

**THE IMPORTANCE OF A DRAMA PROGRAM IN CULTIVATING
SOFT SKILLS: THE ACTORS STUDIO ACADEMY AS A CASE STUDY**

MARK BEAU DE SILVA

**CULTURAL CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

2018

**THE IMPORTANCE OF A DRAMA PROGRAM IN CULTIVATING
SOFT SKILLS: THE ACTORS STUDIO ACADEMY AS A CASE
STUDY**

MARK BEAU DE SILVA

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PERFORMING ARTS**

**CULTURAL CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

2018

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

Name of Candidate: Mark Beau De Silva

Matric No: RGJ 130006

Name of Degree: Master in Performing Arts (Drama)

Title of Project Paper/Research Report/Dissertation/Thesis ("this Work"): The Importance of A Drama Program In Cultivating Soft Skills: The Actors Studio Academy As A Case Study

Field of Study: Drama In Education

I do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

- (1) I am the sole author/writer of this Work;
- (2) This Work is original;
- (3) Any use of any work in which copyright exists was done by way of fair dealing and for permitted purposes and any excerpt or extract from, or reference to or reproduction of any copyright work has been disclosed expressly and sufficiently and the title of the Work and its authorship have been acknowledged in this Work;
- (4) I do not have any actual knowledge nor do I ought reasonably to know that the making of this work constitutes an infringement of any copyright work;
- (5) I hereby assign all and every right in the copyright to this Work to the University of Malaya ("UM"), who henceforth shall be owner of the copyright in this Work and that any reproduction or use in any form or by any means whatsoever is prohibited without the written consent of UM having been first had and obtained;
- (6) I am fully aware that if in the course of making this Work I have infringed any copyright whether intentionally or otherwise, I may be subject to legal action or any other action as may be determined by UM.

Candidate's Signature

Date: 27/8/2018

Subscribed and solemnly declared before,

Witness's Signature

Date:

Name:

Designation:

ABSTRACT

The research is conducted to highlight the importance of a drama program as a tool in cultivating soft skills. The research objectives are to identify the components in the drama program that directly instil particular soft skills in the participants, and to compare and contrast the students verbal and non-verbal communication skills, before and after graduation of the drama program. The methodology of research is primarily qualitative, and depends on interviews with facilitators and participants, and observation throughout the drama program. The field of study for this study is drama in education, and the literature review focuses mainly on how the components of drama in education connect to its object of study, which is The Actors Studio Academy. The books and materials from the literature review purports that The Actors Studio Academy utilizes the drama enquiry technique, a main proponent of drama in education, which originated from the west. The topic of research for this study is soft skills, in particular the level of soft skills in young Malaysians, and how the courses at The Actors Studio provide aid in its cultivation (soft skills). As a holistic learner of drama also cultivates hard skills, it is crucial in this research to also see its (hard skills) co-relation to soft skills. The research endeavours to connect both soft skills and hard skills to the three domains of learning which are the cognitive (creative thinking), affective (emotion/ feeling), and psychomotor (physical/ kinesthesis). Once the data was collected via a mainly qualitative analysis, the research shows a positive to respond toward its hypothesis, which is; the drama programs at The Actors Studio Academy cultivates soft skills amongst its learners, through targeted lesson plans and activities aimed at grooming specific soft skills in the young learner.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan menilai kepentingan program drama dalam memupuk kemahiran insaniah. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti komponen-komponen dalam program drama yang mampu mewujudkan kemahiran insaniah tertentu, dan untuk membuat perbandingan sebelum dan selepas ke atas pelajar-pelajar program. Metodologi kajian ini berunsur kualitatif, dan banyak menggunakan hasil temuramah bersama tenaga pengajar dan pelajar, serta teknik pemerhatian sepanjang tempoh program ini. Oleh kerana kajian ini bertumpu kepada drama dalam pendidikan, tinjauan literatur merangkumi bahan-bahan bacaan yang berkaitan dengan topik pembelajaran drama sebagai perangsang kemahiran insaniah. Bahan-bahan bacaan ini kemudiannya dikaitkan dengan program di Actors Studio Academy. Komponen-komponen pembelajaran insaniah (*hard skills*) yang diterapkan dalam program ini dikenalpasti dan dikaitkan dengan kemahiran insaniah (*soft skills*) yang dipupuk. Ini kemudiannya dikaitkan dengan pembelajaran kognitif, afektif, dan psikomotor seseorang pelajar. Setelah kajian selesai dilaksanakan, hasil kajian diperolehi dan dianalisa, serta hipotesis kajian ini disahkan; didapati program drama mampu mewujudkan kemahiran insaniah dalam kalangan pelajar-pelajarnya. Kemahiran insaniah tertentu akan dimangkinakan dengan aktiviti-aktiviti yang dilaksanakan. Walaubagaimanapun, kajian ini mendapati yang program drama tidak mampu menghasilkan pelajar-pelajar yang konsisten secara keseluruhan dalam penghayatan kemahiran insaniah mereka; sesetengah pelajar didapati lebih mendapat manfaat daripada program drama, sedangkan yang lain mungkin tidak.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to thank the supervisors, Dr Marlenny Deenerwan and Dr Indra Utama for their expertise and support throughout the research, and past lecturers Dr Zainal and Dr Rina Tung for their guidance. The researcher would also like to acknowledge Dato Faridah Merican and Joe Hasham, the founders of The Actors Studio Academy for inspiring this research.

University of Malaya

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	3
Abstrak	4
Acknowledgements	5
Table of Contents.....	6
List of Figures.....	8
List of Tables	8
CHAPTER 1	
1.1 Background of Research	9
1.2 Statement of Problem	12
1.3 Research Scope	13
1.4 Research Objectives	13
1.5 Research Questions	14
1.6 Research Limitations	14
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Drama in Education: A General Perspective	16
2.3 Soft Skills: Definition in relation to Drama	17
2.4 Creative Drama and Its Relation to Soft Skills.....	22
2.5 Mantle of the Expert	24
2.6 Child Drama: Readings on the Concept of 'Play'.....	25
2.7 Children's Theatre: Creating Thinking Skills for the Young Audience	26
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 Research Design	31
3.3 Sample Population of Study	32

3.4	Sampling Techniques	32
3.5	Instrumentation for Data Collection	33
3.6	Validity of Questionnaire and Method of Data Collection.....	34
3.7	Method of Data Collection	34
3.8	Method of Data Analysis	34
3.9	Final Performance of Students as Assessment	37

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1	Introduction	39
4.2	Speech and Drama and its utilization of Vocal Training to cultivate soft skills	39
4.3	Speech and Drama and its utilization of Ensemble Training to build soft skills	42
4.4	Speech and Drama and its utilization of Physical Training in cultivating gestures	45
4.5	Compartmentalization of Emotions and Soft Skills	49
4.6	Actors Training to aid soft skills	51
4.7	Devising Theatre to build Critical Thinking	55
4.8	Devising Scripts to build Original Thought	56
4.9	Theatre Ethics in building Life Skills	59
4.10	An Analysis of the Actors Studio Academy model in comparison to similar models	62
4.11	An Analysis of the Students after leaving the drama course	63

CHAPTER 5

5.1	Summary of Research	66
5.2	Conclusion	67
5.3	Recommendations	71

REFERENCES	74
-------------------------	-----------

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Psychomotor, Cognitive and Affective Learning in a Drama Lesson ...	15
Figure 2.1: Categorization of soft skills and hard skills	19
Figure 3.1: Summary of Research Methodology	31
Figure 3.2: Bloom's Taxonomy and the analysis of a drama-improvisation class ...	38
Figure 4.1: Speech and drama and its utilization of vocal training in cultivating confidence in speech, clarity of speech, emoting and empathy as a listener	42
Figure 4.2: Utilizing Ensemble Work to Cultivate Leadership and Teamwork	45
Figure 4.3: Physical Theatre and its Cultivation of Body Language and Gestures	48
Figure 4.4: Theatre Ethics and the Life Skills it Cultivates	48

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Summary of research plan for three semesters of Speech and Drama	30
Table 3.2: Population size and sample participants of research	32
Table 3.3: Observation chart to gauge type of soft skills category observed	35

CHAPTER 1

1.1 BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

In the 1980s, Joe Hasham and Faridah Merican, two of the country's leading pioneers in contemporary performing arts formed the Actors Studio Theatre as a platform to stage plays around Kuala Lumpur. They found that most of the actors that they used were borne out of passion, and had little to no training in the arts. With that in mind, Joe and Faridah decided to conduct classes, mostly one off master classes for their young actors. The demand grew until the couple decided to form The Actors Studio Academy in 1989, a venue that would provide anyone as young as 3 years old drama courses.

From 1989 until 2016, there have been close to a hundred courses offered at The Actors Studio. These range from acting classes like Acting for Beginners to vocal and singing classes for aspiring singers. For this research, the focus will be on the Speech and Drama class which have undergone gradual changes over the years, but rooted on the founder Joe Hasham's training at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts, Australia.

'The idea was to provide young people a foundation in performing arts through drama and dance classes, little did we know that the parents would come back and tell us how their children have grown to become more confident and outspoken in school' (Merican, 2014).

The Actors Studio Academy's Speech and Drama Programme for 13-25 years old started in 1989 with the main objectives of imparting drama skills to improve confidence in self, speech skills and as a basic introduction to the world of performing arts. Many of the parents whom enrol their children for this course are more interested in the first two objectives, a desire that is in line with creative drama's goal of 'learning through play'.

There are parallels between the creative drama used in The Actor's Studio Academy's Speech and Drama Programme with techniques created by pioneers in drama

for the young, particularly the ‘Mantle of the Expert’ dramatic inquiry teaching approach by Dorothy Heathcote.

‘Mantle of the Expert’ can be aptly summed from the book, ‘Drama as a Learning Medium’, as a student centred dramatic inquiry. It allows students to take charge of their learning, with the teacher functioning as a guide via the imposition of questions that will stimulate decision making and ideas from the learners (Wagner, 1976).

Being the ‘mother’ of all drama lessons for young learners, The ‘Mantle of the Expert’ is hence a fitting guide to the growth of The Actors Studio Academy as it strives to empower young Malaysians with the use of drama.

The State of Expression: A General and Historical Perspective

Since the formation of the Education Act 1961, our Malaysian Education system has gone through various modifications, largely due to changes in policies. However, the core objective remains; that is to produce a nation that is economically competitive in the region and ultimately the world, a move akin to most Asian countries (Pillai, 2014).

This of course translates to policymakers, educators, parents and students whom think that to achieve this objective, the academics of a child should be paramount. Hence, the curriculum since then has been an exam oriented one, relegating academics to the fore, and subjects like fine arts and handicrafts as electives. There is almost no inclusion of creative arts.

‘This pedagogical-centric model begs the question: why aren’t our children learning through the senses and feelings? What about the emotions of the learners? What about creative drama as a tool to aid the communication skills and creative thinking of the learners? Wouldn’t these all contribute to the bigger picture?’ (Latiff, 2010).

The result of this is problematic, as Malaysian graduates are finding it difficult to find employment due to their poor communication and language skills. Their inability to express their thoughts effectively signals a long-term problem resulting from an academic based, exam oriented curriculum.

‘Too many young Malaysians seem inflicted by declining confidence, expression, articulation, and critical thinking- what we like to call “soft skills”, as if possessing them is not entirely important or relevant, and we fear that this will translate directly into a loss of economic advantage when dealing with foreigners’ (Ng, 2010).

The decline in confidence, expression, articulation, and critical thinking does not happen overnight. It is a gradual digression that happens over time. The 80s and the 90s were also times when the country saw more Malaysians returning after education abroad. This made the graduates more discerning individuals, wanting their voices to be heard, and demanding for platforms of expression. These individuals ultimately became parents themselves, who wanted more in their children’s education in the country, especially having had experience a more holistic lifestyle overseas. This paved the demand for more artistic outlets in Kuala Lumpur, with the introduction of amateur drama troupes, and poetry recitals. These drama groups were led by pioneers Dato Faridah Merican, Krishen Jit, and KS Maniam.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The lack of soft skills in Malaysian youth has been increasingly become the focus of the Ministry of Education. This has resulted in an increase in unemployment amongst fresh graduates. According to a survey in 2013 by online employment portal, Jobstreet.com, 55% of employers deny employment to interviewees because they lack the necessary communication and soft skills.

The Ministry of Education has recently admitted that the education syllabus needs to be revamped to remedy this situation. In this effort, soft skills were cited as an important component that should not be overlooked.

An informal, and general observation of students who joined The Actors Studio Academy showed that these students were somewhat more vocal and expressive in their thoughts and ideas. The drama course seemed to make them more in-tune to their emotions and the way they communicated with new people in a mature and respectful manner; all characteristics of people with adequate soft skills. They were also more sociable and able to exhibit creativity in solving problems in class, and upon in their graduation performance. This ignited the research; and hence the hypothesis; that drama students have stronger soft skills compared to the rest. However, the question now is, if drama is such a useful tool, why isn't it picked up yet by the ministry of education?

Some of the implications that have hampered the progression of drama education in our country could be that the 'result' of learning drama is not tangible, and we come historically from a community that upholds productivity and economics. The mission now is to prove the intangible, to show how important it is, to learn something like drama, to produce qualities so innate and unseen, yet powerful and useful for everyday survival.

