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Autism centered theatre: The use of drama to improve social skills for children on the autism spectrum

Olivia Rhoades

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Autism Centered Theatre:
The Use of Drama Activities to Improve Social Skills for Children on the Autism Spectrum

Olivia Rhoades
Thesis
Submitted to the Department of Special Education
Eastern Michigan University
as a component for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in
Speech-Language Pathology
Thesis Committee:
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October 31, 2014
Ypsilanti, MI
Dedication

To my family, whose constant love and support provided the motivation for this journey.
Acknowledgements

Completion of this project would not have been possible without the assistance and support of several outstanding figures. To Dr. Ana Claudia Harten I extend my deepest appreciation. This inspiring woman began as my academic advisor (and favorite professor) before becoming my thesis chair. With these two roles, Dr. Harten has provided excellent guidance and education throughout my graduate career, not to mention countless hours reviewing, meeting, and providing suggestions to help make this research project a success. In the time that I have known Dr. Harten, she has become a mentor and personal role model for achievement. Thank you.

Thank you to my thesis committee, Dr. Bill Cupples, who provided his expertise on autism, and Patricia Zimmer, whose position in the theatre department provided a wonderful resource on the artistic side of this project.

To the parents and instructors who provided their opinions and observations for the study, thank you. Without your donated time and thoughtful words, this project could not have been possible.

Finally, to Mr. and Mrs. William and Delores Brehm, I extend my sincerest gratitude. The Delores Soderquist Brehm Center for Special Education Research and Scholarship funded and fueled my education as a qualitative researcher. My experience as a Brehm Scholar will never be forgotten.
Abstract

This study explored the benefits of a week-long drama camp on the social skills of children on the autism spectrum through the perspectives of parents and instructors. Data collection included pre- and post-camp questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that daily intensive exposure to drama and theatre can be a viable option to promote the development of social skills among children on the autism spectrum. The activities seemed to promote particular gains in caregiver/peer interaction, adjusting to routines, eye contact, and social perceptions/cues. Additionally, results indicated that children with greater social communication needs and those with more extensive exposure to the arts seemed to make stronger gains in social skills. Finally, the results of this study suggest directions for future studies in the area of using theatre to develop social skills, and highlight the importance of advocating for the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum in theatre programs.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background Information and Problem Statement

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a “neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by deficits in social communication and social interaction and the presence of restricted, repetitive behaviors.” (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2014). The social communication deficits present in the ASD population may include impairments in aspects of joint attention and social reciprocity, with difficulties initiating and responding to interactions, and using verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors for social interaction. The restricted, repetitive behaviors, interests, or activities can be manifested among children on the autism spectrum in different ways, including perseveration of speech, motor movement, or use of objects; inflexible adherence to routines; restricted interests; and hyper- and/or hypo-sensitivity to sensory input. 

ASD has been associated with multiple etiological factors including genetic, neurobiological, and environmental, and it can differ in terms of severity level, with symptoms varying from person to person. Despite its heterogeneity, the common characteristics and challenges associated with ASD impact the development of critical social communication skills. 

ASD is a lifelong problem that requires intervention due to the pervasive nature of the social communication issues involved in the disorder. In a world moving toward the acceptance of individuals with differences, parents, service providers, and educators of children with autism spectrum disorder feel the need for programs which target social communication skills to help enable this acceptance, including drama and theatre. Drama can be defined as an art form that explores human condition and tension, deepening our understanding of social motivation and behavior (Schiller, 2008). The art of theatre often includes the performance of rehearsed
dramatic material along with activities that expand the understanding of this material. For the purposes of this study, the words *theatre* and *drama* will be used interchangeably.

Theatre has revealed itself as a valuable tool for the development of social skills in typically developing children (Kelin, 2007; Schiller, 2008). Through theatre, children learn in multi-sensory ways, incorporating different learning styles to reach students with both special and typical needs (Schiller, 2008). Drama allows students to discover empathy, and encourages them to connect with someone outside themselves; thereby increasing social awareness (Kelin, 2007). Studies have indicated that using theatre and drama can be an effective way to teach social skills to children on the autism spectrum (Kelin, 2012; Kempe & Tissot, 2012; Blythe et al., 2011; Peter, 2009). Despite the abundance of research on the topic, two gaps in the existing literature are noticeable, justifying the need for further studies. Researchers have regularly observed and reported increased social skills when using drama with children on the autism spectrum, but parent perspectives on the development of such skills are absent from the literature. In addition, no studies to date have investigated the use of daily, intensive exposure to theatre in the form of a summer day-camp as a way to increase social skills in children on the autism spectrum.

**Purpose of the Study**

With an extensive background in theatre and drama for the young, this researcher has observed the social benefits that theatre can have on typically developing children. These experiences in educational theatre, paired with this author’s background in speech-language pathology (SLP), have led to the question of whether theatre can be equally beneficial to special needs populations, namely to children with autism spectrum disorder. The purpose of the current study was to examine the benefits of daily, intensive exposure to theatre on the social skills of
children on the autism spectrum, through the perspectives of parents and instructors participating in a summer theatre day-camp.

Research Question

This study aimed to examine the following questions: Will parents report improved social skills in their child with autism spectrum disorder after daily, intensive exposure to theatre activities in the form of a summer day-camp? If so, what types of social skills changes will be reported? Will parents’ reports be congruent with instructors’ reports on the children’s social skills observed throughout the camp?

Justification and Significance

This researcher’s interest in the benefit of theatre for children with special needs is not unique. Previous studies on the topic are pervasive, yet several questions remain unanswered. No former studies have particularly considered parent perspective on social skill development for children on the autism spectrum. In addition, the effects of concentrated exposure to theatre have not been examined. By studying these domains in the field, the current study set out to shed new light on the topic, possibly contributing to another form of education for children with autism spectrum disorder.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Literature-based Drama Activities

Existing texts, such as picture books, have been used to develop drama activities for children with special needs (Peter, 2003; Peter, 2009, Gray, 2010). For instance, Peter (2003) used the popular children’s book *Where’s My Teddy* by Jez Alborough to create a highly structured drama activity, using a narrative framework termed a Prescribed Drama Structure (PDS). The PDS contains features of early interactive play formats, including a predictable narrative framework, a shared focus of interest (with an adult in role and familiar objects as props), turn-taking (opportunities to listen, watch and regulate behavior), interaction within make-believe, imitation and reinforcement of appropriate responses, and reciprocal involvement of players. According to the author, such structured approach can enable children with limited social communication skills to discover pretense and to learn to manipulate representations with others in the creation of shared meanings (and share meanings with others).

In a later study, Peter (2009) used the same book to bring her “prescribed drama structure” to life, helping three young boys with autism spectrum disorder develop social skills (Peter, 2009). These skills included turn-taking, interaction with others through make-believe, and joint attention. The boys observed these skills through characters in the book, and applied this learning to real life. For example, one boy pretended to drink from a cup that contained no liquid, while another imagined the presence of a hair brush while pretending to brush his hair.

Another way drama activities can be literature-based is by using Social Stories™. These Stories™ can be used for teaching social skills to children on the autism spectrum, a method developed by Carol Gray in 1991. Written based on ten criteria, Social Stories™ are intended to create a positive, emotionally safe atmosphere for the learning audience. Authors (either
caregivers or professionals) personalize the Stories™ based on the individual needs of the reader (Gray, 2010). In a study by Schneider and Goldstein (2009) Social Stories™ were used to improve on-task behaviors and social skills in the classroom, including sitting in circle time, making eye contact with the teacher, and responding when called upon. The authors first used Social Stories™ alone, which produced modest improvement among the three children (ages 5, 6, and 10) with autism participating in the study. However, with the addition of a picture schedule to supplement the material in the Stories™, researchers observed greater improvement in social skills, as demonstrated by increased eye contact with caregivers, responding to caregiver interaction, and readily participating in small group activities.

In another study, Brownell (2002) examined the effect of Social Stories™ paired with music on specifically targeted social skills of four boys (ages 6-9) with autism. In a multiple-baseline approach, each boy’s target social skill improved with the implementation of Social Stories™ alone, but increased much more dramatically when the Stories™ were set to originally composed melodies. Results of both Schneider and Goldstein’s (2009) study and that of Brownell’s (2002) indicate that pairing Social Stories™ with other interventions (such as drama) may lead to optimal improvement in social skills for children with autism spectrum disorder.

**Theatre Activities**

Several theatre activities have been reported to be successful in teaching social skills to children with autism spectrum disorder, including “mantle of the expert” activities, “teacher-in-role” activities, rehearsal, and performance (Kempe & Tissot, 2012; Peter, 2009). “Mantle of the expert” activities put the learner (in this case, children on the autism spectrum) and the teacher on the same level, allowing students to explore humanity from the position of the “expert” on a certain topic. (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985) In a study by Kempe and Tissot (2012) students
participated in a “mantle of the expert” by teaching a “novice” about a social situation; thereby learning the new skills themselves. The researchers observed two adolescent girls on the autism spectrum along with other children with special needs in the development of a classroom drama activity. The authors used mantle of the expert activities to have the girls teach an imaginary new student (Lauren) how to “fit in” in her new town. Activities included teaching Lauren how to dress, speak, and “hang out” in her new neighborhood. Through the drama, the adolescents on the autism spectrum learned the social skills that they were teaching their new “classmate.”

Peter included “mantle of the expert” activities in her 2009 study. The researcher developed a drama in which children on the autism spectrum taught Eddy, the book character, how to dress for school, as well as other activities of daily living. In participating in the drama, children developed imagination (by pretending to get dressed themselves), and joint attention (by all working toward the same goal of teaching Eddy his new skills).

