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Playing multiple roles: a journey towards promoting spontaneity, creativity, and self- confidence in Grade 7 to 9 learners as a drama teacher/therapist

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Wits School of Arts

Drama for Life

Masters Research Report

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RESEARCH TOPIC:

Playing multiple roles: a journey towards promoting spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence in Grade 7 to 9 learners as a drama teacher/therapist.

SUPERVISOR(S): Emma Hutton

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Student number: 9206331a
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Signed:  Date: 12 August 2025

Course code: WOSA 7082

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

"It's not about what it is, it's about what it can become"

Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax* (LastingQuotes.com, 2025)

This research aims to elucidate on the complementary roles of the drama teacher and the drama therapist within educational settings, emphasising their respective contributions to fostering spontaneity, creativity, and the enhancement of self-confidence during adolescence. The concept of 'role' is examined on multiple levels: not only in terms of the formal responsibilities and positions held by teachers and therapists, but also in relation to the deeper purpose and impact of their work. It is valuable to critically examine the status and recognition of these roles within the school environment, as well as to consider the potential implications and complexities associated with individuals assuming multiple roles in such settings.

Clive Holmwood (2012, p.18) speaks of the occasional merging of roles in his research on the 'differences and similarities between dramatherapy and drama education'. I am particularly interested in the potential synergistic collaboration and relationship between a drama teacher and a drama therapist. Having taught drama for the last 20 plus years and now training to be a drama therapist, I find myself drifting between the two. While I sense that holding these two roles can allow for congruence, it has become apparent that there is a need to be more cognisant of the difference between the teacher and a therapist in a school setting.

In South Africa, the roles of teacher and therapist fall under different professional councils that are intended to ensure good and ethical practice. Both the therapist and the teacher need to be aware of the different parameters guiding their professions and be able to distinguish between the different functions and the benefits of their co-existence in a school environment. While the numbers are low, due to drama therapy being a relatively new profession in South Africa, there are increasingly more registered drama therapists working in their private capacity at relatively well-resourced schools around the country, offering therapy to both individuals and groups.

Briefly looking at the overriding difference, a drama teacher may provide a safe space in which learners can creatively explore themes and issues. Using both published and devised works, learners develop the following: physical awareness, coordination and strength, cognisance of what contributes to and motivates interpersonal relationships, take responsibility for decisions as well as develop an awareness of consequences (CAPS123, 2021). Drama teachers need to be registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) that was established in 2002 to ensure teachers provide quality education as well as promote ethical conduct (Kimathi & Rusznyak, 2018).

According to the South African National Arts Therapy Association website, drama therapists work intentionally and systematically with drama and theatre processes and published plays to achieve 'psychotherapeutic goals of symptom relief, emotional, cognitive and physical integration and personal growth' (SANATA, 2020). A drama therapist is a professional mental health care provider who is registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). The regulations defining the scope of drama therapy, promulgated in 2024, refer to the psychotherapeutic use of dramatic processes such as dramatic play, role play, improvisation, and drama games amongst other processes to facilitate the client's ability to gain insight into their personal behaviour, put alternatives into effect, set goals, improve interpersonal skills in personal or professional environments, and building the flexibly to play different roles in these spheres (Department of Health, 2024: 51711). Note that this scope is abridged to highlight what is relevant to the study.

Drama therapy is considered to take a strength-based perspective which is in alignment with other arts-based therapies and positive psychology (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). In the *Handbook of Positive Psychology,* Martin Seligman (2002) posits that psychological treatment need not only be focused on deficits but also on strengths and the healthy parts of a client as well. This work, Seligman suggests, is a holistic focus on all aspects of the client's life, including how they work and play. The client is given greater agency in accessing their current state of being, recognising what resources they have and building towards a greater sense of well-being. Dickinson and Bailey (2021) note that the ability to communicate, make connections and meaning is born out of self-expression. What appears important, is an acknowledgement of one's own actions as opposed to external factors that influence our lives and thus the need for strategies to manage this.

Both the drama teacher and the drama therapist in a school setting should be guided by the interest of the learner - the teacher by their educational interests and the therapist by the therapeutic needs. What is paramount is that both roles require extensive knowledge of the relevant theories associated with their work, context, ability to work with the respective stakeholders and to ensure best practice and professional development (Kimathi & Rusznyak, 2018). As there is overlap in a range of categories, the roles require distinction and a comprehensive understanding of the functions the teacher and therapist should fulfil. What is becoming evident in an ever more digitised 21st century, is the need for learners to focus on soft skills which include communication, problem-solving, adaptability and collaboration (Gajjar, 2017) which, fortunately, are skills entrenched in the South African National Curriculum Statement. This will be elaborated on in chapter three. In drama therapy, the goal is not to 'cure' the suffering but rather to strengthen the client's ego with a focus on creativity and spontaneity to cope within their limitations (Mostafa, 2019). The need to develop personal resources can blur the lines between the educator and the therapist, pointing to why a distinction would be valuable.

It is worthwhile considering why the Department of Basic Education in South Africa deems the arts appropriate to include in the curriculum. Creative Arts is a compulsory subject in the Senior Phase (Grade 7 to 9) of school and Dramatic Arts an elective in the Further Education Phase (Grade 10 to 12). The specific aims of Creative Arts include the development of 'creative, expressive and innovative individuals' and to 'develop life skills through the arts' (Department of Basic Education, 2011). According to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document, drama is deemed to build interpersonal skills in a range of contexts. Dickinson and Bailey (2021) agree that there is a therapeutic benefit in engaging creatively with material to reduce stress levels and anxiety as well as an improving one's ability to regulate mood disturbances. However, CAPS have been criticised by teachers, who have been inadequately trained to implement the curriculum in the classroom, for being too content heavy and theoretical (Ajani, 2021). An adequately trained pre-service and experienced teacher may well have the capacity to manage the broader topics in the Senior Phase (SP) which include the development of dramatic skills, elements in playmaking and the interpretation and performance of selected dramatic forms (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The reality in South Africa, however, is that much of the professional training is knowledge-based, relying largely on instruction which equips the new teacher to be a disseminator of knowledge (Kimathi & Rusznyak, 2018). Dr Gajjar (2017) expresses that

content and pedagogic knowledge alone is no longer satisfactory in the classroom. He advocates that education globally needs to be more aligned with contemporary society and thus include skills-based learning. This is believed to equip learners to practically apply solutions to real-world issues. Gajjar suggests that the role of the teacher should shift to being one of a guide and mentor establishing a rapport with the learners that is built on trust. The teacher at this point appears to be transforming into something much closer to a therapist, hence the need to understand the distinction. As I am moving towards becoming a therapist, I have elected to take on the role of a guide as I conduct the practical component of the research. The practical component of the research focuses on fostering spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence which I believe can equip the learner to cope in a dynamic and diverse modern world. The research therefore includes both how and why these global functions need to be nurtured in a school setting.