To gather information for this sort of research would entail not numbers and statistics, but communication itself; with the people that carry out the classes at The Actors Studio Academy, the people that go for these classes every week, and ultimately

the people whose lives have changed due to drama. Interviews and observations will be the primary research method, to gather and be informed on how strongly the teachers, students and parents believe in the drama course.

1.3 RESEARCH SCOPE

This thesis studies The Actor's Studio Academy's role and contribution as a centre that provides learning of the arts particularly drama to learners aged 13-25. Formed in 1989 by Dato Faridah Merican and Joe Hasham, the institution has now evolved into a holistic avenue that is not just for learners of the arts, but any Malaysian youth that is interested in complementing his/her formative education with the benefits that come with drama classes. The research parallels the growth of drama in education by The Actor's Studio Academy with the development of drama education for the young in the west, particularly works by Dorothy Heathcote and Peter Slade (Wagner, 1976).

Two of the programmes that will be used as case studies in this thesis are: 1) Speech and Drama for 13-15. 2) Theatre for Young People programme for 16-25 year olds.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research concerns itself with these main objectives:

- To analyse the components in the Actors Studio drama course that directly promotes particular soft skills.
- To observe research participants before having attended the drama course and after, with regards to their communication and expression skills.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions that this research hopes to answer:

- a) How does the components and activities in the drama course cultivate soft skills in its participants?
- b) How different is the level of soft skills exhibited by the selected participants, before, and after a one-year program of the drama course? (test instrument: interviews and observation forms)

1.6 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that set parameters on the application of the results of the study; that is, the constraints on generalizability and utility of findings that are the result of the devices or method that establish internal and external validity (Cline, 2000).

This research is limited in that the bulk of literature review is from western case studies/ approaches, hence cultural factors must be considered.

This research is also limited to its number of respondents and interviewees, as they are mainly from The Actors Studio Academy, and also from selected schools around Klang Valley that will be used as a representation of Malaysian youth. Thus, the research will not represent the general state of the country.

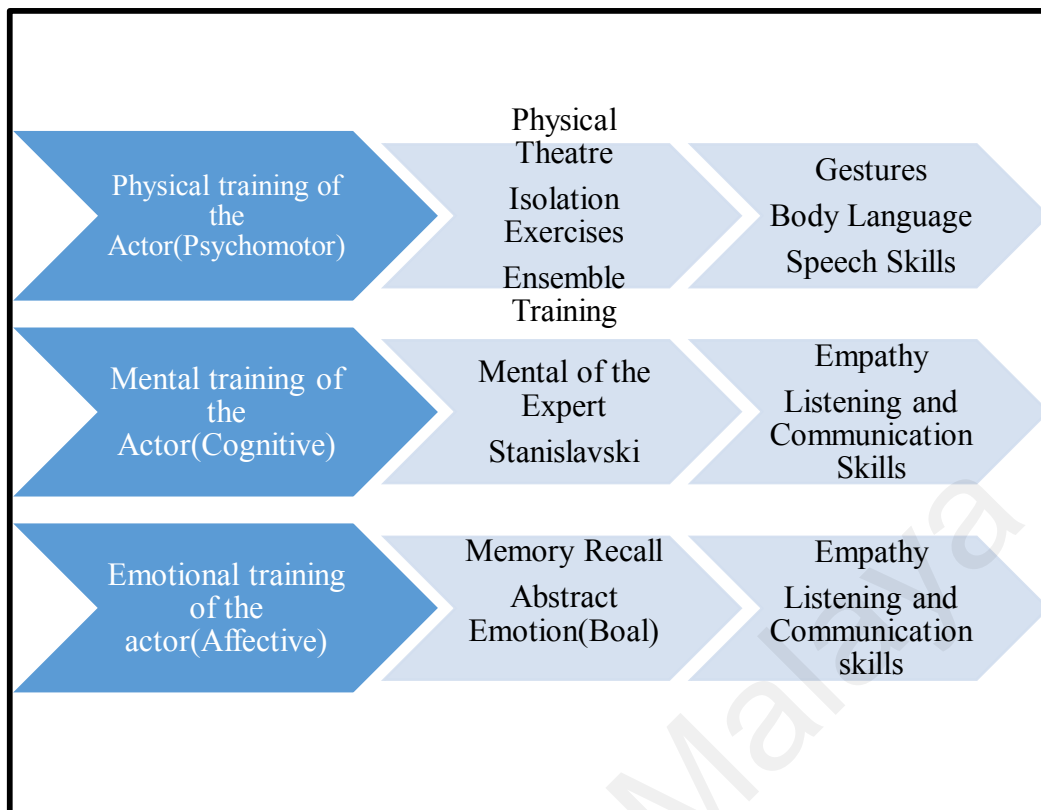


Figure 1.1: Psychomotor, Cognitive and Affective Learning in a Drama Lesson

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will list the readings related to the thesis research. This will encompass literature pertaining to drama, and its relation to soft skills. The research will tie all findings to the syllabus of The Actors Studio Academy. Because holistic drama education encompasses the entire being of the learner, hard skills learned will also be studied in relation to soft skills.

2.2 DRAMA IN EDUCATION: A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

Writings on drama in education is relatively new compared to other areas of the dramatic arts. As stated by Kathleen Gallagher in her book, *'How Theatre Educates'* (2003), 'there is no correct pedagogical model on offer for drama education' (Gallagher, 2003).

Due to this, many drama training centres, particularly in Malaysia have no formal pedagogy as foundation to its syllabus, and teachers that teach the subject have little to no training in the subject. Teachers of the Actors Studio Academy then modifies this for use in the classroom; illustrating again that there is no 'correct' method, but rather, localised improvisation to suit.

There have been however, models used by teachers in the arts, particularly practitioners whom are interested in formulating new methods of reaching out to their students. These models are generally determined by the political, religious, and cultural climate of the particular school/ state where the teacher is practising (Bolton, 1999).

This shows that drama is a fluid subject that can be taught for the sake of teaching drama, or as a complement to enhance the teaching of other subjects. For examples, drama has been used in correctional centres and prisons to aid in self-expression classes.

In her book '*Drama*' by Charlyn Wessels, the justification for drama as a tool in education quotes Brian Way in the introduction, 'What is a blind person? You might simply reply 'a blind person cannot see', and this would probably satisfy intellectually. But if you replied, 'shut your eyes and try to find the pen on the desk in front of you, ' you would be involving him in the actual experience of being blind, and would thus satisfy him not only intellectually, but emotionally as well, and possibly inspire in him feelings of empathy with all blind people. He would be more likely to remember the meaning of the word as a result of this moment of direct experience (Wessels, 1987). In other words, drama is a subject which is best taught, and learned experientially. This connects to The Actors Studio Academy's objectives since 1989, of wanting to produce individuals who are not only able to think academically, but feel, reason, and create with both heart and intellect, through drama in education (Merican, 2015).

When drama is taught for the sake of imparting acting skills to the learners, there will be 'side-effects'; as mentioned by Faridah by above. These innate qualities that one gets from the learning of drama is delved further below, in readings on soft skills.

2.3 SOFT SKILLS: DEFINITION IN RELATION TO DRAMA EDUCATION

The Collins dictionary defines soft skills as desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude. In the article Identifying Soft Skills, published by The University of Sydney in 2016, an elaboration of the term soft skills is people skills, social skills, communication skills, character traits, attitudes,

career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients among others that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills.

Drama when taught thematically can coax the brain into solving problems creatively. A Harvard study by Howard Gardner proved that learning drama pushes the learner into using multiple intelligences to solve simulated problems in a drama lesson. When the drama lesson parallels life, the student uses creative thinking, analytical skills, team work and empathy to get the task done. In the same study, the conditioning of the learners, emotional intelligence is also assessed. It is found that drama students use and exhibit listening skills, empathy and the ability to relate to varying characters; all components of soft skills (Salazar, 1995).

Soft skills also relate to the student's ability to use body language in conveying messages. While the learning the spoken word constitute the hard skill aspect of communication, body language would be its soft skill counterpart. In the book 'Body Language' by Allan Pease, body language is the non-verbal cues and signals used by human beings. Charles Darwin's 'The Expression of the Emotions in Man' studies the evolution of facial expressions and body language in mankind. It notes the change, and most definitely the evolution in the usage of body language as words became primary in communication. For example, while it may seem that human beings are using less of their body to say something, it is the body language and gestures which give the words layers and nuances.

In a startling research by Albert Mehrabian, it is discovered that in sending a message, humans use 7 percent verbal (words only), 38 percent vocal (tone, inflection), and 55 percent in body language. This meant that 93 percent of communication utilizes soft skills.

One's ability to use perception, intuition, and audience relatedness are all part of soft skills as well. The skills to read another person's body language is deemed more difficult, and is an acquired knowledge that also takes into account the setting's culture and situation. Women and men also have varying degrees of ability to read body language, with women being traditionally thought to have more intuitive skills than men. Eibl-Eibesfeldt a German scientist concluded from his research that some gestures are inborn, for example, blind children who are born blind. Also, his study from 5 different cultures found that some expressions such as smiling are in born, while others, like crossing your arms are learned in culture.



Figure 2.1: Categorization of soft skills and hard skills.

Figure 2.1 developed by consultant trainer Vasudevan BK is used to identify and differentiate soft skills from hard skills. Hard skills learned in a drama course, like voice techniques and projection methods aid in the non-technical soft skill learned which are communication flair and also listening and responding accordingly. Peggy Klaus' book on soft skills, 'The Hard Truth About Soft Skills' expounds on this correlation, describing the both as skills that go hand in hand, almost seminal in its difference. Relating it to the diagram above, it considers hard skills the technical skills that teaches you how to do the

job, but it is soft skills that make you excellent at it. The book uses the manager's role as an example: stating that a while say a manager at an accounting firm would need to have the know-it-all in book keeping and the like, it is skills like being understanding of staff, ability to adapt to changes, and the potential to motivate and grow those working under him that would make the manager go the mile.

In the book 'Theatre for Children' by David Wood, he states 'a healthy theatre scene that includes every strata of its community shows a civilized nation'. In its elaboration, a community of young people that is attuned with theatre and the workings of it, may it be as performer or audience, are a people that are emotionally and mentally healthy. This is a world that is thoughtful, imaginative, and alive! In the same book, theatre that is catered especially for children is detailed out thoroughly; considering the fact that, children, who are after all future audiences should be treated with respect. To honour their intelligence with thoughtful works would in turn help them grow as individuals. In Peggy Klaus' the truth about hard skills, she uses the cellist Yo-Yo Ma to connect the three components of affective, cognitive and psychomotor. She states that while every cellist who has the ability to play would accomplish the psychomotor (physical know how), and cognitive (ability to read scores), it takes a special artiste like Yo Yo Ma to add the affective (emotional connection and expression) into the performance, hence elevating it to art.

She also cites an independent study by Fortune 100 to survey the difference between normal managers and high performing managers. While all the managers surveyed could finish their allocated tasks, the high performing managers were elevated in their status simple due to the fact that they had higher levels of self-ware, social skills, self-management and organizational savvy. This meant that the managers were recognized only as high performing when they could incorporate the affective into their

everyday work. It was not enough to use the body and the mind, the emotional completes the occupation.

Elaborating on the matter, she used two managers as examples, one who sent the message: 'SEND ME THE REPORT'. Or: 'PLEASE SEND ME THE REPORT, THANKS'.

It is no wonder when the Klaus revealed that the latter message would illicit more immediate (and happier!) responses from colleagues. She connects this to the, *please, thank you, sorry*, principle. What you add to your messages can turn commands into pleasing requests, and in turn more successful communication with peers; simply by adding an emotional aspect to actions (Klaus, 2007).

In Chuck Jones' *Make Your Voice Heard*, he states the voice training, or any form of theatrical training has to be connected to the actors' emotional life. The voice should not be just the technical work for the actor, but a personal, and natural part of what he or she is experiencing. For example, when doing a breathing exercise, there has to be a correlating emotional response or release.

This claim makes the research relevant, in that in teaching drama, all components of learning go hand in hand to produce a holistic experience (Jones, 1996).

Director Michael Howard says that in his training of young people, gibberish is as important as the script (or maybe more!).

'I use all the things that I found valuable in my own acting and directing life, and found that gibberish is a wonderful way to help an actor become more expressive, to communicate using all of himself. For example, in a scene an actor might find it easy to say, "I love you" because the words do it for him. But if he can only use nonsensical sounds, it forces him to use his body more expressively and his voice becomes more colourful in his attempt to make his feelings clear and communicate with his partner. It also forces the actors to tune into each other more carefully since they can't rely on words but have to look for meaning in sounds and body language' (Howard, 1987).

This shows that drama is unique in that it is a subject that incorporates all three components of learning; the affective, cognitive and physical. In the book 'Soft Skills' published by Iland Business Pages, careers are categorized based on its usage of soft skills, hard skills, or both. Generally, all jobs would require both soft skills and hard skills, but some would require more of either. For example, as hard skills are quantifiable, jobs in mathematics, statistics, and physics would require less interaction with people, while jobs that require more soft skills are such as salesmen, comedians; jobs that require high communication skills. It is interesting to note that jobs like lawyer, teacher, and an actor would require both hard skills and soft skills in almost equal importance. This is because these jobs require technical knowledge of the craft, and analytical and communication skills to put these skills to place (Iland, 2013).

