The Uses of Applied Theatre

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The Uses of Applied Theatre

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

THE USES OF APPLIED THEATRE

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010.

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*Applied theatre* is an umbrella term describing the practice of borrowing concepts from the conventional theatre and applying them to different disciplines. This thesis focuses on the use of applied theatre in teaching effective communication skills. Using the work of the Ariel Group and personal experiences working with the VCU da Vinci Center as examples, this paper demonstrates ways that underlying theatre concepts are used to teach communication skills. Additionally, this paper argues that there are many advantages for using theatre professors to teach communication skills to non-theatre students in other disciplines through the use of applied theatre methods. To support this argument examples are taken from the Critical Communications Group and my experiences teaching Public Speaking.
Introduction

Theatre can be useful outside the contexts of a performance. Theatre experiences have the ability to make powerful differences in the way people interact with each other and their world. The theatre’s ability to be a transformative medium allows it to be used by other disciplines to achieve ends that are outside the scope of performance. The term “applied theatre” describes the practice of using theatrical elements for purposes other than theatre. It can be difficult to clearly define the boundaries between conventional theatre and applied theatre because in many cases there exists a substantial overlap. However, there are differences which allow for distinctions to be made between the subject of theatre and applied theatre.

The differences between conventional theatre and applied theatre fall under two headings. The first is how theatre is used, and the second is why theatre is used. In terms of how, conventional theatre typically involves active performers onstage and a passive audience watching. In contrast applied theatre discipline typically involves theatrical elements blended with other academic disciplines, and usually encourages turning passive spectators into active participants. In conventional theatres, the answer to why theatre is used is to tell a story with dramatic action by creating representational illusions of events. Applied theatre practitioners use theatre to create a change in the world outside the typical theatre discourse (Prentki 10). Small differences like these between how and why define applied theatre in relation to conventional theatre. In order to gain a deeper understanding of applied theatre, it is helpful to look closer at the different types of applied theatre disciplines and the intentions behind using theatre.
Applied theatre is an umbrella term that can be used to describe a number of disciplines using theatre in unconventional ways. Disciplines existing under the umbrella of applied theatre include: heritage community theatre, theatre for social change, interventionist theatre, drama in education, participatory performance practices, prison theatre, theatre in health/education, and theatre for conflict resolution/reconciliation (Prentki 9). There are many possible distinctions, and each form of applied theatre has distinct theories and specialized practices drawn from many different branches of philosophy and social sciences (including anthropology, sociology, psychology and education). In essence, applied theatre forms are interdisciplinary and hybrid practices (Nicholson 2). In applied theatre, theatre itself becomes the means to different ends.

How is theatre able to be used in so many different ways? What makes theatre so useful to such a wide range of disciplines? The answer lies in the underlying concepts and practices that constitute the theatre. Because the term theatre itself includes such a broad range of activities many other disciplines have found something useful within its practice.

Some examples of the underlying concepts and practices that make up theatre are action, story, perspective, communication, environment and transformation. Because not everyone agrees on what these terms mean, I will briefly describe how I am using them here. A play is made up of actions that tell a story, told from a particular perspective. Story and perspective need to be clearly communicated to the audience. Environment helps deepen the story and perspective communicated to the audience by creating an illusionary reality. In some cases, particularly if the environment is strong, theatre has the power to cause a transformation in the thoughts, feelings, or behavior of the participants and audience. Many of these same concepts are used by applied theatre disciplines.
For example, an applied theatre practitioner might realize that their project needs to tell a clear story. The applied theatre user might then research how theatre practitioners use story for conventional theatre, and then modify the concepts or practices that work best. Similar approaches are used for action, perspective, communication, environment and transformation.

Describing how each applied theatre discipline uses theatre would be an enormous task. For my purposes here it is sufficient to say that how each discipline uses theatre will depend on the needs and intentions of their project. There are many ways of describing *how* applied theatre is used, but there are relatively few reasons *why* it is used. The intention of the practitioner is an important guideline in describing a work as applied theatre. Looking at the intention of applied theatre practitioners also allows for an easier way to categorize the many different disciplines in use.

Note that the following classifications of applied theatre are developed out of my understanding of applied theatre’s application and the intentions of their users. Other people might use different classifications. Like many of the territories involved in applied theatre studies, there is much room to debate these boundaries. The following classifications will help place my research in applied theatre into useful categories. It is helpful to think of these categories as guidelines and not firm rules for determining the classification of applied theatre disciplines.

In order to allow for simplified groupings of applied theatre disciplines, it is first necessary to categorize the different intentions of applied theatre practitioners. I have identified three intentions encompassing the general goals applied theatre practitioners strive for in their work. These three intentions can be categorized as: activism, community building, and education. These categories represent three of the general intentions applied theatre practitioners
strive for in their work. These categories are also based on three interrelated theatre movements of the late-twentieth century that highly contributed to the development of applied theatre (Nicholson 8).

Applied theatre falls under the category of activism when it involves using theatre practices and concepts to promote change. This change might be social, political, economical, environmental or personal change for individuals. Types of applied theatre this includes are theatre for social change and theatre for conflict resolution/reconciliation. One example of this type of applied theatre can be found in monologist Mike Daisey and his recent piece *The Last Cargo Cult*. In this piece Daisey explores society’s trust in the value of money. Daisey admits that the system governing money’s place in society may be too entrenched to be radically changed, but he hopes his monologue will help promote change in individuals’ values, which in turn could affect larger social and political values concerning money. Activism applied theatre is promoting change in its audience and participants. Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal are probably two of the most famous practitioners of this type of applied theatre.

Community building applied theatre is characterized by the participation of community members in creating theatre that has a special connection to their community. Types of community building applied theatre include heritage community theatre and prison theatre. An example of a group utilizing this type of applied theatre is the Jewish Theatre of Grand Rapids. Their theatrical productions have Jewish themes and universal appeal in order to build community among the Jewish and non-Jewish members of the Grand Rapids area. Some of Augusto Boal’s community building work might also be defined as this type of applied theatre.

My third and final category is applied theatre in education. Types of applied theatre in education include theatre in health and drama in education. Y Touring Theatre Company is an
example of using theatre to promote health education. Based out of the Central YMCA in Kings Cross, London, the Y Touring promotes healthy living choices by performing scenes dealing with health related issues. Their recent production *Wasted* explores the health issues surrounding binge drinking (ytouring.org.uk). When theatre is being used as an instructive tool, it falls into the category of applied theatre in education. This thesis is mostly concerned with this aspect of applied theatre.

The most important factor for deciding if a project should be labeled as applied theatre is the intention of the work. All three categories incorporate theatre concepts and practices into their work, yet *how* they use theatre and *why* they use theatre is not for mainstream theatre consumption. The examples above were chosen because the answer to *how* they use theatre is almost identical in likeness and quality to a conventional theatre performance, but I argue that they are actually examples of applied theatre because of *why* they use theatre. All of the above examples have the intention to beneficially impact individuals, communities and societies by using the concepts and practices theatre has to offer. The intention to use theatre to create change in the world outside the theatrical discourse is crucial to defining applied theatre.

To summarize, applied theatre is an umbrella term used to describe the use of theatre practices and concepts outside the context of a conventional theatre institutions. This is possible because of similarities that exist between the underlying concepts and practices of theatre and the disciplines that seek to apply it. There are a large number of applied theatre examples that can be classified into three categories based on the intention of the practitioner. Activism, community building, and education are the three general intentions I have identified. The intention of the practitioners is crucial in defining a project as applied theatre, especially when the project shares similarities with traditional performances.
This is a very brief overview of applied theatre. It provides a basic context for understanding how and why theatre concepts can be applied to other fields of study.

**Applied Theatre for Communication Skills**

I have conducted research in a very specific area of applied theatre. The category my research falls under is applied theatre for education. Specifically within that category, the intention behind my research is to use theatre concepts and practices to teach effective communication skills to individuals.

There is a great need for teachers who can effectively develop the communication skills of their students. Communication skills are universally necessary in all aspects of life. At home or in the workplace, communicating with another human is a routine event. Yet good communication skills are often neglected in most training or educational institutions. Because of this, most people have an unrealistic idea of what it takes to be a good communicator.

Most people think they are good communicators because they can speak or write well. But communication skills involve a lot more than expression through verbal and writing skills. Good communication skills involve active listening, which includes hearing the unspoken words of another person. Active listening also involves using the eyes to pick up on the physical messages a person is sending out. Good communication skills require a person to be empathetic with others. A good communicator also reaches out to others and gives them the kind of attention they would like to receive. A good communicator can use all of the body’s means of expression, which includes both verbal and physical skills. Lastly, good communication skills require knowledge of one’s own self.
Likewise one of the underlying concepts of theatre is the need for clear communication. The audience relies on the performers to clearly communicate the story being told. Actors require very finely tuned communications skills in order to deliver the nuanced messages that compose the story of the theatre piece. Developing these communication skills constitutes a large part of an actor’s training. The practices actors engage in to develop their communication skills can be applied to teaching others how to be good communicators. In short, training actors means training good communications skills. These same methods of training can be used by applied theatre practitioners.

This paper will focus on two goals. One goal is to reveal how theatre concepts, particularly actor related ones, can be used to teach communication skills. To do this I will first identify the underlying theatre concepts applied theatre practitioners use. Then I will explain how those concepts are used.

The second goal is to establish the many advantages for using theatre professors to teach communication skills to students. To accomplish this goal, I will point out similarities between teaching theatre and teaching communication skills to non-theatre students. In doing so I hope to demonstrate why theatre professors have advantages in teaching effective communication skills using applied theatre methods.

In summary this paper seeks to explain the use of applied theatre in teaching communication skills and how theatre professors are particularly well positioned to teach those skills.

Each chapter is organized as follows:

Chapter 1: Applied Theatre in Practice: The Ariel Group demonstrates how theatre concepts are used to teach communication skills to non-theatre practitioners. This chapter details
the work of the Ariel Group and their book *Leadership Presence*. The Ariel Group uses applied theatre methods to teach business leaders how to be better communicators. Central to the Ariel Group’s applied theatre pedagogy is the PRES model (Being Present, Reaching Out, Expressiveness, and Self Knowledge). Each element of the PRES model will be described as well as and my understanding of how it relates to underlying theatre concepts, especially acting. The chapter will also describe how these concepts are helpful in teaching effective communication skills to business leaders. This is one example of how theater concepts can be used to teach communication skills.

