Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning   Masters Theses and Projects

Spring 5-6-2022

Examining the Effect of Social Emotional Learning on Student Perceptions of the Safety and Comfortability in the Theatre Classroom

Emily Wooten
egw17a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/metl

Part of the Art Education Commons, Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons, and the Secondary Education Commons

Examining the Effect of Social Emotional Learning on Student Perceptions of the Safety

and Comfortability in the Theatre Classroom

Emily Wooten

Abilene Christian University

Abstract

This study examined the effects of social emotional learning (SEL) on student perceptions of safety and comfortability in the theatre classroom. The researcher implemented SEL lessons using a morning meeting/class meeting format. Data was collected using a pre-survey, field notes, and focus group interviews. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method to look for recurring themes to use for poetic transcription. Four primary codes, entitled "Will You Please Join Us?," "Friend or Foe?," "Climbing the Mountain of Anxiety," and "The Love of Theatre" were used to create their own unique poem demonstrating the thoughts and emotions of the students in the classroom.

Examining the Effect of Social Emotional Learning on Student Perceptions of the Safety

and Comfortability in the Theatre Classroom

"The theatre classroom reminds me of a made-up home but instead of guests, there are intruders, people who had no choice but to come here." This quote was written by a seventh-grade student about the theatre classroom. The theatre classroom can appear like home to many. It's fun, exciting, and can bring joy and comfort to students who might be experiencing a monotonous day of learning. This homey environment must be cultivated by all those occupying it, including both teachers and students. All must work together to welcome and respect those in the space in order for it to continue to feel like home. But, when "intruders" have penetrated the safety of the home, it can no longer act as a home for those who found safety within its walls; instead, they find a place to fight for survival.

Purpose

Students often will describe the theatre classroom as a "safe space." This is the kind of environment that theatre teachers strive to create; students put together the best performances when the space feels safe enough to take risks. While this feeling occurs for some, there are other students who experience the opposite. Some will enter into the theatre classroom with extreme fear and anxiety and having to perform in front of others becomes very difficult. The space thus becomes "unsafe" and unwelcoming to the student; as a result, some students do not achieve as highly as others. To practice theatre properly and take risks in the theatre space, students must be comfortable in it and deem it to be "safe" (Lacoe, 2016, p. 1396) The theatre community has learned about the importance of creating

a safe community within a theatre classroom and how hard discussions can lead students to feeling more unified (Garcia et. al, 2018).

Through the implementation of morning meetings, a daily classroom ritual designed to build community, I sought to better understand students' perceptions of the theatre classroom as a "safe space" and facilitate further feelings of comfort within the space. Allen-Hughes (2013) discussed the importance of the morning meeting, or class meeting, as it will be referred to in this study, how it can be used to create community and begin the day/period right. I intended to investigate how student perceptions are influenced by the SEL topics, provided by Khazanchi et. al (2021), which served as the focus of our morning meetings. Possible classroom meeting topics could include but were not limited to, emotions, conflict resolution, decision-making, and relationships. The study addressed the following research questions:

Question: What are student perceptions of the theatre classroom?

Sub-Question: In what ways does a class meeting intervention influence student perception of the theatre classroom?

This action research study took place during my graduate year-long clinical teaching placement. This occurred in a West Texas city with a population of approximately 124,000. My placement was in Castle Middle School (all names are pseudonyms) with a population of roughly 850 sixth through eighth grade students. Castle MS is one of four middle schools in Abraham ISD. Castle MS demographics include 16.8% African American students, 45.4% Hispanic, 31.7% White, .3% American Indian, 2% Asian, and 4% of students falling under two or more races. At Castle MS, 71% are economically disadvantaged, 6.1% are English learners, and 18.1% of students utilize special education services.

Literature Review

When thinking about safe and comfortable spaces, one may be asking why this is necessary. Of course, it is never a bad thing for someone to feel comfortable, but why should we, as teachers, be making safety and comfortability a priority for our students? The importance of this concept can be seen in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow hierarchy is built from the bottom to top with five levels of needs that must be met for a person to feel truly fulfilled. At the second lowest level is safety needs, the focus of this study. This is described as protection, security, stability, and freedom from fear (Maslow, 1943). In order to reach the fulfillment of the needs above it, safety must be felt. Without comfort and safety within the classroom, students will experience insufficient trust, lack a feeling of belonging or respect from others, and struggle to reach high levels of achievement (Maslow, 1943). When student comfort is achieved, students are more likely to learn the content and have a more positive perception of the teacher and the instruction (Keiner et. al, 2014). Although we are easily able to identify the "why" in creating safe and comfortable spaces, it is far more difficult to identify the "how."