It has been a privilege to work at a school that offers CAPS with an additional focus on experiential learning. This is a skills-based approach that encourages learning through doing (Gajjar, 2017). Experiential learning includes project-based learning (PBL) in which I was involved. PBL is an approach to learning in which students are presented with an open-ended question about a real-world issue requiring them to independently investigate possible responses culminating in a product or demonstration (Larmer, 2014). The school is committed to offering a learning space that is adaptable, evolving and dedicated to growing resilience and establishing a sense of community. While I was not privy to any formal assessments, diagnoses or concessions, I was aware that some members of the group struggled with attention deficit and/or dyslexia. What was evident, was that their current state made thriving in mainstream education difficult. I therefore cannot rule out neurodivergence, which, according to Grant (2024), is a term used for individuals whose brain functionality differs from typical or standard functionally in one or more ways. The learners I worked with enjoyed playing rule-based games outside, but some tended to shy away from dramatic engagement and vocally expressing themselves. Grant (2024) explains that neurodivergence is often stigmatised and viewed as a deficit, resulting in individuals struggling with self-esteem. The challenges associated with the adolescent developmental stage may well compound the situation. This assisted in the choice to investigate if the process of fostering spontaneity and creativity in adolescents can increase self-confidence. Shifting from the role of teacher to researcher in this study, I hoped that the process would impact the learners' attitude, communication skills and possibly enhance a sense of belonging at the school.

The role of researcher requires a more nuanced explanation as it was a shift from the teacher role and not simply an outsider coming in to observe the learners. I was somewhat of an inside/outside researcher as I was recognised within the school as a PBL teacher who was a drama teacher. Gair (2012) understands insider/outsider status to be the extent to which a researcher is positioned within the group being researched. The group of participants were also aware that I am in the process of becoming a drama therapist and finally that I was doing my Practice as Research at the school. I did not have intimate knowledge of the learners, yet I was familiar with those that participated in the previous projects. I was familiar with the other teachers, the school and the educational approach. I therefore considered myself an outsider in that I was part-time and not fully integrated into the system. Whilst conducting the research, I was afforded a slightly enhanced objective view of the learners and the school. The level of familiarity with the school and learners raises an ethical issue around assent which is elaborated on later in the report. Operating as a researcher in a school environment, has the potential to offer greater clarity on the systemic distinction between the role of the drama teacher and that of a drama therapist.

I was intrigued with the potential for a dual drama teacher/therapist role in a school environment as there is significant overlap. I mused over the reality that a dual role may suit budgetary constraints in under resourced school. While there are likely to be opportunities for the drama therapist to operate as an educator in a school, it may have been presumptuous to assume that they have the necessary aptitude or desire to teach subject-specific content to learners. Drama therapists are trained to work in such a way that clients are regulated, guiding them towards the integration of paradoxical, even conflicting experiences (Gaines et al., 2015) which is not necessarily included in pre-service teacher training and likely to be valuable in a school setting.

Following from this point, is a necessary distinction between what constitutes therapy and what is considered therapeutic. On the surface, therapy is time in therapy with a registered health professional and therapeutic is the health and wellness benefits after an experience. Therapeutic benefits could be derived from any number of experiences from playing with animals to gardening. The therapeutic benefits derived from a drama class in which one played drama games and improvised in not therapy. In other words, there will be therapeutic benefits for a learner at school when the focus is on developing personal resources and experiencing alternative ways to perceive the world. McCaslin (in Gaines et al., 2015) adds to

this by describing ‘therapeutic’ as experiences that can be pleasurable, stimulating, gratifying and liberates the imagination. A client who has been referred or who has sought out a drama therapist, has signed consent forms and is seeking healing and understanding may constitute being in therapy. Therapy, according to Holmwood (2014), lies in the space between cognition and catharsis. Nussbaum (in Holmwood, 2014, p. 40) explains that catharsis, which is often associated with drama therapy, is more about clients learning through their emotions and not a ‘purging’ or the intense release of emotions.

The Grade 7 to 9 learners participating in this research are not engaging in therapy. However, the creative sessions comprised of different types of play, drama games and improvisations may well have therapeutic benefits. The design of the creative sessions, inspired by the first two phases of Renée Emunah’s Integrated Five Phase Model is intended to activate spontaneity, build drama readiness and the ability to engage and interact with each other creatively and confidently (Emunah, 1994). The extent to which the learners interacted with each other, shifts in behaviour or experimentation with different roles needed to be acknowledged allowing for an indication of the therapeutic benefits and value of nurturing personal resources.

There is terminology that is used in the different professional spaces which need to be contextually considered. For example, the semantics of ‘quality’. ‘Quality’ could mean the standard of something e.g. the quality is excellent, alternatively ‘quality’ might refer to attributes e.g. the role being played has a physical quality (Landy in Jennings, 2005). As the drama teacher, I could witness and assess the quality (standard of excellence) of the learner’s improvisation in the drama games as either effective or not. The series of improvisations by the learner’s would be critiqued for any improvement on their skills as a performer. A drama therapist may interrogate, without judgement on the standard of the performance, the quality or attributes of the role in the improvisation. The quality of the role deepens the clients understanding of the different roles we play in life to avoid becoming fixed or rigid in our behaviour (Landy, 2009).

From a drama therapeutic lens, one might be cognisant of the structure provided by the game or improvisation as offering a container allowing for adequate distance. Landy (2009) explains aesthetic distance to be the optimal distance when thinking and feeling about the different roles we play in daily life. This distance is ‘midway’ between being over-distanced

and under-distanced where catharsis is possible (Landy in Gaines et al., 2015). The amount of distance is determined by the needs of the client. If the client is feeling isolated or removed from something or someone, they may require less distance to try get closer to the topic or character. If the client is too emotional, they may need more distance to be more objective. A drama teacher may simply look at the stylistic demands of the genre and encourage a representational style of performance often associated with realist plays that require the performer to 'become the character' implying under-distance as opposed to a presentational style often associated with didactic plays or Brechtian styled plays where the actors tend to portray a stereotype or caricature, allowing for greater distance between the performer and the character which is considered over-distanced.