Chapter 2: Applied Theatre in Practice: The da Vinci Project is a personal narrative of how I used my theatre training to be an effective communicator. My communication skills were developed primarily in the conventional theatre, but I have used those skills to my advantage outside the theatre. Through experiences with my da Vinci team, this chapter offers further evidence of applied theatre’s ability to teach communication skills.

Chapter 3: The Advantages of Theatre Professors: The Critical Communications Group follows the work of another applied theatre company. The CCG has conducted a scientific pilot study on using theatre professors to teach clinical empathy skills to medical students. In this chapter I will discuss some of the advantages theatre professors have for teaching effective communication skills. The CCG and their work is a successful example of theatre professors teaching communication skills.

Chapter 4: The Advantages of Theatre Professors: Teaching Public Speaking is a personal narrative about my experience teaching while using applied theatre methods. I had great success as a Public Speaking instructor and I credit a lot of that success to the theatre concepts I borrowed and applied in the classroom. This serves as another example of the
advantages theatre professors have in teaching effective communication skills with applied theatre methods.

The Conclusion will summarize what I have learned and point out directions for future research.
Chapter 1: Applied Theatre in Practice: The Ariel Group

This chapter focuses on how an organization called the Ariel Group has modified theatre concepts to teach communication skills to business leaders and others. Here is some background information on the Ariel Group and how they started using applied theatre.

The Ariel Group was founded in 1992 on three fundamental beliefs:

- One. Presence - the ability to connect authentically with the hearts and minds of others-is a critical skill for anyone who leads, collaborates with or seeks to influence others.

- Two. The experiential methodology of the training that a professional actor receives is the most effective and enduring way to develop the skills of presence and apply them in the real world.

- Three. Making authentic connections dramatically improves the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations, unlocks our most generous selves and makes the workplace, and the world, a better place

(arielgroup.com).

Cofounders of the Ariel Group, Belle Linda Halpern and Kathy Lubar, were once professional actors. As actors they became proficient communicators; acquiring skills like effective listening, presenting ideas clearly, and building self-confidence. They recognized that these skills were also useful outside the contexts of theatre and began teaching others how to become better communicators.

The Ariel Group recognized that business leaders had a great need for effective communication skills. By making slight modifications to the training that develops communication skills in actors, the Ariel Group believed that they could teach business
professionals how to be better communicators. They were successful in this endeavor. The Ariel Group is one of the most widely known companies using applied theatre methods to teach effective communication skills.

The Ariel Group has taught communication skills to many private and public organizations using their experimental applied theatre methods. Some of the Ariel Group’s clients work for huge companies like GE, Mobil, Capital One, Boston Consulting Group, and Merrill Lynch. In these big companies, the Ariel Group is often called in to coach high level executives or to host workshops in developing the communication skills of the management. Other clients include teachers, politicians, U.S. Customs officers and even prison inmates. Always the Ariel Group’s intention is to teach better communication skills through the concepts and practices they have learned from the theatre.

**Discovering Presence**

Shortly after they began teaching workshops, the Ariel Group stumbled upon a significant discovery. Many people attending their workshops began to transcend their normal communication modes and began making authentic connections between one another. This transcendence was slightly different and more complex than practicing basic communication skills. The Ariel Group called this deep connection presence.

Presence, as defined by the Ariel group, is “the ability to connect authentically with the thoughts and feelings of others” (Halpern 3). People with presence seem to have a personal magnetism that attracts people to them. People with presence make the person they are communicating with seem like they are the most important person in the world. Presence is a
valuable skill in many different fields, but it is not always easily obtained. Having presence involves several sets of communication skills working together harmoniously. How one develops these communication skills to acquire presence is the foundation of the Ariel Group’s unorthodox and experimental pedagogy.

The idea of presence is also an underlying concept of theatre, especially in acting. Actors want presence because it distinguishes their excellent acting abilities. People are attracted to actors who have presence. Audiences want to watch actors with presence because the characters they portray are authentic and believable. Actors with presence add to the quality of a theatrical production, which builds their notoriety leading to bigger and better roles. For the actor to develop their stage presence, they must train hard in developing their communication skills.

Some people are gifted with a natural presence. For everybody else it is fortunate that presence is made up of trainable skills. The proof of this is found in the training actors undergo. Some actors are naturally gifted at their craft, for others acting is a harder struggle. Gifted or not, the skills of acting can be taught through the development of certain communication skills that lead to authentically connecting to the thoughts and feelings of others. Quality actor training programs can serve as a model for developing the communication skills necessary to achieve the Ariel Group’s idea of presence.

The Ariel Group teaches people how to achieve presence for interpersonal communication. This presence is not meant to be exclusively used in the conventional theatre. The presence the Ariel Group develops is meant for leaders to motivate and inspire the people they lead. Presence as taught by the Ariel Group is applied theatre.
The PRES Model in *Leadership Presence*

Developing presence, like actor training, consists of training in sets of skills. The Ariel Group describes 4 elements, each training different skills, that need to be addressed in order to develop presence. These four elements are Being Present, Reaching Out, Expressiveness and Self-Knowing. Each of these elements is related to underlying concepts of actor training in theatre, but those connections will be made in further detail below. These four elements make up the acronym PRES. The PRES model is used by the Ariel Group in their pedagogy for presence and it is the subject of their popular book, *Leadership Presence*.

*Leadership Presence* is a remarkable guide for developing presence by working at the skills presented in the PRES model. Developing presence is useful for everybody. Communication is a necessary function of living in society and there are universal benefits to developing good communication skills such as those found in *Leadership Presence*. However the book’s target audience is business leaders. Most examples used throughout the book concern high level business executives with dilemmas. With the Arial Group’s coaching, and applied theatre methods, the business leaders are able to overcome their problems learning valuable lessons towards achieving leadership presence.

Other examples used prevalently through *Leadership Presence* are stories concerning famous actors and their need for the communication skills presented in the book. However this book is not meant to teach actors how to achieve presence on stage. The theatre related stories serve only as illustrations of the similarities between having presence on stage and having presence as a leader. These illustrations strengthen the credibility of applying theatre in the teaching of business leadership presence. Starting in Chapter 1, *Presence: What Actors Have*
That Leaders Need, the book quickly establishes that theatre is important in the work. The authors clearly state that they “will draw heavily on the acting profession for concrete principles, practices, and stories about the development of presence” (Halpern 5). Much of the language in the book is drawn straight from the theatre. This makes Leadership Presence a prime example of applied theatre.

Leadership Presence is organized by chapters according to the PRES model. In each chapter the reader is given a lesson, how it relates to theatre, examples of how the lesson can be useful for leaders and practical exercises that can be performed to develop a skill related to the lesson. Many of the exercises present are modified theatre exercises. Some exercises are not directly borrowed from theatre, however the effectiveness of the exercise can be attributed to underlying theatre concepts.

What follows is a brief overview of Leadership Presence highlighting some examples of applied theatre and how it is used: first, how aspects in each element of PRES relates to underlying concepts in acting or theatre, second, how the elements of PRES are useful to business leaders, and finally how exercise are used to train individual skills. Many of the examples are taken from the book, however the interpretation of the underlying concepts shared with theatre are largely my own.

**Being Present**

The first element of PRES is Being Present. This requires a state of mind that is free from distractions and able to focus on what is happening in the moment. Good communication requires listening, and a person is not able to fully listen if they are distracted by thoughts,
emotions, or anxieties. By eliminating distractions, a person opens up and listens to the stimuli happening around them. It is not easy to eliminate distractions so one of the skills a person needs to develop is how to bring their attention back to the moment after a distraction.

Actors understand how important it is to be present. Actors need to be physically, mentally, and emotionally present while acting. An actor who is not “living in the moment” will not be able to bring honesty and believability to the character. Acting takes a lot of focus on the internal and external impulses of the moment to bring life to a character. When an actor is distracted their actions become nonspecific or the character loses vitality. When this happens communication of the story to the audience gets muddy. Actors need to be present in their work to be effective and lively communicators of the story.

One common distraction that interferes with an actors work is nervousness. Many people falsely believe that actors are not nervous in front of an audience. In truth, numerous actors experience nervousness before a show. One way of dealing with their nervousness is to focus on breathing and the physical stimulation in the body (Halpern 29). By placing their focus on the body and on the breath, an actor becomes aware of what their breath and body is doing right now. This focuses their thoughts on the moment and the nervous thoughts often dissipate. By lessening the nervousness the actor is more present in their acting; allowing them to be more effective communicators onstage.

Nervousness is also a problem for many business leaders. Many business leaders speak in front of people on a regular basis. If the business leader is distracted by nervousness, then message they are trying to deliver will likely be less effective. Business leaders need ways to bring their attention back to effectively communicating with their coworkers after nervousness has distracted them. The techniques actors use to bring their attention back to the moment and
lessen nervousness can also work for business leaders. Like the example mentioned above, a business leader can focus on breath and stimulation in the body and this will help push aside the nervous thoughts.

Dealing with nervousness allows a person to focus more on the moment, allowing better listening to happen and increasing the effectiveness of the communication process. But focusing the mind to be in the moment is the only the first part of Being Present. The second part is acting in the moment which requires flexibility.

It is a fallacy to think that just because traditional theatre is scripted that it is exactly the same in every performance. The moment by moment actions and discoveries made by actors might change each time a scene is performed. Actors need to stay flexible so they can spontaneously respond to any new actions or discoveries encountered in a scene. Actors who are inflexible will not appear to be characters living spontaneously onstage; instead they will look like actors who are taking predetermined actions. To learn how to be flexible and take action in the moment, actors train with improvisation exercises.