As humans, we know what it means to feel safe and can determine who and what makes us feel safe. But when identifying what we need to make an environment feel safe, it is difficult to determine where to begin and what exactly is necessary. Twemlow et. al's (2002) research provides some clarity on what is needed to create a safe space for children. He wrote that in order for children to feel safe, they need to be comforted and soothed when confronted with anxiety as a result of internal or external conditions (Twemlow et. al, 2002, p. 319). Students need assistance in navigating emotions and circumstances that they have never experienced before. Teachers and students must work together in absorbing, holding, and processing student

emotion and thoughts, both positive and negative. Doing so will help students feel safe and comfortable within the classroom.

Extraordinary things can happen when students find a safe space in the classroom. Students who feel more comfortable in a space are more likely to achieve higher levels of affective learning. Keiner et. al (2014) define affective learning as the learning of "student intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, methods students use to interact with content, and how students receive, respond to, and integrate information to form an intellectual disposition" (p. 36). This affective learning contributes to an increase in learning characteristics such as enthusiasm, persistence, and curiosity. A safe space is also beneficial for special education students, particularly those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Children with ASD benefit from having a space where they feel safe with research showing fewer negative incidents involving these students once a designated safe space is provided (Ross, 2019). A space that the children deem as safe and comfortable offers benefits to both neurotypical and neurodivergent students.

To help students manage and navigate their feelings and emotions, SEL was an integral tool for my research. SEL is defined by The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2015) as a "process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (p.1). This process helps children to navigate the world of their emotions and relationships, improve overall happiness (Kaşıkcı & Özhan, 2021), allows students to work within better classroom climates (Anguiano, 2020), and experience higher academic achievement (Kaşıkcı & Özhan, 2021). These items help to improve the student perception of the classroom so that it is able to become a "safe space."

There are many routes that can be taken with topics for SEL discussions. For my research, I pulled topics from a similar SEL study. Four topics of discussion were chosen for the ten days of SEL implementation: self-awareness and self-esteem, understanding and managing emotions, building friendships and being a good friend, and belonging (Cefai et. al, 2014, p. 119).

To implement these SEL discussions into the classroom, my study used a morning meeting format. Morning meeting is defined by Kreite (2006) as four specific components that begin a class. These components include greeting, sharing, group activity, and news and announcements (p. 111). While time disbursement for each section varied day to day, all four sections of a morning meeting were seen every day. Morning meeting is an effective tool to showcase the four SEL topics chosen because it allows for growth within the classroom community. This includes more caring conversations between the students (Kreite, 2006), fewer behavioral issues, improved class climate, and fewer internalized student problems (Cafai, 2014).

SEL is becoming a popular topic of discussion and study. There have been many studies on SEL, especially in elementary settings. Similar research has been conducted exploring this topic in the means of a morning meeting format, such as Anguiano's (2020) research that focused on general student perceptions of the intervention. My study expanded upon similar ideas while filling a gap in the research by discovering more about SEL in a middle school context, focusing on student perception of the safety and comfortability of the classroom, and by including SEL in a theatre classroom. In a class so heavily focused on emotions and experiences to create character, the two combined beautifully to teach students much about themselves and their fellow classmates.

Methods

This action research study took place in a Theatre II class consisting of primarily seventh grade students. Data collection methods included one pre-survey, head notes, and focus group interviews that provided me with qualitative data that was then analyzed using the constant comparative method. Findings were conveyed using poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997).

Participant Selection

Participants in this study included students in an eighth period theatre II course at Castle Middle School. Eighth period was chosen as the study population because of the larger class size, potential for improvement, and diverse student population. There were a total of ten students who chose to participate in the study. Eight out of ten participants were coded as economically disadvantaged, and one student was receiving 504 interventions. Seven students were identified as White, one as both African American and White, one African American, and one student identified as an American Indian/Alaska Native. Participants in the study included six girls and four boys. All participants received parent/guardian permission in order to participate in the study. Nine of the participants were chosen to conduct further research in the form of focus group interviews. These students were chosen based on their varying initial perceptions of the classroom as assessed by the initial survey: four of which had highly positive perceptions, three with moderate or mixed perceptions, and two with negative perceptions.

