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## **A Survey Instrument to Collect Student Perceptions of Drama Class Benefits**

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A SURVEY INSTRUMENT TO COLLECT  
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF  
DRAMA CLASS BENEFITS

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A Project  
Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

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by  
Claudia Wiggins

July, 1999

ABSTRACT

A SURVEY INSTRUMENT TO COLLECT  
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF  
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The purpose of this study is to develop a student survey for a drama class. The focus of the research is to substantiate the need for teaching drama in schools and by using a student survey. Presented is a drama class student survey developed and administered in high school drama classes. Offered are interviews with two drama teachers regarding the use of a drama survey. The study concludes with suggestions for future drama class student surveys.

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# CHAPTER I

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### Introduction

The transition from childhood to adulthood often can be a difficult one.

Adolescence is as special and important a time in students' intellectual development as any other phase in a child's life. Atwell (1998) stated, "They might not be as charming in their attempts to learn as their little brothers and sisters, but adolescents, too, need to be seen as individuals and responded to as people who want to grow" (p.54).

The inclusion of drama classes in the adolescent student's curriculum may offer a positive emotional influence. McLeod (1978) stated, "Only as one enters into another person's situation and judges another's actions, can an individual gain insights in to and totally appreciate that person's actions" (p.4). Students may gain many personal benefits through classroom drama. Involvement in acting class may be seen as a possible enhancement to the teen's emotional stability. Drama class may work effectively during this time of adolescence because students can integrate new experiences into their ongoing process of evaluating life. Students best learn by responding to stimuli and by active engagement in constructing their own reality. According to Renk (1993), teachers are not dispensers of information but facilitators of an individual's processes. "If information is always received as a constituent of a whole situation, then teaching means establishing suitable situations. Which is precisely what educational drama has done" (p.3-4).

As basic curriculum demands more and more of the students' classroom time, elective courses such as drama have been removed from some schools in recent

years. There have been a plethora of studies that observe the positive effects of incorporating drama in the classroom. Silks (1981) stated, "It is found when a student of drama portrays another person, the adolescent is enriched in the area of emotional awareness, as she experiences emotions that might not be evoked in everyday life" (p.28).

There is an increasing need for more relevance in drama research. According to Rasmussen (1996), " We need to acquire and accumulate cultural, aesthetic and educational knowledge about drama, and subject this knowledge to critical examination and reflection" (p.130).

Research can provide meaningful information about the effectiveness of classroom drama. We see the emerging climate for research leading to a rediscovery of the qualities, complexities, and the richness of life in classrooms. Eisner (1988) stated, "We need more ethnographic or interpretive studies of drama as well as action research conducted by teachers themselves" (p.19). As drama research continues, we will more clearly understand classroom drama's effectiveness upon the student's well being.

A review of research by Lawrence O'Farrell examined studies by North American researchers in drama and education. O'Farrell (1993) found that drama educators have begun to realize they can benefit from research in a variety of ways. "Although they can justly rejoice in the advances made by researchers in their field, it is clear from the number and diversity of current issues that there is still much work to be done" (p.29).

Edward Peter Errington reviewed an additional study regarding teachers as researchers. In this paper, Errington outlined certain qualitative research approaches that drama teachers may use in studying the use of classroom drama. Errington purposed the

drama education can move forward only through the research provided by classroom teachers (Errington, 1994).

According to Wagner (1998), research in educational drama can be built on contemporary constructivist theories. "These same theories of learning that underlie our understanding of language and literacy acquisition, the development of quantitative thinking and the growth of understanding of the human and physical world apply to drama" (p.16). As we research the area of classroom drama and its value, students can be considered an important part of the evaluation. Karsten (1994) states, "In addition to asking the referring instructors to indicate their responses, the individual profiles of each participant ...are necessary to give a fuller view of the study" (p.2).

There are many ways to research drama class's value for students. One possible approach in the evaluation process is through a student survey. There are many teacher surveys available that attest to the effectiveness of teaching drama. There are only a few student surveys that ask the students questions in regard to the effects of drama class. A student survey could facilitate the examination of students' perceptions of the benefits of drama. In addition, teachers may utilize this survey information for assessing the effectiveness of their drama classes. The research of this study is directed at developing a drama class survey of students.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to present the first phase of developing a drama class survey. This will assist in examining high school students' perceptions of the benefits of drama. In addition, teachers may utilize this survey information for assessing the



effectiveness of their drama classes. Involved in this study is research regarding the effectiveness of including drama classes in schools.