In a “teacher-in-role activity,” the instructor becomes part of the drama. This involvement creates a nonjudgmental environment, encouraging the children to participate in the theatre activity themselves. In Kempe and Tissot’s study (2012), the researchers also included the collaboration of the teachers and the adolescent students in the creation of an imaginary world. Teachers and students took turns in talking to, or pretending to be, an invisible new “student.” One student provided a voice for the new “student,” and participated in an improvised scene with the instructor. Teacher participation created a safe atmosphere, which facilitated the learning of social skills for the two students participating in the study. Peter (2009) also used teacher-in-role to teach social skills. Instead of watching, the instructors contributed to the drama, exaggerating their emotions in order to foster emotional responses in
the three children on the autism spectrum. When Eddy, the character in the drama, wakes up sick, the teachers displayed overwhelming empathy for Eddy, hoping to draw a similar emotional response from the children. These emotional responses did occur as a result of the investigation, and the students seemed to engage in the drama more wholly than if the teacher had not been in-role.

Rehearsal is an important part of any type of theatre. Through rehearsal, participants learn material, which will later be performed, and practice it repeatedly. While rehearsal is important to any theatrical endeavor, it may also hold special benefit for children with autism. Repetition of drama experiences may lead to neurological changes that strengthen brain activity, thereby developing more flexible thought patterns (Blythe et al., 2011; Peter, 2009). In a study by Blythe et al. (2011), several rehearsal strategies were used with eight children with autism participating in an inclusive production of *The Jungle Book Kids*. The rehearsals included both in-person and video rehearsals. The in-person rehearsals included repetition of songs, dances, and scenes of a play to promote memorization, while video rehearsal included the same songs, dances, and scenes for children to watch and practice at home. In addition to the rehearsal of actual theatrical material, participants and peer models rehearsed social situations in-person and via video rehearsals. The researchers collected quantitative measures of the chemicals oxytocin and cortisol among the participants, and compared their levels prior and after the completion of the rehearsals. Those chemicals have been reported to contribute respectively to the development of social interactions and to the increase in stress levels. Results of the study pointed to an increase in oxytocin and a decrease of the cortisol levels after the rehearsals, and noticeable increase in social perception and a decrease in stress levels among the participants.
As pointed out by Roy (2007), other benefits of rehearsal include the establishment of a nonjudgmental, humor filled, structured environment which creates a network of friends with the unique experience of rehearsing a play together. This network of friends can help improve social skills, increasing the number of significant interactions in the child’s life.

Performance is the culmination of rehearsal, when the children present the material on which they have been working in front of an audience. While performance is not the most important part of an educational drama activity, it is often what the children look forward to the most. In the Blythe et al. (2011) study, the production also involved six performances of the show. Analysis of the performances showed that the naturally reinforcing environment of performing in front of an audience had a positive impact on the children’s social skills, as demonstrated by their increased empathy and social referencing. The results of this study influenced the development of Social Emotional NeuroScience Endocrinology (SENSE) Theatre, a theatrical intervention research program designed to improve the social and emotional functioning of children with autism and related neurodevelopmental disorders.

Another important concept related to performance is the idea that it involves and really relies on each member of the group. Without each member of the cast and crew, a performance would not be possible. According to Roy (2007) typical children and children with special needs feel a sense of belonging with a culminating performance, as they complete their crucial part in making a play go on.

**Creating Supportive Environments for Children on the Autism Spectrum**

Several strategies and guidelines have been developed to aid instructors in developing supportive environments for children with autism spectrum disorder and improve the benefits of instructional activities, including drama activities. These strategies include the use of visual
supports, structure, sensitivity to sensory needs, and easing into the drama. For instance, Iseminger (2009) highlights the importance of visual lesson plans for successful inclusion of children on the autism spectrum in general education music classrooms. As children on the autism spectrum often respond to visual more readily than auditory stimuli, visual lesson plans, which incorporate pictures and a way of showing when each activity is over, facilitate their participation in music activities. Because children with autism spectrum disorder often have impaired auditory processing, Notbohm (2012) recommends *showing* a child instruction instead of *telling* them. With visual schedules, pictured directions, graphic organizers, and pictured choices children on the autism spectrum seem to follow visual directions more readily, and with less frustration (Fisher, 2011).

Multiple authors stressed the importance of physical and routine structure in the development of lessons for children on the autism spectrum (Fisher, 2011; Iseminger, 2009; Peter, 2009). In terms of physical structure, seating arrangements should remain the same all year, with students facing away from potential distractions. Additionally, a sense of personal space for each child (achieved by using carpet squares, tape outlines, or a name tag) seems to keep the child anchored (Iseminger, 2009). In order to structure a routine, each lesson should have the same outline. For example, beginning with a warm up, moving into the lesson for the day, pausing for a snack, and wrapping up with an end of the day activity will keep the environment predictable and comfortable for each child. While individual activities likely change from day to day, the outline should remain the same to facilitate an easy transition (Iseminger, 2009; Peter, 2009). As highlighted by Peter (2009), while implementing drama activities, instructors should consider using the same drama activity during each lesson, and incorporating slight changes every time the activity is repeated. Such structure tends to keep children on the
autism spectrum comfortable, but at the same time allows them to learn through the small challenges that are presented with each repetition. Children on the autism spectrum usually react well to this repetition, demonstrating increased skills in each cycle, due to the safe, structured environment.

Children on the autism spectrum are often hypersensitive to ordinary sensations such as sights, smells, sounds, touches, and tastes. While many people may not even notice these stimuli, they often cause physical and emotional pain to a child on the autism spectrum (Notbohm, 2012). Problem behaviors in children on the autism spectrum are often triggered by this sensory overload. Iseminger (2009) gives some helpful tips to decrease unnecessary sensations in the classroom, among which, turning off the computer monitor and florescent lights when possible, and providing weighted sandbags or other objects to provide tactile stimulation when needed. These modifications to the everyday classroom-or drama camp- help increase positive behavior and focus in children with autism.

In order to accommodate the needs of children on the autism spectrum, researchers recommend that instructors of theatre activities ease into the drama. The adults leading the activities should respect a child’s preference for a particular spot in the room, or begin the drama by using a favorite toy or game. Using activities that the child is already familiar with will provoke emotional engagement in the drama and create a sense of safety, ultimately contributing to the child’s ready participation in more significant drama activities (Peter, 2003). Because theatre activities may be new and frightening for children on the autism spectrum, instructors should keep the needs of this special population in mind when developing the drama. The use of visual support, structured routines, and a slow, easy introduction to drama, as well as an
awareness of sensory needs will increase the likelihood of success in drama activities for children on the autism spectrum (Fisher, 2011; Iseminger, 2009; Peter, 2009).

A review of the current literature on the benefits of drama for children with autism spectrum disorder has revealed several important findings. Using literature as a basis for drama activities seems to increase social skills by allowing participants to empathize with and expand upon the experiences of the characters in the book (Peter, 2009; Peter, 2003; Brownell, 2002). Drama activities including, but not limited to, mantle of the expert, teacher-in-role, rehearsal, and performance seem to encourage children on the autism spectrum to engage in social interactions (Kempe & Tissot, 2012; Blythe et al., 2011; Peter, 2009). Creating a supportive environment for children on the autism spectrum seems to be imperative to improve the benefits of instructional activities, including drama activities (Notbohm, 2012; Fisher, 2011; Iseminger, 2009). Although researchers regularly observe and report positive impact of drama activities on the social skills of children on the autism spectrum, parent perspectives on the benefits and impact of such activities are absent from the literature. In addition, the average program duration reported in the studies ranged from seven weeks for one hour per week (Kempe & Tissot, 2012) to three months at six hours, split among three rehearsals, per week (Blythe et al., 2011). No study to date has reported on the use of daily, intensive exposure to theatre in the form of a summer day-camp as a way to increase social skills in children on the autism spectrum.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Study Design

A summer theatre day camp developed particularly for children on the autism spectrum entitled *Autism Centered Theatre (ACT)* served as the location of data collection for this qualitative study. Parents of children with autism who attended the camp, along with instructors from the camp reported on their perception of the campers’ social skills. More specifically, the study involved pre and post-camp questionnaires given to the parents, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted to examine the parents and instructors’ perceptions of the impact of the summer theatre day camp on the campers’ social skills.

Participants

Eight parents of children participating in ACT camp and four theatre instructors of those children made-up the subjects for this study. Participants were recruited from ACT’s student roster via email informing them of the study opportunity. After showing interest in the study, participants were sent a formal letter explaining the particular data gathering procedures and research goals. All participants signed a consent form which included the voluntary nature of the study, and the right of participants to withdraw at any time, with no consequences to themselves or the campers. The parents’ consent form also included their permission for the researcher to access instructors’ daily logs, and to interview instructors and discuss their children’s social skills. This study did not discriminate against any participant due to health, disability, communication ability, ethnic background, gender, or sexual orientation.

Parents and instructors reported on their perception of the campers’ social skills in relation to the summer theatre camp, ACT. The demographic characteristics of the eight children on whom the participants reported are listed in Table 1. The children’s ages ranged from 8 to 12 years, and four of those children had no previous arts experience. As outlined on Table 2, all
instructors participating in this study had previous experience with children on the autism spectrum, either on a personal or professional level.

Table 1

*Camper Demographics and Corresponding Parents and Instructors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Camper’s Age</th>
<th>Camper’s Pre-Camp Communication</th>
<th>Camper’s Previous Arts Experience</th>
<th>Services Camper Receives</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>• Extremely verbal</td>
<td>One play at the local arts council.</td>
<td>• Occupational Therapy (OT) • Psychiatry • Psychology</td>
<td>L.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>• Large vocabulary • Childhood apraxia of speech (unintelligible output) • electronic devices for communication</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>• OT • speech language pathology (SLP) • PLAY Project • Applied Behavior Analysis</td>
<td>M.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>• Verbal • movie dialogue in conversation</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>• SLP • social work • OT • resource room</td>
<td>M.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>• Verbal • speaking, drawing, and electronics for communication</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>• OT • SLP</td>
<td>M.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>• Verbal • talking and drawing for communication</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>• special education-1 hour per day • counseling-1 hour per week</td>
<td>J.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>• Verbal • movie dialogue in conversation</td>
<td>3 years of boys hip hop dance</td>
<td>• Para-educator • resource room • SLP • social group</td>
<td>J.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

**Instructor Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Arts Experience</th>
<th>ASD Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| L.M.       | - Studying arts management  
- Director/stage manager for youth theatre company  
- Local theatre house manager | - Community leisure program for adults and teens with special needs. |
| J.D.       | - Recreational participant in local theatre and dance programs. | - Significant (not primary) caregiver of brother on the autism spectrum. |
| M.C.       | - Youth choir director at church | - Para-educator of students on the autism spectrum for 15 years. |
| B.G.       | - Director/stage manager for youth theatre company  
- Professional actor for local theatre companies. | - Studying elementary education. |

**Confidentiality Measures**

Confidentiality measures to ensure this safety and privacy of all participants and children included 1) the names of participants and campers were not disclosed, and pseudonyms were used for any form of dissemination of this study 2) any identifying information was protected,
and 3) parents and instructors had the informed right to resign from participation at any time, with no consequences to themselves or the campers.