2.4 CREATIVE DRAMA AND ITS RELATION TO SOFT SKILLS

Drama specialist, Brian Way states in *Development through Drama*, "Theatre is largely concerned with communication between actors and an audience; Drama is largely concerned with experience by the participants."

Creative drama is an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-oriented form of drama, where participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect on experiences real and imagined. Creative drama takes children's natural world, creative play, and develops it further, using theatre techniques, to create learning experiences which are for the participants.

Creative Drama is not primarily concerned with teaching theatre skills, although this may of course occur. The purpose of Creative Drama is to use the natural dramatic impulse to facilitate learning in an unlimited number of fields and areas. Children naturally act out their perceptions, try out roles, and play "pretend." It is the primary way

the very young learn about their world. (This is why, although I know no adults who enjoy vacuuming or cutting the lawn, you can go to any toy store and buy toy vacuums and mowers. Children are "trying on" adult roles.) Creative Drama structures this kind of activity so that students can explore topics experientially. One center in Kuala Lumpur that does this is KidZania, a children's complex that allows the young to play dress up. That principle is akin to creative drama, in that while 'play making', the children take on roles, and in doing so, communicate with one another.

Aristotle said, "Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand."

Creative Drama is also useful for personality growth and self-esteem. It helps children learn to cooperate and to think out of the box, and aid in problem solving- key components in what constitutes soft skills.

It builds language and communication skills better than just about any other activity in school (often including English class). It promotes empathy by letting students step into others' shoes. It can also be used as a tool to teach literally any other subject, if lessons are carefully designed. Whenever I can, I try to support the curriculum of my students in other subjects. What's wonderful about this is that since every Creative Drama lesson necessarily involves subject content of one kind or another, you can usually design a lesson around a non-dramatic curricular topic without compromising the dramatic content of the lesson at all (Way, 1998).

Creative Drama is also sometimes called "Creative Dramatics" or "Creative Play."

The chapter below relays readings on how creative drama is taught via mantle of the expert, a primary method used in the classes of The Actors Studio Academy.

2.5 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT

Relating the chapter above on creative drama, Brian Way must have been inspired by Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert. Mantle of the Expert is arguably the choice approach used by many teachers interested in using creative drama, or in this case 'dramatic inquiry' in their classrooms.

Developed by Dorothy over 40 years, Mantle of the Expert has been called a 'clear system with operant laws'. This is because 'Mantle of the Expert starts with a problem or task, and, in role, teachers and students explore what knowledge they already have while making new discoveries along the way' (Bolton, 1995).

By creating imaginary problems to be solved, a creative drama class using Mantle of the Expert will subconsciously move the learner to think on his feet, and communicate a solution.

Viv Aitken in her book 'Connecting Curriculum, Linking Learning' sums the Mantle of the Expert as, 'the idea of learning growing like a mantle, or cloak, surrounding the learner. In some ways the image which is bestowed as a sign of mana, or respect, knowledge and status. However, Heathcote makes it clear that unlike the korowai, the "mantle" in Mantle of the Expert is not a garment to be gifted by another, but a quality that grows from within: Mantle is not a cloak by which a person is recognised. This is no garment to cover. I use it as a quality: of leadership, carrying standards of behaviour, morality, responsibility, ethics and the spiritual basis of all action. The mantle embodies the standards I ascribe to. It grows by usage, not garment stitching.

As Heathcote's words imply, the Mantle of the Expert approach places the child at the centre of the learning. The teacher's role is to create the conditions whereby a mantle of leadership, knowledge, competency and understanding grows around the child.

This approach assumes a progressive view of learning, responsive to the needs of the child (Heston, 1993). The child centricism begins in the planning stages, with the teacher starting from the children's interests and needs, alongside the curriculum objectives, and continues in the classroom interactions, where the teacher consciously positions the children as competent co-constructors of the learning. Although placing the child at the centre, and including strong elements of inquiry, the approach is far from child-led' (Aitken, 2013).

Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert is important as a prime source of literature as it forms the inspiration to many of the activities conducted by the facilitators of The Actors Studio Academy. Improvisation and devised work which are prevalent in both the Speech and Drama classes and the Theatre for Young People programme harkens back to the principles that govern the Mantle of the Expert.

Heathcote's model is similar to Peter Slade's, that the concept of play is integral to the learning experience of the child. In this sense, child drama is viewed not to create entertainment for the stage, but as playing to learn, or in other words, using drama as a tool (Slade, 1954).

2.6 CHILD DRAMA- READINGS ON THE CONCEPT OF 'PLAY'.

Child drama is an art form in its own right; it is not an activity that has been invented, but the actual behavior of human beings.

'Play is an inborn and vital part of young life. It is not an activity of idleness, but is rather the child's way of thinking, proving, relaxing, working, remembering, daring, testing, creating and absorbing. It is, in fact, life. The best child play takes place only where the opportunity and encouragement are consciously given to it by an adult mind. This is a process of nurturing and is not the same as interfering. It is necessary to build confidence by friendship, and the right atmosphere by sympathetic consideration' (Slade, 1954).

An early conclusion to compare the general findings on Heathcote and Slade is that both approaches are important in its usage of creative drama as a tool to empower the learner to make choices whilst ‘playing’ in the classroom. The word *choices* here means that the learner is encouraged to form a voice, an opinion, and hence forming the building blocks to what one would consider ‘self-expression’.

In other words, the usage of creative drama becomes a tool that ignites the learner into acquiring creative thinking skills, expression skills, and decision making all while participating in the world that is simulated or encouraged by the teacher.

In a thesis by Lenka Krivkova, *Design of the Workshop*, she states, ‘drama is used as a tool to achieve learning goals of other subjects. Components like role play and improvisation are useful in achieving disciplines like interview and debates. These methods are used in a way that they not only accomplish the set pedagogical, but also dramatic goals’ (Krivkova, 2011).

2.7 CHILDREN’S THEATRE- CREATING THINKING SKILLS FOR THE YOUNG AUDIENCE

Children’s Theatre can be best described as performances designed specifically for the young audience in mind. Only emerging in the 1900s in America as a branch of performing arts, Children’s Theatre was already an important art component in countries like China and Russia where the minds of the young are highly regarded. In fact, only the best performers were used to perform in Children’s Theatre in those countries. Many of the children’s theatre companies in America were part of after school programs (Hicks, 1981).

Since its introduction in the 1902, children's theatre has now grown into an art form compatible to adult theatre. A recent article written by Lyn Gardner for The Guardian states that just like literature for young people, theatre for children should be regarded with higher esteem, as children and their experience in the world mean tremendously. 'Could there be a connection between that and our inability to value and nurture the creativity and imaginations of our children? We worry endlessly about exam results and yet squeeze the arts from the curriculum, so that opportunities to learn an instrument or go to the theatre are not an entitlement for every child, but activities that are only within the reach of the privileged few. As one of the characters in Lee Hall's *The Pitman Painters* says: "art is the place where you understand your whole life from." If one single child is excluded from art, we are all the poorer for it' (Gardner, 2013). There are many children's theatre companies in the world. This section will look at two models; one from Canada, and the other Penang, Malaysia.

Theatre Direct Canada has been creating and performing for more than 500,000 children since 1970. Its artistic directors, David Craig and Robert Morgan write and produce their shows, such as *Napalm the Magnificent* and *Dib and Dob* which have all won various awards such as the Tony Awards and Chalmers's Award. The two believe that theatre for children demands high level thinking, mainly because it asks members of the audience to sit in judgement on the play's characters as they make choices within the context of the drama. The company's plays for children also regard the emotional importance of young people highly in their content, contrary to other mediums of entertainment for the young (Giles, 2000).

The Young Theatre Penang Group was an active theatre for children outfit in the 2000s. Lead by Janet Pillai, a leading theatre exponent for the young, the company produced many thought provoking productions for young audiences. Its play *Hen or Rooster* explores issues pertaining to gender, sexuality and cultural identity. Janet who is

known for her cutting edge work used the production as a means to challenge children's perception on gender and sexuality. These themes are uncommon in entertainment for young people, and it is only apt that the stage be used as a medium to put these provocative questions to play (Manan, 2005).

The Actors Studio Academy has also produced various children's plays over the years. The most recent was Zak Zebra's African Safari, an interactive musical written by Nick Choo. The play allows children in the audience's to make decisions along the story to aid the characters on stage.

'I believe giving the children a part in the whole process of creation on stage is empowering and creatively satisfying. Children are not just mere spectators but part of this imaginary world' (Choo, 2015).

University of Malaysia

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is qualitative in nature, hence relying heavily upon interviews, literature reviews, and class observations of participants at The Actors Studio Academy as well as with its founder Dato Faridah Merican and the facilitators/ teachers.

The research process started in August 2014 after attending lecturers on Child Drama with Dr. Zainal Latiff, where preliminary readings on the topic was done. Interviews with key persons of The Actors Studio Academy ensued end 2015 to understand the course better. To complete the analysis of findings, three semesters of the speech and drama classes are observed right until its final performance of the students, in 2016. The final performance (graduation) of the students is used as an assessment of the students' growth. It is considered as a practical assessment. The components of growth from all three semesters are also compared with the Bloom's Taxonomy to gauge the different areas of efficacy. A similar process is carried out with The Theatre for Young People program, focusing from its start of program at the start of 2016, until August 2016. The research process is projected to end in December 2017, when findings and analysis are put into writing.

Table 3.1: Summary of research plan for three semesters of Speech and Drama

2016

	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3
Observation Session in week 1	To gauge soft skills exhibited in the first week of class	To gauge soft skills in the first week of class	To gauge soft skills in the first week of class
Observation Sessions from weeks 2-8	To identify the activities used in the drama course that cultivates soft skills.	To identify the activities used in the drama course that cultivates soft skills.	To identify the activities used in the drama course that cultivates soft skills.
Observation sessions from weeks 9-10	To observe difference in students at the end of the course.	To observe difference in students at the end of the course.	To observe difference in students at the end of the course.
Questionnaire distributed and tabulated in week 10	To allow facilitators of the course to answer the questionnaire pertaining to soft skills and the course.	To allow facilitators of the course to answer the questionnaire pertaining to soft skills and the course.	To allow facilitators of the course to answer the questionnaire pertaining to soft skills and the course.



Figure 3.1: Summary of Research Methodology

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research objectives, which are, ‘to identify how a drama course (and in this regard, The Actors Studio Academy) can aid in improving a learner’s expression skills and soft skills calls for the researcher to identify the components in the Actors Studio syllabus that directly promotes particular soft skills.

To achieve this, the research method is observation of the lessons plans of the Speech and Drama syllabus to highlight activities that directly tackle communication skills and soft skills, as well as the Theatre for Young People programme.

The scrutiny of the Speech and Drama syllabus is complemented by observation of the classes conducted. In fact, by using this method of cross checking between scrutiny of syllabus and observation of actual lesson helps ascertain if objectives of the research is achieved. Please refer to appendix 3 for a sample of the lesson plan.

Interviews are also conducted with founders, facilitators, students, and parents involved in the programme. Interviews with founders and facilitators reinforce the projected objectives of the programmes. Interviews with students and parents give a gauge on how effective the course has been in trying to achieve the set objectives.

3.3 SAMPLE POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The target population for this research is defined to a select group of students of both The Speech and Drama course, and the Theatre for Young People program. As both these courses have more than 300 students in a year, the research has defined a sample of the population to be used for the research. The table below presents a record of the number of total population size, and sample participants selected for the research, in the year 2016.

Table 3.2: Population size and sample participants of research

	Speech and Drama	Theatre for Young People
Total population size	256 students	17 students
Sample population	15 students	17 students
Age range of population	13-15 years	5 years

3.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The sample participants for the research was selected based on the fact that they were of the appropriate age to the field of study. The 13-15 year olds of the Speech and Drama course were selected from the younger students as the study specifically aims at the

adolescence to young adult period of time for the young Malaysian. This is the age when they prepare and finish their secondary and tertiary students upon entering the workforce. The class selected for observation had 15 students, and all 15 were used as sample as they represented different cultural and economic backgrounds. The Theatre for Young People has 17 students, and all 17 students were selected for the study.

3.5 INSTRUMENTATION FOR DATA COLLECTION

For this research, scheduled interviews and observations are main instruments in data collection. The facilitators were interviewed first. The interview questions (refer to Appendix) endeavoured to attain information relating to the drama course and its cultivation of soft skills through the activities conducted. Questions posed related to the methodology and techniques used in class, reactions and responses from activities conducted, evaluation of students' performance and improvement levels, and problems faced, and suggested ways to overcome these problems. Questions chosen in the questionnaire were influenced by a research done on children in the United Kingdom, 'Products of the Performing Arts: Effects of the Performing Arts on Children's Personal Development' (Elver, 2015). The questionnaire for the facilitators of the course has questions targeted to excavate particular areas necessary to the research.

- Questions 1-3: to document state of soft skills in students before commencement of course.
- Question 4: to detail methods used in improving soft skills
- Question 6: to observe and document effected of the methods used at the end of the course and its effects on the students.
- Question 7: to measure efficacy of the course.

Please refer to appendix 2 for full sample questionnaire.

3.6 VALIDITY OF QUESTIONNAIRE

To validate the study, the questionnaire was proposed to experts in the field of drama education. These experts vetted the questionnaire and suggested a five-point Likert scale; 5 points being strongly agree, 4 points agree, 3 points undecided, 2 points disagree and 1 point strongly disagree. The researcher also proposed to these experts to have open ended questionnaires in addition to the Likert scale as it would allow for elaboration and specificities.