#### Limitations of the Study

Subjects: The subjects were students of ages 14-18 years old. They were not of random sample, but a total population of 72 drama students.

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Survey Frequency: The survey was conducted once, at the end of the semester.

Validation Experts: Two drama teachers in two different schools who teach this population .

Setting: A high school in North Central Washington with a population of approximately 1,900 students.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Many studies attest to the benefits of including drama in schools' curriculums. A review of literature by Hobgood (1990) discussed the development of drama within schools. Hobgood (1990) stated, "At length, theatre made itself too useful and productive to be ignored and has won a modest place in the nation's education system" (p.21). Another study conducted by Buege (1992) involved using creative drama in a mainstream classroom that included emotionally disturbed students. The study was designed to determine the effects of using creative drama on the attitudes of the non-handicapped students and their treatment of the emotionally disturbed students. Buege stated, "Through quantitative and qualitative data that the effects of using drama were very positive. Attitudes and self-concepts were improved with the incorporation of classroom drama" (p.21).

A study conducted by Summak (1994) involved incorporating the use of drama for English as second language students. Through the use of drama and puppetry, E.S.L. students were able to improve their use of English. Interviewed teachers stated through the use of drama, E.S.L. students were more comfortable using English than in another classroom setting. Because a physical movement in drama precedes language, it was suggested that this allows students to think freely and easily. "Oral skills are increased with the use of drama" (p.11)

Another study conducted by Rosen and Kozial, Jr. (1990) examined the relationship of oral reading, dramatic activities, and theatrical production to the

improvement of oral communication skills, knowledge, comprehension, and attitudes. This study involved ninth grade, culturally disadvantaged students in a suburban high school. They used in-class staging of scenes from the play *Louis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland* by Anne Coulter Martens. Rosen and Kozial, Jr. (1990) concluded that drama had a greater influence on oral communication skills and self-esteem whereas theatre production had a somewhat greater influence on knowledge and comprehension of the play. Students experienced gains in both areas (Rosen and Kozial, Jr., 1990). A paper by Bassfield (1995) also observed that students benefit as their self-esteem is improved through dramatic experiences.

de la Cruz (1995) completed a study of children with learning disabilities in a Chicago school. This involved a 12-week creative drama program with 35 elementary students. The program was incorporated into their regular classroom. Children with learning disabilities significantly improved their oral expressive language and social skills after the course (de la Cruz, 1995).

Victoria Brown (1992) studied Head Start students as they were in a learning environment that incorporated drama and sign language. She found that students do not have to be deaf to benefit from drama and sign language. After a year of teacher-directed activities, children significantly improved in language. Both the sign language and drama group, and the control group scored significantly higher on the post-test than on the pre-test, but the scores of the drama/sign group were significantly higher than the control group. Brown stated, "The key factor in the children's improvement may be the fact that sign language and drama provide alternative symbol systems for conveying information" (p.6).

In a study by Ustundag (1999), students attitudes toward human rights were observed. Achievement tests were given to students after the inclusion of drama workshops containing human rights and citizenship information. Ustundag (1999) states, "In comparing the scores of the two groups it is found that the pre- and post-scores of the students taught through creative drama show greater change, indicating that 'creative drama' is a more effective teaching method in this area" (p.145).

Another study by Martin (1997) involved using drama to teach gender-inclusive behavior. Martin observed that drama offers students opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. Martin (1997) stated, "Drama allows for the development of communication skills and gives students the confidence to challenge previously unchallenged stereotypical views of the ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed in our society" (p.13).

An investigation by Cremin (1998) explored the improvement of creativity with the incorporation of drama. By expanding the imagination, he concluded creative thought is expanded. Cremin (1998) stated, "With drama, as long as the imagination generates its power, we remember, understand, learn, and think smoothly and efficiently" (p.212).