Data Collection

Implementation of the morning meeting model took place over thirteen school days, excluding days where school did not occur due to weather. Every day the classroom meeting began with physical and vocal warmups where students stretched, articulated consonant sounds, and practiced tongue twisters. Students were familiar with this practice as it was one that had been done from the beginning of the school year. Following warmups, students

participated in discussions focused around four different SEL topics. Discussions were teacher-created and focused on but were not limited to, self-awareness and self-esteem, understanding and managing emotions, building friendships and being a good friend, and belonging; these discussions were mainly student-led but were facilitated by the teacher/researcher. Finally, the class meeting was concluded with a short game to get students excited for learning that followed. All students in the class participated in morning meetings, which lasted ten to fifteen minutes each class period, but only the students that provided assent and received parent permission acted as participants in the study.

Prior to implementing the class meetings, students completed a pre-survey about personal perceptions of the welcomeness and safety of the theatre classroom. This survey consisted of ten short answer questions about their initial perceptions of the theatre classroom (see Appendix A). Upon implementation of the morning meeting, students were sorted into three groups of two to four students to participate in small focus groups based on varying initial perceptions of the theatre classroom. These focus groups lasted ten to twenty minutes. Placement for focus groups were chosen intentionally based on student responses (Patton, 1990). Questions in the focus group were planned but were susceptible to change as the researcher saw fit (see Appendix B). Focus groups were recorded and transcribed. In addition to surveys and focus groups, observational notes (Hendricks, 2017) were taken throughout the implementation process to keep track of memorable details during conversation and observed behavior during research. These were then expanded upon by creating head notes, more detailed notes done after the fact, of the observations made throughout the study (Hendricks, 2017). This process occurred at least three times a week over the intervention period.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from short-answer questions in the survey, observational notes, and transcribed focus group conversations were coded using the constant comparative method to look for trends in discussion (Hendricks, 2017). This process involves looking for common themes and topics of discussion in the findings. Fifteen level 1 codes were generated from the first 20 percent of the data and then used to analyze the following 80 percent. The level 1 codes gathered demonstrated the content of the findings then were further organized into three to five level 2 codes that demonstrated the most significant findings and meaning of the data. Analytic memos were written for each level 2 code then the level 2 codes were used as topics for poetic transcription to allow for new understanding of the qualitative data (Burdick, 2011). A running index of the codes was kept using a Google document. I later returned to the surveys and transcriptions to pull direct quotes that were used in poetry to exhibit the themes of the discussion and feelings of the students that were collected during the study (Glesne, 2017). Student quotes from focus group transcriptions and pre-surveys were selected for poetry when they appeared to be both a universal feeling amongst the group of participants and demonstrated strong feelings and/or imagery of the code. A codebook (see Appendix C) was created to organize the codes discovered through the constant comparative method by using definitions and examples of each code (Tracy, 2013).

Findings

This study is investigating both student perceptions of the theatre classroom and how the class meeting intervention influenced students' perceptions of the theatre classroom. Based on the data that was collected and analyzed, the following main themes emerged: "Will You Please Join Us?" a code discussing the issue of participation in the theatre classroom and how it affects the overall classroom climate, "Friend or Foe?" discussing the importance of building strong

relationships amongst the students, "Climbing the Mountain of Anxiety" discussing the effects of performance anxiety on the student comfort, and "The Love of Theatre" discussing how a passion for theatre can help improve perception of the theatre space. These codes help to answer the research questions by providing perspective as to what made students comfortable and uncomfortable in theatre classroom as well as their opinions of the success of the class meeting intervention.

Will You Please Join Us?

The topic of participation made frequent appearances throughout data collection because of its strong impacts to the overall classroom environment and comfort for many students. In period eight, the spectrum of participation was immense. There were students who excitedly participated in general class instruction as well as the class meeting intervention and did not resist instruction, and on the opposite end of the spectrum, there was a small, but mighty, few who resisted any form of participation in the theatre classroom. This wide discrepancy made it difficult to do any form of group activity and would often make it difficult for the majority of the class to work.

Throughout discussion with participants in the study, the students who were unwilling to participate were frequently brought up with many participants making remarks that the lack of participation brings the entire class down. One participant in the research, Alma, commented that she thought "Eighth period is horrible because some of [the] class does not like to participate during group work or projects" and that "the whole class gets in trouble because of the people that don't participate." The impact of a lack of participation causes the classroom to carry a negative tone and appear uncomfortable. Upon implementation of the class meeting, there was little to no change in the participation of the non-engaged students, and the lack of change was

noticed by the participants of the study. When asked about the overall success of the class

meeting and whether or not they felt it could continue, some seemed discouraged. Despite their

own personal success, growth, and happiness found from implementing the class meeting, a few

participants felt as though the lack of participation in some students prevented significant

improvement overall. Many commented that they witnessed improvement and found it beneficial

but because some students "don't take it in or don't consider it" the efforts were moot. The

feelings of the participants of the study have been captured in the poem entitled "Will You

Please Join Us?" demonstrating the frustration and stress felt by the students who were willing

and active participants in the classroom.