While there can be therapeutic benefits engaging with different styles of performance, this is not the primary focus in drama therapy. The appropriate distance is likely to be revealed to a drama therapist once the client has gravitated to a performance style. When the client is under-distanced, they are likely to be impulsive, overwhelmed or even manic as opposed to being over-distanced which may be rigid, withdrawn or depressed (Gaines in Gaines et al., 2015). When a client is operating at an aesthetic distance, they can recognise themselves in the role (Bailey in Blatner, 2007), they are regulated, spontaneous and able to reflect on and tolerate the paradoxes in their lives (Gaines in Gaines et al., 2015). It is through this reflection that one can extend their role repertoire. The value of this is the ability to perform and reflect on the multiple roles one is called upon to play in daily life. Landy (2009) suggests that well adapted, and 'healthy' people can extend their role repertoire.

Dickinson and Bailey (2021), who advocate for a strengths-based approach to therapy, express the imperative of fostering global functions creativity and spontaneity to contributing to self-assured, adaptable and critical thinkers. Before embarking on considering the interplay of spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence, it is worth establishing a clearer understanding of these global functions as they stand alone.

Moreno (1993 in Dickinson & Bailey, 2021, p.48) understands spontaneity to be 'psychological energy'. This energy is often associated with a state when one is open, curious and in the moment as opposed to inexpressive, inhibited or unemotional (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). The authors go on to explain that unbridled spontaneity can result in impulsive and inappropriate behaviour. Moreno (1978) focuses on the dynamic interplay between

spontaneity and creativity, considering spontaneity to be responsible for 1) instinctive and unconscious responses and 2) the efficient output which is often associated with creativity. In other words, spontaneity is the backbone of creativity. Research has shown creativity to be a blend of functionality and originality (van der Zanden et al., 2020). Glăveanu et al. (in van der Zanden et al., 2020) express that creativity is not a once off, and owing to humans existing within a social context, is not produced in isolation. Self-confidence, according to Petty (2015), in his TEDx talk, is the conviction of your judgements. In other words, one can be confident in their strengths as well as their shortcomings. However, positively affirming one's belief in themselves as capable and competent contributes to a positive self-perception. If spontaneity opens one to being more expressive and creativity allows for unique and productive output, then one may conceive of these two functions as contributing to an enhanced sense of self and self-confidence. A brief understanding of how these functions manifest in the body and the interplay will be discussed further in chapter 3.

The findings of this study are intended to support the therapeutic benefits of promoting spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence in Grade 7 to 9 learners in a school environment. Building resilience, self-awareness, and a willingness to engage with others is fundamental during adolescence, a period marked by substantial neurological and physical growth. Acknowledgment of the scope of practice of drama teachers and drama therapists suggests a promising potential for collaboration. Such collaboration could enhance the educational experience while simultaneously supporting the mental health and well-being of students. By each playing their role in fostering personal resources, the learners are likely to be better equipped to face future challenges.

Problem Statement

The title of Moreno's 1978 book, *'Who Shall Survive?'* prompts a question about who will indeed survive in a world that is characterised by change? One needs to contemplate if the appropriate cognitive functions likely to have a profound impact on an adolescent's future, are being developed (Byrnes, 2006). Dickinson and Bailey (2021) propose that cultivating an openness to new experiences and novel thinking have a positive impact on functionality in daily life, behaviour and confidence in one's ability. They propose too, that being spontaneous and flexible are key for creativity. In other words, responding to stimuli in the

here and now can liberate one from rigid thinking and stifled action. Dickinson and Bailey (2021) explain that the inability to be spontaneous impairs making decisions and taking risks. The adolescent learners in this study were somewhat inhibited emotionally when I first engaged with them. They appeared to lack confidence and the ability to express themselves creatively. It is plausible that they viewed the drama games and activities as childish. Emunah (2005) suggests that resistance to play may be evident should adolescents deem an activity appropriate for younger children. Therefore, adolescent learners may require gentle encouragement to combat their rigidity and resistance to play. Improvisation and role-play which promotes spontaneity, allow for adolescents to be open, curious and receptive to other perspectives and worldviews. This idea is supported by Ackerman (2018) who suggests that role-play rapidly increases flexibility in thinking.

As it is conceivable that some of the participants in this study are neurodivergent, it is worth having a broad understanding of neurodivergence and how this may influence their engagement with each other and the creative sessions. Chasen (2005) explains that neurodivergent adolescents desire social connection, however, owing to possible inattentiveness, rigidity or impulsivity, they can disrupt group interaction, antagonising those around them. As an act of self-preservation, they may choose to disengage from social encounters which negatively impacts their self-confidence (Chasen, 2005). Dickinson and Bailey (2021) point out that impulsivity is linked to an overabundance of spontaneity, resulting in inappropriate and disruptive behaviour. For healthy social interactions, one needs to harness or regulate impulsivity. Dickinson and Bailey (2021) suggest that various spontaneous and creative games in which the boundaries or rules must be respected are known to support impulse control. It is important to note that this study will operate on a broad understanding of neurodiversity as a natural difference (Grant, 2024) and not focus on any one condition or diagnosis, allowing for greater inclusivity in the school environment.

I believe there is a problem in the current South African schooling system with regards to fostering spontaneity and creativity. West and Meier (2020) in their research entitled *Overcrowded classrooms – The Achilles heel of South African education?* indicate that the high ratio of pupil to teacher in many schools, is counterproductive to a style of education that is intended to be working towards developing personal resources. Noise levels, distraction and a lack of differentiated learning impacts the quality of learning as well as influence the amount of stress experienced by both the teacher and learner (West & Meier,

2020). The impact of this stress on the standard of mental health is evidenced by the high suicide rates in South African schools (Motshekga, 2023). Poor mental health standards are exacerbated by poor economic, social and living conditions (Mohamed, 2020) combined with under resourced schools and an insufficient number of educators (West & Meier, 2020). This is not to say that low mental health standards are exclusive to under-resourced schools. The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (no date) emphasise that mental health challenges and suicide have no boundaries. Thus, it is important to examine how schools can play a role in promoting mental health and detecting early warning signs, despite the education system potentially exacerbating the problem.

South Africa's former Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga (2023), called for a collective intervention, imploring all stakeholders to be key players in developing the mental health of our learners. What Motsheka failed to acknowledge is the role the educational system itself may play in contributing to the demise of the mental health of the learners. However, this goes beyond the scope of this research. This research responds to the call for a 'collective intervention' in addressing the mental health of the learners within the schooling system. Not pursuing the development of personal resources is likely to contribute to the already rising numbers of learners in South African schools struggling with their mental health.

I believe, there is potential for a synergistic relationship between a drama teacher and drama therapist in the school system as they both have a common interest in developing personal resources in the learners. The difference is that a drama teacher is compelled to focus on outcomes that are product orientated with a numerical value and a drama therapist is more inclined to work in such a way that is non-judgemental, non-time sensitive, and process orientated. To be able to broadly define the roles of each would be beneficial to the learner in the creative arts space as well as their social and emotional health in the greater school environment. The global functions of spontaneity and creativity can be potent antidotes for the development of anxiety (Chasen, 2005), boosting personal growth and opportunities for change (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021).