A paper by Pinciotti (1993) discusses drama and some of its long-term benefits. With the inclusion of drama, Pinciotti (1993) reviewed the positive effects of drama upon the creative imagination process. Pinciotti (1993) stated, "Creative drama activities require even young participants to recall personal, sensory-rich experiences and select specific dramatic actions to express and image" (p.27). Through the development of the imagination, Pinciotti (1993) further discussed the long-term benefits of drama, such as,

“thinking on one’s feet, problem solving, collaboration skills, and the ability to delay gratification” (p.28).

Papers by Johnson (1998) and Beyersdorfer (1993) reviewed the effects of including drama as a classroom instructional tool. Johnson (1998) and Beyersdorfer (1993) emphasized the merits of incorporating drama into other curriculum such as reading, writing, and literacy development. Both encouraged the use of drama as an effective teaching strategy.

In a paper by Harris (1983), a review of literature regarding students’ dramatic responses to literature was completed. Harris (1983) stated, “Creative drama as an educational strategy, has potential for encouraging an affective response to literature” (p.21). A review of literature by Fennessey (1995) discussed the effectiveness of using drama and literature to teach history. Fennessey (1995) observed the power of drama to deepen students’ understanding of history. Fennessey (1995) stated, “With the use of classroom drama, history can come alive in the minds of students” (p.17).

Courtney (1989) completed a paper reviewing the implications of drama upon children’s empathy. Courtney (1989) stated, “It appears true, as the literature tells us, that creative drama helps children build empathy for others” (p.20). Yassa (1999) also conducted a qualitative study and examined the effects of drama upon students’ daily interpersonal relations. It was found that involvement in drama class enhanced social interaction and self-confidence (Yassa, 1999). Another paper by Woodruff (1982) discussed the benefits of theatre and drama for children’s socialization. Woodruff (1983) stated, “The implications of drama as a tool for social development are far reaching” (p.25).

Farris and Park (1993) studied the effects of how drama can impact students in the regular classroom. They interviewed three students who had been in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom that had recently included drama. With the addition of drama, the students felt a greater freedom to take risks and express themselves. Farris and Park (1993) stated, "Drama offers a safe place to learn, have fun and do new and different things" (p.231). They later stated, "Drama frees children to portray roles in order to gain better understanding and empathy toward others" (p.236). Also, in a review by Klein (1993) it was purported that children tend to sympathize with students more after being exposed to drama.

#### Review of Drama Student Surveys or Questionnaires

All of the student based drama surveys that could be located in literature are reviewed in this section. The available studies were Karsten (1994), Multi-Arts Service Program (1994), and Cognetta (1986). The studies reviewed incorporated several types of student surveys. The Karsten (1994) study chose an instrument to gather information about the self-esteem of high-risk adolescents involved in theatre workshops. Having studied both the Coppersmith Self Esteem Inventory and the Harter Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, Karsten chose to use the Coopersmith. Karsten found the Harter to be a difficult questionnaire as the style of questioning in the Harter Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents allows only the responses, "really true for me" and "sort of true for me". The Coopersmith, asks for statements to be rated as "like me" or "unlike me". Karsten stated, "Subsequent discussion determined that their true preference was for surveys that are scaled to give them greater variety of response. I will continue to search for such an instrument" (p. 2).

Additionally this paper reviewed a survey performed by the District of Columbia Public Schools that gathered information regarding the study of the arts through workshops. The data gathered were not only limited to the area of drama as this focus was upon all of the arts. The survey instrument employed a broader scale than the Copperfield Self-Esteem Inventory. Its content focused less upon the emotional development attached to participating in drama class and more upon the general like for the theatre class and the desire to participate in the future. Several open-ended essay questions were asked as well. These easily understood questions provided useable information for the documentation of the arts program (Multi-Arts Service Program, 1994).

The third drama survey reviewed was from the Monterey County Office of Education. These student questionnaires were used to evaluate the 5-week summer program including drama and other academic programs. This Yo Puedo Program was conducted on the campus of the University of California, Santa Cruz. Interviews with students were conducted and questionnaires were administered to students, staff and parents. An exit questionnaire was developed to ascertain students' perceptions of the Yo Puedo Program, and expected life activities after leaving high school. They asked six, open-ended, short answer questions in their survey. According to Cогnetta, with these essay-like questions, these data were more difficult to analyze (Cогnetta, 1986).

## CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURES

In this chapter the researcher will describe the third and fourth steps taken to develop this project. The steps in the total project were as follows:

1. Examine previous research regarding the value of including drama in the classroom.
2. Review all available student drama surveys.
3. Develop a new drama survey instrument.
4. Begin the first phase of validating the survey instrument.