<u>Will You Please Join Us?</u>

Eighth period is horrible.
Stress.
Frustration.
Trouble.

A lot of people just don't care at all.
They waste our time.
They force all the work onto you.
Don't take it in,
Don't consider it,
Don't participate in anything.
They just sit there.
They don't try.
If they tried,
At least put in the effort,
Things would be better.

But they don't care at all.

That's not going to change.

Friend or Foe?

The most consistent theme amongst the data was the important role that relationships played in overall feelings of safety and comfortability in the middle school theatre classroom. This idea comes with two sides, one quite positive and one very negative.

We will begin with the positive. This study suggests that when students have friends in the class, fellow students who they deem to be safe and supportive, they are more likely to feel comfortable enough to take risks and try things that they view as scary. Multiple participants made comments about feeling most comfortable when they were around people that they knew and felt like they would not judge them, naming specific friends in the class and also naming friends outside the class that they wish were taking the class with them. Students also commented that they preferred to do work in groups because performing became less intimidating when they did not have to do it alone. When they had to do projects by themselves, many commented on feelings of fear, anxiety, and stage fright. When students were surrounded by those that are deemed as safe to them, the space itself becomes safe.

On the flipside, negative relationships, or individuals deemed as "foes," are integral to creating an environment that is viewed as unsafe to students. During focus group interviews, multiple participants spoke of individuals in the class who will "pick on them" or students in the audience insulting them on their performance and calling them names. In a middle school theatre classroom, when first attempting to perform, especially improvisation, it is necessary that the audience be extremely respectful. This is because stepping in front of a group of peers or strangers can be frightening, particularly when it is still new, and improvisation requires that you get comfortable with making mistakes and taking risks in spite of that. Only one participant in the study had any prior performing experience to help provide confidence from background knowledge. When an environment is created where you never know what will be said about you

or to you when you step up to try something new, the risk outweighs any kind of reward in sight

and the task becomes too daunting. The two-sided coin that is relationships in the classroom is

shown through the following poem:

Friend or Foe?

The theatre classroom reminds me of a home.
What makes me feel comfortable is knowing I have my best friends beside me.
Family
I need my friends here with me.
I know them,
They help me to feel courageous,
Comfortable enough to be myself.

But there are intruders in the home.

I don't trust everyone.
I don't like the people there,
Like certain people.
They make fun of me,
And make me feel bad.
They bring down the class,
And themselves.
They think it's gross to have close friends that you admire.
Those people prevent us from being comfortable.

When everyone is being nice to each other,
We get to know each other,
And become friends.
Being a part of it,
Just having fun,
It feels good.

One of the main goals of creating a class meeting was to attempt to facilitate more

positive relationships amongst the students. The topic of relationships and how to build strong

friendships founded on trust, respect, support, and love were discussed during the class meeting

for multiple days of the intervention. Students were able to identify examples of good friends and

traits that they have found in good friends. Multiple times throughout these discussions the topic

was brought up by students of being a friend to those they don't like. To some, this concept

seemed foreign and, to an extent, it was not a concept they enjoyed. This could be seen in their behavior in class, as well. Although they were able to identify traits they wanted in good friends, some were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to act on those traits.

When asked whether they thought the class meetings should continue, while some were hesitant due to the reaction of others in the classroom who were disruptive during class meetings, several found the meetings to be very helpful to understanding those around them. They enjoyed understanding the emotions of the other students and getting to know what they needed, ultimately providing some with a small amount of the comfort they needed to perform through relationships. One participant, Jared, commented that he thought the class meetings should continue "because I think if we do it more... I feel like I would be a little bit more comfortable going out by myself." It is possible that with more time, the class meeting could make strides in creating a comfortable environment to perform through the building of strong, positive relationships.

Climbing the Mountain of Anxiety

As previously discussed, being a new performer can come with immense fear and anxiety. Many like to refer to this feeling as "stage fright." The simple thought of performing or the action of doing so, can cause many extreme performance anxiety that negatively impacts the ability to succeed in the theatre classroom. This stage fright can also play a major impact on the comfortability of the students in the classroom. When the space becomes so heavily associated with fear and anxiety, the feeling of safety or comfort are difficult to achieve.