**Data Gathering Procedures**

Each parent completed a pre- and post-camp questionnaire. The questionnaires included short answer questions and nine 5-point Likert scale questions addressing the children’s social skills (Joint Attention, Eye Contact, Imagination, Social Perceptions, Social Cues, Peer Interaction Initiation, Caregiver Interaction initiation, Response to Peer Interaction, Response to Caregiver Interaction). The pre-camp questionnaire, completed before the first day of camp, focused mainly on the child's social skills before camp, and on parent expectations for the camp. The post-camp questionnaire was given on the last day of camp, after the final performance, and focused on what, from the parent perspective, had changed or stayed the same in regards to social skills from day one through day five of camp, and whether the camp met parent expectations. Both parents and instructors participated in an individual semi-structured post-camp interview which focused on the impact of the camp on the camper’s social skills. Pre- and post- camp questionnaire forms are listed below:

**Parent Pre-Questionnaire**

*Short Answer*

- What services does your child receive at school or privately?
- What are your expectations for Autism Centered Theatre?
- Does your child have previous arts-related experience? If yes, please elaborate.
- Is your child verbal?
- What is your child’s preferred mode of communication?

*Rating Scales*

Please rate your child’s ability level in the following social skills using a Likert scale.

1=very poor
2=poor
3=average
4=good
5=very good
Joint Attention
 Definition: two or more persons paying attention to the same object or event at the same time.
 Example: When a caregiver points and says “look at that car,” the child turns his or her attention to the car along with the caregiver.
 Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Imagination
 Definition: the ability to engage in pretend play.
 Example: The child role-plays, pretending to cook dinner or take care of a baby-doll.
 Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Eye Contact
 Definition: maintenance of mutual eye gaze during communicative events.
 Example: The child looks at the eyes of his caretaker when asking for a snack.
 Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Social Perceptions
 Definition: appropriate responses to communicative situations.
 Example: The child is more quiet and reserved in the library as opposed to the playground.
 Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Social Cues
 Definition: recognizing facial expressions and body language as they relate to communication.
 Example: The child shows concern when a classmate/friend is crying and huddled in the corner.
 Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Please rate the frequency with which your child engages in the following communicative activities using a Likert Scale.

1=very infrequently
2=infrequently
3=average frequency
4=frequently
5=very frequently

Initiation of Peer Interaction
 Definition: using social skills or language to initiate communication with peers.
 Example: The child asks classmates/friends to play together on the playground.
 Rating: 1 2 3 4 5
Response to Peer Interaction
- Definition: using social skills or language to respond to peer communication.
- Example: When a classmate/friend asks the child to play on the playground, he or she responds with an affirmative or negative.
- Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Initiation of Caregiver Interaction
- Definition: using social skills or language to initiate communication with caregivers.
- Example: The child requests a snack from his or her caregiver.
- Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Response to Caregiver Interaction
- Definition: using social skills or language to respond to caregiver communication.
- Example: The child responds with an affirmative or negative when offered a snack from his or her caregiver.
- Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Parent Post-Questionnaire

Short Answer
- What was your child’s favorite part of ACT?
- What was your child’s least favorite part of ACT?
- What was your favorite part of ACT?
- What was your least favorite part of ACT? Did ACT meet your expectations? Why or why not?
- Do you think your child’s social skills improved throughout ACT? If so, how?
- Overall, was ACT a positive experience for your family? Please elaborate.
- Do you have any constructive suggestions on how to improve ACT?

Rating Scales
Please rate your child’s ability level in the following social skills using a Likert scale.
1=very poor
2=poor
3=average
4=good
5=very good

Joint Attention
- Definition: two or more persons paying attention to the same object or event at the same time.
- Example: When a caregiver points and says “look at that car,” the child turns his or her attention to the car along with the caregiver.
- Rating: 1 2 3 4 5
- **Imagination**
  - Definition: the ability to engage in pretend play.
  - Example: The child role-plays, pretending to cook dinner or take care of a baby-doll.
  - Rating: 1 2 3 4 5
- **Eye Contact**
  - Definition: maintenance of mutual eye gaze during communicative events.
  - Example: The child looks at the eyes of his caretaker when asking for a snack.
  - Rating: 1 2 3 4 5
- **Social Perceptions**
  - Definition: appropriate responses to communicative situations.
  - Example: The child is more quiet and reserved in the library as opposed to the playground.
  - Rating: 1 2 3 4 5
- **Social Cues**
  - Definition: recognizing facial expressions and body language as they relate to communication.
  - Example: The child shows concern when a classmate is crying and huddled in the corner.
  - Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Please rate the frequency with which your child engages in the following communicative activities using a Likert Scale.

1=very infrequently
2=infrequently
3=average frequency
4=frequently
5=very frequently

- **Initiation of Peer Interaction**
  - Definition: using social skills or language to initiate communication with peers.
  - Example: The child asks classmates to play together on the playground.
  - Rating: 1 2 3 4 5
- **Response to Peer Interaction**
  - Definition: using social skills or language to respond to peer communication.
  - Example: When a classmate asks the child to play on the playground, he or she responds with an affirmative or negative.
  - Rating: 1 2 3 4 5
Initiation of Caregiver Interaction

- Definition: using social skills or language to initiate communication with caregivers.
- Example: The child requests a snack from his or her caregiver.
- Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Response to Caregiver Interaction

- Definition: using social skills or language to respond to caregiver communication.
- Example: The child responds with an affirmative or negative when offered a snack from his or her caregiver.
- Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Interview

Interview questions were composed based on results from the parent pre and post questionnaires and the instructor log entries. The researcher aimed to get more detailed information about particular instances of social interaction reported on the logs and questionnaires, learn why or why not social skill changes were reported, investigate to what extent parents and instructors attributed the changes to the theatre exposure, and clarify any unclear statements from the questionnaires. Interviews took place between one day and two weeks of the last day of camp, and ranged from twenty to forty minutes in duration.

Autism Centered Theatre Camp

Autism Centered Theatre camp spanned five days and lasted three hours per day. The campers on which the data for this study was based each attended the full duration of the summer camp, and participated in all activities.

The structure of ACT camp remained constant from day to day, with certain times blocked off for specific types of activity. A visual schedule posted on the wall announced the days’ activities. Each day began with a schedule review and warm-up drama game, followed by music and dance class, a drama-themed craft (including puppets and masks), and the lesson for the day. After a snack break, each day resumed with a read-aloud story which connected to that
day’s lesson, a drama game, and some creative sensory time (using clay and other manipulatives). Finally, the days concluded with rehearsal for the performance and a cool-down friendship circle. Games, crafts, and lessons varied among days within the daily schedule.

The layout of ACT camp was consistent with the routine structure that is important to the success of children on the autism spectrum while allowing opportunities for creativity and safe social interaction through hierarchically based instruction. The instructional activities that were repeated daily (music and dance class, drama lesson, and small group rehearsals) built upon the previous lessons so that learning was structured step-by-step. For example, on the first day of camp, the small-group rehearsals did not include scripts, but instead included a lesson on acting basics. The next day in small-group rehearsals, the scripts were introduced, and campers were required to apply the acting lesson from the previous day. Finally, on the third day of camp, once the acting skills had been introduced and applied, the instructors were able to reinforce the skills by directing the scene. Further description of the daily camp experience is located in Appendix B, which provides the lesson plan for the second day of ACT camp.

On the fifth day of camp, campers’ families were invited to attend a performance in which campers performed three large group, choreographed musical numbers, a puppetry piece, and scripted scenes. In consideration of the campers’ routine and sensory needs, they performed in the space where the rehearsals had taken place. Two of the musical numbers included light choreography and singing, while the third musical number included more complex choreography and no singing. For the puppetry piece, the campers utilized puppets that they had made during craft time earlier in the week. The puppetry piece was a pantomimed comedy set to music. The scenes, which were performed in small groups of two to three campers, were either narrated by the instructors and pantomimed by the campers or were memorized and spoken by the campers,
depending on the verbal communication skills of that group. All of the scenes were adapted from the book Acting Antics: A Theatrical Approach to Teaching Social Understanding to Children and Teens with Asperger Syndrome by Schneider (2007). Appendix C provides two of the scripts used during ACT camp’s performance.

Each instructor was assigned a small group of two or three students to focus on throughout the week, both in terms of social skills observations and instruction. To avoid the change in routine that comes from a new instructor for each activity, the instructors helped their assigned students throughout the entire day to learn the song and dance routines and excel at drama games. That instructor also directed the small group scenes for those specific children. To provide a picture of the instructors’ role in any given activity, the following is a description of a typical dance class during camp:

The instructor with the most dance experience stands in front of the campers, who are spread out throughout the rehearsal space, standing near their assigned daily instructors. The dance instructor leads a warm-up and stretches, during which the other instructors help their assigned students as necessary. Next, the campers move to one end of the room with their assigned instructors to practice their dance steps across the floor. The dance instructor gives a direct model of each move, and the campers take turns practicing it. The individual instructors provide positive reinforcement for well-executed moves and enthusiastic tries, and provide help to their assigned campers when they need it. When the dance instructor teaches the choreography, the instructors help their campers execute the moves. Later, during small-group rehearsal time, the instructors will help their campers rehearse and memorize the dance moves.