3.7 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaires were given out to all facilitators after a briefing on the research. They were given by hand, and were individually briefed on the research. The questionnaire was given on the final day of course, of the Speech and Drama program, and the final day of graduation performance, of the Theatre for Young People program. The facilitators were all aware of this questionnaire at the start of the course, and knew that their students would be observed throughout the course.

3.8 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data was collected via observation, questionnaires and open ended interviews.

Observation was conducted via filling up a schedule observation chart. Each week, types of soft skills are observed and filled up in the chart according to the categories emotional, creativity, communication and social.

Table 3.3: Observation chart to gauge type of soft skills category observed.

Types of skills exhibited according to weeks	Soft Skills: Emotional	Soft Skills: Creativity	Soft Skills: Communication	Soft Skills: Social
Week 1				
Week 2				
Week 3				
Week 4				
Week 5				
Week 6				

Data collected from questionnaire were analysed based on the response options in the instruments show below:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5 POINTS	4 POINTS	3 POINTS	2 POINTS	1 POINT

Profile Of Facilitators Of The Programme

The teachers in this research were the faculty of The Actors Studio Academy year 2015/2016. Their experience ranges from 5-50 years working in the arts/ education.

The following paragraphs will detail their experience as practitioners and teachers of the arts.

The first teacher Faridah Merican, is a co-founder of The Actors Studio Academy. She was awarded the BOH Cameronian Lifetime Achievement Award for 2004. In July 2005, Faridah was conferred the ‘Darjah Dato’ Paduka Tuanku Ja’afar’ by the Yang Di-Pertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan on the occasion of His Highness’ 83rd Birthday. In

August 2006, she received an Honorary Master of Letters at University Sains Malaysia's 35th Convocation. Finally, in 2014, Faridah received the Outstanding Achievement award under the Arts, Culture and Entertainment category from the Inaugural Malaysian Women of Excellence Awards. Faridah now sits on The Laureate Advisory Board and is the Executive Producer and co-founder of The Actors Studio, The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre and the Performing Arts Centre of Penang (penangpac). Faridah has been teaching basic in acting to beginners since 1989, and continue to do so today.

The second teacher, Joe Hasham was born in Tripoli, Lebanon, and did his schooling in Sydney, Australia, moved to Malaysia in 1984 and is now a proud permanent resident of his adopted country. Joe is Artistic Director and Co-Founder of The Actors Studio, the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre and Penang Performing Arts Centre, which he set up with his wife Faridah Mericcan in 1989. Joe is a graduate of NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art) at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Joe was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM), within the Australian Honours System "For Service to the performing arts through The Actors Studio (Malaysia) and The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre; and, as an actor, writer, producer and director.

The third teacher, Omar Ali is currently a resident director at klpac. As a full time actor, Omar focuses on voice work at The Actors Studio Academy. His vast working experience as a voice talent has been useless in imparting the importance of tuning the voice for the stage.

The fourth teacher, Lex Lakshman, is a graduate from the National Arts Academy Malaysia (ASWARA), Lex Lakshman Balakrishnan is currently the Choreographer-In-Residence at The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre. As the resident choreographer, Lex has produced many dance works as well as choreographed for a wide variety of

production ranging from choral productions to plays to large scale musicals. He is passionate about combining both traditional and contemporary elements in his creations. Lex established a popular contemporary dance platform with The Actors Studio called KIV which has been running for the past four years and has showcased exciting new works by emerging Malaysian choreographers. In 2011, he accompanied the Malaysian contingent to the World Choir Games in Shaoxing, China where they won a Gold Medal in the Folklore category. In 2012, he presented a paper on Malaysian traditional dance and music with Susanna Saw from the Young Choral Academy at the KODALY Symposium in Brisbane, Australia. Lex can also be seen on stage as an actor, dancer, and singer and was awarded the Bintang Irama 1Malaysia by RTM & JKKN in 2010.

3.9 FINAL PERFORMANCE OF STUDENT AS ASSESSMENT

The final stage of the research uses the graduation performance of the student as an assessment of skills learned. Blooms Taxonomy is used as a guide to identify the skills learned, as well as the skills-combinations from each component taught in the speech and drama class.

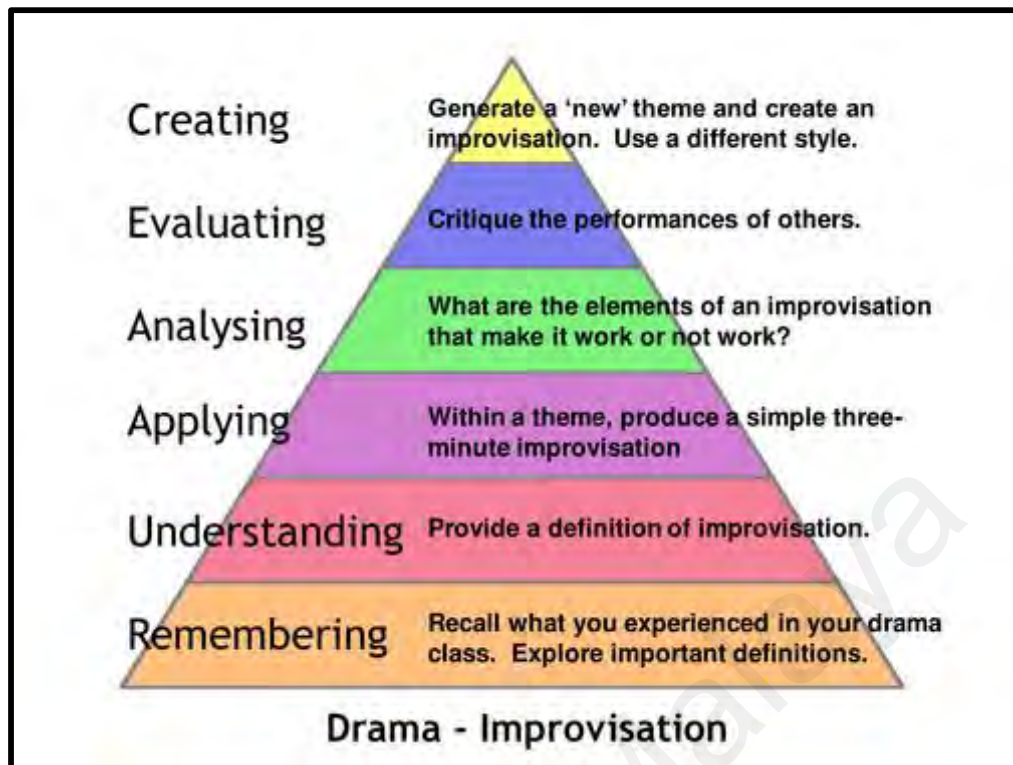


Figure 3.2: Bloom's Taxonomy and the analysis of a drama-improvisation class

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The first part of this analysis is a thorough look at the speech and drama syllabus of the Actors Studio Academy. The analysis would be formed when the components in the syllabus which produce soft skills are identified. The activities geared towards training these young actors in the syllabus would be the hard skills learned, while the soft skills produced would be the inherent skills that would be indirectly acquired. The analysis is formed when these inherent skills are acquired.

The following analyses each component that would produce a set of soft skills.

4.2 SPEECH AND DRAMA AND VOCAL TRAINING TO CULTIVATE SOFT SKILLS

The speech and drama programme at the Actors Studio Academy caters to students from 3-17 years old. The main objective of the course is to increase speech confidence of the students through drama activities. One of the main tools in achieving speech confidence is by using vocal training. The vocal training constitutes breathing and projection exercises to enable the students to communicate in a clear manner with appropriate articulation. Volume, pitch, pace, rhythm, style and dynamics are made distinct to the student in modulating and learning how to use the voice for communication. By observing the lessons, the students are put through vocal training every time they come for the class. A typical vocal training class would see the teacher explaining the need for these exercises. The researcher finds this explanation important, as Malaysian students who are not exposed to this sort of vocal work might find them funny. This was obvious

in the vocal class observed, which was handled by teacher, Omar Ali. The students who were beginners in drama (aged 13-17 years old) began giggling when asked to 'work their mouths'. Omar focused on the technicalities; how the mouth region, the tongue, and the stomach are interconnected to produce 'voice'. Naturally his activities were such as tongue rolls, vowel and consonant emphasis, and projection exercises. An example of this would be to imagine standing in a football field, and to pick an aim. The student then pulls back the 'ball' while inhaling. As he exhales, the ball (voice) is summoned from the summoned and 'thrown' out to reach the aim.

When the researcher spoke to the students, they expressed that having the technical aspects of speech helps them as comments from teachers in school to 'speak up' or be clearer can seem vague without explanation on how to do so.

These activities, when related to the readings of Mantle of the Expert that, compounds that learning while playing unconsciously triggers skills in the learner as a problem solving exercise. To 'throw' the voice to a target seems like a playful task, but when analyzed it teaches the student to gauge the correct level of volume to use to the prospective audience. The Actors Studio academy voice class hence engages the student to pick up confidence in speech through these simple games and exercises. In the final presentation of the students' there is a marked difference in the students' level of projection as compared to the first lesson. Omar Ali states that if the audience, can comprehend what is being said on stage during the final presentation, then the students have proven themselves to be able to use voice confidently (please refer to Appendix 1: Video of End of Year Production, TASA 2017 performance).

Below is a sample of the vocal lesson used in the Actors Studio speech and drama program which lists the activities to be used for specific objectives.

Topic	Objectives	Activities	Observation Hours
3. The Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to introduce basic voice work/ breathing -to inculcate team work in the group - to continue work on body - to be able to perform in an audible and clear manner with appropriate articulation (eg. volume, pitch, pace, rhythm, style, dynamics) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mouth exercises 2. Projection exercises 3. Breathing exercises 	2.5

Based on the observation of the class above, the teachers explained that to express oneself in an audible and clear manner, with appropriate articulation, the volume, pitch, pacing, rhythm, style and dynamics of the speaker can be controlled with guided breathing and projection techniques. He demonstrated this via a group breathing exercise, where inhalation was to be from the nose, and exhalation from the mouth, and to have controlled voice projection coming from the diaphragm. Once the students were clear on proper breathing techniques, and to have the voice come from the diaphragm and not the throat, the teacher demonstrated that the pace, rhythm and dynamics of the voice can be modulated via controlled manipulation of other muscles like the mouth and tongue. After the class the teacher noticed a marked difference in the way the students used their voice, and the students themselves felt that they could at least be louder if they needed to speak to an audience.

These are some of the comments tabulated from the interviews with the speech and drama students when queried on their impression of the vocal classes;

‘I like it that teacher Omar gives us a step by step approach to being louder and clearer’

‘It’s pretty cool to think of the mouth and the stomach as main ‘engines’ that need to be warmed up.’

‘I feel with these exercises everybody can learn to be a better speaker’.

When I connect this with earlier findings in the survey by Jobstreet, the reason to why so many graduates are unable to communicate is that they lack knowledge on how to do so. I also spoke to a human resource manager on her views on the matter;

‘When the human resource manager meets the candidate, there is only an average of 30 minutes to an hour to make an impression. In this limited time period, very minute things like pronunciation and articulation of words become the first things you see. Mumbling, slurring, and lack of projection are indications of low self-esteem in self and language skills’ (Sim, 2014).

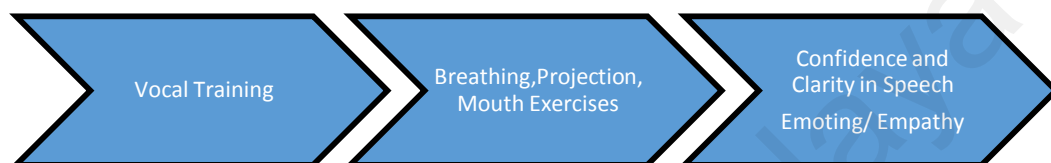


Figure 4.1: Speech and drama and its utilization of vocal training in cultivating confidence in speech, clarity of speech, emoting and empathy as a listener

4.3 SPEECH AND DRAMA AND ITS UTILIZATION OF ENSEMBLE TRAINING TO BUILD SOFT SKILLS

One of the core principles in the speech and drama programme at the Actors Studio Academy is the ensemble training element. ¹In the ensemble training spirit, the drama teacher works with the class as a team that problem solves together. Problem solving in this context would of course mean creating dramatic pieces either as a class activity, or for the purpose of presentation.

The researcher observed a class where the drama teacher was devising a scene based on Roald Dahl’s *The Witches*. The teacher gave the students an excerpt of the script as per below, and the students did the usual as one would expect in a drama class. They began with a cold reading of the script, then discussed the characters, and talked about how they would see the play being stage. However, the teacher had something else in

mind. He used the script just as a guide, as the class would be devising an original piece based on the text by Dahl. A stimulus used by the teacher was to ask the students to relate the story to actual 'witches' in society. In other words, who would be the ones kidnapping and causing harm to the young in today's society. The teacher explained that this was to tie fiction to real life issues, in this case, child abuse and kidnappings which are rampant in today's society. These were some of the students' feedback;

'I read in the papers about this boy who got kidnapped in Mont Kiara. They found him after a week. Reading this script made me remember the emotions I felt when I heard from the Principal about the missing boy as he was from our school'

'I feel that Roald Dahl was talking about real witches. We still read about them in the papers. People whoop kidnap children and sell them to other countries. I find them the real monsters!'