Rationale

If creativity and spontaneity are key drivers of personal progress and development as suggested by Ackerman (2018), then surely there would be value in fostering both in

adolescents who are experiencing tremendous change and possible instability (Emunah, 2005). I certainly believe that it is worth exploring the importance of fostering these key global functions to enhance a sense of self as being dynamic and creative. While this short-term study cannot predict or reveal the long-term effects of fostering these key points, it will allow for a glimpse into the potential to assist learners to be more agile in their thinking as well as being open and responsive to a range of stimuli.

Adolescents who are not open and agile may point to deeper defence mechanisms which Anna Freud defines as unconscious processes that help individuals to minimise internal conflict (Bailey & Pico, 2025). When these unconscious processes are brought into consciousness, one can begin to understand their patterns of behaviour. This helps build a greater sense of self-awareness which has the potential to prevent mental disorders (Bailey & Pico, 2025). If spontaneity and creativity are found to contribute to openness and agility, and building self-confidence can minimise internal conflicts, then developing these functions can contribute to supporting mental health and well-being. Awareness of this, is likely to be an asset for both educators and drama therapists, especially considering the role they play in bringing the unconscious into consciousness and thus facilitating the process of identifying and understanding patterns in behaviour.

Understanding behavioural patterns and how these are associated with ‘role’ allows for a deeper comprehension of how humans engage with each other, how we see ourselves in a range of contexts and what roles we are not (Frydman, 2016). The ability to spontaneously select a role suitable for the situation and context is an indication that the individual is comfortable with the paradoxical roles in their repertoire (Frydman, 2016). Unhealthy persons, according to Landy (2009), cannot take on different roles and therefore struggle to be empathetic. Extending one’s role repertoire and building empathy are key components in drama therapy as it allows for individuals to view things from a different perspective, develop relationships and the capacity to deal with another person (Jones, 1996).

This study has the potential to facilitate an understanding of the distinction between learners in school, working in much the same way in the drama classroom, as they would with a drama therapist. By way of example, a drama therapist working with a client who tends to withdraw or struggles with impulse control in a social context, may focus on developing self-belief, emotional regulation and communication skills. This would be for the purpose of

being proficient from a social perspective. Similarly, a drama teacher may focus on developing the same skills but in this instance, to enhance the actor-audience relationship. These skills are massively important to foster for theatrical endeavours and in life as they allow for individuals to relate to the world around them. The distinction between the teacher and the therapist is the acknowledgement of aesthetic distance and catharsis which is needed to meet therapeutic goals (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021).

The potential gap this research may fill, is the role and expectations of the drama teacher as opposed to the drama therapist in a school environment. Owing to drama therapy being a newly formalised discipline in South Africa (SANATA, 2020) and the regulations defining the scope promulgated on 6 December 2024, many schools are not aware of what a drama therapist might offer and thus confuse the function with that of a drama teacher. While not entirely amiss, schools may only use the drama therapist for psychosocial education with large groups and not for individual therapy with clients. At worst, the drama therapist is only called upon to manage disciplinary issues to uphold the status quo of the school system. This study has the potential to shed light on how drama therapists work to allow for teachers and management structures to best assist and support them in the school. Taking this a step further, the research looks at what functions the therapist should fulfil in the daily running of the school and what the practical expectations by staff and learners alike are. Traditionally, school counsellors and other psychological support are not involved in day-to-day classroom teaching (Oparah, 2021). Drama therapists who have had experience in a school setting will be able to point to different perspectives on this topic and the extent to which they need to be integrated into the school system to build trust, be accepted and form relationships. This begs the question of the feasibility of holding dual roles in a school when the school demands transparency and the client requires confidentiality.

American based author and columnist Abigail Shrier (2024) in her podcast after the release of her controversial new book *Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren't Growing Up*, is vociferous about the ethical implications of teachers taking on a dual role as mental health support in American schools. In South Africa, where there is an awareness of the great need for psychological support for the learners, the government initiated the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) in 2012. This was intended to equip teachers to manage the psychosocial challenges experienced by their learners. Despite this, teachers in under-resourced schools still felt ill-equipped to manage the extent and complexity of psychosocial support needed

(Pillay et al., 2023). Owing to budgetary constraints, one can understand the move towards teachers taking on dual roles, particularly in under-resourced schools. One could argue that leaving teachers to navigate therapeutic spaces goes beyond the scope of their professional practice. The study will ideally reveal the need for a drama therapist to craft their position, with a clear understanding of their role and function they serve in a school.

The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach to this type of research, allows for the integration and adoption of a range of creative tools to be employed, affording the drama teacher and drama therapist insight into the learner's levels of spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. This knowledge will either be a valuable end point in revealing the individual within the developmental stage or a point of departure for further developmental progress. There is tremendous opportunity for scaling this research in terms of leaning towards ascertaining how a drama therapist may facilitate social and emotional learning and the role they may fulfil in the educational setting in its entirety. It is the intention of this study to focus on the role of the drama teacher and that of a drama therapist in promoting spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence, however, further research has the potential to feed into how schools could intentionally offer a multidisciplinary approach to equip learners with the necessary skills to navigate life.

Aims and Objectives

This research investigates multiple approaches to inspiring spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence in adolescent learners at school and how this relates to the roles of a drama teacher potentially working synergistically with a drama therapist in a school environment.

The following will thus be explored:

- To attempt to identify the roles of the drama teacher and that of a drama therapist working with adolescent learners in school. This will be observed in both myself and compared to the information gathered in interviews with registered drama therapists who are working in a school setting.
- The value of promoting spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence in adolescent learners. This objective will be dependent on the observation of the learners.
- The range of theatrical techniques and therapeutic approaches that build resources and foster spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. This objective allows for the

application of a variety of techniques that a drama teacher/therapist may intentionally employ depending on the needs of the learner or the client.

Research Questions

1. What is the difference between the role of the drama teacher and the role of the drama therapist in a school environment?
2. What is the value of promoting spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence in Grade 7 to 9 learners?
3. What are the distinguishing factors between the drama teacher and a drama therapist in stimulating spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence in adolescent learners?

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

The primary theoretical framework that underpins this research is Robert Landy's Role Theory (RT) to understand the roles of the teacher, therapist and researcher as well as those of the participants. This therapeutic theory together with a comprehensive understanding of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12 in South Africa and the associated Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) serve as valuable guides towards recognising the role of a teacher and the role of a drama therapist. Complementary theories and models that help outline the key concepts in this research are Jacob Moreno's theory of Spontaneity-Creativity (S-C), Landy's instrument for assessment Role Profile (RP) as well as Susana Pendzik's Six-Key Model for Assessment.