Each day’s games, crafts, and stories were chosen to reflect the lesson or “Drama Theme” for the day. The Drama Themes included in the camp were imagination, concentration,
observation, and cooperation with a fusion of all four themes on the last day. Each theme was taught as an important element that makes a complete drama. Imagination allows us to pretend the drama is real, and pretend we are someone we are not. Concentration is used in theatre to focus on a scene, dance, or song, and when outside distractions occur on stage. The five senses are used for observation to interact with other actors and solve problems when something goes wrong on stage. Finally, cooperation is used in theatre when actors and directors work together to teach, learn, and play. These four Drama Themes were taught to the campers, and reinforced throughout the week. For example, the observation drama theme was taught using the game “Floating Feather,” wherein actors must visualize the movement an invisible feather while passing it around the circle creatively (e.g. blowing, dropping). The game “Character of the Space” was used to teach the imagination drama theme by asking actors to move as if the room was filled with different substances (e.g. glue, water). Appendix D includes a comprehensive list of drama and theatre activities used throughout ACT camp.

The games and activities throughout camp were based on the four Drama Themes, and had connections to the current literature on the subject. All activities fell into the categories of literature based drama, mantle of the expert, teacher in role, rehearsal, performance, music, dance, or puppetry. These types of activities encouraged safe participation, indirect modeling of social skills by teachers, reinforcement of social skills by peers, and enjoyment of the group experience.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Two main sets of data were collected and analyzed in the present study. One referred to the parents and instructor interviews, while the other referred to the pre- and post- camp parent rating scales of social skills. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and cross-referenced for common themes. A descriptive analysis of the rating scales was conducted to describe parents’ reports on the impact of the camp experience on specific social skills. Analyses of the themes derived from the interviews, as well as of the rating scales, are discussed in this chapter.

Data Analysis of the Interviews

The data collected during the interviews were coded and analyzed for common themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The coding process involved three steps. During the first step, the researcher read each interview transcript and identified major themes. Personal quotations were extracted in order to develop data categories. The second step involved finding common themes among the participants to build connections between data categories. Once the themes and categories were identified for the parent and instructor groups, the researcher then cross-referenced the findings from both groups in step three. Overall, seven common themes emerged and are discussed in the following sections.

Theme 1: Changes in Caregiver Interaction. Caregiver interaction was defined to participants as “using social skills or language to initiate communication with or respond to communication from caregivers.” For the parents, this meant socialization at home with parents or significant caretakers. Instructors, on the other hand, identified themselves as the caregiver during the camp day, and reported on social changes within the child-instructor relationship. Both groups observed changes in caregiver interaction.
Five parents reported significant changes in social interaction with caregivers. From sharing information about camp “Usually, he never wants to tell us about his day, but he kept talking about camp” (P6) to initiating humorous exchanges “He even cracked jokes,” (P5) a positive trend in caregiver interaction was noted among parents. These changes were attributed by parents to a number of factors, including fun “He enjoyed it so much that he told us everything” (P6) and the general presence of socialization partners at camp “He was more engaged with people all day.” (P2) Drama and theatre activities were mentioned by one parent as a contributing factor in this change, stating “He talked about the performance and asked us to help him practice for it at home.” (P7)

Table 3

Examples of Cross-Referenced Quotes Related to Theme 1 “Changes in Caregiver Interaction”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I did notice that with us at home, her social interaction was better</td>
<td>He initiated social interactions with me more frequently as the week went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that unusual. (P8)</td>
<td>on. (B.G.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When he got home from camp each day, he was a little more “with it.”</td>
<td>They were a lot more open and honest with each other and the instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P2)</td>
<td>which allowed them to better communicate with us. (B.G.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instructors, however, attributed observed changes in caregiver interaction to specific drama and theatre activities “It [drama] was a fun and different way for these kids to learn.” (B.G.) One instructor cited a change in caregiver interaction among two specific children “He initiated social interactions with me more frequently as the week went on,” (B.G.) with longer utterances noted as a specific change “He used more short sentences and phrases toward the end of the week versus the beginning of the week when he was just saying words or making sounds.” (B.G.) Another instructor reported changes in information exchange with the instructors “Some
[campers] were able to voice opinions about the scenes and songs and even ask questions about acting.” (L.M.).

While changes in caregiver interaction were observed by both parents and instructors, it is important to note that two parents did not seem to relate changes to theatre-based camp activities. Instead, they attributed changes in caregiver interaction to the general fluctuation in social skills that they typically see in their children, stating “It may just be the mood of the day for her” (P8) and “He’s a day by day kind of kid.” (P3) However, one of these parents did also state that while it is impossible to know for sure whether the drama led to the social change, “It may have been [the drama],” and “I did notice that with us at home, her social interaction was better than usual.” (P8)

**Theme 2: Changes in Peer Interaction.** Peer interaction was defined as “using social skills or language to initiate communication with or respond to communication from peers.” Parents had limited access to the social interaction that went on during camp hours; confined to drop off/pick up times and the performance hour on the last day of camp. Therefore, they reported on these times as well as any time outside of camp that their child interacted with peers throughout the week. Instructors, conversely, reported on the peer interaction that they observed during camp each day. All of the instructors and most parents reported positive changes in social interaction, though several parents cited their child’s propensity to imitate as a barrier to social improvements with peers.

Change in peer interaction was noted by five parents. Examples of peer interaction that parents thought was better than normal for their child included awareness of peers “after the first day of camp he was interested in the names of the other kids” (P2) and initiation “I did notice him greeting the other kids in the morning.” (P6) Two parents cited the performance as a
specific trigger of increased peer interaction. One mother recalled the sense of pride that she observed in her son at the time of the performance “I could see it on his face. I could see it in the way he was interacting with the audience and with his peers,” (P3) while another was impressed with her child’s participation in the performance “He seemed a little bit more distracted than the other kids, but he really participated in the group numbers.” (P2) One parent also attributed the change to the camp environment, stating “The social setting of theatre was good for him,” and “The more children he is around, the better he interacts with them.” (P2)

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I could see it</em> [pride] <em>in the way he was interacting with the audience and with his peers.</em> (P3)</td>
<td><em>He would ask them</em> [his peers] <em>questions about their day…or even what they were going to this weekend.</em> (L.M.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I did notice him greeting the other kids in the morning.</em> (P6)</td>
<td><em>She tried harder to be with the other kids during activities toward the end of the week.</em> (B.G.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most parents did report an overall positive change in peer interaction. However, two parents found that changes were hampered because of their child’s tendency to imitate unwanted behaviors that may have been exhibited in their peers. One parent stated that “He saw that some of the other kids weren’t participating at his level, so he thought he could drop to their level,” (P6) while another mentioned that “When she is in a group with certain behaviors, she will bring them home.” (P8) However, both of the parents agreed that theatre itself has the ability to help their children improve peer interaction, “Acting is a good way to learn,” (P6) attributing the lack of change to the lack of grouping among participants “The acting idea is great for ASD, but the kids should be differentiated by level.” (P8)
All of the instructors observed changes in peer interaction among the campers. Two instructors specifically mentioned increased participation in peer-based activities, stating “He did interact with his peers more towards the end of the week,” (J.D.) and “She tried harder to be with the other kids during activities toward the end of the week whereas during the start of the week she kept more to herself.” (B.G.) Another instructor cited a change in the complexity of the interactions made between peers “He would ask them questions about their day, their skit, or even what they were going to do this weekend. He maintained this information and based future conversations off of this material later in the week.” (L.M.) Most notably, one instructor reported the formation of friendships throughout the week which directly impacted the success of peer interaction for one student “I think that new friendship gave him a social outlet for his anger instead of acting out. When they would talk, he would use his words and talk about similar interests the two of them shared.” (L.M.)

**Theme 3: Adjusting to Routines.** An unexpected theme that emerged throughout the interview process was reported improvement in adjusting to routines. This skill was originally identified as a goal of the camp for one parent, and five parents and two instructors mentioned an improvement by the end of camp. Parents reported on their child’s ability to adjust to routines based on what they observed in their limited time at camp as well as their communications with their child at home, while instructors reported on changes they observed in the campers during camp hours.

For one parent, an improvement in adjusting to new routines was a major goal of the experience, and a contributing factor in enrolling her son. When asked if the camp had met this goal, she said “Yes, definitely! The first day was very frustrating because he didn’t want to wait
for the rest of the kids to come…he wanted to get started right away…but the change is good because he will face new things every day.” (P2)

Many parents mentioned their child’s reluctance to begin a new activity because of their difficulty with adjusting to new routines. “He was upset that he was signed up without permission, but he liked it,” (P5) “When walking in the first day, he didn’t want to go, but he ended up liking it and socializing,” (P3) and “He initially struggled with the change of summer routine” (P2) are statements that illustrate the apprehension that the children felt going into a new environment. However, they are also statements that point out the success that each student had in adjusting to the new routine, which parents attributed to the experience of drama camp.

Table 5

*Examples of Cross-Referenced Quotes Related to Theme 3 “Adjusting to Routines”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>When walking in the first day, he didn’t want to go, but he ended up liking it and socializing.</em> (P3)</td>
<td><em>He knew what to expect and was less apprehensive.</em> (M.C.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The new place shook it up. It was hard on him and me at first, but the change is good because he will face new things every day.</em> (P2)</td>
<td><em>As he got more comfortable he became more outspoken during group activities.</em> (J.D.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appreciation for the visual schedule provided at camp was expressed by two parents. One parent even mentioned this as her personal favorite part of the camp structure because “She has a schedule at school. She is very good with schedules and after a few days she memorizes it and doesn’t need it anymore.” (P8) The other parent expressed relief in seeing the schedule on the first day of camp, because it told her that “They know what they’re doing. They know autism.” (P7)

Two instructors also reported changes in adjusting to routines among individual campers. One instructor attributed this change to the routine itself “His sounds/outbursts were reduced by
the end of camp. He knew what to expect and was less apprehensive.” (M.C.) The other instructor attributed the change to the safe and comfortable environment that theatre provides “As he got more comfortable he became more outspoken during group activities.” (J.D.)