From the students' feedback, and a chat I had with the teacher after the class, I find that this ensemble exercise made the students form opinions about society, and beyond the classroom. Akin to the Mantle of the Expert, the students functioned as a group to form an idea and 'solve' a problem which they have imagined based on reality. They related to the characters, and formed opinions, feelings, and sympathy towards the protagonist; all qualities of a young person with empathy.

The class then were given the homework of adapting the script into Malaysian context. In doing so, they asked themselves questions like; how would a sexual predator groom their victims, what gestures can be used by children to sniff out paedophiles, what are the characteristics of a child that had gone through trauma.

In forming the questions above, the students have unknowingly formed emotions and opinions regarding the issue. In relating this to Mantle of the Expert, the students have become a brotherhood of 'experts' regarding the issue of child abuse/ kidnapping

cases evident in their ability to have an authority in the matter. Because they have spent hours in the rehearsal room either as victims or predators, or simply as observers of a kidnapping story, they have experienced the emotions that might have occurred in a real life case.

According to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015, the ‘ability to discuss a subject matter critically with a peer’ is a key criteria to look for when assessing students’ communication and soft skills. In this regard, speech and drama becomes a valid agent in cultivating soft skills. In the same class, the students were divided into groups as they discussed Roald Dahl. Via observation, as the students were left to their devices, the researcher noticed how they took turns taking charge, and listening to one another. In the book Teaching Thematically by Laura Gardner Salazar, the above is quoted as well. Students learn to form fluid hierarchies as they discuss and plan a project, and these hierarchies teach them the qualities that would be required of a democratic negotiation. Below is the excerpt from the syllabus that highlights the objective of cultivating team work in the ensemble training lessons.

Topic	Objectives	Activities	Contact Hours
3. The Ensemble	-to introduce ensemble work on a deeper level. - to compare and contrast solo work/ duo work/ group work.	1. Activities to promote: - trust- 'the fall': trusting the team -groupthink -openness-sharing/ the paper game. -comfort levels -risk taking -safety	1
4. Continuation on Ensemble work	- to introduce ensemble work on a deeper level. - to introduce spacial awareness in ensemble pieces.	1. Activities to promote: - spatial awareness -audience awareness - team work	1

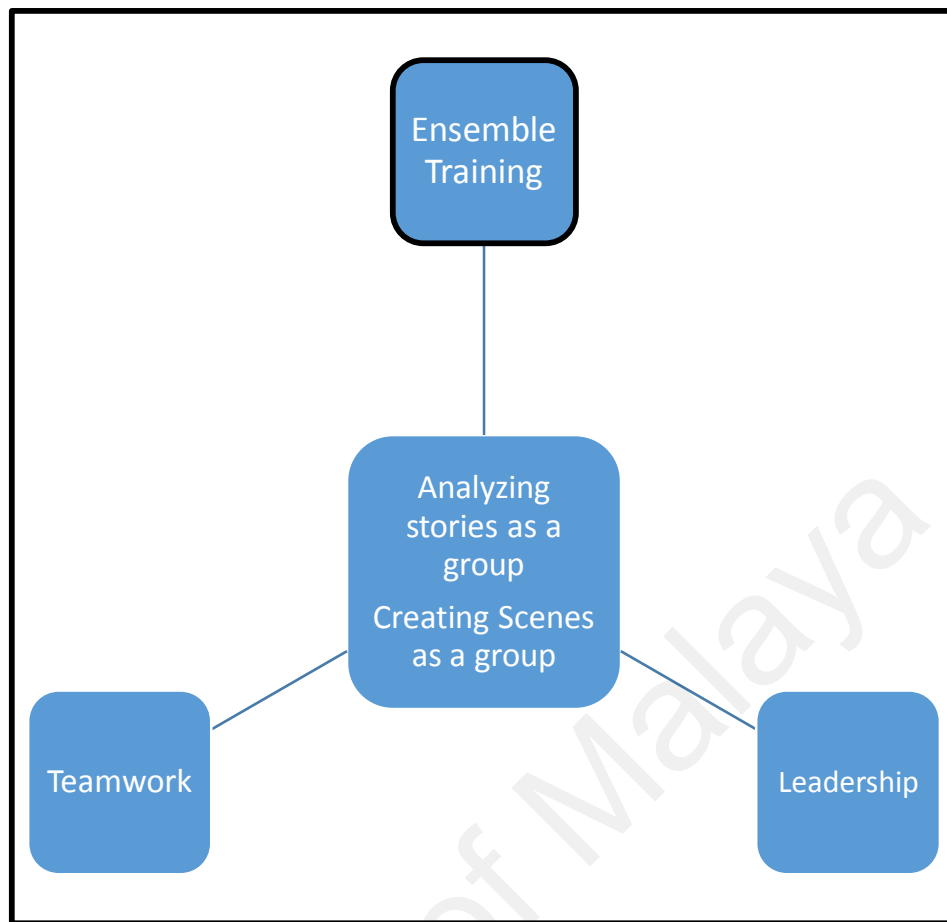


Figure 4.2: Utilizing Ensemble Work to Cultivate Leadership and Teamwork

4.4 SPEECH AND DRAMA AND ITS UTILIZATION OF PHYSICAL TRAINING IN CULTIVATING GESTURES

The speech and drama program devotes 40 minutes of each week's lesson on physical theatre. Physical theatre can be defined as expression or conveyance of a story via the use of the actors' body. This can include hand gestures, and dance. The common trait of physical theatre performances is that it contains minimal to no text. Body language on the other hand is non-verbal communication. It is when thoughts, feelings and intentions are sent via physical behaviour like gestures and facial expression.

In the physical theatre class observed, the teacher provided the students with a stimulus. They are to react to the theme of deforestation. The teacher asked questions like

how they felt about deforestation, what they think caused deforestation and how this issue would be remedied. The students then gave their thoughts, albeit candidly. Once the group has come up with a collective idea on what they feel and think of the issue, the teacher played a musical track. The students were then asked to assume 'characters' that could form a scene depicting deforestation. Some became wood cutters, others became the evil logging business owners, and most assumed roles as trees! The observation made was that the 'dangerous' archetypes like the wood cutters and loggers were faced with fear from the rest of the group. The trees and the innocent folk of the forest tensed and walked away when these 'dangerous' characters came close. The teacher spent some time after the exercise to reflect on reflexes and responses. He asked the students when they would react similarly. The students collectively said that the loggers made them think of danger, and their bodies reacted accordingly. In the observation, the students' bodies exhibited caution and hesitation. Their bodies tensed, muscles were not relaxed, and vocalization almost ceased. In fact, the room became very quiet, and when later queried, the students said that at the time, they felt like they could not open their mouths to speak as they were in 'alert mode'. Although this scenario might be extreme to educate the students on body language, the teacher explained that it made the students understand that communication of a message combined the spoken word and what the body conveys. For example, by understanding how scenarios like the above can stimulate a person to behave, the students can prep themselves better when faced with similar circumstances.

The research relates the above to the Genard method, a foundation of public speaking principles founded by Gary Menard, a speech guru from Boston. The Menard method lists poses and facial expression as two key things that should be acquired for successful communication, may it be formal, or informal settings. Social psychologist Amy Cuddy's research into power poses supports this. Cuddy presented her research in her TED talk, "Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are", which purports that the

public makes up their impression on a person by observing bodily cues first. So, this means that physicality precedes speech in a person's formation of perception towards another.

When the researcher relates this to the predicament faced today of young graduates lacking soft skills, body language is a vital tool to be acquired to help solve the problem. Body language is not something that can be learned through books. It can only be attained via experiences, and the closest thing to having a real life experience would be stimulated realities; achievable through physical work in a drama class. For example, when an individual is regarded as being intuitive and emphatic to others, that individual would have gone through instances and life experiences which called upon these skills. Empathy and intuition are also exhibited via physical gestures, such as nodding to show understanding and eye contact to establish connection to the speaker. All these could be read in books, but can only truly be applied in a hands on lesson such as drama.

In the Speech and Drama class, the students are also taught 'appearances'; which is an exercise of getting them to manifest an emotion in a frozen stance or tableau. This is akin to biomechanics, where the body contorts itself to express an emotion, and ultimately the individual experiences that emotion on the inside. The students who go through this exercise claim that they experience a change in their emotions. For example, if they were asked to do the happy appearance, they immediately feel happy. This is useful to the student interested in improving soft skills and confidence, for when it is applied, the result is almost immediate. It is not a long term solution, but practised regularly in drama class, it can help students control and compartmentalise their emotions. Below is a sample of the lesson plan indicating the physical theatre used and its correlating skills to be learned.

Topic	Objectives	Activities	Contact Hours
The Group and You	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to introduce more intensive body work - to inculcate team work in the group. - to inculcate a sense of self and space. - to inculcate non spoken communication via body 	1. Warm ups. . Physical: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility - Strength -Endurance -Gestures - Expressiveness -Control -Awareness -Partner stretches -Centre of gravity 	5

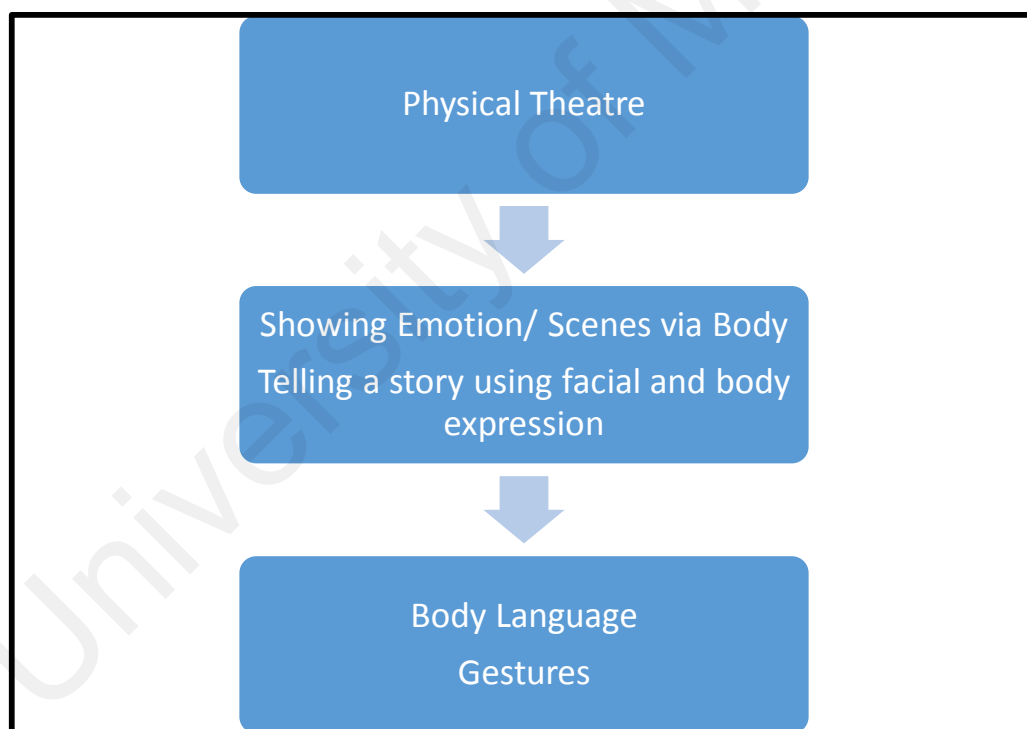


Figure 4.3: Physical Theatre and its Cultivation of Body Language and Gestures

The next part of this chapter will be a study of the Theatre for Young People programme, of the Actors Studio Academy. The study aims to link how creative drama aids in the cultivation of expression and soft skills amongst Malaysian students aged 13-17. While Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert will be used as primary reference, the researcher will attempt to link how creative drama affects this age group, who are transitioning from tertiary education into the workplace.

The Theatre for Young People programme was formed in 2008 to provide young Malaysians from 16-25 years old a holistic education in the performing arts. It is also a stepping stone for an individual to take on a career in the performing arts, while at the same time providing an avenue of creative expression. The training period of 4 months aim to equip the participants with the basics in acting, directing, writing for stage, movement and technical backstage skills. While the module for the programme has evolved since its inception, the core fundamentals remain. This part of the research will scrutinize how this training of actors in will in turn also cultivate soft skills in its learners.

The researcher sat through several key sessions at the start of the programme, to find correlation between Theatre for Young People and the research topic. The first session was called Compartmentalizing Emotions, and how to use memories for the stage.

4.5 COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF EMOTIONS AND SOFT SKILLS

In this session Faridah Merican led the participants on a soul searching exercise- an important tool to be utilized in the art of story-telling, particularly monologues. In the exercise that was observed, the participants are made to sit in a safe circle, and assured that the dialogue that ensues, and the result of the improvisation would remain in the room. One by one, they would share stories from their lives that they have found difficult to express to family or friends. This is akin to drama therapy, however, one clear

difference is that the process is a creative one, which would hopefully yield material for performance (Merican, 2014).

In the book *Teaching Dramatically, Learning Thematically* by Laura Gardner Salazar, parallels are found, 'Feelings are intense and extreme at this age. Players know about private sufferings. They imagine impossible romances, and crushes are common. Mood swings may make players difficult to work with, yet player's mood may provide a starting point. Since Ulysses for example has such extreme moods, one way to make "The Odyssey" lesson appropriate for young teens would be to use the emotional hostility so often found in teenagers as a beginning for working on that story.'