At the core of Landy's RT is the assumption that human beings have the innate ability to play many roles and can imagine themselves in these different roles. Landy acknowledges that the basic concept of the generation of RT was inspired by theatrical giants: Stanislavsky, Brecht and Brook (Landy, 1994). The theatrical approaches of these practitioners assisted in recognising that playing a role is as mysterious as it is complex (Landy, 2009). As an actor playing a character for dramatic purposes inhabits the mind, body and spirit of that character, so too do we inhabit roles in life (Landy, 2009). According to Landy (1993) and RT, the possibility for healing in drama therapy is firstly, working with the appropriate distance to experience the paradox of being both yourself and an imaginary role simultaneously. Moving between the dramatic and everyday reality, one can identify and confront problematic issues. The imaginary role is considered either to be unconsciously drawn or the client will have a clear idea of which of the roles they play in daily life is needing attention (Landy, 1993). Before relating the fictional role to everyday life, the client will experiment with the role, finding different alternatives to the quality, function and style of the role. The last two phases of the process are to integrate the fictional role into one's role system and finally trying out the newly integrated role in a social context. A role system is the total amount of roles a person can take on at any moment (Landy, 2009). For this study, the learners will only attempt to access or invoke fictious roles. I, on the other hand, can reflect on the extent to which I perceived myself in the role of drama teacher or guide or researcher and consider alternative qualities, focus and styles.

The practical application of Landy's RT is known as Role Method (RM). Both are deeply entrenched in drama and theatre to understand the self and the human experience. 'Self' in the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2023) is a noun that describes an individual in their entirety. This includes all conscious and unconscious characteristics, traits and qualities, mental processes and physical attributes. The 'self' from an African perspective is contextual, meaning that there is a co-dependency between the sovereign self and their community which exist within an ecosystem of the environment and spiritual forces (Makanya, 2014). This distinction is important when applying Landy's RT in a South African context. One can find somewhat of an alignment when using RM if you consider that the theory is based on the belief that life can be understood through the metaphor of all that constitutes the theatre (Landy, 2009). We can begin to understand the 'self' and by extension, one's personality, as the integration of the many different roles required to play in life or in one's ecosystem. Landy's RT is an iteration of Moreno's theory which looks at roles as being both psychological and social, a concept fundamental to the theory and practice of Psychodrama (Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017). Psychodrama, which was established by Jacob Moreno in the 1920s, is a therapeutic approach in which participants build the necessary spontaneity to enact roles that can then manifest in life (Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017).

Landy uses his understanding of role to develop RP (Landy et al., 2003). This assessment is intrinsically linked to RT and RM and the belief that behaviour is influenced by the different roles one plays and that the integration of problematic roles support role flexibility, allowing clients to move effortlessly between the different roles (Landy et al., 2003). The assessment invites clients to order cards that have images of characters one might find in plays, movies, and stories into 4 piles: 1) what you are, 2) what you are not, 3) unsure if you are that or not and 4) what you would like to be (Landy et al., 2003). The images on the cards represent archetypal roles such as 'helper', 'hero', 'sinner', 'outcast', 'artist' etc. which Landy identified and categorised after an extensive study of all the different characters in Western plays from ancient Greek to the 20th Century (Landy et al., 2003). Landy refers to his theatrical archetypal system as a taxonomy of roles (Fischer, 2016) and believes that human beings have the potential to play all the roles he has identified (Landy, 2009). Owing to the roles being reduced to archetypes one can conceive of a universal appeal. Carl Jung, founder of Analytical Psychology, believed that the deepest level of the psyche is the collective unconscious in which all prehuman and human experiences throughout evolution are stored influencing and entrenching behaviour over generations (Shultz & Shultz, 2016). Drawing on

the notion of ‘self’ being a collection of roles, I thought it worthwhile to base the interviews with drama therapists working in schools on Landy’s RP. The drama therapists will be asked to reflect on what they understand about role, what roles they fulfil as a drama therapist in the school, what roles they do not fulfil and what role they would like to have in their respective schools.

To appreciate the role of the drama teacher in the Senior Phase (SP) in South African schools, one can turn to the aims and purpose of Creative Arts as described in the CAPS curriculum. The key components are to foster communication, collaboration, problem solving and inclusivity (Department of Basic Education, 2011). It is recognised that these life skills, achieved using the arts, also develops creativity and imagination. Further to this, is the nurturing of an appreciation for the arts which is considered to contribute to the development of future audiences. It is also the responsibility of the teacher to be building performance skills which are developed further in the FET phase of high school. Developing dramatic skills focuses on building personal resources such as vocal and physical flexibility to access a range of performance styles (Department of Basic Education, 2011). There is also a focus on developing and acknowledging elements in drama which, in SP, relies heavily on improvisation, both spontaneous and polished (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

To understand the imperative of spontaneity and the link with creativity it is worthwhile elucidating on Moreno’s (1955) theory of S-C that posits spontaneity and creativity as being twin concepts fundamental to understanding human behaviour. The theory is based on spontaneity being the catalyst for creativity which is the product and that the concepts are both observable and subject to experimentation. Moreno explains that spontaneity is the readiness to act in the here and now which requires warming up. The generation of spontaneity depends on the type of creative product desired. The warm-up, therefore, could be undirected physical engagement or directed for something goal-orientated, it could include action and reaction or seeking novel and far-reaching associations (Moreno, 1955). This theory will inform the warm-ups in the creative sessions designed for this research, starting as undirected and progressing to seeking novel and far-reaching associations.

Testing for S-C involves impromptu activities such as drama games, structured or semi-structured improvisations and the extent to which the subject can suspend their disbelief in the surplus reality (Moreno, 1955). Suspension of disbelief in the surplus reality is the extent

to which one can immerse themselves in the fantasy or fictious story. What is observable is the quality of the readiness. According to Moreno (1955), this ranges from anxious to free and at ease. Responses to the provocation (drama game or improvisation) ranges from not being able to respond at all, stiff responses, adequate responses which show proficiency to responses that are novel and creative (Moreno, 1955). The shortcoming of the theory is that the creative product is subjective and cannot be measured. However, the value of fostering spontaneity and creativity is reinforced by Moreno's hypothesis that spontaneity and creativity are the positive attributes to negative states or defence mechanisms. The antithesis of spontaneity is anxiety, fear and defensiveness, whereas the antithesis of creativity is frustration, projection and substitution (Moreno, 1955).