**Theme 4: Overall Social Change.** As previously discussed, improvements in caregiver interaction, peer interaction, and adjusting to routines were identified through parent interview as three particular areas of social growth. In order to get a broader sense of whether an overall change was observed, all participants were asked to report on the presence or absence of overall changes after camp. The parents reported specifically on their own child’s social skills, while the instructors reported on individual children and on the group as a whole.

Four parents gave examples of changes in overall social interaction. Two parents mentioned that the overall change was the most present in their child’s attention, stating “He seemed more into what was going on at camp than at school,” (P3) and “If it was something he was interested in [acting], he had very good attention.” (P5) Both of these parents attributed the change to interest in the drama and theatre activities in which their children were participating.

Two other parents cited noticeable differences in their children’s daily exchanges and skills. One parent said “Just in one week we were able to see things we didn’t know he could do,” (P2) attributing the changes to the work toward the final performance, while the other attributed changes to the overall camp experience “After camp he was using longer sentences and more descriptors in general interactions.” (P7)

While many of the parents reported an overall positive social skill change, one parent gave an example of her son not living up to his social potential. This parent reported a discrepancy between her son’s skills and his participation in the performance, which she
attributed to imitation. “When we asked him why he didn’t do his best, he said ‘I’m autistic, too.’” (P6)

Table 6

Examples of Cross-Referenced Quotes Related to Theme 4 “Overall Social Change”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just in one week, we were able to see things that we didn’t know he could do. (P2)</td>
<td>There was an overall change. Some [children] were able to voice opinions about the scenes and songs and even ask questions about acting. (L.M.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He seemed more into what was going on at camp than at school. (P7)</td>
<td>I believe there was an improvement in social skills overall. Some of the noises and frustrations the students had in the beginning were reduced by the end of the camp. (M.C.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When reporting on overall social skill change in individual campers, the instructors reported an improvement. Three individual campers were mentioned by instructors as displaying noticeable social skill growth, as illustrated by statements like “He practiced all his lines, and knew his choreography and songs by the performance,” (L.M.) “By his actions on the last day I felt he was acting out more because he didn't want to leave when during the week he was acting out for attention,” (L.M.) and “He was so thankful to just learn new material, facts and meet new people.” (L.M.) Conversely, two children were mentioned to have maintained their overall social skills level, “For them, as I recall, they still exhibited some of the behaviors they came in with.” (M.C.)

Three instructors reported an overall change in social skills observed in the group as a whole, emphasizing learning, an increase in positive behaviors, and a decrease in negative behaviors. In terms of learning, one instructor stated “It was a fun and different way for these kids to learn,” (B.G.) while another said “There was a lot of learning going on for them,” (M.C.) while still another mentioned “To see children learn, practice, and perform at any level speaks
volumes.” (L.M.) All three of these statements attribute learning to the social aspect of theatre and drama activities. Increases in certain positive behaviors were noted by instructors, such as cooperation “They learned how to work together,” (L.M.) confidence “Confidence is a big part of performing, and to see the growth in these participants over a five day stretch was so special,” (L.M.) and overall performance skills “Their songs became stronger, their lines became memorized, and their whole body language changed.” (L.M.) Finally, a decrease in unwanted behaviors was mentioned as part of the overall improvement, with one instructor mentioning “I believe there was an improvement in social skills overall. Some of the noises and frustrations the students had in the beginning were reduced by the end of the camp.” (M.C.)

**Theme 5: Positive Experiences.** Both parents and instructors overwhelmingly reported on how the camp in general was a positive experience for the campers. These reports manifested themselves in many ways among campers, and were attributed to a number of different factors by parents and instructors.

Every parent had an example of what made ACT camp a positive experience for their child and for their family. Two parents compared camp to an escape from everyday reality “He was getting anxious about school [starting], and this took his mind off of it,” (P7) particularly the escape from therapy “He still loved the camp, and it was not therapy, so it was good.” (P6) One parent became emotional when asked to recall what made her son proud of his work at camp “I could see it in his face. When all the parents walked in to watch the show…I’ll never forget that moment.” (P7) Two parents provided comical anecdotes about their child missing camp such as “He watched the video of the show all weekend,” (P7) and “When camp was over, she told herself ‘Sorry, camp is over.’” (P8) Three more parents attributed their children’s positive experiences to a love for the performing arts, stating “He loved dance class and the One
Direction song.” (P4) “He loves to play-act, and seems more comfortable dressed up in a costume,” (P5) and “He has a love for theatre, mimicking movies, comedy.” (P5)

Table 7

*Examples of Cross-Referenced Quotes Related to Theme 5 “Positive Experiences”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I could see it in his face. When the parents walked in to watch the show...I’ll never forget that moment. (P7)</td>
<td>They were smiling, laughing, and clapping! They were so proud of themselves, as were their families. (L.M.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not watch the play, but he seemed very happy every day after camp. (P2)</td>
<td>I definitely think the children who participated had fun. (B.G.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instructors also perceived the children’s camp experiences to be positive. Two instructors cited the general experience of being at camp as the contributing factor, stating, “They seemed excited to be there and disappointed at the end of the day when they had to leave” (B.G.) and “From the moment he walked in, he was excited to be there.” (L.M.) Additionally, the performance was mentioned as a moment of pride and enjoyment for the students, with one instructor saying “After the final performance on Friday there is no doubt in my mind that they didn’t have fun. They were smiling, laughing, and clapping! They were so proud of themselves, as were their families. The performance results were a revelation that no matter the range of ability in a young child, they love to play. We just gave them a new outlet to do so!” (L.M.)

In addition to reporting positive experiences for the campers, three instructors mentioned that they, too, found ACT camp to be a positive work experience. Two instructors attributed the positive experience to the camp’s format, with remarks like “The camp was well set-up, and had a positive environment for the children and the instructors,” (J.D.) and “I think this is because the program was so organized I was never worried about what I was supposed to be doing...I could focus on the kids.” (B.G.) One instructor reported stress in her camp experience because “I felt
overwhelmed at times,’’ however, she also stated that “I found the camp very well organized.” (M.C.) One instructor was moved by the work she did at camp, stating “I am so glad I was a witness to see the happiness they felt performing,” and “It was just so inspirational to be a part of this camp.” (L.M.)

**Theme 6: Recommendations.** Among both groups, three major recommendations were provided by parents and instructors, including longer/more intensive exposure to theatre, implementation of a grouping system, and a more grand performance opportunity. Most parents, even those who observed social skill changes in the one week period, advocated for a longer program to help improve and solidify the learned skills. Two parents recommended a longer camp in order to further develop the social skills that had begun to mature in the week long camp, saying “He understands what acting is, but doesn’t understand what really being is. A longer camp would help him pick up the subtlety of real socialization” (P6) and “With a longer program I think we would see what he can really do. Maybe even a speaking part.” (P2)

Another parent remarked that a longer camp would aid in generalization of learned social skills in that “I would recommend a week long camp like you had, with maybe a once a week class for maintenance after that.” (P4)

Table 8

*Examples of Cross-Referenced Quotes Related to Theme 6 “Recommendations”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longer exposure to the activities would equal more comfort (P4)</td>
<td>With a longer program I believe more [social skills changes] would have been observed. (J.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting beforehand to place them in different groups and having the kids interviewed on an individual basis would have helped. (P8)</td>
<td>I would like to have seen how the activities would have gone if we had no groups at all. (B.G.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be great if they could have the final performance on a big stage as a big event. (P4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another recommendation that parents mentioned was introducing a more sophisticated grouping element. However, parents’ reports were not congruent in the type of grouping they recommended for their child. Four parents recommended a mentorship program, stating “Peer mentors would have been interesting, if the other kids could mentor behaviors that he has troubles with.” (P6) Three parents thought that grouping by ability would be the most successful suggesting that “It would be best to have three or four kids in the same group.” (P4) Finally, two parents recommended no grouping at all, because “I actually thought he excelled in the mixed environment.” (P3)

A final recommendation by parents was to create a more grand performance for the campers, by introducing a large stage, more elaborate costumes, and lighting. One parent stressed that “She has an understanding of theatre, of the stage, and of performance. It would have been great for her to see a stage,” (P8) while another stated “It would be great if they could have the final performance on a big stage as a big event.” (P4)

Like the parents, longer/more intensive exposure was recommended by one instructor to increase the amount of social skill development that took place. She stated that “There was minimal change in social skills, but with a longer program I believe more would have been observed.” (J.D.) Additionally, all of the instructors mentioned grouping as a factor to consider to improve the social learning at camp. One instructor mentioned a mentor-like relationship, stating “Regarding the grouping of students, I believe each student should have a mentor, at least age 16 or older,” (M.C.) while another recommended that “grouping by ability may benefit the camp, with some times of no grouping (such as during lunch and sensory time).” (J.D.) However, two instructors advocated for minimal grouping, as was the case with ACT camp. One instructor mentioned “I would have liked to have seen how the activities would have gone if we
had no groups at all. I think if the kids were encouraged to help one another as well as
themselves it might have worked,” (L.M.) while another said “I actually thought no grouping
until we broke off into scenes was a smart approach. This way all the participants were together
as one unit; no one was left out because they were different.” (B.G.) The instructors who
advocated for no groups cited acceptance and learning through community experiences as their
reasoning.

**Theme 7: Continuing Drama Education.** As a final question during the parent and
instructor interviews, every parent was asked if, in terms of social skill improvement, they would
enroll their child in another theatre and drama camp, and every instructor was asked if they
would recommend that ACT camp continue to help teach social skills. Parents reported based on
the social skills changes they observed in their child and the overall experience that their family
had. Instructors reported based on the social skills improvement that they observed during camp
as well as their experience teaching camp.