As a theatre teacher, I was heavily aware of this phenomenon even prior to conducting research; it is something I experienced in myself as a novice actress and took many years for me to tackle. What I didn't know was how prevalent this was throughout the students in my

classroom. When asking participants to recall a time when they felt uncomfortable in the

classroom, almost all mentioned that idea of performance or performing alone causes feelings of

anxiety and discomfort with comments such as "I just don't like having attention on me." This is

a difficult barrier to overcome in a theatre context where much of what you are teaching students

to do involves eyes and attention on them. The feelings of fear and anxiety can be demonstrated

through the following poem entitled "Climbing the Mountain of Anxiety."

Climbing the Mountain of Anxiety

They're keeping their eyes on you.

I'm going to mess up.
They're talking about me in their head.
They're going to make fun of me.
They're going to judge me.
They're going to laugh,

Because that's what they do.

Eyes on me,
Attention on me.

I start to turn red,
Because I am aware that they are currently judging me.
In that moment.

I hate that.

  As demonstrated in the poem, stage fright can create worst case scenarios for students

who experience it. Even when there is no obvious threat, the student is able to perceive one.

Most of these threats were focused on the perceptions that others have of them because pre-teen

students care heavily about what their peers think of them. Many participants had fears that their

performances would cause others to think they were no longer cool, untalented, or weird. They

wanted to feel accepted and affirmed by their peers. The need to be affirmed and approved of by

their fellow classmates prevented many from pushing themselves to take risks and try things that

were scary to them because they believed that if they did so, every worst-case scenario would

come to life.

The Love of Theatre

Throughout the research process, I was able to identify a common trend that brought

many participants back to buying into theatre learning despite all of the previously discussed

barriers to comfortability: a love of theatre. There is immense joy that can and does occur in the

theatre classroom that can be seen throughout the data. Some words and phrases used to describe

the theatre classroom in both pre-surveys and focus groups were "exciting," "theatre to me

brings happiness," and "it expands your mind." This joy was a reflection of the comfort levels of

many of the participants in the study and suggests that although many of the students had

limitations to this comfort, they still had reasons to be happy and have fun while participating in

theatre class.

This idea can be used not only to describe the theatre classroom but to describe the class

meeting intervention which many participants found to be generally enjoyable and beneficial to

getting to know those around them. Other reasons for enjoying the class meeting discussed by

participants are that students found it to be helpful and interesting to know how others were

feeling. They also enjoyed incorporating fun activities and daily learning together so that they

were able to bond through both personal discussion and exciting activities. Of the participants

interviewed in focus groups, eight out of nine participants said that they felt the class meetings

should continue. The positive feelings of the participants toward theatre, the theatre classroom,

and the class meeting intervention are demonstrated through the following poem entitled "The

Love of Theatre."

<u>The Love of Theatre</u>

Theatre brings me happiness,
Excitement,
Laughter,
Fun and learning in the same day.

Theatre lets me experiment,
With imagination and games.
It expands my mind.
You can make things happen.

I can express myself.
Everyone gets to be themselves,
Enjoy themselves.
We are able to talk about how we're feeling,
To bring me to the sunny side of life.

The theatre classroom is my happy place.

This information was important to my research and my research questions because of its implication to overall student happiness in the space. While I listened very carefully for negative opinions of the classroom because I wanted to be aware and be able to fix those things in the future, it is equally as important to include the positive opinions of the classroom to demonstrate a well-rounded idea of the thoughts on the classroom space and the class meeting intervention. Through this study and the class meeting intervention, many were able to experience happiness in the theatre classroom.

Limitations

Through the research process, naturally, there are going to be limitations to the overall effectiveness and understanding of the data. My research was no exception to this.

One possible limitation to the class meetings conducted over the intervention period is that I did not address possible feelings of anxiety and how to handle anxiety when it is felt in my SEL lessons. Because those specific lessons were not presented to the students, there was

nothing assisting in diminishing feelings of anxiety in the classroom besides the growing

relationships forming through the lessons conducted in class (see Appendix D for slides used

during the intervention period). It is possible that different results would have occurred if lessons

were altered to address feelings of general anxiety, performance anxiety, and fear of what others

may think that was experienced by most of the participants.

One of the biggest limitations to this study was that the students who chose not to

participate in class and during the class meeting were also not active participants in the study.

Like most things that occurred in the classroom, they were unwilling to bring home the forms

needed to participate in the research, thus I was unable to collect data on their specific thoughts

and opinions of the classroom and on their safety and comfortability. This information would

have provided more information on the thoughts processes and decision making behind the

students who willingly did not participate. This is a glaring limitation although it does

demonstrate the exact issues that were occurring in the classroom and how little some students

were willing to do.

Implications for Teachers

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school perceptions of the theatre

classroom and to explore the impacts of a morning meeting model on student perception of the

classroom. Class meetings involved a physical and vocal warm up, a short SEL lesson, and a

game played as a class.