Improvisation teaches actors how to respond in the moment. One important idea governing improvisation exercises is keeping the scene moving forward. This requires actors to accept the actions given to them by other actors and to build off of those actions. In other words, an actor must say “yes” to any action that is given and then add something to that action. This will keep the scene progressing in a forward direction. If an actor says “no” to a given action, the progress of the scene stops. Actors need to communicate clearly with one another so that the intention of every action is plainly allowing for the next action to build upon the previous one. An improvised scene may change quickly, so actors must stay flexible to accept the directions and respond to them in the moment.
Business leaders sometimes find the need to keep a conversation moving forward. For instance, during brainstorming sessions someone might stop the discussion of an idea by continuing to reject it. The conversation comes to a halt as the naysayer continues to stubbornly refute any positive remarks or progressive conversation about the idea. In order to get something accomplished, a business leader needs to keep discussion moving forward. One way to do this is to use a modified improvisation exercises called *Big Bad Idea* (Halpern 71).

Here is how it works. When someone hears an idea they want to discuss, they will say “Big Bad Idea.” When they do, everyone else will have to spend the next two minutes finding ways to support that idea. Nothing negative can be said about it. Only positive, supportive solutions that could make the idea work are allowed to be shared. This forces everyone to accept the idea and move it forward, much like in an improvisation scene. This teaches flexibility as the idea keeps evolving new ideas have to be built upon the previous ones. This creative collaboration often leads to good ideas that would not have otherwise been discovered if the participants continued to stop the forward momentum of the conversation by saying “no” to everything. This is one improvisation exercise that is useful for practicing flexibility and keeping communication moving in a positive direction.

There is one last aspect of flexibility that is important for both actors and business leaders. Both need flexibility in their tactics. For actors it works this way: Each scene has an objective for the actor. Actions the actor takes in pursuit of the objective are the actor’s tactics. Theatre is more interesting to watch if the objective is difficult to obtain, so an actor encounters obstacles. When an obstacle is met, the actor must to be flexible and change tactics. This continues until the objective is reached, changed, or unable to be obtained. Because good drama
consists of objectives that are difficult to obtain many changes in tactics will happen. Therefore actors find the flexibility to shift tactics very important.

Flexibility in tactics is also important to business leaders. Business leaders want to pick the tactics that will achieve the objective the easiest. Business leaders also encounter obstacles that will require changes in tactics. The tactics business leaders will shift between are their leadership styles.

_Leadership Presence_ identifies four major leadership styles: captain, conceiver, collaborator, and coach. The specific details for each style are not crucial to this paper. It should be noted however that each leadership style utilizes different tactics. Depending on the circumstances, some tactics are more effective than the others. Every leader has their preferred leadership style congruent with the tactics they prefer to use when communicating with others. A good leader is flexible and can change his leadership style if it will help reach the objective and make communication more effective. A less flexible leader will continue to operate in their preferred leadership style even if it is not yielding positive results.

The mentioned leadership styles are roles a leader can play. The exercise to work on different leadership roles is experimentation in different situations. Depending on the situation the leader must be able to change between roles. Each leadership style needs to be developed individually and authentically, much like an actor playing multiple parts. This is another influence of the theatre on the applied theatre work found in _Leadership Presence_.

The examples of applied theatre presented above are all concerned with bringing a communicator into the present moment and equipping them skills to act in that moment. When a person is truly Being Present, they will identify communication problems as they are happening and quickly respond with a change in tactics. This can allow for more effective communication.
The above examples have demonstrated how the Ariel Group has taken practices and concepts from theatre and applied them to teaching the communication skills needed for Being Present.

**Reaching Out**

The second element of PRES is Reaching Out. Reaching Out involves having empathy for others and the ability to establish relationships with others. Without the communication skills obtained by Being Present, it becomes very difficult to develop the skills associated with Reaching Out. When communicating with others many important things are left unsaid. Being Present opens a person up to hearing the unsaid, but Reaching Out gives that person the skills to act on that information. The first step to Reaching Out is learning how to empathize with others.

Empathy is the ability to understand the thoughts, feelings or experiences of others. In the theatre, empathy allows actors to understand the characters they portray. Empathy allows actors to find the thoughts, feelings and experiences that motivate the character to behave in manner prescribed by the text. When the actor understands these essential details they can then synthesize that information with similarities in their own life. Honest believable acting does not involve an actor trying to be someone completely different from himself. Instead an actor is playing a particular facet of himself that is shared with and informed by their understanding of the character. Empathy allows the actor to understand the character.

Business leaders are not trying to portray characters. Leaders need to be themselves. However, empathy is useful to leaders because it allows them to understand how other people think and feel. Understanding others allows leaders to identify the needs of others. This will eventually give leaders the insight to communicate with others in the manner that they wish to be
communicated in. For example, if someone prefers direct conversation then the leader should communicate directly to that person. That is the second step to Reaching Out made possible by empathy.

Empathy is not easy, but it is always possible. When it is difficult to empathize with another person, business leaders can use the power of the Magic If (Halpern 101). This is a thought exercise many actors use that is associated with the teachings of Russian theatre legend Constantine Stanislavski. By using the Magic If, actors imagine what it is like to be in another person’s situation. What would the actor do if they had the same background as their character? For leaders, contemplating Magic If questions can open up many new insights about another person. This is helpful for allowing empathy as it requires a leader to think about the thoughts, feeling and experiences that drive a person to behave the way they do. The Magic If opens the possibilities to understanding another person’s perspective. Using the Magic If to empathize with others is another example of using applied theatre methods to teach a communication skill.

Empathy is important for the communication process because it allows people to understand each other. Most people have blockers that interfere with the communication process. These blockers prohibit people from completely opening up to others. One way to help people lower their blockers is to empathize with them. When someone feels understood by another human being, they are more likely to open up to them. This allows for more effective communication.

As mentioned above, empathy is the first step to Reaching Out. The next step would be to give other what they need by actively listening to the unspoken words in their conversation. There are more aspects to Reaching Out with more applied theatre examples from Leadership Presence that will not be covered in this paper. This section is not meant to be a complete
recreating of Leadership Presence. It is meant only as a demonstration of how applied theatre is used in the Ariel Group’s pedagogy for teaching communication skills.

Expressiveness

The third element of the PRES model is Expressiveness. When speaking to other people, only a fraction of the communication process is expressed in the words a person says. Albert Mehrabian, a social scientist, conducted studies on elements of expressiveness. His finding suggested that words account for only 7% of a speaker’s impact. The voice, which includes tone and pitch, accounts for 38% and the body language 55% (Halpern 134). This means a huge percentage of the communication process is not what a person says; it is how they say it. If a person is not engaging their voice and body language, they are not communicating as effectively as they could. The importance using the full range expressive possibilities is highly recognized by actors.

Actors spend many hours rehearsing how to express themselves. How an actor expresses the actions and emotions of their character has a significant impact on the story of the performance. Actors need the message their body and voice are presenting to support the story intended to be told. The actor needs all elements of expression to be telling the same clear story. Therefore, actors train themselves to have a wide range of expression and how to control the message their body and voice are expressing. Much of an actor’s training involves opening up and controlling expressiveness.

Business leaders also benefit from being expressive. Leaders are responsible for the energy level of their work environment. A leader’s followers will subconsciously pick up on the
tone of voice and body language of the leader, allowing these expressive qualities to affect their mood. Leaders want to use their expressive qualities as tools for generating a positive work environment. When the leader is expressing authentic excitement it will be contagious and influence the mood of his fellow workers. The ability to express excitement is one example of how a business leader will benefit by being expressive.

Unfortunately, most people, including leaders, are pressured to be less expressive as they grow up. It is difficult to peel away the blockers people have put up that hinder expressiveness. Generally people feel uncomfortable using different ranges of their voice or incorporating their bodies while communicating with others. But as studies have shown, voice and body make up a huge percentage of a speaker’s impact. Therefore it is imperative that people learn to overcome their uncomfortable feeling about being expressive and allow their voice and body the freedom to be expressive.

One of the exercises suggested in Leadership Presence to help leaders be more expressive is to read a story to child (Halpern 155). To do this exercise right, the leader telling the story needs to emphasize the emotions in the story, such as fear, happiness, or sorrow. The leader should use different voices for characters, engaging the full range of their voice. Facial expressions, gestures, and other body language should also be utilized. I think children love exciting stories so the leader will must use the expressive qualities of their voices and body language to bring the story to life with authentic excitement of their own. I also think children are rarely harsh critics and reading to a child is a safe environment to push the boundaries of a leader’s expressive comfort zone.

This exercise’s effectiveness draws it strength from theatre. Telling stories is at the heart of theatre. But more than that, theatre has the ability to bring stories to life. The actor’s role in
bringing stories to life is to express the thoughts, feelings and actions of the character to the audience. Essentially the leader should try to act the story and bring it to life for the child. The exercise of reading a story to child will help the leader be more expressive by demanding the same type of expressiveness that brings the theatre to life.

Expressiveness is an essential element of theatre that is also a critical component in the communication skills needed by business leaders. The Ariel Group is using applied theatre to teach the development of Expressiveness as a communication skill. The first step to being more expressive is to develop the tools of voice and body. The next step is to use those tools to express authentic emotion and passionate purpose.

**Self Knowing**

The final element of the PRES model is Self-Knowing. It is important for a person to know who they are and how they perceive their world. Self reflection is beneficial to all people as it allows them to communicate internally and discover what is valuable in their life.

In the theatre, it was mentioned earlier that acting is finding the similarities between the character and actor and playing those similarities in a believable way. An actor needs to have a good understanding of self in order to find parallels with their character. An actor who has a deep self knowledge will be able to draw upon a meaningful reserve of experience that can be used to strengthen the choices they make as the character. Self-Knowing is an incredibly important skill for actors to develop and many actors enjoy the challenges of playing new characters because it offers another opportunity for self exploration.
Business leaders need self exploration for a slightly different reason than actors. Business leaders do not need to portray characters; they need to be their most authentic selves. To do this, leaders will need to know what their values are and let those values be reflected in their actions. A leader’s values are the principles and beliefs that are most important to them. Values guide a leader’s decisions. When a leader’s actions and values are aligned people recognize a genuine quality in the leader. A leader must make their important values a conscious part of their decision making process. Therefore a leader must spend time in self reflection to identify the values that are important to them.

