ee” to the open “ah” to the full “oo,” on one sustained tone. As you move from vowel to vowel, encourage a great deal of expanse and freedom in the upper and lower resonating spaces. Notice the point at which each vowel sound takes on its richest resonance. When the upper and lower resonating spaces are adequately expanded, it is possible to sequence from vowel to vowel without any abrupt shift or deterioration in tone. All three vowels possess an equally rich and stable resonance that is best described as *forward*, *open*, and *full*. Repeat this three-vowel sequence several times using a variety of comfortable pitches. (131-2)

Vowel tuning helps actors balance resonance, finding better vocal expressive capabilities while also encouraging play and acting technique for students. Warm-ups should be fun and encouraging, as Luger writes “[h]ave fun...A spirit of play sets up a creative, impulsive, environment for improvisation” (109). If students are having fun and enjoying theatre, then they are more likely to have positive behavioral and social skill growth. After warm-ups, when

adapting Luger's *Expressive Actor* for teaching people with special needs, the rehearsal or class can consist of learning and exploring each physical property, then stacking. Luger mentions "[c]reating your own exercises" when he writes:

There is no single set of codified exercises that comprise this method; but rather, the exercises are simply a practical extension of the principles. Any exercise that charges and releases, expands and contracts, contacts and withdraws in a free flowing matter are useful and acceptable. When the principles are fully understood, it is possible to create new, different, and inventive exercises of your own that transcend the ones suggested in this book. (80)

If a teacher is creating his or her own exercises, this can mean incorporating scenes that are relevant to the student's individualized education plan, or rehearsing a scene from a play while utilizing vocabulary from Luger's physical properties. At the end of rehearsal or class, the teacher can lead the class in a discussion about what the students enjoyed, and what they would like to continue working for the next rehearsal or class.

Adjusting to students' needs and offering routine to classes will benefit the students, as other possible closing activities might include yoga, dancing, or opportunities for students to socially interact (Hollander 319-21). As beneficial as improvisation, viewpoints, and expressive actor training is for teaching people with autism, there is still a need for additional research and studies for adaptive theatre techniques when teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The many successful traditional techniques teachers utilize when teaching people with autism are especially beneficial to people with autism. Because of the amount of success and significance that traditional educational techniques have when teaching people with autism, it is essential that theatre techniques be adapted to accommodate for the needs of people with autism to effectively improve the student's behavioral and social skills. Since theatre is oftentimes empathetic and adaptive in its nature, adaptive theatre techniques offer many advantages for improving behavioral and social skills for people with autism. The benefits of theatre for teaching people with autism should be further researched and explored because: autism spectrum disorders is "[a] relatively new term" or disorder, people with autism make up a community of people in need of additional techniques that accommodate their diverse symptoms, and because they are worthy as people and artisans (Turkington 20).

Scientists and culture have only recently accepted autistic people for who they are. As Turkington and Anan write, "[m]ost experts believe that before the discovery of the pattern of symptoms now known as autism, most people with the syndrome were considered either to be mentally retarded or insane" (93). This means that before science could identify people as autistic, people with autism might have been overlooked or misrepresented. Since alternative treatments for people with autism have also only recently been researched, there is a need for additional data and exploration to determine effective alternative options for teaching them. Theatre should also be further researched as an alternative treatment for people with autism since people with autism have a myriad of different needs, requiring additional treatment options to accommodate these needs.

People with autism are considered ‘on the spectrum,’ and as we discussed earlier, their abilities can vary greatly between persons. Since their needs can be diversified, so should the different treatment options be available to accommodate for this need. As Turkington and Anan write, “[e]very person with autistic disorder is an individual, with a unique personality and combination of characteristics” (29). As every person with autism is individual, so should their treatments be diverse to accommodate their individuality, and theatre can most effectively be modified for student’s needs. Theatre’s adaptability of improvisation, viewpoints, and the expressive actor theatre techniques are examples of how helpful theatre can be and how compassionate it is for people with autism. Lastly, theatre should be further explored for additional benefits for people with autism because they are worthy of the investment as humans and performing artists.

When participating in theatre, people with autism experience the joy and satisfaction of performing arts, while developing other important skills, such as behavioral, communicative, and social skills. Our culture has made advances in accepting and including autistic people for who they are. One example can be seen in the many individuals that advocate for Neurodiversity. As Jami Anderson writes in *The Philosophy of Autism*:

[N]eurodiversity...it means regarding autistic individuals *as fully persons* rather than as broken beings in need of repair...rather than regarding autistic neurological structures as “defective” or “disordered,” one should regard autistic neurology as worth valuing because each neurological structure contributes to the collective variety of human neurological diversity, in much the same way that each human culture contributes to cultural diversity and each of the hundreds of human languages makes a valuable contribution to human linguistic diversity. (127)

People with autism are a part of our society, and they contribute to what makes us human. Jami Anderson goes on to defend the value of the autistic community's art by saying that "others argue that autistics create original art, literature, music and are creators of scientific innovation that have cultural worth" (127). The autistic community is capable of great artistic accomplishments such as the collective works in *Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement*, the original works the All Community Theatre Project, and other theatre groups that produce theatrical works with people with autism. This is a community of people that could greatly benefit from additional assistance in developing their performing arts skills. As Eric Garcia also advocates for neurodiversity, in *Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement*, writing:

[S]ociety should accept and accommodate people with autism, dyspraxia, ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder], or other conditions considered an abnormality. Neurodiversity wasn't diminishing the specific challenges of autistic people but rather...like other disability rights movements before it, society should welcome neurodivergent people and give them the tools necessary to live a life of dignity...instead of the world trying to make us be more "neurotypical," the world should celebrate our atypicality and accommodate accordingly. (Kapp 234)

Since more people have been diagnosed with autism, science has only recently explored the benefits that artistic alternative treatments offer people with autism. As our culture has also become more culturally inclusive of people with autism, there is more of a need for research and additional treatment options. Theatre can teach people with autism many skills, including behavioral and social skills, but also allows representation for a culture that has struggled with

various challenges. Tricomi and Gallo-Lopez might explain the importance of theatre for people with autism best when they share that their theatre is

an opportunity to experience the beauty of connection, the joy of developing relationships, and the unique understanding of self and others that accompanies social growth. Through the experience of creating original work, sharing with and being heard by others, and engaging with others to develop their ideas into a functioning whole, ACT [All Community Theatre] Project participants practice flexibility, compromise, communication, and a host of other skills that move them ever closer to becoming socially competent individuals. (Gallo-Lopez 289)

Theatre is a great option for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills and should be further studied and encouraged because of the recent advancements in alternative treatments for people autism, the diverse needs of people with autism, and because people with autism are worthy human beings and talented artists.

Now that we better understand: the symptoms people with autism spectrum disorder and people with autism might have, the traditional strategies for teaching people with autism behavioral and social skills, and the benefits adaptive theatre techniques offer students with autism. Continued research exploring additional theatre techniques and their effectiveness for improving behavioral and social skills for people with autism would help people with autism in developing these important skills, progressing in their goals and aspirations.

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