Every parent reported that they would continue pursuing drama and theatre education for
their child in terms of social skills development. Five of the parents said “yes” with no caveats,
and even asked for the instructors to keep them abreast of any upcoming theatre opportunities.
One of these parents also added, in reference to the performance “Parents sell their kids short all
the time, but they can do more than we think they can.” (P2) Two parents were interested in
continuing drama education for their child, but only if the program underwent changes in
grouping, stating “Yes, with modifications,” (P8) and “We would be very interested in
participating again. My only hesitation is the social skill level of the other children.” (P7)
Table 9

Examples of Cross-Referenced Quotes Related to Theme 7 “Continuing Drama Education”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We would be very interested in participating again. (P7)</td>
<td>Yes I would recommend that ACT continue. (B.G.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. It is hard to have an ASD camp because the kids are too low, and a regular camp because it moves too fast. (P8)</td>
<td>It is a safe environment to use hands-on learning to promote the performing arts. (L.M.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents sell their kids short all the time, but they can do more than we think they can. (P2)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The instructors’ overall recommendation was for ACT camp to continue with respect to teaching social skills to children on the autism spectrum. One instructor recommended that camp continue only if there were “A more specific target group such as Asperger’s or cognitively impaired students that are verbal.” (M.C.) However, three instructors were in resounding agreement that ACT camp had a positive enough impact on social skills to continue, stating “This is a great program for children to explore the world of acting and create, make, and become someone they were always meant to be.” (L.M.)

Analysis of Parent and Instructor Congruency

Instructors and parents reporting on the same child (paired) often recounted similar observations in regards to the seven themes, as outlined in Table 10. For the paired parents and instructors who mentioned a given theme, 100% congruency was revealed for Changes in Caregiver Interaction, Changes in Peer Interaction, Adjusting to Routines, and Positive Experiences. Further, congruency rates for Continuing Drama Education, Overall Change, and Recommendations were 72%, 57%, and 50%, respectively.

Four themes were mentioned by six or more pairs of parents and instructors. Positive Experiences was the most highly reported on theme by paired parents and instructors (eight
pairs) with a 100% congruency rate between their reports. One parent reported “He had fun the whole time,” (P7) while his instructor, stated “I definitely think the children who participated had fun.” (B.G.) Continuing Drama Education and Recommendations were also mentioned often during interviews, with six pairs of parents and instructors reporting on each, and a 72% rate of congruency between the pairs. One parent would recommend that her child continue “if he could be in a group that was better than him socially but not pushed too hard,” (P4) agreeing with that child’s instructor who stated continuing the program “with a more specific target group.” (M.C.) Four out of seven pairs of parents and instructors agreed on Overall Change throughout camp. When reporting on the same camper, one parent stated “After camp he was using longer sentences and more descriptors in general interactions,” (P7) while his instructor mentioned “He used more short sentences and phrases by the end of the week.” (B.G.) Six pairs of parents and instructors reported on recommendations for ACT camp, but only 50% of those pairs agreed upon their recommendations, giving that theme the lowest congruency rate.

While fewer pairs of parents and instructors reported on the themes Changes in Caregiver Interaction, Changes in Peer Interaction and Adjusting to Routines, these themes nevertheless had high levels of congruency. Three out of three pairs agreed upon Changes in Caregiver Interaction with one parent noticing that “with us at home her social interaction was better than usual” (P8) and that child’s instructor mentioning “She initiated more interactions with me and the other campers as the week went on.” (B.G.) Changes in Peer Interaction was a theme addressed and agreed upon by two pairs of parents and instructors. A statement from one instructor, “As he got more comfortable he became more outspoken during group activities” (J.D.) correlates with the paired parent, who said “Every experience helps him to grow and get more comfortable with other kids.” (P5) Another theme, adjusting to Routines, had congruency
between 100% of the three pairs who mentioned it in the interviews. When reporting on one child, his instructor stated “His sounds and outbursts were reduced by the end of camp,” (M.C.) agreeing with his parent’s statement, “I think he did a good job adjusting by the end of the week.” (P2)

Table 10

*Paired Parent and Instructor Agreement/Disagreement on Common Interview Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Disagreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| P1     | L.M.       | • Change in Caregiver Interaction  
                 • Positive Experiences  | • Overall Change |
| P2     | M.C.       | • Adjusting to Routines  
                 • Overall Change  
                 • Positive Experience  
                 • Recommendations | • Continuing Drama Education |
| P3     | M.C.       | • Adjusting to Routines  
                 • Overall Change  
                 • Positive Experiences  | • Recommendations  
                 • Continuing Drama Education |
| P4     | M.C.       | • Continuing Drama Education  
                 • Positive Experiences | • Overall Change |
| P5     | J.D.       | • Changes in Peer Interaction  
                 • Adjusting to Routines  
                 • Positive Experiences  
                 • Recommendations  
                 • Continuing Drama Education | |
| P6     | J.D.       | • Changes in Peer Interaction  
                 • Overall Change  
                 • Positive Experiences  
                 • Recommendations  
                 • Continuing Drama Education | |
| P7     | B.G.       | • Changes in Caregiver Interaction  
                 • Overall Change  
                 • Positive Experiences  
                 • Continuing Drama Education | • Recommendations |
| P8     | B.G.       | • Changes in Caregiver Interaction  
                 • Positive Experiences  
                 • Continuing Drama Education | • Overall Change  
                 • Recommendations |
Descriptive Analysis of Rating Scales

Each parent completed the pre- and post- camp questionnaires, which contained identical social skills rating scales. When responding to the post-camp questionnaire, the parents had already returned their pre-camp questionnaire, therefore not having access for comparison. Due to the small sample size, rating scale responses could not be analyzed for statistically significant changes in social skills. However, certain trends in the rating scales became evident during a descriptive analysis.

The parents rated their children’s proficiency in each of nine defined social skills (Joint Attention, Eye Contact, Imagination, Social Perceptions, Social Cues, Peer Interaction Initiation, Caregiver Interaction initiation, Response to Peer Interaction, Response to Caregiver Interaction) on a Likert scale (1=Very poor/Very infrequently; 2=Poor/Infrequently; 3=Average/Average frequency; 4=Good/Frequently; 5=Very good/Very frequently). Certain social skills were reported to have increased more often than other social skills, including eye contact (two parents), social perceptions (three parents), initiation and response to peer interaction (four parents), and social cues (three parents).

Children whose pre-camp communication skills were poorer than other campers were reported to have more prominent changes in social skills when the skills were rated individually. All three parents whose children were nonverbal reported noticeable increases in at least two of the nine social skills, with one reporting a remarkable increase in five social skills. Only two of the five parents with children who were verbal reported an increase in more than two individual social skills. The discrepancy between verbal and nonverbal children may be attributed to the proportion of social skills with which each sub-group began. Since the nonverbal group began with fewer skills, they were exposed to more new material. The verbal children may have
already possessed some of the targeted social skills, which thereby did not lead to more noticeable improvements.

Table 11

*Parent Ratings for Individual Social Skills*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Post</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>P3</td>
<td>Pre</td>
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<td>P6</td>
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<td>P8</td>
<td>Pre</td>
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</table>

Previous experience in the arts may have played a role in the changes in social skills throughout camp. All four parents (P1, P6, P7, and P8) whose children had previous performance arts-related experience reported a noticeable increase in at least two individual social skills, while only one out of four parents whose child had no arts experience reported an increase in two or more social skills. However, it is important to note that this was also the parent (P2) who reported the most significant increases among all individual social skills, leaving the impact of previous arts experience relatively ambiguous.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Results of the present study corroborate with the current literature on the subject in terms of specific and overall social skills changes, as well as the benefits of the activities themselves. In the current literature, different social skills have been observed to improve as a result of the drama activities, among which, caregiver interaction, peer interaction, and social perceptions. These social skills were highlighted in the pre- and post-camp interviews included in the present study, and also surfaced throughout several parent and instructor interviews. Both parents and instructors reported caregiver interaction as one social skill that showed growth after ACT camp. This was observed through longer and more complex utterances, the willingness to share information with caregivers, and asking pertinent questions during instructional time. These observations correspond to the findings of Kempe and Tissot (2012), whose study revealed that the children were more apt to communicate with instructors in pretend play after the teacher-in-role based drama activities were introduced. Similarly, increases in peer interaction were seen in both the current and preexisting studies. Parents observed that their children became more aware of their peers, and improved in initiation of social exchanges, a finding that mirrors the results of Kempe and Tissot (2012) and Roy (2007). Both of these studies stressed the network of peers that formed a comfortable environment for children to practice peer interaction. Social perceptions was another social skill noted by three parents in the rating scales to have improved, and was illustrated by instructors to have improved shown by the children’s consciousness of and reaction to other campers’ behaviors. Peter (2009) also observed changes in social perceptions, demonstrated by increased empathy during emotion-based drama activities. The current literature substantiates the findings of the present study in terms of the improvements in caregiver interaction, peer interaction, and social perceptions.
In addition to improvements in individually observed social skills, current literature highlights changes in the overall social skills of participants in several studies. From engagement in social activities to social awareness of communication partners, each study provided anecdotes describing the overall changes observed in their participants’ social skills (Blythe et. al., 2011; Kempe & Tissot, 2012; Peter, 2009). In the present study, parents noted overall social change as demonstrated by attention to daily interactive activities and interactions with other children and adults. The instructors mentioned increases in cooperation and confidence with decreases in negative behaviors. These changes were attributed to the theatre and drama activities, as were the changes mentioned in the pre-existing literature.

A final correlation to the current literature includes the activities included in the drama camp itself. Throughout the literature, rehearsal and performance were indicated as important tools to increase social skills through drama (Blythe et al., 2011; Peter, 2009; Roy, 2007). The social skills improvements noted in the current study were often attributed to rehearsal by the instructors and to performance by the parents. Instructors noticed that as the children continued to rehearse, their interaction with fellow campers and instructors improved, while parents stated that excitement for the upcoming performance provided an opportunity for more caregiver interaction. Additionally, both parents and instructors noticed that the sense of pride that the campers exhibited through their performance contributed to social awareness and perceptions. This pride corresponds to Roy (2007)’s statement that the rehearsal and performance process seems to give children a sense of belonging which contributes to growth in social awareness and perceptions.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

The present study provided insight into the possible benefits of theatre and drama activities on the social skills of children with autism spectrum disorder based on parent and instructor report after a week-long theatre camp. Analysis of pre-and post-camp questionnaires and interviews points to congruency between both groups of participants as well as connections to pre-existing literature. Conclusions drawn from the interviews and rating scales are discussed in this chapter, along with their clinical implications, the study limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

Themes

In the parent and instructor interviews, three particular social skills were highlighted as being improved as a result of ACT camp, including caregiver interaction, peer interaction, and adjusting to routines. In terms of changes in caregiver interaction, drama and theatre activities, general fluctuation of skills on a day-by-day basis, fun, and presence of social interaction were all potential contributing factors cited by both groups. Drama and theatre was the most common influence on changes in caregiver interaction specifically mentioned by the instructors.