Despite the very clear difficulties in assessing creative output, testing and assessment is key in educational environments. The drama teacher is required to conduct both informal and formal assessments which evaluate the extent to which learners have acquired the necessary skills and content knowledge either for a teaching period or for progression to the next year, or certification if the learner is leaving school at the end of SP (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The motivation for informal assessments which is to consistently and continually collect information regarding the learners' progress, is to allow the learner to recognise their own growth, inform the teachers planning as well as measure the success of their methodology (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Informal assessment need not be recorded as the learner's proficiency will be assessed formally in a summative assessment at the end of a module or teaching period.

Formal assessments include both a written examinations and performance tasks. The written assessment caters for low, medium and high cognitive levels which are informed by Blooms Taxonomy. Benjamin Bloom's original taxonomy was designed to help classify educational goals and objectives (CAPS123, 2021). Having undergone various iterations over the years, the lowest cognitive level includes only recall, comprehension, application and analysis are considered medium levels with evaluate and create as higher order cognitive levels (Department of Basic Education, 2011). It is valuable to note that 'create' is the highest in cognitive levels, suggesting that all the other cognitive abilities support creativity.

The formal practical assessment in Grade 9 upholds the understanding of integration, as the teacher looks for the extent to which there is collaboration, incorporation of dramatic

elements such as scripting a devised play, themes and the educational value of the work. The assessment also focuses on performance elements which may include characterisation, actor-audience relationship and the overall impact or entertainment value of the performance. At the end of the year, the school will expect reporting on both the cognitive and practical application in Creative Arts. This integration and application of practical skills is all geared towards the aim of the NSC which is to produce learners that are adept at problem solving, decision making and are critical and creative thinkers (Department of Basic Education, 2025d). When one considers these skills in conjunction with Moreno's S-C theory and the pinnacle of Blooms Taxonomy, one can begin to conceive of creativity as being fundamental to understanding human behaviour. Moreover, it is a testimony to why creativity is so important to foster.

Owing to the time-sensitive nature of the research, the desired practical outcomes and criteria stipulated in CAPS and NCS will inform the thinking behind the design of an assessment. I will, however, lean more towards Susana Pendzik's Six-Key Model for Assessment to assess and analyse the extent to which the learners can suspend their disbelief when entering a dramatic reality. Pendzik (2006) considers dramatic reality to be the most important concept in drama therapy. She explains that this interaction is unique, involving a tangible transition into a fictional realm, requiring a suspension of disbelief. Not all games need to be performance orientated as dramatic reality includes being in the present moment that is different from ordinary life (Pendzik, 2006). An example of this might be when one is immersed in playing a board game. Pendzik's model emphasizes the importance of helping the client develop the ability to meaningfully engage with dramatic reality, a necessary component for drama therapy to be conducted (Oren & Pendzik, 2020). Using this model, I can assess the ease with which the learners enter, exit, and maintain a satisfactory dramatic reality. The ease with which one can enter a dramatic reality is linked to Moreno's S-C theory that looks at the level of ease or anxiety when responding to a prompt or a stimulus. The ability to sustain a dramatic reality supports the development of ego strength and healthy coping mechanisms which is understood to be useful in managing life's challenges (Lahad, 2006 in Oren & Pendzik, 2020). Pendzik draws on Mooli Lahad's 'BASIC Ph' coping mechanisms which are 'belief, affect, social, imagination, cognitive and physical states' as well as Sue Jenning's Embodiment Projection and Role (EPR) (Lahad in Jennings, 2011, p. 119). Deconstructing EPR allows for the understanding of what is happening inside the body

(embodiment), outside the body (projection), and the integration of the two (role) (Oren & Pendzik, 2020).

There is an alignment between Pendzik's understanding of malleability in the dramatic reality (Oren & Pendzik, 2020) and Landy's RT. If dramatic reality is where 'me/not me, real/imaginary, private/public, virtual/concrete meet' (Pendzik, 2006, p. 11), it is a place that allows for people to manage the paradoxical nature not only of the roles one plays in life but also of their very existence. The aim of Landy's approach is to increase one's range of roles and flexibility in accessing them. One's openness to role-development and thus transformation requires the psychic energy Moreno describes as spontaneity.

If spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence are vital ingredients both for the theatre and for life, then the drama teacher and drama therapist play an important role in fostering these global functions. The many theories and educational objectives cited in this theoretical framework underpin the design of the creative sessions and allows for the understanding and interpreting of the data that is generated from the drama processes and the interviews. The therapeutic theories identified support the notion of 'role' and how these manifest in the different foci of the research. This includes being able to recognise the capacity of the learners to play different roles in a dramatic reality and how this translates to the development of ego strength and coping mechanisms. The educational policies and all they perpetuate in the South African schooling system point to the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and the demands on the learner.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This literature review will attempt to uncover the various local and international attitudes and understandings of the role of the drama teacher and drama therapists in schools as well as their role in fostering spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. In a country with the history such as South Africa's, the prevailing socio-economic conditions, cultural diversity and attitudes to mental health combined with the dire state of psychological structures in the country (Bowman et al., 2024) one can assume there is a need for therapeutic interventions in schools. It is therefore worthwhile considering how drama therapists could work effectively in school systems. It is also valuable to explore the range of theatrical and drama therapeutic practitioners who have focused on working with adolescents and how their approaches may contribute to prompting the development of spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence.

Adolescent Development

As a point of departure, one needs a broad understanding of the population group and developmental stage with which the research is being conducted. Adolescence is a critical transitionary phase between childhood and adulthood generally considered to be between the ages of 10 and 19 (van der Zanden et al., 2020). Learners in grade 7 to 9 tend to be between 12 and 16 years old placing them squarely in this developmental phase, the definition of which has undergone many permutations. Marisen Mwale (2012) in his book *Adolescent Psychology: The African Perspective* cites different perspectives regarding the onset and termination of adolescence many of which tend to be derived from a western perspective.

The hypothesis that adolescence begins with the onset of puberty and is a time of 'storm and stress' was perpetuated by the theories of Granville Stanley Hall, possibly the first psychologist to offer a theory of this developmental stage in the latter part of the 1800s (Mwale, 2012, p. 17). Albert Bandura, social learning theorist refuted these claims in the mid-20th century indicating that if teenagers were labelled as being stressed out and unpredictable, they would be (Mwale, 2012).

Bame Nsamenang, a South African psychologist argued that the study of adolescence is Eurocentric and that all other African and non-western studies tend to align themselves with Western ideology (Mwale, 2012). While this may be true of scientific investigations, adolescence is generally deemed an important time as one transitions into adulthood. Ancient

cultures, such as the Yao in southern Malawi will mark the onset of adolescence in a ceremonial rite of passage followed by a time of socialisation when the adolescent learns about taking on adult roles and responsibilities (Mwale, 2012).