Faridah explains and compounds further on this comparison, 'The great thing about this age group is that there is a lot of pent up emotions, so drama provides an outlet for this emotions; a creative expression if you may. We want to show them that expression need not just be connected to the negative, expression of emotions can be used to create'.

And pent up emotions certainly came to its head during the sessions. As they were aware they were being observed, the participants were at the start self-aware and hesitant with their sharing. However, after being coaxed by Faridah, they opened up one by one; sharing their experiences with the group. The important thing to note here is that the dramatic affair of sob stories is not the focus here. As explained by Faridah, it is getting this stories out, so that the individuals can move forward. It is akin to letting go of excess baggage. It is perhaps a most necessary introduction to our Asian society that discourages one to talk of hurt and pain, but rather suppress and keep it inside. To analyse this further, it is inevitable but to link it to drama therapy.

Drama therapy is relatively new in Malaysia, but is beneficial in aiding expression in individuals. Professor Sue Jennings, a drama therapy advocate says, 'drama therapy is a focused interaction, whether with an individual child or group, that

enables a child to express and communicate their feelings and life experience through play.”

In an interview with the Star newspaper, Sue offers that drama therapy gives patients the freedom to explore, to become confident by using dramatic tools. It also helps patients to be empathetic by gaining different perspectives on themselves and others (Chaim, 2015).

The benefit of this in self-expression is multi-faceted. Take for example a young person going for a job interview. By merely memorizing stock answers and answering by the book would give the impression that the person is not in touch with his emotions, which further indicates that he lacks the ability to process and deal with matters of the heart effectively. Compare this to a candidate who is able to process emotions and express his thoughts genuinely. The indications of this would vary; this candidate would be deemed well-balanced and in touch with his emotions, hence a more successful communicator of his self.

4.6 ACTORS TRAINING TO AID SOFT SKILLS

Actors training varies from one school of thought to the other. The actors training for the Theatre for Young People Programme is designed by Joe Hasham. It involves training of the voice, and body. ‘I always tell my students that it is absolutely important to at least warm up the tongue and lungs daily. It is the individual’s most important organ for communication.’ (Hasham, 2015).

In one of his voice sessions, students were made to do breathing exercises, voice projection exercises and mouth and tongue exercises. Joe explains that the reason they have to do is because we have become so attuned to communicating via technology that

when we actually do speak to one another, it is done ‘lazily’; through mumbles and not enunciating the words properly.

Referencing the early part of analysis will show that our English language syllabus places more emphasis on writing and less on speaking. This sends an indirect message to our youths; that speech is secondary to the written word. Hence, an individual that may express himself well on paper may not necessarily do the same in person. There are various reasons that contribute to this, however, in this session, Joe wants to emphasize that it is all about knowing the right technique.

Joe teaches them that speech comes from breathing correctly; inhaling through the mouth, and exhaling with the voice from the stomach. When the individual understands and practises this concept, his speech will form the expression of thoughts. Relating this to the earlier analysis in this chapter, the researcher finds that this issue of not knowing the right technique stems early on in the life of an average Malaysian youth. Just as how the secondary schools students would find it unusual to learn breathing, the older students in this class professed to have never done this as well. The observation from the member of the Theatre for Young People as they engage their bodies in proper breathing is enlightening, for them, and the researcher. Some of the feedback from the class was that they felt more relaxed, and their bodies seemed more energized, and ready for ‘work’, in this case expression.

After the voice, Joe works on the actors’ position. The actors’ position is akin to having the right posture when one stands; shoulders straight but not tense, head focused to the front but relaxed comfortably on the shoulders, and legs apart to distribute the body weight evenly. Joe explains that the actors’ position is assumed when an individual needs to centre and ground himself to be ready for any kind of stage work. ‘The most effective way to start physically developing a character is to define the placement of the shoulders.

Shoulders give the audience an instant image of who a character is, their power status, and their emotional state. That's a lot of information packed into one body part!' (Price, 2010).

When sitting in the class, the general observation was that here was an unease from most of the students, probably from nerves! They seemed all tensed up. When this was addressed, the participants shared that their perception was that to be an actor was to 'put on' a persona. This perception was slowly debunked as Joe helped them channel their energy toward a focused stance, which of course required them to be relaxed, but in-tuned with their emotions as well. The researcher deduced that if the participants followed this principle in everyday life, he would be more relaxed and ready to communicate genuinely. Hence the conclusion is ironic, that is for one to be more authentic in communicating; principles of 'acting' can be applied and used.

In actor's training, the actor is taught to compartmentalize his emotions. This technique is derived from the Stanislavsky system of acting, where memory recall or sense memory is used to connect the actor's history to that of the character being played.

'In Sense Memory exercises, the actor trains their imagination to respond to the memory of their five senses. Using the actor's memory, the aim is to connect the imagination to the memory of the real sense. It is claimed that the actor who does not use Sense Memory only pretends or indicates through representation that they are cold. It is claimed therefore that the actor using Sense Memory can recreate, relive or re-experience that cold sensation and therefore their acting is more truthful. In other word connecting real sensations to a pretend scenario can help the actor to experience the make believe world of the play as real' (Westbrook, 2008).

In the Theatre for Young People session, Joe gave simple play texts to the participants. He then asked them to research the roles, by using actual people in their lives as models to relate to the characters from the text. 'The performance that one gives using this technique has more believability and truth. It also separates the performer from

the character, which is important as most of the time young performers seem to confuse the two' (Hasham, 2015).

What ensued in the class was that the participants had group discussions according to their allocated scripts. They discussed the characters they were to play, and the emotional journey from start to end of the story. One participant, Thomas Alexander, 23, from the Theatre for Young People 2015 programme relayed that the character he studied from the play *Let's Talk* by Haresh Sharma paralleled his life experiences. He said that although he and the character went through similar experiences, the choices he has made in life were not the same as the character. This provided him with a chance to reflect, which in turn helped him take a step back to express his thoughts. He further explained that it would seem unlikely to talk about your life choices candidly. However, when they are viewed without judgement as per the exercise given by Joe, they remained just that, choices.

This is an important tool for young people who might be at an age where emotions can overwhelm. There is a right place and time for varying emotions to be expressed. In my experience interviewing interns, young and inexperienced graduates tend to either say too much, or too little. Joe further explains how when an individual learns to compartmentalise emotions, he would know when to relay the right sort of information to suit the situation. For example, in an interview, the interviewer may not necessarily want to hear about your familial problems, but how your skills can contribute to the company. The reasoning for this could be that due to the lack of communication skills training from a young age, Malaysians are generally unaware of the different outlets there can be for varying forms of expression. Hence, if actor's training can provide an outlet for pent up emotions, then they can better keep their expressions in control. In other

words, individuals will have to marry the technical skills they have learned with soft skills like emotional connection and empathy to the listener.

4.7 DEVISING THEATRE TO BUILD CRITICAL THINKING

The Theatre for Young People programme introduces the devising theatre class in the second month of its programme. In the class, the students use societal issues as stimuli in creating dramatic works. The idea is to have the students read, research, and basically scour any source that is related to a topic at hand; which will then be used as content for the stage. In 2016, the topic selected was women's issues in Malaysia. Below is a 6 week breakdown of what ensued in creating the production.

Week 1-2: In the first two weeks, the facilitators got the students to present what they have researched on the topic: women's issues in Malaysia. The students either presented what they have read in the media which was of interest to them, or wrote stories based on their life experiences.

The researcher found this process important in the context of communication and soft skills as it made the students think, question, and articulate their emotions. They are learning to become young people who not just accept news they read, but ones that are able to analyse their society.

Week 3-4: After the students have decided on the stories they want to use as the base, the process of turning them into skits will begin. The skits will be an interpretation, a response to the story they have selected. As an example, one student Roshinee Mookaiah decided to write a script based on the court case battle between Indira Gandhi and her husband pertaining to the custody and religion of their children. The script she wrote was

loosely based on the case, but more importantly meant to highlight the issue of custodial rights and religious freedom of children in Malaysia.

The researcher found the idea of interpreting the issues in their own words particularly important in the achievement of building effective communication and thought. The students are not only made to analyse the situation, but indirectly suggest solutions to the issue at hand. Take for example the issue plaguing Indira; it is a case still largely unresolved. However, with the students' version, the play ends with the characters finding resolution, which is important as it suggests what the society feels on the subject.

Weeks 5-6: The last two weeks of the devising programme sees the students culminating their work into a one-hour workshop performance. The workshop performance would be a collage of selected writings and movement pieces. The selection will be done democratically with the facilitators. After the workshop performance, especially in the closed preview night, the students will discuss the work with the audience, where feedback will be given and a question and answer session ensues.

This last part of the process is important as it allows the students to take accountability for their work. This accountability would also mean that the students would have to explain their creations, and learn to accept criticism by their superiors and the public. It is an important learning for the students, to be able to communicate their creations, and ultimately themselves to others.

4.8 DEVISING THEATRE TO BUILD ORIGINAL THOUGHT

Western culture upholds the individual's right to express thought- the individual is seen as independent and expected to form his own construct devoid of influences from surroundings. The eastern philosophy is a contrast to this; individuals are seen as

interdependent beings, which means he is connected via his cultural construct to be dependent on family, friends, and society.

An example of this is to look at how Confucian teaching relays a successful young adult as one who is filial, and conscious of his actions to society. ² In other words, to be an acceptable member of society, words and actions carry consequences. This, coupled with the stringent censorship laws of the country make one think twice before saying anything; a behaviour that is conditioned in students as young as seven years of age. It is no wonder then that when the students become youths, they carry with them this self-consciousness in expression.

The Theatre for Young People program recognizes this and hence introduced the devised text component to ease self-expression; the ideology is that if the students are not used to speak it, maybe they will write it. An example of this is when the class was asked to comment on social events, and a particular case became a popular discussion; the Indira Gandhi case. In the case, Indira Gandhi and her ex-husband are in legal dispute over the child's religious status. The students in the program felt that when it comes to issues like religion and race in the country, self-expression becomes limited as too many quarters are on the ready to attack if anything too sensitive is said or commented. The students were then asked to write their take on the case; if the courts (at the time the dispute was still going on) have not come up with a solution, what solution can they suggest via a stage performance?

After much work on the script, below is an excerpt from the script inspired by the case:

Scene 3: Custody Battle

[At court, a trial is commencing]

ADAM: ALL RISE!

LAWYER 1: Cik SUSILA, is it true that you placed a picture of a Hindu God in your daughter's backpack?

SUSILA: It's Lakshmi. Maha Lakshmi.

LAWYER 1: Please answer the question Miss SUSILA.

SUSILA: Yes. She has a statue by her bedside so I thought-

LAWYER 1: No more questions, Your Honour.

LAWYER 2: Miss SUSILA, you said that you placed the picture in her bag so that it will help with her transition?

SUSILA: Yes. She is going to a new house. A new family. My husband-... My EX-husband's parents never came to visit her. They don't know anything about her, she doesn't know anything about them and all of a sudden she's going to live with them? The picture will help, especially at nights. No?

LAWYER 1: You are making it sound like she's going to a haunted house.

LAWYER 2: Objection!

LAWYER 1: Aren't Gods and Deities used to ward off evil spirits?

LAWYER 2: Your honour!

LAWYER 1: Isn't that what your people believe, Cik SUSILA?

LAWYER 2: Will you please stop--

LAWYER 1: Evil spirits.

LAWYER 2: What?!

LAWYER 1: And despite the court granting your husband full custody, and right over your daughter's religion you still stubbornly went against the court's rule by poisoning her little head with your deviant teachings!

LAWYER 2: Deviant?! Your honour please!

[There was a silent pause in the courthouse]

SUSILA: My daughter, NALA, such a scaredy cat you know? Eversince she was born, she cannot sleep in the dark, scared she say. So I will sit beside her, sing to her, songs from the temple. It will help her sleep. Sometimes the office wants me to stay back late, so I call her. I said, 'NALA, you go to sleep now. MAMA will be back late. You look at Maha Lakshmi, you listen to her. The

songs that MAMA sing to you, MAMA learned it from her. How lucky it is now, that you will be able to listen to the song, straight from the original singer!'. The song in a little girl's head will not disappear just like that. It will linger. It will come, it will go, but it will always be there. You can teach her to hide it, pretend it was never there and maybe, one day, she will forget. But until then, I pray, you let my Maha Lakshmi sing.

After the staging, many of the audiences felt that the skit exemplified what they would have wished for in the real world. In an article on the world economic forum online, this sentiment is echoed, 'Engaging with art is not simply a solitary event. The arts and culture represent one of the few areas in our society where people can come together to share an experience even if they see the world in radically different ways. The important thing is not that we agree about the experience that we share, but that we consider it worthwhile sharing an experience at all'.

4.9 THEATRE ETHICS IN BUILDING LIFE SKILLS

The third part of this analysis looks at the theatre ethics imparted by The Actors Studio Academy. Joe Hasham explains that the ethics are formed to create discipline in the rehearsal space and ultimately performers who will become professionals in the field. A case study to back-up this point is a ten-year study by Heath and Roach, who studied 124-youth groups that used performing arts at its core of training. The result of this research is that theatre ethics impart in the students of the 124 organizations the ability to use their combined talents and abilities for the betterment of community, as well as higher self-esteem in adulthood (Heath, S. Roach, 2014).