Five parents and all four instructors reported a positive change in peer interaction among campers. While all of the instructors reported a change in peer interaction, none of them attributed the change to specific theatre activities or any other factor, focusing instead on the types of interaction they observed. Interestingly, most of the parents attributed this change to the drama and theatre activities that the children were exposed to throughout camp. The two parents who did not report a positive change maintained that the drama and theatre activities would have influenced positive change in a differently grouped setting. As reported by both instructors and
parents, the frequency, type, and complexity of peer interactions were positively impacted by the camp.

It is important to note that the data do not differentiate the cause of change between specific drama and theatre activities with the generalized camp experience. However, five parents and two instructors cited improvement in the skills of adjusting to new routines, with one instructor specifically attributing this change to the comfort that theatre provides. The increase in the particular social skills of caregiver interaction, peer interaction, and adjusting to routines may have been related to the amount of time spent on drama activities that directly related to these social skills or, alternatively, to the number of opportunities presented at home to display each social skill.

Not only were changes in three individual social skills cited as a result of camp, but overall social skills changes on an individual and group level were also reported by parents and instructors. Observations of the campers on an individual level resulted in parent reports that the children’s overall social skills had improved. They attributed these changes to interest in theatre, preparation for the performance, and the overall camp experience. Similarly, instructors reported individual changes in social skills caused by rehearsal, fun, and meeting new people. Observations of the campers as a group led to overwhelming instructor report that overall social growth had occurred, as attributed to the learning opportunities provided by theatre and drama activities, rehearsal, and the overall camp experience.

In addition to changes in social skills, camp was reported to be a positive experience for everyone involved, with an overwhelming desire to continue drama education for the campers. The reasons for the campers’ positive experience ranged from a genuine love for theatre, to pride in their own performance, to an escape from therapy. The overall instructor experience was also
reported as positive, due to camp organization and the inspirational aspect of teaching. These reports highlight the perception that no matter the therapeutic qualities of theatre on social skills, enjoyment of the activities seems to have prevailed among all involved.

Overall, both parents and instructors were in agreement that the ACT experience had a positive enough impact on the campers’ social skills to recommend its continuance. While two parents and one instructor would hesitate to re-enroll without modifications to the grouping system, all of them agreed that drama and theatre education could continue to improve social skills for the campers.

In spite of the overwhelmingly positive experience reported by the participants, both parents and instructors highlighted the importance of making some changes to ACT to increase its impact. The two groups recommended a longer camp to increase and maintain social skill learning. They also agreed that modification to the grouping system would have benefited the camp, though there was no agreement on the type of grouping approach that would be most beneficial to all students. While instructors did not mention the need for a grand performance, several parents agreed that having a larger-scale performance on a stage would have created a special experience for the campers.

In addition to looking at themes on an individual basis, it is important to note that there was a high level of congruency when themes were analyzed between pairs of instructors and parents reporting on the same child. For all themes, congruency levels were 50% or higher, with four of the seven themes at 100% congruency between paired participants.

**Rating Scales**

Trends emerged from the pre- and post- camp rating scales completed by the parents. Children who began camp with poorer communication skills than some other campers were
reported by their parents to have more prominent changes in their social skills. The same trend occurred when parents of children with previous arts experience reported more significant social skills changes when compared to those without a previous performance background. Finally, certain social skills were reported to have increased more regularly than other skills, including peer interaction, social cues, social perceptions, and eye contact. While the differences between sub-groups and individual social skills cannot be differentially attributed to particular causes, they are important to note because of possible clinical implications.

Clinical Implications

When the results of the current study are considered, two major clinical implications emerge. Including drama and theatre activities into lesson plans for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and classroom teachers, and advocating for the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum in theatre arts programs are both ways that the information gleaned from this study could be used in practice.

Difficulty with the pragmatic parameter of language is one characteristic of ASD that is often treated by speech-language pathologists (ASHA, 2014). Considering the overall change in social skills as well as particular improvement in caregiver and peer interaction reported in this study, it could be efficacious for speech-language pathologists to use drama and theatre activities when working with the ASD population. Some activity structures cited in the literature which were also used during ACT camp include using literature to create theatre, mantle of the expert, teacher in role, rehearsal, and performance. These types of drama, when paired with the clinical skills of a SLP could be used to improve and generalize social skills for children on the autism spectrum.
Communities and school districts often have theatre and drama education programs for children who are typically developing. The positive results on social skills revealed by this study, as well as the parents’ recommendation for peer mentors suggest the importance of including children on the autism spectrum in educational theatre programs. Through analysis of parent and instructor interviews on an individual and paired basis as well as descriptive analysis of parent rating scales, several major conclusions arise. Exposure to drama and theatre activities may help improve social skills for children with autism spectrum disorders, with convincing evidence to support particular gains in caregiver/peer interaction, adjusting to routines, eye contact, social perceptions, and social cues. Furthermore, children with greater social communication needs and those with more extensive exposure to the arts may show stronger gains in social skills when exposed to theatre and drama activities. Speech-language pathologists providing services for children on the autism spectrum may use the results of this study to advocate for the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum into educational theatre programs.

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study and Directions for Future Study

While the findings in this study are partially generalizable to reflect parent and educator perspectives on the impact of drama activities on the social skills of children with autism, qualitative studies, as defined by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), are not always generalizable in the truest sense of the word. The limited number of participants and single trial offering of the summer camp limited breadth of the study. Future studies should consider incorporating multiple theatre camps and larger groups of parents and instructors to determine if the effects described in this study accurately portray the effects of theatre on the social skills of children on the autism spectrum. Additionally, the objectivity and diversity of opinion was limited in the study, as data was derived from subjective report and observation, and only parents and
instructors provided these reports. Objective and standardized social skills measures, along with personal experiences relayed by the campers themselves may provide additional, important information about the true changes in social skills that occurred.

Future studies should consider a longitudinal design to assess for possible long lasting effect of summer camp programs, as well as possible generalization to the classroom context. The current study expanded the work of others in order to understand the full benefit that drama and theatre activities may provide for children on the autism spectrum. Future studies on the subject may substantiate an efficacious social skills program using theatre and drama, thereby impacting the communication potential of children with autism spectrum disorder.
References


Appendix A: Definition of Terms

**Autism Spectrum Disorder:** Also known as ASD. It is a developmental disability with multiple causes which has its onset between two and three years of age, and is part of a greater category called pervasive developmental disorder. ASD can be mild or severe and causes problems with social skills and communication. (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1997-2013).

**Caregiver Interaction:** Using social skills (e.g. joint attention imagination, eye contact, social perceptions, social cues) or language to communicate with caregivers.

**Concentration:** One of the four Drama Themes. Concentration is used in theatre to focus on a scene, dance, or song, and when outside distractions occur on stage.

**Cooperation:** One of the four Drama Themes. Cooperation is used in theatre when actors and directors work together to teach, learn, and play.

**Drama:** An art form that explores human condition and tension, deepening our understanding of human motivation and behavior. The art of theatre often includes the performance of rehearsed dramatic material along with activities that expand the understanding of this material. (Schiller, 2008)

**Drama Theme:** One of four important elements that make a complete drama or theatre experience, including imagination, concentration, observation, and cooperation.

**Eye Contact:** Maintenance of mutual eye gaze during communicative events. (Hedge & Maul, 2006)

**Imagination:** The ability to engage in pretend play. (Wolf, 2005), Also, one of the four Drama Themes, taught as allowing actors to pretend the drama is real, and pretend they are someone they are not.
Joint Attention: Two persons paying attention to the same object or event at the same time. (Hedge & Maul, 2006)

Mantle of the Expert: A system of teaching which places the student in the role of “the one who knows,” enabling teaching and learning at all levels of the curriculum through drama. A full “mantle of the expert” includes specific dramatic elements, including selecting dramatic metaphor, designing tasks, role, teacher modeling, frame change, drama in mind and image making, ritual, and power of student. (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985)

Observation: One of the four Drama Themes, taught as using the five senses to interact with other actors and solve problems when something goes wrong on stage.

Peer Interaction: Using social skills (e.g. joint attention, imagination, eye contact, social perceptions, social cues) or language to communicate with peers.

Performance: The culmination of rehearsal, when an actor presents the material on which they have been working in front of an audience.

Rehearsal: The process by which actors learn material which will later be performed, and practice it repeatedly. Multiple forms of rehearsal exist, including in-person, at-home, and video.