To begin the study, participants took a ten-question presurvey on initial perceptions of the

classroom as pertaining mainly to safety and comfortability. Prior to the intervention, eight out of

ten participants had relatively positive perceptions of the theatre classroom. Students described

the space as home, exciting, and crazy. A minority expressed concern for the overall

environment of the space, specifically voicing concern about a group of students in the class who

bully them or make rude comments about them following a performance. After the class meeting

intervention, the majority who expressed initial positive perceptions of the class expressed,

again, positive perceptions, but this time they had improved even further. These students also

began to show a keen awareness of the issues of class and how the class meeting may not be

beneficial to all (those not included in the study as participants). The minority who had expressed

concern about the classroom and its comfortability also had improved perceptions of the

classroom and wished for the class meeting to continue so they may achieve further

comfortability by getting to know their peers. Overall, the class meetings had a positive impact

on all the participants of the study, some being more than others. No students had any negative

opinions of the class meeting itself, and all wanted it to continue in the future.

Through the research, it became very apparent that there was a strong need for positive

relationships in the classroom. When left to form these strong relationships on their own, middle

schoolers can often fall short. Because these strong relationships are so crucial to comfortability,

it is especially important that this be considered in a theatre placement where comfort is

necessary for successful performance. Theatre teachers must work to facilitate bonds amongst a

group of new performers, so they are able to reach high levels of comfort. The need for activities

that open the door to closer relationships founded on love and respect is there and may apply

across disciplines for when comfortability is lacking but is desperately needed.

One of the hardest lessons to learn was that many of the students who you want and need

to reach the most will often resist being helped. The participants of the study spoke often about

the "unhelpable" students in the class. These were the students who this study was most geared

toward in hopes that something could penetrate the hard exteriors they had created, the ones who

did not listen or participate in any aspect of the morning meeting, including games. I could not force my students to listen and participate in SEL lessons, causing there to be a lack of change. Could the lessons have been impactful to them if they had been involved? It's very possible. It is also possible that SEL lessons was not the thing to reach them. Unfortunately, I am unable to know why they made the choices they did because their lack of involvement extended into the study, and they were not participants in the research.

The beautiful thing about the class meeting model is that it can be manipulated to fit the needs of the classroom. While I chose to do warmups, SEL lessons created specifically for my students' needs (see appendix D for slides used during intervention period), and a game, it doesn't mean that those specific activities and lessons are fixed in place. If you would like to try this in your own classroom, even outside of a theatre placement, use the activities and SEL lessons that you think are best fit for your students at that time. Their social emotional needs will likely be different from my students, and it is crucial to adjust to our students' current needs. If I were to conduct this research again now knowing about my students' anxiety, I would adjust my lessons to accommodate for that need. For theatre teachers, also consider the capability of incorporating the SEL lessons into curricular lessons such as characterization where students must be able to understand true and deep emotion. By speaking about their own emotions and hearing about the emotions of those around them, it is likely that students will be better able to understand emotions felt by characters that they need to portray. There is great potential in connecting these lessons.

There is still much to learn about creating a comfortable learning environment in the theatre classroom, and there are multiple routes for future research on this topic. The first is to explore the effectiveness of SEL lessons on comfortability. What lessons are most beneficial to

creating a space that is deemed to be safe by the students? Another idea for future research is to explore this in different age levels. While it proved to be beneficial at a middle school placement, it is difficult to know if the results would be similar at an elementary or high school. Each age group has such different characteristics, it is possible that the response to SEL lessons would vary.

References

Allen-Hughes, L. (2013). *The social benefits of the morning meeting: Creating a space for*

social and charactereducation in the classroom [Master's thesis, Dominican

University]. Dominican Scholar.

https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2013.edu.08

Anguiano, S. (2020). *Student perceptions of social-emotional learning through morning*

meetings in a 12th-grade economics classroom. [Action research project, Abilene

Christian University]. ACU Digital Commons.

https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/metl/30?utm_source=digitalcommons.acu.edu%2Fmetl%

2F30&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

Burdick, M. (2011). Researcher and teacher-participant found poetry: Collaboration in poetic

transcription. *International Journal of Education & the Arts,* 12(1.1), 2-3.

http://www.ijea.org/v12si1/

Cefai, C., Ferrario, E., Cavioni, V., Carter, A., & Grech, T. (2014). Circle time for social and

emotional learning in primary school. *Pastoral Care in Education*, *32*(2), 116–130.

https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2013.861506

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2015). *Effective social and*

emotional learning programs: Middle and high school edition. Collaborative for

Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

Garcia, B., Crifasi, E., & Dessel A. B. (2019). Oppression pedagogy: Intergroup dialogue and

theatre of the oppressed in creating a safe enough classroom, *Journal of Social Work*

Education, 55(4), 669-683. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2019.1567414

Glesne, C. (1997). That rare feeling; Re-presenting research through poetic transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(2), 202–221.