One way to help facilitate self reflection is to do an exercise called the River of Life (Halpern 219). The leader draws a river on a page and label one end “Birth” and the other end “The Present.” Then the leader reflects on the many different people and experiences that have helped shape their life. These details are drawn as bridges, forks in the river, islands, or anything else that helps the leader represent particular elements in their life. Visualizing the influences that shaped the river help identify the values that have shaped the leader’s life.

The strength of this exercise is that it symbolically displays important aspects of a person’s life. Symbols can be powerful tools. In the theatre, symbols are used to add deeper meaning to a dramatic work. By creating a River of Life, a person is telling the story of their life in a symbolic way. The symbols contribute to a deeper self understanding in the same way they add a deeper meaning to a dramatic work. This is the underlying concept borrowed from the theatre that makes the River of Life exercise effective.

Exercises that develop Self-Knowing help leaders bring their life experiences into their actions in the same way great actors bring their life experiences to the roles they play. Others will recognize this as authenticity in the leader or actor. Self-Knowing requires a person to
identify the experiences and values that have shaped their life. The Ariel Group demonstrates the similarities between the actor and business leader have in this final element of the PRES model.

**Presence Conclusion**

The PRES model helps leaders achieve presence. Presence allows for authentic connections to be made between people and requires excellent communication skills. Being Present means being aware of what is happening in the communication process and being flexible enough to act in the moment if necessary. By Reaching Out, empathy is established to understand the needs of others and to build a connection with them. Expressiveness teaches a leader to use the range in their voice and body to more accurately convey the messages they are trying to communicate. Lastly, Self-Knowing allows values to be identified and communicated through the actions of the leader; giving the leader authenticity. These communication skills work together to give the leader presence; the ability to authentically connect to the thoughts and feelings of others.

The method that the Ariel Group uses to teach presence draws heavily on theatre concepts, particularly from practices of actors. As the examples have demonstrated, applied theatre methods can be used to teach effective communication skills to business leaders. Next I will share how my own theater background has helped me effectively communicate with my teammates on a small group project.
Chapter 2: Applied Theatre in Practice: The da Vinci Project

Shakespeare once wrote, “All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players.” I have come to appreciate this metaphor and often view the world through a lens heavily tinted by theatre concepts and practices. My capabilities as an effective communicator are no exception. Indeed, many of my communications skills were taught to me as theatre skills. I have chosen to apply those communication skills to experiences outside the theatre. One example is working with the VCU da Vinci Center. There I found opportunities to explore how I communicate with others in a small collaborative group setting and how applied theatre has influenced my abilities to communicate. The examples shared in this chapter offer further proof of applied theatre’s ability to teach effective communication skills.

Our da Vinci Team Project

I had the opportunity to work on a project with the da Vinci Center at Virginia Commonwealth University. The da Vinci Center for Innovation in Product Design and Development creates an interdisciplinary educational atmosphere where students can prepare for management roles in the global, technology-driven workplaces. The da Vinci Center integrates students from the VCU Schools of the Arts, Business and Engineering into teams. These teams complete projects in product development and design sponsored by one of the Center’s business partners. The projects extend beyond the classroom and have real world results as the
sponsoring companies will use the results provided by the da Vinci team. The project I worked on was sponsored by the Science Museum of Virginia.

The Science Museum of Virginia wanted our da Vinci team to design an innovation studio where scientists, engineers, and/or designers could collaborate on an idea, design it, and prototype it all in one central location. The Science Museum gave our team the following guiding principles for designing the studio:

- A space where people can create, present, and share innovation
- Offer digital connectivity
- Provide tools for prototype development
- Incorporate dramatic presentation systems, such as high definition televisions
- Accommodate groups as large as 25
- Adaptable to meet the museum’s needs
- Keep it within the $50,000 budget.

These guidelines left a lot of freedom for our da Vinci team to design the innovation studio. The ideas our da Vinci team conceived would later be the plans the Science Museum would take to build the innovation studio.

Designing the innovation studio required creativity, ingenuity, and above all collaboration. The members of my da Vinci team met twice a week to discuss our ideas and to delegate the work necessary for completing the project deliverables. Throughout the project, I discovered that my communication skills played a notable role in the team’s success.

There were six members on the da Vinci team assigned to the Science Museum Project. Two members were from the School of Engineering. They were Brent Puckett and Ken Shultz and both were studying electrical engineering. Two members were from the School of Business.
The first was Fatima Frojan Abalo, a Spanish exchange student working towards a business administration degree. The other business student was Ian Bennett whose concentration was in finance. The remaining two members were from the School of the Arts: Andrea Manrique, an interior design student, and myself, studying Theatre Pedagogy.

Each member of the team brought their own skills to the work. The engineering students were able to tackle the technological needs while the business students were able to handle the marketing aspects of our project. Andrea’s interior design skills were incredibly useful for designing the room and visualizing our ideas. I brought my communication skills to the group and served as team leader. Some of my duties included facilitating meetings, serving as a liaison to the Science Museum, and delivering presentations about the project. As the leader, I needed to understand what kinds of communicators my teammates were so I could more effectively engage them during the meetings. To gather this information I relied on the observation skills I acquired in theatre.

**Making Observations**

When I first met my da Vinci team, before anyone even said a word, I noticed their body language, how they dressed, and the tiny mannerisms they subconsciously produced. When they spoke, I listened for the values that were expressed unspoken in their words. By consciously looking for these traits I turned my observations into useful information. Later, I used this information to more effectively communicate with my teammates. It takes skill to glean useful information from the observations of others and I credit my theatre training with providing me with this fine skill.
As a movement instructor in theatre, making observations is a critical aspect of my work. These skills were developed through my experiences in theatre, particularly when using masks as an actor training tool and as a stage combat instructor. For example, one observation trick I was taught by a stage combat instructor is to not look too hard. By softening the focus of your eyes, they can more easily pick up on movements that are out of the ordinary. Once an unusual movement is noticed, the observer can give it more attention and discover the movement’s source. My observation skills are strong because I use the skills daily in theatre classes and rehearsals. Such theatre influenced observation skills used outside the conventional theatre make them examples of applied theatre. Theatre not only advanced my abilities to make observations, but it also matured my instinct for interpreting what I observed.

In a theatre course, I learned that everybody has habitual actions that they have developed through their life. These habits offer insights to the inner workings of the person. Habitual actions form in response to a need in a person’s life and are commonly expressed through a physical mannerism. Identifying these mannerisms and the needs that caused them is not an exact science and wrong assumptions can be made. However, a practiced eye will be able to find useful clues about a person that can be supported by other observed behavior. The accumulation of observations can offer insights that serve as starting point for understanding the needs of others.

Here are some of the observations I made during the first meeting with my teammates and the conclusions I drew from them. I will describe Fatima, Andrea, Ken and Brent as a group because I observed many of the same traits within all four of them. They all dressed very neatly, with collared shirts on the men and skirts on the women. Attention had been given to their appearance as they knew they would be making first impressions at the meeting. Adding to this
observation I saw that their backpacks and papers were neatly ordered and organized. From this, I determined that they were detail-oriented people who liked structure in their lives. I believed these four were introverted people because they would often need someone else to initiate conversation before they would speak. When they did speak, it was sometimes difficult to understand what they were saying because their voices were quiet. There was not much expression in their voices, instead their vocal inflections were very flat. I believed they felt uncomfortable expressing themselves to new people and were even less comfortable expressing emotions at any time. These are just some of my initial observations, but they were supported by later instances.

During our work on the project, these four spent a lot of time working out minor details of the innovation studio. As I had predicted, they were all detail-oriented in conversation. Structured was particularly important. For instance, Andrea created time lines to keep her individual assignments organized and Ken would often bring well designed handouts to the meeting to discuss his ideas. Also their tendency to not express emotions surfaced once when a heated argument broke about the artistic concept for the innovation studio. I was the only member of the team who expressed any frustration through my volume and tone of voice while these four remained very controlled in their expressiveness. Each of them seemed very uncomfortable being expressive in front of new people. As the team spent more time together these four eventually opened up a tiny bit, but when we had to give presentations to the museum staff they were very anxious about speaking in front of others.

Ian on the other hand was nearly a polar opposite of these four teammates. He spoke confidently and clearly, often starting conversations with other people. His plain white T-shirt and jeans were wrinkled and dirty. He wore a white sweat band on his head. I thought him to be
less structured and more relaxed about letting things happen. On the first day Ian spent a lot of
time texting on his iphone, taking himself out of the group conversations. However, when he
was asked a question he quickly answered as if he had been engaged in the conversation the
whole time. Ian proved to be an enigmatic study. Despite what seemed to be an apparent lack of
attention placed on his appearance, I believe Ian’s look was deliberate. I believe he wanted
people to think him less capable in hopes that less would asked of him from the group. I did not
come to this conclusion on the first day, but arrived at it after many observations. Ian rarely
volunteered to take on duties, but when duties were assigned to him, he always finished on time.
I think he was quite capable but was not motivated to take on extra responsibilities. These are
just a few of the conclusions I was able to draw based on observations of my teammates. Now
will share how I used that information to improve communication in the group.

When we met, I would structure the meetings to prioritize the pressing topics we needed
to discuss. This was necessary because my detail oriented teammates often spent too much time
discussing one particular element of the project without allowing time for more important
matters. Knowing that many of my teammates would not jump into the conversation on their
own, I would often ask them their opinions to make sure they had the opportunity to contribute.
This helped make everyone feel ownership of the project. Another thing I began to do was
delegate work by suggesting names instead of asking for volunteers. This was meant to get Ian
involved because he rarely volunteered to take on assignments, but it also help spread the work
load evenly across the group. It was useful for me to know everybody’s capabilities so
assignments could be suggested to the right people.

Observations became a regular part of the meetings for me, and many of my insights
prove to be fairly accurate. With this information I could anticipate how my teammates were
going to behave, and this allowed me to make informed decisions on the tactics I took to facilitate group communication. The foundation of my observation skills are rooted in my theatre practices. My use of these observation skills and the subsequent positive affects they had on group communication make this an excellent example of applied theatre.