#### Survey Development and First Phase Validation

With the facilitation of drama experts, a survey instrument was designed. Classroom and student observation also contributed to the created questions. The format was developed as a result of survey research (Hubbard, 1993). The drama survey focus was directed to the area of students' emotional development and self-esteem. The survey was limited to eight questions due to the students' time efficiency and attention. The questions were edited and reworded as to be understood by the subjects. The Wiggins Drama Survey was given to 72 students (Appendix A).

#### Subjects

The 72 subjects were approximately 50% male and 50% female. The high school students were approximately 85% Caucasian and 15% Hispanic. Their ages varied between 14 and 18 years old. Their grade levels were 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>.



### Setting

The survey took place in a large high school located in North Central Washington State. The school's population is approximately 1900 students. The school is approximately 75% Caucasian and 25% Hispanic. It is situated in a community of 30,000 people. The socio-economic level is middle class. Major sources of income are acquired from orchard work, education and some industry.

### Expert Teachers

Two expert teachers offered their advice as the survey was being designed and later for its review. They both teach in the area of drama. One has taught for 39 years and the other for 28 years. They have directed major productions for the community and public schools.

### Review of Data

The final step of the project involved the analysis of students' completed surveys and the expert interviews with reference to the researched data. The data were reviewed after observing the results with regard to frequency. The expert teachers reviewed the results of the survey finding and gave additional input as to methods for improving the Wiggins Drama Survey.

CHAPTER IV  
DATA AND ANALYSIS

Survey Results

The Wiggins Drama Survey conducted with the 72 drama students produced the following results:

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1. Since being in Drama Class, are you more comfortable listening to other people share personal issues?

Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
14	28	25	3	0

2. Are you more comfortable public speaking since being in Drama Class?

Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
18	32	11	5	4

3. Has Drama Class caused you to become less sympathetic to your classmates?

Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
1	9	12	20	30

4. In Drama Class have you gained more meaningful knowledge of your classmates, as compared to other High School classes?

Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
27	24	15	3	1

5. Since being in Drama Class, are you more able to share emotions with the class?

Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
9	24	28	4	4

6. Are you more willing to assist classmates in Drama Class than in other High School classes?

Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
8	22	29	11	2

7. Has your self esteem improved since being in Drama Class?

Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
9	26	24	6	5

8. Have you become more patient with other students since being in Drama Class?

Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
15	28	21	5	2

### Survey Results

Generally, the students responded to the survey with consistent indicators. They reflected a positive attitude about the effectiveness of drama in the area of becoming better listeners. When asked about public speaking, fifty-five percent of the students indicated they are more comfortable doing so since attending drama class. When asked

about gaining more meaningful knowledge about their classmates, seventy percent stated they have gained more meaningful knowledge of their classmates, as compared to other high school classes since being in drama class. In the area of self-esteem, forty-eight percent indicated their self-esteem has improved since being in drama class, and forty-six percent were neutral. When asked about improved patience, fifty-nine percent replied that they have become more patient with other students since being in drama class. From these indicators one may suggest that drama class has some degree of a positive effect upon the students. By evaluating these results, it can be observed that students are experiencing benefits from drama class. These results may be used to place greater focus into various areas of material and literature selections. In addition teachers may interact with the students in improved ways due to the survey findings.

### Interview Results

After reviewing the survey one expert stated, "Unless we keep our classrooms current and in touch with the students' lives we do not serve education well. Students need to be heard in regards to how drama class is effecting their lives." She suggested a few changes in context and wording of the survey:

Question 3. Change the phrasing to a positive approach such as, "Has drama class caused you to become a better listener to your classmates?"

Question 4. Change the phrasing to, "In drama class have you felt closer to your classmates, as compared to other High School classes?"

Question 5. Change the phrasing to, "Since being in drama class, are you more able to share your feelings with the class."

Additionally, the expert suggested the following questions:

Do more students and friends confide in you since being in drama class?

Are you able to reveal more of yourself when acting, such as crying, since being in drama class?

Another expert suggested adding questions about the students' future plans in the area of drama. For example:

Would you consider signing up for another drama class?