Erik Erikson's pioneering work on psychosocial developmental stages offers another western construct of understanding adolescence as being a time of seeking and questioning identity. Erikson posits that during the psychosocial phase he referred to as 'Identity *vs* Role Confusion', the adolescent experiments and eventually settles on a preferred social role that is congruent with their biological and psychological needs and pursuits within a particular milieu (Erikson in Kroger & Marcia, 2022). Bishop (2013) explains that Erikson considered the psychosocial crisis of identity to be both an internal struggle as one grows physically and sexually as well as an external struggle prompted by social changes. These struggles shape self-awareness and ultimately how one navigates life. While it is unlikely that one's identity is solidified at the culmination of adolescence, it is important that the process of integration is underway (Kroger & Marcia, 2022). Integration, in this regard, refers to the gradual unification of integral components like traits and behavioural patterns (Psychologydb.com, 2025) as one moves towards adulthood. Erikson proposed that the ability to resolve the crisis results in either a healthy personality or one that is fragmented and damaged (Bishop, 2013). A healthy personality is connected to 'ego strength' which is key to Erikson's psychosocial stages. Ego strength is associated with an awareness of self and identity, locus of control, self-esteem, alternative points of view and coping mechanisms (Markstrom & Marshall, 2007).

James Marcia (1980), inspired by the work of Erikson, views adolescence as a time when internal self-structures form. These structures support the ability of the individual to recognise their uniqueness and similarities to others, allowing the adolescent to acknowledge their own strengths and weaknesses. This is reminiscent of Landy's RT and the healthy development of a role repertoire and thus role flexibility as one responds to societal and personal demands. However, if these structures are underdeveloped, individuals will struggle to differentiate themselves from others resulting in assessing oneself from external sources only (Marcia, 1980). 'Roles', according to Slotkin (in Figueroa & Fajardo, 2023), hold a status in society which are arranged hierarchically and associated with concrete action, expectations, and perceived ideals and attitude. The history of 'role' and how these are conceived of in drama therapy will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

To further the understanding of societal and personal demands on adolescents is the influence of their status in a group. There are two important factors here that can have a profound influence on one's mental health - status and groups (Fournier, 2009). Adolescent behaviour is often influenced by the desire to belong, causing an adherence and conformity to the group an adolescent would like to identify with (van der Zanden et al., 2020). Within the group is a pecking order or rather a natural hierarchy which is often based on one's rank or social standing, which is determined by leadership qualities and influence, and the other is the extent to which one is liked (Anderson et al., 2012). American social psychologist, Morris Rosenberg (in Fournier, 2009), indicates that being liked and social standing is so important to adolescents, that having a low social standing and being rejected contribute to increased levels of depression. David Rock (2009), in his book *Your Brain at Work*, explains that increases and decreases in status, activate reward circuits resulting in significant emotional connections. An increase in one's status has the same chemical activation as when one is rewarded. Dopamine, serotonin, cortisol and testosterone are all implicated in the feelings of happiness and lower stress levels when one's status increases (Rock, 2009). However, when there is a drop in status or rejection, one experiences a threat response which is an increase of cortisol, raising stress levels and negatively impacting one's ability to think clearly (Rock, 2009). Rock suggests that people equate being wrong to a drop in status and being right to raising one's status. The fear of being wrong is so powerful that one often remains passive or fears acting. This is a no-win situation, however, as the minute someone else acts and is right, one's status remains threatened. From Rock's perspective, the only way one can overcome the vicious cycle of the status interplay between people is to compete against yourself. While this may sound somewhat impractical as people are social beings, one can conceive of a level of self-awareness, allowing for the adolescent to manage themselves as they ride the 'status rollercoaster'. Perhaps the way to alleviate the pressure of always getting it right or mitigating the fear of getting it wrong is to develop the personal resources to mediate between the two.

There are two areas in research over the last twenty years that have impacted the narrative that the adolescent brain is imbalanced resulting in unpredictable and less than desirable decision making (Leslie, 2024). One, is that higher order thinking like evaluation and synthesis, and executive functions which is goal-orientated behaviour continues to develop throughout adolescence and second, that the regions in the brain sensitive to reward, appear to be in overdrive during the mid-teens (Leslie, 2024). Interestingly, Linda Wilbrecht at the

University of California, Berkeley found that adolescents were more than capable of good decision making if they are given the right type of task (Leslie, 2024). These might include capitalising on their interests, working in a more social environment and providing creative tasks that challenge the status quo (Siegel, 2011). Teenagers are inclined to try new options because they are preparing for independence and must learn new skills. Dr Daniel Siegel, an interpersonal neurobiologist and author, points out in his book, *Brainstorm,* that teenagers tend to challenge adults because they desire to find their own way and find alternative solutions to what has come before (Siegel, 2011). He explains that interpersonal experiences and practicing change can reinforce the structure and function of the brain. It is the feedback between the reward signals and the cerebral cortex that is instrumental in pruning neural pathways (Leslie, 2024). In other words, if the task and the reward are optimal, new neural connections and pathways will be created while others will fall away.

Siegel (2011, p. 12) refers to the 'essence' of adolescence which stands for 'emotional spark', 'social engagement', 'novelty seeking' and 'creative exploration'. While he acknowledges that his work is focused on adolescents in America, it may offer insight into the changes in the brain and how teachers and therapists alike can capitalise on the opportunities and navigate risks when working with learners and clients in this developmental stage (Siegel, 2011). It is worth pointing out the distinction between risk-taking and risky behaviour. Dr Damour (2024) in an UNICEF article on this topic refers to risk-taking and risky behaviour as the same thing. Owing to the adolescent brain being sensitive to the thrill and feeling of reward that comes with a new experience, they will continue to experiment or push boundaries. However, this desire to experiment and push boundaries can be harnessed and navigated to allow adolescents to distinguish between risks that are harmful and those that build self-belief in a healthy way (Damour, 2024). For the purposes of this study, risk-taking refers to taking risks in a safe and contained environment as opposed to risky behaviour that is harmful to oneself or others. Acknowledging the 'essence' may help with the design and selection of games that will appeal to an adolescent, challenge their capacity to think, feel and innovate, enhance how they experience the world, build resilience and develop strategies for emotional regulation.

If adolescence is a time of significant remodelling which involves pruning and myelination it is the optimal time for fostering healthy mindsets (Siegel, 2011). During adolescence there is an abundance of neurons that are responsible for processing and transmitting information that

will either be retained or lost depending on whether synaptic connections are established (Spear, 2013). Spear explains that the speed and efficiency of the transmission of information is enhanced during adolescence owing to the accelerated growth of myelin which insulates the neuronal axons. The high sensitivity to rewarding experiences contribute to increased connections whether the reward is positive or likely to increase risky behaviour (Spear, 2013).