**Self Knowing My Role**

Another lesson I found incredibly helpful while communicating with my da Vinci team was knowledge of my own habits. I tend to assert my influence when working in a group. Often this leaves me with leadership responsibilities. With the da Vinci team, I was reluctant to volunteer for extra responsibilities. I was very busy during the project and did not want the added stress of leadership. I attempted to assert myself slowly in the group hoping that a different team member would emerge and take up the mantle of leadership. However, I soon discovered myself in the role of leader. I was prepared for this because I understood that taking on leadership responsibility is one of my default settings.

There was a time in my life when I was not consciously aware that I habitually take on responsibility. This self knowledge came directly from an acting class when it was pointed out by Dr. Aaron Anderson and my peers during an exercise called *Sit-Stand-Walk*. The exercise was designed to draw attention to the habitual actions of the student actors. The idea behind the exercise was to make students consciously aware of habits so they could use them or hide them depending on the needs of a character. For instance, if a student actor’s habits were to appear small and timid, they could use these natural traits when playing a character that is also small and timid. However, to play a brave or bold character, the actor needs to be aware that their natural
tendency to be small and timid will work against them. For me, this exercise to discover habits revealed a significant discovery about myself that transcended my training as an actor.

The *Sit-Stand-Walk* exercise was simple. A student would sit, stand, and walk around the room while the rest of the class observed. Then a neutral mask was placed on the student and they would again sit, stand, and walk around while the rest of the class continued to make observations. People naturally look at a person’s face so the purpose of putting on the mask was to focus attention on the person’s body language, making it easier to identify habitual physical actions. The class would describe the physical habits they saw in the student who was sitting, standing, and walking. Through this habits were identified and probing questions were asked to see if it was possible to discover the underlying need that caused the habit to form in the first place.

When I did the exercise, one observation the class made was that I have strong broad shoulders. However, my shoulders contained tension in a certain place that made it appear as if they were carrying a great weight. There was strength in my broad shoulders, but it also contained weariness.

Aaron asked me, “Do you often take on extra responsibilities?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Pretty easily?” He pressed.

“Yeah,” I realized that I did.

“You are the person in your group of friends that often plans things, aren’t you?”

“Ok that’s creepy. How did you know that?”

“I bet you’re usually asked to be group leader.”
At that moment, I realized my habit to take on leadership roles. This was a habit that extended beyond just a physical trait that could be scene in my acting. This was a behavioral tendency of mine to add responsibility, even when it would cause me added stress. From that point forward, I became consciously aware of my tendency to take on leadership roles and worked to turn that habit into a choice rather than a subconscious reaction.

I wanted to know what need I was satisfying by taking on leadership roles. Further self exploration into the habit yielded two more significant findings. One was that I like to appear strong and in control. As a communicator this sometimes hinders me from expressing myself, especially if it involves my weaknesses or failures. Also my need for control manifests itself in my leadership tactics when I take charge of a situation. This is great for moments of crisis, but can be a hindrance in other situations. Habitually, I take control of a situation. Knowing this tendency towards forceful leadership tactics makes it easier to spot and easier to change tactics when the situation calls for it.

The second thing I learned is I have a genuine need to help others. I take on the leadership role because I know I will be helping others in that capacity. This can offer great service in communicating with others because I naturally want to give to them what they need. However, it causes stress in my own life when giving too much to others takes away from myself and my close loved ones. Knowing this tendency helps it easier for me to say “No” to others, which is sometimes a needed response.

As leader of my da Vinci team I would find great need for my knowledge of my self. There were times when everyone on the team was stressed and conversations were starting to fall apart. One particular event happened near the end of the project when Ken and Brent wanted to make changes to some of the plans Andrea had drawn up. As the leader I played the mediator. I
started by taking charge of the situation and telling Andrea what she could do to accommodate Ken and Brent’s suggestions. Quickly, it became obvious that this was not working. Andrea was unreceptive because she felt this section of the project was her chance to be artistically expressive. I realized I was stuck in my default habits to control the situation and needed to change tactics. I appealed to Andrea that our team mates wanted to also have input in the artistic designs of our project. I knew it might cause her some added work to make changes and offered to help her. In the end, Andrea agreed to take the new ideas into consideration and try to incorporate them in her artistic vision. This particular example demonstrates how knowing myself made an impact on how well I could mediate a conversation. I recognized myself taking control by default, but changed when I realized it was not the best tactics for the situation.

I would not be so well informed about my capabilities if it were not for a particularly insightful theatre exercise. Theatre played a critical role in discovering significant insights about my habit to be a leader. This knowledge has beneficially served me outside the theatre. For my own development, the *Sit-Stand-Walk* exercise became a power example of applied theatre.

Two examples have been provided from my experiences working with the da Vinci Center explaining how applied theatre has helped me communicate effectively with my team. The da Vinci Project offered many more examples, but I feel that these two examples sufficiently demonstrate how theatre can be applied to communication skills. Observation skills that I developed through my theatre training gave me the ability to glean information from my teammate’s behavior. I listened to their body language and behavior to inform my decisions of how I should communicate with them. The knowledge I gained from my theatre courses makes me aware of the type of communicator I am and gives me the confidence to lead effectively.
These examples represent how applied theatre has been useful in shaping me as a communicator. 
I believe many of the same theatre concepts and practices that helped me achieve these communication skills can be used to teach others how to be better communicators as well.
Chapter 3: Advantages of Theatre Professors: The Critical Communications Group

Many theatre professors is to teach their students the necessary skills to be capable actors. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, many of the skills being taught in theatre are related to effective communication. When these skills are taught for the purpose of developing a student’s acting abilities, these skills stay within the realm of the conventional theatre. However if a theatre professor teaches these skills to people who were not acting students, with the purpose of making them better communicators, then their teaching would be considered applied theatre. As mentioned before, intention is one of the critical components for defining applied theatre. In this chapter, by looking at the work of the Critical Communications Group, I will explain how theatre professors have an advantage in teaching communication skills.

When I use “theatre professor” I am referring specifically to professors who teach and train acting students. Acting skills, as opposed to other theatre disciplines such as stagecraft and theatre history, have the most in common with the communication skills I discuss, therefore I believe that theatre professors who teach acting are best suited to use applied theatre to teach communication.

The CCG Pilot Study

The Critical Communications Group (CCG) was founded by David S. Leong, Dr. Aaron Anderson and Dr. Alan Dow. David S. Leong is the Chairman, Full Professor and Producer of
the Department of Theatre at the Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr. Aaron Anderson is an Associate Professor of Theatre at VCU. Dr. Alan Dow is the Assistant Dean of Medical Education at Virginia Commonwealth University / Medical College of Virginia. Dr. Dow oversees the clinical education of medical students at VCU/MCV.

The CCG uses performance-based training to teach effective communication skills. Like the Ariel Group, one area in which the CCG uses their applied theatre pedagogy is teaching leaders how to be better communicators. In addition to that, the CCG has conducted research on using theatre professors to teach communication skills to medical professionals and students. I will focus on this area of their work.

In a pilot study, the CCG tested the effectiveness of using theatre professors to teach clinical empathy skills to medical students. Clinical empathy “is the skill of recognizing a patient’s emotional status and responding, in the moment, to the unique needs of the patient to promote better clinical outcomes” (Dow 1). Clinical empathy is crucial for positive therapeutic doctor-patient relationships between patients and their doctors. As Francis Peabody says, “The secret of the care of the patient is caring for the patient” (Dow 1). The CCG observed that medical training programs were not sufficiently teaching clinical empathy. Therefore, the CCG sought out a new method for teaching clinical empathy.

The Critical Communications Group knew that theatre professors were excellent teachers of communication skills. Two of the founding members are theatre professors and they have a personal understanding of ways of teaching communication skills. The CCG continued to identify advantages for theatre professors by examining more similarities between the underlying concepts of theatre and clinical empathy. They observed and hypothesized:
Clinical encounters are similar to the interactions of talented actors. During patient encounters, expert clinicians perceive empathy cues from patient and compose verbal and nonverbal responses that are tailor-made to what they observe and hear. Similarly, actors on stage must identify the different vocal tones, body language, and degree of emotion expressed by other actors. They then respond, in the moment, with a carefully measured reaction. This skill, similar to a skillful clinician’s interaction with a patient, is vital to successful theater. Professors of theater dedicate much of their classroom time to teaching these observational skills. They seek to teach their learners to react uniquely in each performance with the appropriate vocalization, posture, and verbal and nonverbal expression. For assessment purposes, theater educators use instruments to measure the students’ abilities to observe nonverbal cues, listen to the cadence and expression of others, and respond appropriately. As learners then become experts, they develop the subconscious ability, known as deep acting, to use these skills subconsciously. (Dow 2)

With these thoughts in mind the CCG conducted a pilot study. In the study, theatre professors taught clinical empathy skills to an experimental group of medical students during four 90-minute sessions. A control group was also used. The group that received intervention from the theatre professors improved their clinical empathy skills more significantly than the control group. A number of follow up studies were also conducted each with positive and statistically significant findings. Taken as a whole these studies suggest that theatre training techniques can be modified to teach clinical empathy skills and that theatre professors were capable of teaching these skills to medical students.
Theatre Professors Have Advantages

I have had the opportunity to attend several of the CCG’s workshops where I noticed many influences of theatre on their work. One important workshop I attended was for medical faculty in geriatrics and palliative care. The workshop was given to teach the physicians in attendance how they could more effectively teach clinical empathy skills using the applied theater curriculum developed by the Critical Communications Group.

In the workshop I noticed that the CCG members did not speak exclusively with theatre vocabulary, although many times they would identify how specific concepts related back to the theatre. At points, it appeared as if the CCG members were proactively defending their qualification to teach clinical empathy skills with applied theatre methods in case any of the workshop attendees had doubts. Dr. Aaron Anderson and David S. Leong made it very clear how theatre training connected to the clinical empathy skills they were teaching. They also pointed out several advantages theatre professors have in teaching communication skills to non-theatre students including criteria for grading the progress of the students. Since the purpose of the CCG’s workshop was not to inform the participants about applied theatre, these advantages were only briefly touched on during the workshop. However, these advantages are what my research is centered on therefore I will elaborate on them below.