If so, what activities would you like to see more of in future drama classes? The expert felt this would be helpful information for the instructor as future curriculum is designed.

“As educators we are always seeking information about how to improve upon the presentation of information to our students. As we work with them in the area of drama, we need to know the effects of our teaching upon their lives.”

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary and Conclusions

From this study the researcher learned that the incorporation of drama in the high school curriculum appears to benefit students. The literature suggests that research in the area of drama is valuable and needed. Also, this study concluded that there is not a drama student survey that is readily accessible for drama teachers in this area to utilize. The three surveys studied were limiting for various, aforementioned reasons. Hence, there is a need for a more approachable, beneficial, and valid student survey instrument. From the first phase of a validation process of the Wiggins Drama Survey, knowledge was gained regarding ways to improve and design a drama survey for future use.

As the first step of validating the Wiggins Drama Survey, the researcher sought reviews from two expert teachers. Both felt positively about the importance of a student survey. They suggested this instrument be used at the beginning of the semester as well as the end. As educators, they valued the information provided about the effectiveness of teaching drama that would be provided by a survey. As professionals they would use a survey tool to evaluate the effectiveness of their classes and use the results to improve their drama instruction.

### Recommendations for the Next Phase

As the next phase of a student drama survey is approached, the following recommendations are made:

1. Avoid ambiguity in word choice (Hubbard and Power, 1993).
2. Avoid bias in question writing, which is the value reported versus the true value (Sudman, 1982).
3. Use a closed-answer format to more easily evaluate the responses (Strauss, 1987).
4. Include middle categories or middle alternatives in order to accurately assess attitudes (Hubbard and Power, 1993).
5. Decide on the critical aspects of the attitude to be measured (Sudman, 1982).
6. Ask a series of separate questions, each of which reflects the general attitude (Sudman, 1982).
7. If general and specific attitude questions are related, ask the general question first (Hubbard and Power, 1993).
8. Administer survey in anonymous form without names include (Strauss, 1987).
9. Administer survey to a relatively large sample as related to the number of drama students (Strauss, 1987).

After the expert interviews, the researcher recommends additional modifications to the drama survey instrument. It is suggested that all questions be kept in a similar language format, so not to confuse the students. One expert recommended such an approach to question number three with less negative wording. In addition, the expert recommended less threatening word choices. Hence, the researcher suggests changing “able to share emotions” to “able to share feelings.” Furthermore, after reviewing one expert’s suggestions, changing the wording of “your self esteem” to “your self-confidence” could improve students’ understanding of the survey. In addition, it was suggested that the survey be changed to declarative statements in order to be more accurate with the response format. (See Appendix A)

When using a drama survey, the researcher further recommends giving it at the beginning of the semester or quarter as well as at the end of the semester or quarter. The drama experts suggested this approach in order to more accurately measure students’ change. The results from both surveys should be compared at the end of the semester or quarter.

Additionally, the researcher recommends the incorporation of questions about students’ future plans in the area of drama. According to the experts questioned, this information would be useful for improving the high school drama curriculum. Also, additional drama courses may be offered as teachers review students’ future drama class plans through a survey.

As improvements are made, the drama survey instrument for students may be a useful tool for drama teachers. The survey instrument offers a method to gather students’



perceptions of drama class. As teachers analyze the survey data, teaching approaches and curriculum improvements may be made to benefit students.

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APPENDIX A  
WIGGINS DRAMA SURVEY

---

## DRAMA CLASS SURVEY

	Strongly agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	strongly disagree
	5	4	3	2	1
1.	Since being in Drama Class, I am more comfortable listening to other people share personal issues.				
	5	4	3	2	1
2.	I am more comfortable public speaking since being in Drama Class.				
	5	4	3	2	1
3.	Drama Class caused me to become less sympathetic to your classmates.				
	5	4	3	2	1
4.	In Drama Class I have gained more meaningful knowledge of my classmates as compared to other High School classes.				
	5	4	3	2	1
5.	Since being in Drama Class, I am more able to share emotions with the class.				
	5	4	3	2	1
6.	I am more willing to assist classmates in Drama Class than in other High School classes.				
	5	4	3	2	1
7.	My self-esteem has improved since being in Drama Class.				
	5	4	3	2	1
8.	I have become more patient with others students since being in Drama Class.				
	5	4	3	2	1