The first ethic to be observed is decorum. This means the conduct and appearance of the learner in a drama lesson, is as important as the lesson itself.

'This is not to say that you have to abandon the wonderful casual feel of working in the theatre. It just means you need to be attentive as to how you present yourself. You must make an effort to be always presentable and professional, and even when casual, maintain your decorum with no low cleavage or exposed midriffs for the girls, or shirtless tops for the guys'

(Hasham, J. 2016).

The second aspect is courtesy. ‘You should mind your language, and avoid profanity and ANY questionable slurs or references, even in jest among friends. Be professional and courteous at all times. And during a tedious rehearsal or difficult production, a simple smile or encouraging word from you can accomplish great things, so make sure you're always cheerful, accessible, and approachable. Pay special attention to your crew, techs, volunteers, and janitorial help. Make sure to point out jobs well done, and thank them for their contributions regularly. We all want our hard work noticed and acknowledged.’

The final ethic code is ‘maintaining professional relations’. This is a tricky one because the theatre's a fun place and it's one in which we all tend to make friends and form relationships. But, in a nutshell, while it's great for you to make friends with actors and crew during the process of mounting your production, make sure that you nevertheless maintain a certain amount of slight but professional distance. Try to avoid too much carousing with the actors, and absolutely never badmouth the director in front of cast or crew, even casually or after hours. You should always put yourself forth as a united front with the director (Hasham, J. 2016).

The teachers of the speech and drama program explained that to put these ethics into place, rules of conduct and rehearsal were made clear from the first day, and a ‘penalty’ would be imposed if they were not imposed. The following is a list of appropriate conduct the expected of the drama students: Punctuality and Discipline, Proactivity, Problem Solving, Working under Pressure, Maintaining Composure, Ensuring Health and Safety of Every Aspect of the Production, Personal Hygiene, Respect for Space, and Reporting to Director/Executive Producer/Production Manager.

In an observation session of a speech and drama class for the 13-15 year olds, the teacher Omar Ali explained that the list above is important as ensures the main focus of the course is achieved, and not the individual wants and needs of the students. In other words, they are to put the course, and the final production above and beyond anything else, and to do this would mean no 'drama' (of the negative kinds!). In the dance class by Lex Lakshman, he explained that choreography, while fun and exciting, can only achieve its full potential if the idea of 'ensemble' is held paramount. Again, the idea of ensemble puts the group above the need of the individual. The researcher observed that during the first few classes, particularly in the speech and drama class for the younger students; several individuals struggled to keep the requirements of listed above. There was idle chatter, which needed reprimanding, and tardy students, who were called out by the teacher! The teacher dealt with these in a diplomatic manner, reminding the students generally that all these deviations from the rules caused inconvenience, and shall not be tolerated again. It is observed that the tone of the teacher changed during this reprimanding sessions, making the point loud and clear to the students. True enough, the teachers testified that after week 3, the students have settled into their 'new' ways and were adhering to the rules. The result was a more harmonious class and a more conducive learning environment. While these ethics brought about better productivity in class, the researcher observed that they have learned soft skills that will be useful in other aspects of life. The students have learned that punctuality is important, teamwork is paramount, and diplomatic conduct is important in life, generally. Roshinee Mookaiah, 24, a graduate of the Theatre for Young People program states that after being trained at The Actors Studio Academy, she conducts herself with more professionalism in her new workplace. She relayed an incident where she managed to handle difficult clients in the centre that she works at by being objective and calm, traits she picked up while working as an actor.

4.10 AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACTORS STUDIO ACADEMY MODEL IN COMPARISON TO SIMILAR MODELS

The final section of the analysis endeavours to study other similar models to that of the Actors Studio Academy. These drama training institutions for young people have similar objectives, but the purpose of studying their existence is to compare results of the courses particularly its association to soft skills.

The first of this is the Arts-Ed initiative by Janet Pillai. Centred in Penang, Malaysia, the program aims to engage children to themes and issues that are pertinent to them through excavation of their culture, identity, and surroundings. In this, it is hoped that the children will be able to inquire, analyse, and reflect on their 'world'. An extraction from one of its case study had the children retrace the heritage of wayang, source for information on the wayang, share the information as a group, test out the stories that they found, mapped out the oral stories, which ultimately ended up in a performance by the students. Although the process seemed more delicate and thorough compared to the speech and drama course at The Actors Studio, the benefits reaped from both trajectories are similar. While The Actors Studio Academy provided its students with an inquiry based learning through imagination exercises, and devising of stories, Arts-Ed had the students' research, study, and exhibit what they have discovered. Both trajectories made the students work on their communication, comprehension and analytical skills (Pillai, 2014).

Another youth program which is geared towards the performing arts is the Dama Orchestra, SPB Dama Young Artist Project. A nine month theatre and musical training program, Pun Kai Loon, the founding member states that the program was created to help young people discover themselves and their talent. When the researcher spoke to one of its members, Annabelle Yong, she says that the instilled in her the traits of a professional

performing artist. These include being responsible for her craft, being a team player, and most definitely pride in honing her talent. This level of confidence is akin to that of students who have graduated from the Actors Studio's Theatre for Young People program. The Theatre for Young People program has brought the students abroad to Singapore and Russia to perform in international arts festivals. This experience of representing the country has matured them into confident young Malaysians with self-worth and purpose (Tan, 2013).

To sum, it is observed that all programs geared at empowering the young with performing arts would produce individuals with a degree of confidence, communication skills, and more. The fact that all these courses would end in a public performance would mean that the students would have to sum up vocal, and communication abilities, engagement with audience and working in an ensemble. The fact that these students were given the task to write and perform their own work, particularly with The Actors Studio students and Arts-Ed students would also prove that the students could analyze source material before creating.

4.11 AN ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS AFTER LEAVING THE DRAMA COURSE

This section is aimed at highlighting and understanding how selected individuals from the drama programs at The Actors Studio Academy have graduated and gone on to further their careers and lives. The main purpose of this section is to find relationship between the individuals' education at The Actors Studio Academy to their success in everyday life.

The first individual is Ho Lee Ching. She graduated from the Theatre for Young People program in 2010. After that, she went on to star in many high profile theatre

productions such as Thunderstorm, Sisa Sisa and Dato Seri. Recently, a play she directed, 'Still Taming' toured Singapore and Russia. A review of her play states that Ching's play shines the spotlight on pertinent current issues in Malaysian context, and that she clearly understands societal issues and is able to use it as inspiration to form artistic creations in her works. What is important to note is that Lee Ching has been suffering from Tourettes Syndrome since childhood. Tourettes Syndrom is a neurological disorder that manifests in uncontrollable tics. This has cause Lee Ching to have self-esteem issues and difficulty in communicating with her peers. During the Theatre for Young People program, she was given the tools to focus on stage, and miraculously, her tics disappeared whenever she performed. Lee Ching says the training gave her confidence not just as a performer, but as a person as well. In January 2018, Lee Ching directed her first devised performance, OCD. The play centres on her dilemma with Tourettes and also Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. She was able to understand her condition, analyse it, and then create something artistic from it. This demonstrates her strong analytical skills, and also leadership qualities in directing her 4 ensemble actors.

The second student who went on to have an impressive academic and oratory career is Abbernaa Kukanathan. She has been a Speech and Drama student at The Actors Studio since she was 13 years old. When she was 15, two years after joining drama classes, she won the gold prize at the Inter-school Solo Acting competition. She performed monologues coached by the teachers of The Actors Studio and managed to beat out students from all over the country. In an interview with Abbernaa, she states that the judges mentioned that she won for having exceptional diction, clarity, and expression; tools she learned and picked up at her drama classes. She is currently on a full scholarship by Yayasan Sime Darby, and claims that she aced her application due to all her extra-curricular activities which include her involvement in drama. 'One cannot underestimate the importance that drama has played in prepping me for the interviews that I had to go

for before being given the scholarship. The fact that I was able to articulate my experiences and future goals must have impressed the panel' (Kukanathan, 2017).

To conclude the chapter on the research analysis, the researcher finds that the courses in the Actors Studio Academy prepares the students not just for the stage, but in life as well. The students demonstrate soft skills such as communication skills, team work, and leadership not just in their final performance but also in their everyday lives, as evident in those who have left the program in pursuit of other careers.

The next chapter will give more a more conclusive statement about the research, and suggest improvements for the programs at The Actors Studio Academy.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

The research is conducted to highlight the importance of drama as a tool in cultivating soft skills. The field of study for this study is drama in education, and the literature review focuses mainly on how the components of drama in education connect to its object of study, which is The Actors Studio Academy. The topic of research for this study is soft skills, in particular the level of soft skills in young Malaysians, and how the classes at The Actors Studio provide aid in its cultivation (soft skills).

The objectives of this research are 1) to analyse the components in the Actors Studio drama course that directly promotes particular soft skills. 2) To observe research participants before having attended the drama course and after, with regards to their communication and expression skills.

The literature review of the research is divided into readings on drama, and readings on soft skills. Readings on drama produced information on child drama, drama inquiry, drama education, and drama education in Malaysia. Readings on soft skills produced definition and understanding of soft skills and its relation to hard skills, as well as means of identifying these skills.

The research is qualitative in nature; relying heavily on observation, interviews, and readings pertaining to the topic. Observation of the lesson plans were compared to observations of the actual lessons in class, to form analysis of efficacy of the course. Interviews with teachers were conducted to understand the methodology and pedagogy behind drama classes. Interviews with students were conducted to gauge their feedback towards the course. A questionnaire was also created for the set participants to fill out. The

answers from the questionnaire was used as part of the analysis, to compare with the observations conducted.

The research analysis was done over a span of a year (2016), which accounts to a full duration of the speech and drama course. It also covers the duration for a cycle of Theatre for Young People. Observation and interviews were done in 2016, while in 2017, the analysis was put into place and writing.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This section will endeavour to provide findings based upon the objectives of the research.

OBJECTIVES:

- To analyse the components in the Actors Studio drama course that directly promotes particular soft skills.
- To observe research participants before having attended the drama course and after, with regards to their communication and expression skills.

The research findings show that creative drama classes improve expression skills and soft skills through drama activities that are targeted towards a particular goal. Below is summary chart on these findings.

PROGRAM	ACTIVITY	RESEARCH SOURCE	RESEARCH METHOD	FINDINGS
SPEECH AND DRAMA	VOCAL TRAINING	TASA SPEECH AND DRAMA SYLLABUS	READINGS AND INTERVIEWS CROSS-EXAMINATION WITH ACTUAL LESSONS (OBSERVATION)	VOCAL TRAINING PROVIDES ADEQUATE TECHNICAL INFORMATION ON HOW TO ENGAGE THE RIGHT BODYPARTS AS TOOL TO SUCCESSFUL SPEECH; AND ON HOW SPEECH WORK IS CONNECTED TO THE CELEBRAL AND EMOTIONAL ASPECT OF COMMUNICATION.
SPEECH AND DRAMA	ENSEMBLE TRAINING	TASA SPEECH AND DRAMA TEACHERS	OBSERVATION OF LESSONS, AND INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF CLASS	1. ENSEMBLE TRAINING'S FINAL SHOWCASE ILLUSTRATES THE STUDENTS' ABILITY TO FUNCTION AS A TEAM; EXHIBITING TEAMWORK, AND SHARED LEADERSHIP.
SPEECH AND DRAMA	PHYSICAL THEATRE	TASA SPEECH AND DRAMA SYLLABUS	OBSERVATION OF LESSONS AND FINAL PERFORMANCE	1. FINAL PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS EXHIBIT THEIR ABILITY TO COMPREHEND TOPICS, PROCESS THEM, AND PHYSICALIZE THEM IN PERFORMANCE VIA GESTURES AND BODY LANGUAGE. (BLOOMS TAXONOMY)
THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	COMPARTMENTALITION OF EMOTIONS	MASTER TEACHERS- JOE HASHAM AND FARIDAH MERICAN	OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEWS WITH JOE, FARIDAH, AND STUDENTS OBSERVATION OF MONOLOGUES	1. ABILITY TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND PROCESS EXPERIENCES, THEN DISCUSS AND EXPRESS THEM. (BLOOM TAXONOMY)
THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	ACTORS TRAINING	TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF THE PROGRAM FEEDBACK FORMS FROM AUDIENCE ANALYSIS	OBSERVATION OF LESSONS AND FINAL PERFORMANCE	1. STUDENTS EXHIBIT CONFIDENCE IN SELF; POSTURE, BODY THOUGHTS.

THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	DEVISING THEATRE	DEVISING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS	OBSERVATION OF LESSONS AND FINAL PERFORMANCE	STUDENTS EXHIBIT ABILITY TO CRITICALLY ANALYZE AND PROCESS EVENTS, THOUGHTS, AND EMOTIONS. STUDENTS WERE ABLE TO FORM THEIR OWN THOUGHTS IN CREATIVE CREATION.
--------------------------	------------------	--------------------------------	--	--

The research concludes that to achieve a particular soft skill, a specific component in the drama syllabus was used. This meant that the type of soft skill achieved is determined by the lesson that is undertaken. The term ‘soft skills’ is found to be too general and specific skills had to be specified as not all drama activities would yield the same skills. This conclusion suggests that to utilize drama techniques efficiently for this purpose, its function has to be determined before it can be applied to yield a particular soft skill.