From these workshops, I discerned several advantages theatre professors possess for teaching communication skills such as clinical empathy. The advantages I find most prevalent are that theatre professors have a range of perspectives, from teaching everything in one lesson,
to coaching students, to recognizing habitual actions. These are my observations of how theatre professors are advantageous for teaching clinical empathy.

**Perspective**

Perspective makes a big difference when communicating. One advantage of a theatre practitioner teaching clinical empathy is that they can offer a new perspective to the lesson. Theatre professors generally think outside the box and are highly creative problem solvers. Part of what makes this creativity possible is that theatre professors have to shift their perspectives regularly. Because shifting perspectives is a necessary ability in acting, theatre professors must understand and utilize this ability in order to teach it to their students. For instance, an actor regularly shifts his perspective between himself as the actor and the perspective of the character. An actor should be aware of the audience’s perspective and try to ensure that his actions on stage will read clearly to the audience.

Furthermore, theatre professors regularly shift between looking at their students’ work from the point of views of a director, an acting coach, and a teacher. As a director, a theatre professor is looking for the final product of the actor’s work. As a coach, a theatre professor is looking at the process the actor is developing in the work. As a teacher, a theatre professor is looking for the lessons that can be taught from the actor’s work. Shifting perspectives allows a theatre professor to identify different aspects in a student’s work. When teaching clinical empathy, this means that the theatre professor can see a medical student using clinical empathy skills and see their decision making process, their end results, and what lessons need to be taught to the student.
A theatre professor knows that understanding someone else’s perspective is a key component to empathy. A doctor will see many patients throughout the day and will need the ability to empathize with all of them. Because theatre professors are regularly looking through different perspectives they can help teach this important aspect of empathy to medical learners.

**Teaching Everything in One Lesson**

Teaching clinical empathy skills are difficult because they can not be taught as a linear progression of skills. Communication is a web of interconnected skills. This means that all the necessary skills for clinical empathy are always present in every lesson and exercise. When making choices on what actions to take in a clinical empathy encounter there is no single right answer; instead, there are more effective choices. Everything is dependent on the circumstances of the encounter. This makes it difficult for the instructor to know in advance what lessons will be most available. This is how theatre professors teach on a regular basis.

In an exercise, if a student fails at one element of clinical empathy it will cause a chain of cascading failures. The web of interconnected skills involved in clinical empathy requires all the skills to be taught at the same time. However in practice this is impossible because it would overload the student with information. Particular skills will inevitably be focused on during a lesson in order for the information to be absorbed. The particular skills that get highlighted will depend on what is observed during the lesson and the needs of the students. The possibility remains that any of the clinical empathy skills could be taught at any time from any lesson or exercise. Therefore the instructor must be prepared to talk about everything and be flexible enough to improvise on the lesson plans when new teachable moments arise.
In acting there is a similar need to teach all of the skills at the same time. If an actor fails at one element it will cause a similar cascade of failures in other aspects of their acting. Theatre professors plan certain exercises to highlight specific lessons in acting, but they must always be prepared to talk about other acting lessons that surface in class. Theatre professors must be prepared to teach anything and everything in a single lesson. Acting skills are interconnected exactly like clinical empathy skills and this congruency allows theatre professors to effectively teach them both.

There is no single action that will solve an encounter requiring clinical empathy. It requires a process of recognizing needs and making effective choices. There is no short cut through the process, and this can frustrate doctors who try to develop quick, one-size-fits-all processes for diagnosing patients. The same is usually true for young acting students. They too want a short cut. However quality theatre education stresses the importance of developing the process of acting much more than the final product of acting the scene. Theatre professors know the frustrations of building a process, but also know why the process is so important. A process is needed to deal with interconnected skills in any art form. Communication is an art form; therefore, it needs to be taught like an art form. A process is needed to deal with interconnected skills in any art form. Theatre professors are experts at instilling this process and so have a particular advantage when teaching clinical empathy.

Coaching Skills

Role-playing scenarios are common exercises medical students will encounter while learning clinical empathy skills. In a typical role-playing scenario, two roles must be filled, the
doctor and the patient. In general, the scenario gives the doctor role an encounter that must be handled using clinical empathy skills. However the doctor role will not know what skills to use or choices to make when the scenario starts. All of the doctor’s choices must be made during the scenario as they are contingent on the actions taken by the patient. A typical role-playing scenario not only gives the student a chance to practice making observations and responding in the moment, but also always keeps open the possibilities for other lessons to be taught.

While developing their clinical empathy process the student playing the doctor will inevitably make poor choices that will hinder their success. These poor choices are also teachable moments. One method many instructors use is to point out the other choices the student could have made. However, directing actions in this way is an inferior method for teaching communication skills. Such a teaching strategy only offers alternative solutions; it does not address the problem of why the student made the poor choice in the first place. Having the students discover why they made poor choices helps them develop their process to use clinical empathy skills. Developing such abilities is what a coach does.

Theatre professors understand the importance of coaching students through a process of discovery in a scene. When student actors make poor choices in a scene, a theatre professor might ask them what they saw or heard that caused them to make those choices. This tests if the students are paying attention to what is going on around them. If the student can not recall what caused them to make a poor choice, then they probably were not making observations. In such cases the students might be asked to do the scene again, only paying more attention to making observations. If the student can recall what impulse caused them to make a choice, the professor can ask other guiding questions to help lead the student to making important discoveries for themselves. In this way of teaching, questions are asked to lead students as opposed to giving
solutions that dictate what the students must do in this specific event. This same process could be used for coaching the typical role playing scenario for clinical empathy.

Coaching a scene or a role-playing scenario takes patience from the instructor to not jump in and direct the student in what actions they should take. Instead, a good coach will help guide the student in figuring out their own process for making choices. Being a coach is a regular role for a theatre professor, and it gives them a better approach for teaching students how to forge their own way through a role-playing scenario.

Habits

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, recognizing habitual actions plays a significant role in successful communication. Because recognizing habits is fundamental to the acting process, theatre professors have made it a priority to help find and eliminate habitual actions that interfere with students’ acting. However, habits are usually unconscious. This makes it difficult for students to eliminate them because the student does not know they are doing them. Having an outside eye, like a theatre professor’s, trained to make observations facilitates the detection of habits in actors or non-actors alike.

The first step to eliminating a habit is to bring attention to it. One way theatre professors often do this is to ask the student to exaggerate the habit. This makes it bigger and more noticeable. Another method is to excessively use the habit to an absurd degree. Repetition of the habit will interfere with the communication process and draw attention to why the habit has a negative impact. Theatre professors are used to this process.
Not all habits are negative and knowing which ones are positive can have a beneficial impact on communicating with others. Just as it is important to be able to recognize negative habits, a person must first be conscious of their positive habits before they can make use of them. Theatre professors are experts at recognizing when a habit is helping a student and encouraging the use of it. The ability to recognize and deal with both positive and negative habits is another advantage theatre professors have for teaching communication skills.

The Critical Communications Group has been successful at using applied theatre techniques to teach communication skills like clinical empathy. In workshops and presentations the CCG demonstrates the advantages theatre professors have in teaching these skills. In their research they have specifically tested the ability of theatre professors to teach clinical empathy. Here I have outlined many theatre influences in the CCG’s work and have highlighted a few examples that help explain why theatre professors have an advantage when teaching communication skills.
Chapter 4: Advantages of Theatre Professors: Teaching Public Speaking

Knowledge about theatre can also be translated into the ability to teach Public Speaking. For instance although my undergraduate education included only one course in speech, I have been very comfortable teaching public speaking because of the knowledge and skills I have acquired working in theatre. The many similarities between public speaking and theatre allowed me to teach the public speaking as if it were an acting class. Not only did this approach allow me to teach the class, I believe it actually gave me a significant advantage in teaching the communication skills required for the course.

My speech students came from many different educational disciplines. There were electrical engineers, fashion designers, physicists, public relations consultants, international students, and even a couple theatre students. Each of the students brought their own learning modality based on their background and my job as the teacher was to help each student make sense of the material and to use this material to develop their communication skills. I found my theatre training quite useful in teaching such a diverse group because flexibility and creativity were often required to satisfy each student’s learning needs. For instance if someone did not understand the lesson, I could use improvisation exercises to clarify the point. Indeed I discovered that theatre had prepared me well for handling many of the challenges presented to me in teaching this course.

Like the members of the Critical Communications Group, I felt it necessary to explain why a theatre practitioner was teaching Public Speaking. Doing so allowed me to build my
credibility with the class as I explained the many similarities between theatre and public speaking. The most important similarities I pointed out were that both theatre and public speaking require a person build a relationship with and communicate a message to an audience. This requires the actor, or speaker, to overcome their own anxieties and project confidence. The class trusted that I was qualified to teach them these skills.

In all three sections of Public Speaking that I taught, I came across a similar challenge: many of the students were intimidated by the idea of speaking in front of others. To overcome their anxieties, I created an environment that was safe and supportive (and similar to ones I have experienced in theatre courses). I also taught skills that built confidence in their ability to engage an audience with a speech. By pointing out and eliminating the obstacles that were preventing them from success, my students discovered a process for delivering speeches that they could use outside of the classroom. The successes I had teaching can be attributed to applied theatre.

**Authentic Expectations of Failure**

My first step to creating a safe environment was to authentically engage my students. On the first day of class, I told the students this was the first class I had ever taught by myself and that I was a little nervous. This could have been disastrous as the students might not have respected my authority, thought me inept, or tried to take advantage of my inexperience. But instead my students respected my openness and honesty. I had proven that I respected them enough to share my insecurities with them and in return, I hoped they would respect me back. This built an instant relationship with the students similar to an actor sharing their vulnerabilities.
to an audience. The authenticity of my “character” was acknowledged and my presence in the classroom started the class on a positive note.