Hendricks, C. (2017). *Improving schools through action research: A reflective practice approach* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Hunter, M. A. (2008). Cultivating the art of safe space. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance,* 13(1), 5-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569780701825195

Kaşıkcı, F., & Özhan, M. B. (2021). *Prediction of academic achievement and happiness in middle school students: The role of social-emotional learning skills*. [Action research project, Abilene Christian University]. ACU Digital Commons. *13*(2). https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol13/iss2/15

Keiner, M., Green, P., & Ahuna, K. (2014). Using the comfortability-in-learning scale to enhance positive classroom learning environments. *A Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, *9*, 36–43.

Khazanchi, R., Khazanchi, P., Mehta, V. & Tuli, N. (2021). Incorporating social–emotional learning to buildpositive behaviors. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 57(1), 11-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2021.1851581

Kriete, R. (2006). Morning meeting: Teaching the art of caring conversation. In M. J. Elias & H. Arnold (Eds.), *The educator's guide to emotional intelligence and academic achievement: Social-emotional learning in the classroom* (pp. 109–118). Corwin Press.

Lacoe, J. (2020). Too scared to learn? The academic consequences of feeling unsafe in the classroom. *Urban Education*, *55*(10), 1385–1418. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916674059

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370–

    396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). SAGE

    Publications, Inc.

Ross, H. (2019). A case study: Developing a safe space for vulnerable young people at school.

    Nasen, *34*(2), 162–178. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1111/1467-9604.12246

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis,*

    communicating impact. Wiley-Blackwell.

Twemlow, S. W., Fonagy, P., & Sacco, F. C. (2002). Feeling safe in school. *Smith Studies in*

    Social Work, *72*(2), 303–326.

Appendix A

Initial Classroom Perception Survey

1. How comfortable do you feel in the theatre classroom? Explain.

2. What words or phrases come to mind when thinking about the theatre classroom?

3. How would you describe the classroom community in period 8 theatre II?

4. What do you need to feel comfortable enough to take risks?

5. How comfortable do you feel taking risks and getting out of your comfort zone in the theatre classroom?

6. Tell me about any prior theatre experience you have before taking this class. If none, please write"none."

7. Would you be interested in participating in theatre if you were not required to take an elective? Why or why not?

8. How does performing in front of others make you feel?

9. Tell me about a time you didn't feel comfortable or felt unsafe in the theatre classroom.

10. Is there anything else you think I should know about your safety and comfort in the theatre classroom?

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

1. How comfortable do you feel taking risks in the theatre classroom?

2. How do you feel like morning meeting has affected the environment of the classroom?

3. What have you learned or come to understand because of our class meetings?

4. How would you describe the classroom community in period 8 theatre II?

5. What words or phrases come to mind when thinking about the theatre classroom?

6. Tell me about a time where you felt safe to take risks in thetheatre classroom if you have experienced one.

7. Tell me about a time where you felt unsafe to take risks in thetheatre classroom if you have experienced one.

8. Do you feel that the morning meeting should continue? Why or why not?

Appendix C

Codebook

Name of Code	Definition	Example	Level of Code
Anxiety	The anxieties experienced in the theatre classroom, can describe anxiety caused by others or more personal performance anxiety	"I just feel self-conscious going in front of everybody" (Alexis)	I
Caring Environment	The positive adjectives used to describe the theatre classroom	"Happy place" (Ava)	I
Comfort Zones	How comfort zones can limit our theatre growth and how theatre can help grow comfort zones	"[I'm] not used to being social around people. I want a chance to stretch out my theatre style." (Alexis)	I
Disrespectful Behavior	Students acting out in class and distracting from the lesson	"Not really mean but a little disrespectful when the teacher talks" (Ava)	I
Encouragement	How encouragement can help make taking risks less scary	"And it didn't make me feel that nervous because they all clapped and laughed and stuff, and it was kind of exciting to play the game." (Ian)	I
Fun	The fun that can be experienced or felt in theatre class and from doing the morning meeting	"Yes, because I enjoy it, and it's fun." (Hannah)	I
Interactive Learning	The lively descriptions of learning that occur in theatre class	"Playful" (Katie)	I
Low Comfortability	Descriptions of low comfortability in the theatre classroom	"Pretty uncomfortable depending [on] who I'm performing in front of…" (Michael)	I
Overwhelming Emotions	Descriptions of the theatre classroom that	"Crazy" (Katie)	I