Social Cues: Recognizing facial expressions and body language as they relate to communication. (Blythe et al., 2011)

Social Perceptions: Appropriate responses to communicative situations. (Blythe et al., 2011)

Social Skills: A set of abilities used for communication, including social cues, peer and caregiver interaction, pretend play, eye contact, joint attention, and social perceptions. (Blythe et al., 2011)

Social Story™: A story (authored by a parent or professional) that helps a child on the autism spectrum to learn a social skill. Social Stories™ are personalized based on the individual needs
of the learner, and are written based on ten criteria which create a positive, emotionally safe atmosphere for the learning audience. (Gray, 2010)

**Teacher-In-Role:** An activity in which the instructor becomes part of the drama. This involvement creates a nonjudgmental environment, encouraging the children to participate in the theatre activity themselves. (Kempe & Tissot, 2012)
## Appendix B: Lesson Plan and Handouts from ACT Camp, Day 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Sign in/name tags, take a seat</td>
<td>Sign-in sheet, name tags, assigned seats</td>
<td>Physical structure of the chairs remains the same each day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:05</td>
<td>Go over schedule for the day</td>
<td>Large visual schedule on wall, icons for each activity</td>
<td>Remove icons at the end of each activity throughout the day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15</td>
<td>Game: Floating Feather</td>
<td></td>
<td>A game to go with the “observation” drama theme. Campers must make observations about the movement of a feather, and apply them to this activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Music and Dance</td>
<td>Music, speakers</td>
<td>Introduce hip-hop moves which will later be incorporated into choreography: double bounce, triple step, step touch, slide jump.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45</td>
<td>Craft: Make Masks</td>
<td>Mask template, scissors, crayons, elastic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Drama theme lesson: “Observation”</td>
<td>Observation worksheet (below), pencils</td>
<td>Introduce “observation” and why it is important to drama. Work through the worksheet as a group. Allow campers to act-out scenarios.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>Snack Time</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Story Time</td>
<td>Selections from “Where The Sidewalk Ends” by Shel Silverstein</td>
<td>Choose poems that connect to “observation.” Did the character in that poem use observation? Why? Why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45</td>
<td>Game: Walk Like A... (Mask Version)</td>
<td>Masks</td>
<td>An “observation” drama game. Campers must make observation about the way people walk when they are sad/happy/angry, etc. and embody those motions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Sensory Time</td>
<td>Sand table, play dough, stress balls, etc.</td>
<td>Consider campers’ sensory needs by allowing appropriate sensory input through play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15</td>
<td>Game: Mirrors</td>
<td></td>
<td>An “observation” game in which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Rehearsal</td>
<td>Scripts, Acting 101 handout (below)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In small groups, instructors will introduce scripts to their campers. Review acting lesson from day one, and help campers apply lessons to their new scenes.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11:55</td>
<td>Cool Down: Friendship Circle</td>
<td>Campers and instructors come together in a circle to hold hands. Send a squeeze around the circle to help build our community of friendship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Dismissal/sign out</td>
<td>Sign-out sheet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. COMMIT
Commit to the scene and your character. Don’t act like the character, BE the character. Don’t read your lines, mean your lines. Don’t be afraid to give 100%.

2. USE THE SPACE
Reciting lines is only half the job. Move around the space, but with purpose. Don’t just wander. Make specific choices to DO specific things. Interact with the environment and the other characters.

3. PROJECT
Speak loudly without yelling. Use your diagram to speak so that even those in the last row can hear you. If they can’t hear you, they won’t understand the story you are trying to tell.

4. SPEAK CLEARLY
Anunciate! The audience won’t understand you if you mumble or rush. Remember, YOU are responsible for telling the story and making sure the audience understands it.

5. CHEAT OUT
Never turn your back on the audience while speaking. Even when you talk directly to another actor, angle your body out towards the audience.
Drama Theme 3: Observation

All About Observation

Observation is using all five senses to learn more about a situation. The five senses are sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. In theatre, we use observation to help us interact with other actors, and solve problems when something goes wrong on stage.

Observation Activity

Circle "yes" if these kids are using observation, or "no" if they are not.

1. Jake forgets his next line in his scene with Julie, but Julie sees that he looks worried and helps him remember.
   
   Yes  No

2. Jordan does not notice that his props are not in place for the next scene, and ends up missing his cue looking for them.
   
   Yes  No

3. Sally hears that the audience is laughing very loud at the joke she just said, so she waits until the laughter stops before saying the next line.
   
   Yes  No
Appendix C: Sample of Scripts Used during ACT Camp

Adapted from *Acting Antics: A Theatrical Approach to Teaching Social Understanding to Kids and Teens with Asperger’s Syndrome* (Schneider, 2007)

Script 1: Stranded on a Desert Island (memorized and performed by campers)

**Sam:** It is so hot here!

**Bill:** I am so thirsty!

**Pete:** I am so hungry!

**Joe:** I so love this desert island!

**Sam:** I wish I could be in Alaska, where it is nice and cold.

**Bill:** I wish I could be at McDonalds, drinking a thirst-quenching soda.

**Pete:** I wish I could be at my Grandma’s house, eating all of her homemade cookies.

**Joe:** Wow, it’s lonely. I wish all my friends were back here so I would have someone to talk to!

**Sam:** What am I doing back here?

**Bill:** Wait, how’d this happen?

**Pete:** Where’d my grandma go?

**Joe:** Hooray, you’re back, my wish worked!

**Sam, Bill, Pete:** Oh, man!

Script 2: The Zoo Keeper (narrated by instructor and pantomimed by campers)

Ladies and gentleman, I would like you to meet our amazing zoo animals!

First, the hopping tiger (tiger hops)

And now, the spinning monkey (monkey spins)

Did I mention the tiger can play the drums? (tiger plays drums)
And the monkey can, too (monkey plays drums)

Oh, and the tiger can balance on one foot. (tiger balances on one foot)

And the monkey can do jumping jacks. (monkey does jumping jacks)

Well, one day, the animals got so fed up with performing, they turned on the zookeeper, and he was never heard from again…… (monkey and tiger chase zookeeper off the stage)
### Appendix D: Drama and Theatre Activities Used during ACT Camp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Directions</th>
<th>Targeted Social Skills</th>
<th>Targeted Drama Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Character of the Space    | Instructor names a substance (e.g. bubbles, glue, water) that the room is filled with. Actors explore moving as if that substance were really there.                                                           | • Imagination  
• Response to caregiver interaction                         | Imagination           |
| The Magical Pencil        | Actors pass a pencil around the circle. The pencil “transforms” into different objects (e.g. a telescope, a toothbrush) each time it changes hands.                                                          | • Imagination  
• Joint attention                                              | Imagination           |
| Inanimate Objects Pantomime| Actors pull the name of an object (e.g. chair, video game controller) out of a hat, and have to “use” the object without talking. The rest of the group attempts to guess the pantomimed object. | • Imagination  
• Joint attention  
• Initiation of peer interaction                                | Imagination           |
| Friendship Circle          | Actors hold hands in a circle with closed eyes. One actor begins by squeezing a neighbor’s hand, and the squeeze travels around the circle as quickly as possible. This is a great end-of-the-day activity. | • Initiation of peer interaction  
• Response to peer interaction                                   | Cooperation           |
| Zip Zap Zop                | Actors stand in a large circle and take turns passing “energy” to their peers by clapping in an unspecified pattern. The claps must be accompanied by eye contact and the words “zip,” “zap,” or “zop.” | • Eye contact  
• Initiation of peer interaction  
• Response to peer interaction                                   | Concentration         |
| Walk Like A…               | Standard Version: Instructor calls out a stereotyped character (e.g. ballerina, astronaut) which actors embody while moving around the space. Mask Version: Instructor calls out an emotion which the students, | • Social cues  
• Social perceptions  
• Response to caregiver interaction                              | Observation           |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Interaction Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Director         | In groups of three, actors choose to be a director, vision, or actor. The actor closes his eyes, the vision strikes a silly pose, and the director attempts to verbally position the actor into the same pose without touching. | • Theory of mind  
• Initiation of peer interaction  
• Response to peer interaction  
• Joint attention | Cooperation                  |
| Floating Feather | Actors take turns passing an imaginary feather around the circle in creative ways (e.g. blowing, dropping) while visualizing the speed and weight of the moving feather. | • Imagination  
• Joint attention | Observation                  |
| Mirrors          | In pairs, actors take turns leading slow movements, which the other actor must mirror exactly.                                                                                                               | • Eye contact  
• Joint attention  
• Social cues | Observation                  |
| Machines         | One actor begins a repetitive movement and a sound. Each actor adds on to the “machine” to create a moving picture. Variation: At the beginning of the game, name a function that the machine would achieve. | • Imagination  
• Joint attention (for the variation) | Cooperation                  |
| Uncle Glugg      | The instructor or an actor (portraying “Uncle Glugg” the story teller) orally makes up a short story while other actors embody the characters and setting of the story.                                             | • Response to peer interaction  
• Response to caregiver interaction  
• Social perceptions | Imagination                  |
| Claps/Snaps      | Actors stand in a large circle and take turns passing energy around the circle in creative ways (e.g. overhand, behind the back, bouncing). Each actor claps or snaps when “catching” the energy, and again when “throwing” it. | • Imagination  
• Joint attention  
• Eye contact | Concentration                 |
<p>| Twinkle, Twinkle Little | One actor attempts finish “The Itsy Bitsy Spider” while the rest of actors observe.                                                                                                                         | • Response to peer interaction | Concentration                 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spider</th>
<th>the group simultaneously sings “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.”</th>
<th>Social cues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Three Changes | In pairs, actors take one minute to observe everything about their partner’s appearance, then they face away from each other and change three things about themselves (e.g. put hair behind ears, put shoes on opposite feet). When actors face their partners again, they try to guess the differences. | • Initiation of peer interaction  
• Response to peer interaction | Observation |
Appendix E: Human Subjects Permission Letter

Eastern Michigan University
College of Education
Review Committee on Student Research
Involving Human Subjects Committee Action

Project Title: Autism Centered Theatre: The use of drama and theatre activities to improve social skills in children with autism spectrum disorder
Principal Investigator (must be a faculty member): Dr. Ana Claudia Haten
Department: Special Education
Co-PI / Student Investigator: Olivia Rhoades

Approved [ ☑ ] Conditional Approval [ ☐ ] Disapproved [ ☐ ]
Exempt [ ☑ ] Not exempt [ ☐ ]

Reasons, if disapproved:
N/A

Comment:
Thanks for getting the instruments to me. The study is approved for data collection.

Signature for the Committee: ___________________________ Date: July 24, 2013

* Please note that all Human Subjects Proposals need to be submitted well in advance of scheduled solicitations of potential participants and that no data involving Human Subjects should be collected prior to approval.

NOTE

1. Investigators are obligated to advise the review committee of any change in protocol that might bring into question the involvement of human subjects in a manner at variance with the considerations on which the prior approval was based.

2. Every 12 months from the date of this approval or at shorter intervals where specified by the committee, the investigator must submit the proposal to the committee for re-review.

3. Investigators are required to immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an unanticipated negative change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research, and shall report the circumstances promptly to the review committee for its further review and decision on continuation or termination of the project.