Telling my first class that I had never taught public speaking before had an additional effect too. It pointed out that that I was not perfect. Even in future classes I would admit that I was not perfect and explain that I am still learning how to be a teacher. This established the classroom environment where the process of learning was stressed. In other words, the students did not need to feel the pressure to be perfect and a type of common ground was established in which we all recognized that everyone was in the class to learn. By sharing a classroom experience together we would help each other improve our skills. One of theatre’s beneficial features is that it requires collaboration and teamwork. By establishing this common ground I hoped that the students would help work together and not try to seek individual glory.

In theater, I have learned that actors need to experiment with different choices when developing a scene. These choices involve taking risks; sometimes resulting in brilliant discoveries, but many times resulting is failure. This makes failure an inevitable part of the process of acting. I wanted to extend this philosophy to my public speaking classroom. I extend an invitation to my students to take risks and fail. Many of them were reluctant because they had been conditioned by grading systems in other courses that equate failure with poor grades. I explained that in public speaking classes failure was expected and that I would grade them on overall improvement rather than on perfect execution of skills. I shared with them the philosophy of one of my theatre professors, Dr. Aaron Anderson, who often says that students are always allowed to fail as long as next time they fail better. Several students said they really liked how I kept the pressure off of them when they were delivering a speech. They knew that if they messed up in one area it was not going to completely hurt their grade. As long as the
students continued to learn from their failures and improve they could still receive a high grade in the course.

I realize that teaching Public Speaking, like teaching clinical empathy or acting, requires that all skills be present at the same time. One failure will cause cascading failure in other areas. Furthermore all of a student’s skills are not equally developed when they start a public speaking course. These insights gave me an advantage in teaching speech because I recognized that I needed to help the students build a process for using their communication skills at the same time. I could not simply teach a formula for delivering a good speech. The students needed to know how to prepare in advance but also how to make changes in the moment based on the feedback from the circumstances and their audience. In our short time together I focused more on teaching a process of delivering a speech than on the final product of their performance. This again is similar to how I teach an acting class.

I found that authentically opening up to my students and giving them permission to not be perfect grants many advantages. It allowed the students to feel less pressure when they gave a speech which in turn allowed their work to be more genuine. My experiences teaching theatre has allowed me to train my speech students the same way I would train an actor, allowing them to safely take risks and learn from their mistakes.

Pedagogy of Negativity

My pedagogy developed in the theatre. There is no denying theatre’s influence in my teaching courses such as Public Speaking. One of these influences is the via negativa, or negative way. Jerzy Grotowski summarizes the via negativa as “not a collection of skills but an
eradication of blocks” (Grotowski 17). In its purest form this type of pedagogy does not provide any answers, but rather only presents questions. I imagine using the *via negativa* in this way would frustrate the non-theatre students in my speech classes to a point where they no longer cared to learn. The students expected to learn skills that would help them be better public. The compromise was that I taught them a collection of skills, but still I heavily enforced the concept of eradicating blocks.

Using the *via negativa* allowed me to point out things that were preventing students from delivering an excellent speech. In essence each thing I pointed out was a stumbling block on a student’s road to success. When I point out one of these blocks, it became the student’s responsibility to remove that block. Once the block was removed, the student improved. But if the block remained, it would trip up the student again and they would fail in the same way (which is the only non-acceptable failure).

By explaining this to the students, I established the primary type of feedback the students were going to receive from me. Usually it was “negative feedback” because it concerned their failures. However I pointed out that such criticism only sounds negative, while in truth was given to be constructive. I occasionally gave “positive feedback,” commenting on the successes of the student, but I believe students learn more by improving in the areas where they are failing. That is why most of my feedback was negative.

I set the tone early that I would give direct, honest feedback. Some students enjoyed the straightforward comments while others found it more difficult to hear. I was sensitive to the feelings of the student, but not overly so. I wanted to help my students learn to accept critical feedback without getting defensive because this skill is useful for their future careers. When speaking with Dr. Kenneth Kahn about the VCU da Vinci Center, he mentioned that one of his
favorite things about working with students from the School of the Arts was their ability to take criticism without getting defensive. He said:

Engineers are quick to defend their work, and so are the business students, because they were taught there is a right way of doing things and they feel like they are the ones being told they are wrong. The arts students, on the other hand, they usually handle feedback well because they know it’s not about them personally, it’s about the work.

Because of my theatre background, I understand how difficult it can be to hear feedback and not get defensive. This allows me empathize with my students’ feelings but still maintain the goal of conditioning them to receive critical feedback.

I also encouraged the student to participate in giving feedback to each other. When I cast myself as the primary giver of negative feedback, the students responded by supporting each other with positive comments. This also helped build the class unity I sought. Encouraging the students to participate helped develop their skills at giving critical feedback too. When I opened the floor to feedback I asked the students for objective observations rather than subjective opinions. I adopted this method from a mask theatre course I took. With masked theatre, the audience’s observations and feedback are essential to learning the style. In mask classes, the teacher uses the feedback given by the students to gage how well the students understand the material. Furthermore this type of class participation also increases the number of eyes watching a given moment, thus allowing for more elements to be commented on. Together the class and teacher give a wealth of useful feedback. This proved to be a highly successful strategy for teaching Public Speaking as well.
Theatre has positively influenced how I teach my students in the classroom. Through negative sounding comments I pointed out where the students needed to improve. In most cases the students successfully improved or completely removed their stumbling blocks. By the end of the course the students were more skilled at making observations and giving and receiving constructive criticism, and had additional communication skills that were not in their text book. But these are only some of the general ways theater influenced how I taught Public Speaking.

I also used applied theatre in my classroom in other ways. Some were simple exercises such as a physical and vocal warm ups. Some were more complex like using a Shakespearian scene to discuss ethics. Using theatre heightened the students’ ability to engage with the activity and highlighted the importance the lessons. This in turn made the lessons more memorable. In short I drew from the underlying need theatre has for action by taking the action contained in theatre and giving my students active ways to learn about public speaking. Applying theatre in this way also made the lesson fun which generated motivation to come to class. Here are three different examples of how I applied theatre in my public speaking course.

**Neglected Warm Ups**

The first example is the use of a physical and vocal warm up. Arguably, warm ups are not uniquely tied to theatre. Warm ups are a generic activity and each discipline requiring one will customize it to fit their needs. For instance, both boxers and dancers stretch before they engage in their physically demanding events. However a boxer will likely give special attention to the muscle groups in his arms while a dancer may give more attention to the legs. Both boxing and dancing are physically demanding activities, but the specifics of their warm ups vary.
Neither the boxer nor dancer will likely perform a vocal warm up because it is not necessary for their event. Singer will warm up their voice, but do not always do a physical warm up. In contrast actors need both physical and vocal warm ups. Acting can be incredibly taxing physically, vocally, and even emotionally. To prepare for the emotional challenges of a role, many actors develop a pre-show routine that helps establish the right state of mind for their character. An actor’s warm up has much in common with the needs of Public Speaking.

Obviously, the voice needs to be warmed up before delivering a speech. These warm ups could include singing scales, tongue twisters, or even practicing a speech. I borrowed tongue twisters from my theatre warm ups and gave them to my speech class. The tongue twisters forced articulation of consonant sounds (which are often otherwise dropped at the end of words). Another element of the vocal warm up I taught was howling like a siren from the lowest register in the voice all the way up to the highest. This includes the full range in the voice. Because public speakers need to be expressive with their voices, it is important that they have a thorough vocal warm up.

The physical warm up a public speaker needs is not as intense as an actor’s warm up. It is a good practice for a speaker to stretch all the major muscle groups in their body as this helps blood circulation which in turn increases the speaker’s energy level. The body should be warmed up so that it is free to be expressive during the speech. The face is the most physically expressive part of the speaker’s body and the area most people are conditioned to look at. Therefore, a public speaker should dedicate some time to warming up their facial muscles.

One of my favorite facial warm ups is *Lion-Face, Lemon-Face*. First the facial muscles are expanded as wide as they can be. This looks like a lion’s roar. Then the face is scrunched together as if the person just ate a sour lemon. Back and forth the face goes from a lion to a
lawn. Doing this exercise right requires the students to look ridiculous. My students felt silly but were amazed how effective it was. Many students reported that they felt more energized for their speeches and I also noticed a difference in their physical expressiveness.

Physical and vocal warm ups are important to both the public speaker and the actor. The reason for a warm up is to allow the voice and body to be more expressive. Like a musical instrument, the body and voice of the speaker needs tuning before a performance. Using warm ups I learned as an actor is one simple but effective way I incorporated theatre into my speech class. Warm ups bring energy to the class as they actively get the students moving around. I also believed that it was necessary to provide the students with some basic warm ups because the textbook for the course neglected to include any.

**Shakespeare and Ethics**

Ethics are important in public speaking. I chose to include discussion on ethics in the beginning of the course because I wanted the students to be aware of ethical guidelines governing public speaking. Because the students had not yet had a lot of experience speaking in front of the class, I sought a lesson that would give both a public speaking opportunity and a discussion on ethics. The solution was drawn from Shakespeare. I chose to use the Marc Antony Funeral Oration, found in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* Act III, Scene II, for a theatre exercise on ethics.

I picked this exercise for a couple reasons. First, it would push the students out of their comfort zone. Shakespearian verse can be difficult to speak and also difficult to understand. The students struggled to say the lines aloud and lacked expressiveness in their voices making it
even more difficult to understand the meaning of the text. Complete thoughts were interrupted causing greater difficulty in comprehension. The students had to try hard to succeed at this text, but most failed. Therefore, we occasionally stopped to summarize what Antony was saying to ensure that people had a basic understanding of the text. Slowly we made our progress through his speech. When we came to the end of the speech our discussion on ethics began.

Most students were unfamiliar with the history of Caesar’s murder prior to our study of Shakespeare’s text. This was important to my lesson plan because the students heard only Marc Antony’s side of the story and most blindly accepted his words as truth. I asked them what was unethical about this speech but the students could not come up with any obvious sinister examples. Nothing initially appeared to be unethical, but eventually someone mention that Antony’s use of Caesar’s will was unethical because it was private property that did not belong to Antony. There was a start. Another person then mentioned that Antony’s continual use of “honorable men” while referring to Brutus and the rest started to sound like an insult. This might be slander, which is usually considered unethical. However some argued that it was not unethical because Brutus killed Caesar and it was okay to insult a murderer. Now the students were beginning to see that ethical questions not always clearly answered. The students were finding minor ethical issues and missing the really important one. This was actually exactly what I wanted.