Comparing the students’ soft skills at the start of the course with their skills at the end of the course.

The students that join the courses at the Actors Studio Academy can be divided into two camps; the ones that want to be actors, and the ones that don’t. The latter are usually young people who come to improve their communication skills, are deemed ‘shy’, or want a boost in their confidence. When the researcher speaks to the parents of these students, there would be an air of hope in the parents; the hope that speech and drama could ‘change’ their child!

Of course, after explaining to them that creative drama is more process oriented than it is result oriented, their understanding, and a more relaxed expectation towards their children’s ‘performance’ would allow more work to be done by the teachers. The traits of students who are brought in by their parents are usually shy, introverted, and

reserved when it comes to group activities. They are however strong in analytical skills, and are able to observe writing and comprehension tasks very well.

It is when the teachers identify these strengths, and apply it to the group dynamics that they see their worth, and slowly start opening up. By the end of the first semester, when they would all have to perform, these shy students would be given more writing and behind the scenes work, and enough performance work to not intimidate.

By the second and third semester, the idea of performance would have become more comfortable, and almost all of them would participate in the group show. In fact, some of the quieter ones have blossomed so much that they have requested for more roles, and lines.

One of these would be Ho Lee Ching, mentioned earlier. Ho's Tourette's conditioned her to 'be quiet' if she could manage it. Her constant tics reminds her that society does not like 'noisy' people. However, after undergoing acting classes, first in Joe Hasham's Acting for Beginners, and the Theatre for Young People, her uniqueness was celebrated, and she not only became more of herself, but found a way to channel her energy and focus on stage.

The same can be said for many of the other students who come in with learning disabilities. Some with mild autism find their classes at school too fast and rigid. With drama classes, their left brain is made to be utilized more, in affective and cognitive learning modes found in a drama class. It has to be said though, that the students who come in wanting to become performers would have great growth, exponentially, in the duration of the year. The students who come in with a need to work on their communication skills would see a more varying degree in their growth rate. For example, a young girl, Aizatul Ibrahim who joined the class since she was 7 still could not be heard clearly after a year into the course. However, now at 12 years old, she is a happy and

confident girl, with a strong booming voice. It took her almost 5 years, but that is the thing about drama, it waits for the child.

To conclude, the researcher can state that despite varying levels of growth, The Actors Studio Academy would produce in almost all of its students, skills to communicate to a small public, skills to improve vocal and oratory skills, and skills in socializing with peers.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section aims to provide recommendations on how the Actors Studio Academy can improve its position as an avenue in improving one's communication and soft skills. The chapter will end on providing a suggestion to schools and how they can incorporate drama in their curriculum.

The researcher recommends that The Actors Studio Academy acknowledges the fact that a 'side-effect' of its drama training is the cultivation of soft skills. While it is clear that the institution has actors training as its prime objective, it is worthwhile for The Actors Studio Academy to highlight to the community of its ability to assist in perfecting the soft skills. This is purely from an educationist's standpoint, in studying an understanding that there is a void that needs to be filled in the Malaysian education system. The alarming lack of spoken and oratory components in the local education system can be supplemented via drama classes akin to the ones at The Actors Studio Academy. If the Actors Studio Academy highlights the importance of their cause, this can educate parents and the general public on the importance of communication and soft skills in the holistic education of a child.

In 2016, via Yayasan Sime Darby Arts Festival, the Actors Studio Academy embarked on a 12-week tour around schools in Kuala Lumpur to impart drama classes. The idea was that the speech and drama teachers introduce speech and drama to the schools via a full day workshop. The teachers of the school were to absorb as much as they can and then continue the work started by the speech and drama teachers. The project was met with mostly positive results. The students found the learning of speech via drama to be fun and new, while the teachers found exciting and innovative ways to conduct their language classes. However, the classes would have had more impact if the program was sustainable, in that the students actually developed their speech skills over time via drama, akin to a year-long course.

The idea is that drama be made a compulsory subject, just like English and Math. This harkens back to the philosophy derived by child drama educationists; that drama, particularly drama enquiry methods aid in the learning of other subjects. Creative drama is not necessarily to teach acting, but for the child to be empowered to ‘solve’ simulated situations in a drama enquiry exercise. This in turn inculcates life skills; the ability to solve problems, the ability to think on your feet, and the ability to think out of the box.

To achieve this, a suggested gradual implementation in schools is recommended. The ideal subject to incorporate drama is English. This is because the 2013-2015 Malaysian Education Blueprint highlights drama activities as suggested lesson plans for its speech component. Currently, the English language teachers in schools, might, or might not use drama in their speaking component, as the suggested activities are up to the teacher’s discretion. This would result in a hit and miss, where only some students might get to experience the benefits of drama if the teacher is inclined to use it. Also, even if it is incorporated, drama would be used as a tool in learning, with its focus still on learning the language. To implement drama effectively in English classrooms, a dedicated slot would have to be allotted, at least once a week.

To conclude, the researcher would like to state that after the two years of research with the Actors Studio Academy, and analysing its endeavours, drama has been shown to inculcate soft skills in young learners. This is most evident in the final assessment of the students when they demonstrated vast improvements from when they first came to class. This is however, challenged by the fact that the courses are done once a week, and are not a stable of the students' overall learning. To counter this, the researcher suggests that the students receive a more holistic and continuous learning of drama with more involvement from the central education system; that is, to have drama implemented in all schools, for all students. With the benefits of drama demonstrated in this research, it is hoped that every child, from every Malaysian school, will experience the learning of soft skills, through the magic that is drama.

REFERENCES

Books

- Aitken, V. (2013). *Connecting Curriculum, Linking Learning*. New Zealand: NZCER Press.
- Bolton, G. (1995). *Drama for Learning: Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert Approach to Education*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Bhatt, H. (May 22, 2005). *Class Acts*. Kuala Lumpur: The News Straits Times.
- Gardner, L. (2013, 23 October). *Why Children's Theatre Matters*. New York: The Guardian.
- Giles, J. (2000). *The Importance of Children's Theatre in Elementary Schools*. Vancouver: Ontario Books.
- Gallagher, K. (2003). *How Theatre Educates*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Howard, M. (1987). *The New Generation of Acting Teachers*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Jones, C. (1996). *Make Your Voice Heard*. New York: Back Stage Books.
- Klaus, P. (2007). *The Hard Truth About Hard Skills*. New York: Harper Business.
- Ng, U-En. (June 20, 2010). *The Arts in Education*, Kuala Lumpur: The News Straits Times, p.3
- Pillai, Janet. (2014). *Community-based arts and culture education: a resource kit, Strategic Information and Research Development Centre*, Penang: Persatuan Pendidikan Seni Pulau Pinang.
- Salazar, L. (1995). *Teaching Dramatically Learning Thematically*, Vancouver: New Play Books.

Shakila Abdul Manan. (2005). *Why Did the Chicken Cross the Border?* Penang: Aliran Monthly.

Stanislavski, K. (1936). *An Actor Prepares*. United Kingdom: Bloombury Publishing.

Soft Skills. (2013). Iland Business Pages.

Slade, P. (1954). *Child Drama*, United Kingdom: University of London Press.

Wagner, B. (1976). Dorothy Heathcote: *Drama as a Learning Medium*, Washington D.C: Heinemann Drama.

Wessels, C. (1987). *Drama*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wood, D. (1999). *Theatre for Children*, United Kingdom: Faber and Faber.

Way, B. (1998). *Development through Drama*, London: Humanity Books.

Online Sources

Krivkova, L. (2011). *Design of the workshop: how to use drama in an English language class*. Retrieved from http://is.muni.cz/th/151036/pedf_m/Krivkova-Drama-final.pdf.

Tan, K. (2013). *Dama Nurtures Young Talent*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/entertainment/arts/on-stage/2013/11/26/dama-nurtures-young-talents/>

Zainal Latiff. (2010, November 1). *Enhancing the Skills of Early Childhood Educators through Acting and Drama*. Retrieved from <http://eprints.um.edu.my/13590/1/0001.pdf>.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 2: LIKERT SCALE QUESTIONNAIRE TO ASCERTAIN AREAS IN THE DRAMA COURSE THAT CULTIVATES SOFT SKILLS- TO BE ANSWERED BY FACILITATORS

QUESTIONS	1 STRONGLY DISAGREE	2 DISAGREE	3 UNDECIDED	4 AGREE	5 STRONGLY AGREE
MY STUDENTS EXHIBIT COGNITIVE SKILLS IN WEEK 1					
MY STUDENTS EXHIBIT PYSCHOMOTOR SKILLS IN WEEK 1					
MY STUDENTS EXHIBIT AFFECTIVE SKILLS IN WEEK 1					
MY STUDENTS RESPOND POSITIVELY TO LESSON PLANS IN THE SYLLABUS					
THE LESSON PLANS ARE EFFECTIVE IN CULTIVATING A CHANGE IN SOFT SKILLS LEVEL AMONGST THE STUDENTS					
I FEEL THAT THE COURSE IMPROVED THE COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE AND PYSCHOMOTOR SKILLS OF THE STUDENTS BY THE END OF THE COURSE.					
THE COURSE IS EFFECTIVE IN ITS OBJECTIVE TO CULTIVATE SOFT SKILLS					

APPENDIX 3

Below are the questions directed to the founder of the Actors Studio Academy, Dato'

Faridah Merican.

- 1) What are the main objectives of the Actors Studio Academy?
- 2) What are some of the pioneer courses when the Actors Studio Academy was founded?
- 3) Why were these courses selected?
- 4) What are the main courses being offered at the Actors Studio Academy now?
- 5) How have the courses changed since 1989? In your opinion, why is there need for these courses now?
- 6) What is your opinion on the state of communication skills and expression amongst the Malaysian youth today?

APPENDIX 4

Below is an example of a lesson plan found in the syllabus of the Speech and Drama for 13-15 year olds:

Topic	Objectives	Activities	Contact Hours
1. Introduction to the course and the facilitator. - Getting to know you.	- to introduce the main components of the course. - to allow the participants to get comfortable with one another and the facilitator.	1. The snake chain- students hold hands and the head of the snake moves the chain without breaking, while entwining around one another. (Mark to explain) 2. Zip, Zap Boink! 3. Catching! 4. Police and Thieves	2.5
2. The Body and The Imagination	- to introduce basic body work - to inculcate team work in the group. - to introduce appropriate use of body and space to complement performance. -to introduce spoken word and interpretation of the body in relation.	1. Stretching. 2. Breathing and the body 3. The Mirror Game- participants mirror one another in pairs. 4. The Water Plant 5. Participants listen to 'The Lion The Witch and The Wardrobe' by CS Lewis and react with their bodies	2.5
3. The Voice and the Imagination	-to introduce basic voice work/ breathing -to inculcate team work in the group - to continue work on body - to be able to perform in an audible and clear manner with appropriate articulation.(eg. Volume, pitch, pace, rhythm, style, dynamics)	1. Mouth exercises 2. Projection exercises 3. Breathing exercises 4. Making tableau 5. The Puppet- One student sits on a chair and reads the poem 'James and the Giant Peach' by Roald Dahl. His friends will use voice/ special effects to add to the story behind the chair. 6. Making The sound scape- in a giant circle,	2.5

		the students close their eyes and create a sound scape for 'forest' and 'city'.	
4. The Body and Mime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to introduce the concept of body in portrayal of characters in prose/ poetry. - introduction of 'WHO'. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The archetypes- students walk around the room as 'AIR', 'FIRE', 'ROCK'.- they discuss the difference in their body and mind 2. Students read 'Oliver Twist- a chapter' by Charles Dickens. The team leader will be sculptor to 'sculpt' their favourite characters. 3. Students retell the story of Oliver using mime techniques. 	2.5
5. Prose and Storytelling and Poetry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to introduce the fundamentals of a story- emphasis on 'WHERE' and 'WHAT'. - to comprehend text(READING) and to retell a story. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Chocolate Room- students lay on the floor and the facilitator gets them to imagine and mind map a chocolate factory with eyes closed. They then take turns to relay their versions of the factory. 2. Students read a short text individually. As a group, they retell the story in their own words. 	2.5
6. Conversation and Drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to introduce action reaction. - to improve on communication skills. - to introduce work with a partner(duo acting) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improvisation games 2. The Man and His Wife- In a circle, students take turn to be Man and Wife while not breaking the conversation. 2. Students read a text and discuss the pivotal characters. 	2.5

		3. Students break down text into small scenes to ask 'who are the main characters' and 'what are they trying to say'.	
7. The Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to introduce the mini presentation. - to disseminate the scripts/ items to be performed in the mini presentation. - to read and discuss the scripts/ items to be performed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students and facilitators engage in discussion on presentation items. 2. Students to get into groups and read their scripts. 	2.5
8. First Rehearsal	- to introduce the rehearsal culture: punctuality, respect, ...etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students have their first read. They should have elected a leader to manage the team. 2. To introduce the main components of a production to the groups: director, stage manager, ..etc. 	2.5
9. Second Rehearsal	- to rehearse for the presentation under the guidance of the facilitator.	-	2.5
10. Third Rehearsal	- to rehearse for the presentation under the guidance of the facilitator.	-	2.5
11. Bump In	- to rehearse in the performance space	-	2.5
12. Performance	SHOW TIME	-	2

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya

University of Malaya