	are overwhelming or chaotic		
Participation	How lack of participation in the theatre classroom inhibits overall comfortability and learning	"To be honest I think 8 period is horrible because some of [the] class does not like to participate during group work or projects" (Alma)	I
Personal Growth	Growth shown after the class meeting intervention	"I Think it's affecting the classroom in a positive way. It's not negative in any way, and it's kind of helpful" (Michael)	I
Positive Thoughts	How positive thinking can make taking risks easier	"Think positive and stay on the sunny side of life" (Alexis)	I
Self-Expression	How the theatre classroom can be a hub for self-expression	"Everyone gets to be themselves and enjoy themselves" (Hannah)	I
Teacher Help	How the teachers assist in facilitating a safer environment	"I feel comfortable in the classroom because I know the teachers wouldn't make [me] do anything we didn't feel comfortable doing" (Katie)	I
Relationships/Classroom Community	The positive and negative relationships that occur within the theatre classroom and how they affect comfortability	"I get a little uncomfortable when people start arguing and fighting" (Hannah)	I
Will You Please Join Us?	How the lack of participation in the theatre classroom affects overall comfortability and learning	"Well, I feel like nobody listens to them, but the people who do listen to them actually do pay attention and learn something from it. But since half the class is full kids that don't care about anything in that class." (Hannah)	II

Friend or Foe?	The effects of friends/allies in the classroom versus those who appear as enemies to learning	"What I think is scary, well, whenever we play freeze, I usually don't go up there because I'm worried that people might make fun of me or laugh. I'm worried about embarrassing myself." (Alexis)	II
Climbing the Mountain of Anxiety	The anxieties that get in the way of theatre learning	"Whenever we usually do the plays. I feel like if I mess up, everybody's thinking in their head 'What is the dude doing?' So I kind of get nervous doing things." (Jared)	II
The Love of Theatre	The joy and creativity that occurs in the theatre classroom	"Theatre is kind of fun because you can experiment to figure things out [that] you like." (Ian)	II

**Appendix D**

SEL Lesson Slides

Let's Practice!

1. I am enough.
2. I am intelligent.
3. I am perfect just the way I am.
4. I am smart.
5. I am kind.
6. I matter.
7. I am confident.
8. I am capable of so much.
9. I believe in myself and my abilities.
10. I have the power to achieve my goals.

11. Today I choose to think positive.
12. Today I choose to be a leader.
13. Everything will be okay.
14. Today is going to be an awesome day.
15. My mistakes help me learn and grow.
16. It's okay not to be perfect at everything.
17. If I fall, I can get back up again.
18. I forgive myself for my mistakes.
19. It's okay to ask for help when I need it.
20. I love myself.
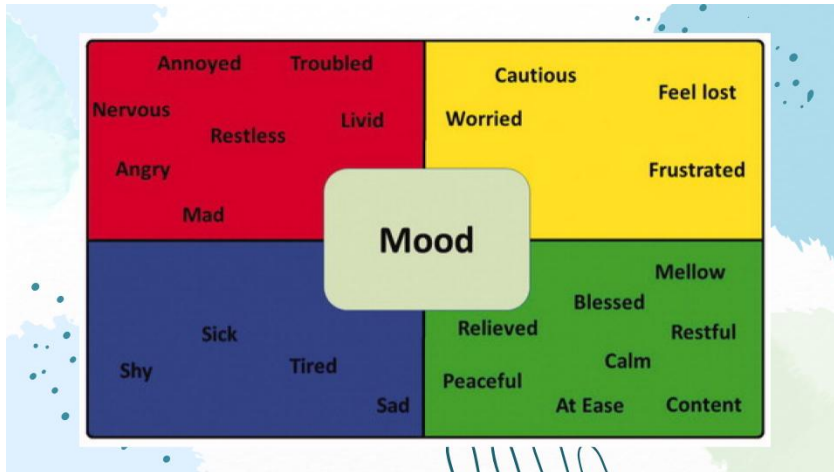
Emotions

How did your emotions change from yesterday?

What can we do to bring our emotions back to the green zone?

Talk about a time someone has been a good friend to you. How did that make you feel?

Listen carefully. You will share your partner's response.

Belonging

Draw or write about a time where you felt like you didn't belong.

What can we do to help others feel like they belong?

https://youtu.be/s1vHPtyoGv0

Answer the following questions.

Do you agree or disagree with their definition of kindness?

Write your own definition of kindness.