On the first reading, the students failed to hear the message Marc Antony was delivering between the lines. On the surface, Antony is reminding the people of Caesar’s greatness, but underneath that, he is rousing the people to start a violent revolt. Suddenly the students’ entire perspective changed. When I pointed this out to them I noticed a dramatic shift in their enthusiasm for the exercise. We worked our way through the speech again, this time picking out
the Antony’s call to action. Each new discovery gave the class a new appreciation for the complexity of Antony’s speech. The class discovered that Marc Antony was incredibly manipulative and underhanded. The crowd had started off supporting Brutus, but step by step, Marc Antony persuaded the crowd to his side. The students began to see how Antony’s actions were possibly unethical because he was trying to start a bloody revolt. I feel this lesson on ethics would be easily remembered because the students had to actively struggle with the Shakespearian text. Theater had helped bring action to this lesson.

I enjoyed the fact that the students had to reevaluate the text in order to understand it completely. This required finding the meaning between the words. The questionable ethics of this speech were not clearly visible to the students upon first reading. It took the students some effort to recognize the ethical question in the text. They learned that ethical questions are not always easily answered and that one needs to dig deep and think critically in order to find answers. I doubt if they would have learned these lessons as strongly through a less engaging exercise.

This speech had many advantages for teaching the students lessons on effective communication. The interconnective webs of public speaking skills were active in this speech. I used this speech as an example in many other lessons I taught during the course as well. For example when the class studied persuasive speeches I pointed out how Antony systematically lays out his argument to persuade his audience.

Each time I used this speech to discuss ethics for a new section of public speaking I would add a little more text. For instance by including Marcus Brutus’ speech that precedes Antony’s in the play we could compare and contrast why Antony’s speech was much more effective. We found that Brutus spoke in prose, symbolizing that he was speaking plainly to the
people. Brutus tried to appeal to the minds of the crowd; however his reasons were difficult to follow because he used many double negatives to make an affirmative point. Antony on the other hand spoke in verse. His poetic language roused the emotions of the crowd, making his message more appealing and persuasive. I used this example when we talked about emotional appeal in speeches.

As the class progressed I also brought in some film versions of the speech. The acting in the selections I chose were not spectacular, but the actors’ delivery of the text was significantly better than the delivery from my students. My students recognized that the meaning of the text could be better understood when the speakers put some expression in their delivery. As a result the students learned an important lesson that tone of voice has a significant impact on a verbal message. I used this example again when we spoke of vocal variety.

In my class I used Shakespeare’s text for a discussion on ethics and actors’ performances of this speech as examples of fine public speaking. I am not surprised that one of Shakespeare’s texts could serve so many educational purposes. Applied theatre allows teachers to add dramatic action to almost any lesson.

Mock Interviews

The last example of how I used theatre to teach public speaking is through the conducting of mock job interviews. Many of the students had already had job interviews and were familiar with the process. If we had done a traditional mock job interview, many of the students would have been bored. Therefore I wanted to give them something new and exciting that they would remember. So I gave them an interactive theatre experience.
First, I decided on the educational lesson I wanted to incorporate. It needed to be related to job interviews. I chose to focus on answering difficult questions that often come up in an interview. The class and I compiled a list of difficult questions like: What is your biggest flaw? Are you applying to any other companies? Are you comfortable working with people who live an alternative lifestyle?

All of the questions were difficult because they require finesse to answer. How do you make a flaw sound like a positive thing? Should you tell possible employers you are applying at the company’s competition? How do you respond to a question that is morally complicated? There were plenty of lessons the class could talk about, but talk is not as engaging as experiencing the lessons.

The students were given homework: they were to prepare for the mock interview as if it were a real interview. This meant dressing appropriately and practicing how they would answer questions in advance. They also had to do research on a company to which they might potentially apply, and ask questions at the end of their interview. This is important because at the end of an interview, a potential employer typically asks if there are any questions. A candidate for a job should ask intelligent questions about the place to which they are applying in order to demonstrate their interest in the company and leave a good impression. I made this a requirement for all mock interviews.

While the students were preparing for the exercise, I recruited actors to play the interviewers. Three of my theatre graduate student peers volunteered. This allowed the class to have several interview configurations. We could do a single interviewer or have a panel of interviewers. We could interview the students alone, with a partner, or in a group. We tried to
incorporate many different configurations because the number of people at an interview impacts how a person should behave.

The improvisational aspects of the mock interviews were fun. I had no idea what lessons would emerge from the exercise. I had to remain flexible in my teaching, but that is expected when teaching communication skills. The students also had to be flexible because anything can happen during an interview and I deliberately staged it to ensure something would happen. To ensure this I added one final level of difficulty to the exercise: not only were the students going to be asked the difficult questions, but the interviewers were also going to be rude and obnoxious. As a result the mock interviews became horror stories of real interviews, transforming them into entertaining scenarios for the rest of the class to watch.

The students were completely engaged. They kept waiting for the next awkward moment that their peers had to handle it all with the calm composure fitting proper interview etiquette. In one instance I called one of the actor-interviewers on his cell phone. Cutting off the student in mid-answer, the actor rudely took the call. The student had to wait patiently as their interviewer chatted away on the cell phone. It is not easy to remain calm when you are being disrespected in real life, and that was part of the lessons for these mock interviews. My students handled these situations like professionals. This was in part because they understood that the actors were playing and no true disrespect was intended. Nevertheless the students had an opportunity to experience rudeness and how they should handle it in a real interview. In order to make the entire experience more fun, and to ensure that the students were not completely helpless in the scenario, I gave the student’s the power to try and stump the actor-interviewers with their closing questions about the company. This gave the students a chance to make the actors sweat as they had to quickly improvise an answer.
These mock interviewers were rehearsals for the worst-case scenarios in life. Despite the pressure, the students had fun. They told me they very much appreciated the useful information and that it was easier to remember the lessons because the mock interviews were so entertaining. In fact one of students had a real job interview two weeks after our exercise. She said she was asked one of the difficult questions from class and was thankful that she had already practiced answering it. Another student wanted to hire me to conduct mock interviews for a student organization he was affiliated with because my interviews were much more fun than traditional ones. The mock interviews clearly demonstrate how creatively incorporating applied theatre in the class can have a significant impact on teaching communication skills.

In conclusion, teaching public speaking has been a significant opportunity for me to develop my pedagogy and incorporate applied theatre methods in my classroom. I discovered that many of my talents in teaching were first developed as theatre skills. My ability to establish connections with my students helped create a supportive atmosphere that encouraged risk taking. The use of theatre in the lesson plans provided the students with engaging activities that were entertaining and informative. The results of my experimentation with applied theatre in the classroom might not be as scientifically robust as many of the findings of the Critical Communications Group’s research, but I stand by them nevertheless. I have no measurable data to back up my claims but I do have the students’ testimony. In all courses the students enjoyed my uses of theatre to teach public speaking and many students told me that they were surprised how much they learned. I remain thoroughly convinced of theatre’s ability to be used outside of the stage and inside the classroom and can identify several advantages it has given me for teaching communication skills in public speaking.
Conclusion

The stories actors bring to life on stage need to be clearly told and expressed authentically. To make that happen, actors train hard to develop effective communication skills. Through applied theatre, non-actors can also learn how to develop these universally beneficial communication skills. I have learned many valuable lessons about how to use applied theatre for teaching communication skills and why it is advantageous to do so.

I have found that it is fairly easy to understand how applied theatre can be used by different disciplines. The secret is in the underlying similarities between the concepts and practices of theatre and the discipline seeking to apply it. For teaching communication skills, these similarities are very strong and make applied theatre a valuable tool for teaching these skills. By exploring my own background I was also able to identify how theatre played a critical role in developing my own communication skills.

Through my research I found that theatre professionals (actors, directors, professors and others) have several advantages for teaching communication skills. The theatre professional has an understanding of the importance communication plays in the theatre and by transferring this knowledge to a different area of study are able use applied theatre to be an effective instrument for the teaching of communication skills generally. In business this can lead to an increase in presence and business related rapport. In medicine, this can help doctors and nurses master clinical empathy skills in pursuit of better outcomes. For my own life, it has opened up the possibility of teaching courses outside of the theatre such as Public Speaking.
For future research, more exploration could be spent on the similarities and differences between applied theatre companies such as the Ariel Group and Critical Communications Group. Another area of research I am interested in pursuing is how specialized theatre philosophies such as Grotowski, Lecoq, or Chekov lend themselves to being applied outside the theatre. Do theatre professors who specialize in these schools of thought have additional advantages or disadvantages for teaching communication skills? One last area of research to consider is how theatre metaphors can be used to play a significant role in using applied theatre. Is the vocabulary used by theatre practitioners useful for applied theatre education? These are a few directions I would to take to continue to learn about applied theatre.

My hope is that interest in applied theatre will continue to grow. I hope universities will recognize that theatre practitioners can contribute to more than the artistic culture of the university. Using theatre as a cross-disciplinary tool for enhancing education in other subjects has many benefits such as invigorating the classroom with inspired activities and offering new insights through a dramatic lens. Teaching is part performance and that makes theatre training a benefit to all educators.

As for my own future, I will continue to use applied theatre in many aspects of my work. As a future theatre professor, I hope to find the opportunity to teach some classes outside the theatre so I can build an audience that respects what theatre has to offer. Finally, I also hope to offer my future students the possibility of using their own theatre training in other careers paths in case they decide that they no longer wish to pursue a life as an actor. These pursuits and others keep me interested in applied theatre now and will continue to do so in the future.
Works Cited


Additional Works Consulted


Vita

Matthew Patrick McKay was born on September 19, 1984, in East Lansing, Michigan, and is an American citizen. He graduated from Northview High School, Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2002. He graduated magna cum laude from Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana receiving his Bachelor of Arts in 2006. He received a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2010.