Dongil Chung (2020) an assistant professor in the Department of Biomedical Engineering at the Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology in South Korea explains that when there are rapid developmental changes in the brain, as there are in adolescence, slight interruptions can bring about change. There is value then in having the adolescent learners engage in improvisations that allow for a perspective on risky behaviour and an experience of what it feels like to make healthier choices. The dramatic play allows for the individual to rehearse for future encounters and build coping strategies when one is faced with negative peer pressure (Rao et al., 2020). The same may be applied to acting out violent scenes. If this is done in a safe and contained environment, the adolescent can perceive of a different perspective on the perpetrator, victim, bystanders and the community at large. The consequences of one's actions or inaction can be explored in the hopes that violent behaviour outside of the acting or therapy space can be curbed (Emunah, 2005).

The World Health Organisation (2020) advocates for an increased understanding of this developmental stage and call for an acknowledgment of the impact of this stage on mental health and the need for developing healthy social and emotional habits. What is recommended is a varied, even multidisciplinary approach to reinforce procedures that regulate emotions, strengthen interpersonal skills along with coping and problem-solving skills, build resilience and draw attention to substitutes for risky behaviours (World Health Organisation, 2021). Theatrical and therapeutic practice have the potential to address the recommendations expressed by the WHO through the development of spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. Briefly, spontaneity is understood as the ability to be adaptable and open to alternatives catalysing creativity which allows for innovative and novel approaches to finding solutions (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). By allowing spontaneity and creativity to flourish, one can develop a positive self-image, able to conduct oneself with confidence and self-assurance. The ability to perceive and reflect on oneself is linked to self-confidence (Maclellan, 2014).

Renée Emunah, a pioneer of creative and expressive arts therapies, indicates that the physical, psychological, and cognitive changes in adolescence require external expression. When an adolescent's autonomy is usurped, they often resort to rebellious behaviour which is also known as 'acting out' (Emunah, 2005). 'Acting out' is considered a defence mechanism when one expresses unconscious material (Yaniv, 2018). Emunah (2005) explains that adolescents can 'act out' or enact their rebellious behaviour in a safe and contained environment allowing for new perceptions and awareness which leads to shifts in behaviour. Dr Sue Jennings, a pioneer of drama therapy, author and co-founder of the British Association of Dramatherapists in the UK, considers drama to have a 'curative effect' that may significantly contribute to the maturation process into adulthood (Jennings, 1995, p. 90). Sue Jennings adds to the understanding of the value of being able to 'act out', particularly when one considers that a new sense of self can be internalised when playing the role of someone who has the desired skills. Her example was of a traumatised person playing the role of someone who is strong and has coping skills internalises that they are strong and coping which is the start of building these resources (Jaaniste, 2016). In other words, if an adolescent who feels judged by others, takes on the role of someone who does not care what others think, they can internalise the belief that they too do not fear judgement. The spontaneity that is required to play the role in the first place, allows for the openness to an alternative belief in oneself. Anna Beck in a 2022 TEDx talk explains that even when you 'pretend' as one does in play and acting, you are in fact doing what is necessary to combat insecurities or build belief that you already have the necessary resources. Beck (2022) reiterates that drama empowers and that individuals need to be actors in their own lives as opposed to sitting in the audience.

It is important to note that not all adolescents develop at the same rate, nor is there a universal standard for this change. However, these changes profoundly impact how adolescents think and act (World Health Organisation, 2024). The rapid neurodevelopmental changes allowing for more sophisticated levels of rational, hypothetical, abstract, and metacognitive thinking in adolescents contribute to why spontaneity and creativity are so important to nurture at this stage (Kleibeuker et al. in van der Zanden et al., 2020). Multiple factors ranging from individual, social, educational and filial influences contribute to the development and inhibition of creativity (van der Zanden et al., 2020). If creativity includes developing novel and effective approaches to achieve a desired outcome (Cropley, 2020), then the collateral damage of not fostering creativity is the inability to think critically, problem solve and make meaning (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). This may also impact negatively on one's self-

confidence. What is interesting is that these global functions ebb and flow in adolescence depending on their context and social experiences hence why fostering them more consistently is valuable.

Understanding Role

According to Robert Landy, drama therapist, educator and theatre practitioner, personality is understood as a system of interactive roles that are both conscious and unconscious or dormant (Landy, 2009). Different circumstances can call roles into the foreground and relegate others to the recesses of the mind. The number of roles a person can accommodate comfortably is known as their role repertoire (Bailey, 2009). When these are limited, we can become rigid and inflexible. Expanding our repertoire equips us to cope with a wider range of circumstances (Emunah, 1994 in Bailey, 2009).

Taking a step back, however, 'role' is understood in a range of different domains. In the theatre this is the character or part the performer portrays. Sociologists and social psychologists have developed theories that shed light on how the roles individuals occupy influence behaviour, how people perceive themselves and how their behaviour is judged by others (Anglin et al., 2022). There is an assumption that the roles we occupy in daily life have corresponding expectations. For example, a teacher imparts knowledge and a therapist nurtures. However, roles are never as straightforward as this and are not only applied to occupations but also to a social environment in which there are any number of intersections impacting the roles people play (Anglin et al., 2022). Jacob Moreno, the founder of the psychotherapeutic approach, Psychodrama, believed that one's sense of self was constituted by the many roles we play (Moreno in Emunah, 1995).

Moreno understood that the roles we occupy can be identified, even named, and since they are largely a psychological and social construct, can be reevaluated and modified (Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017). In the 1950s, role theorist and author of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Erving Goffman, expands on the metaphor of people being actors in their own lives (Landy, 2009). Goffman was committed to demonstrating that when people present themselves to others, they are attempting to manage the impression they make (Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017). Goffmann goes on to explain the difference between being 'frontstage' when people are presenting a positive aspect of themselves and 'backstage' where there is no

audience, and one can step out of character and reflect on the role. It is during this time that one can reevaluate and modify one's roles (Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017).

The quest to discover how others 'see' you is synonymous with Psychodrama. Through the dramatisation of scenes drawn from real-life situations and the portrayal of internal processes, clients can identify patterns in their behaviour through how they are perceived by others (Kedem-Tahar & Felix-Kellermann, 1996). These authors explain that clients are encouraged to seek out closure or alternative solutions by addressing unsatisfactory life events. Moreno (in Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017) understood that each role we occupy is an amalgamation of unique and social components, because every individual is defined by their past experiences and what is bestowed upon them by society. Jakovina & Jakovina (2017) explain that by enacting the role, perceptions of oneself are made conscious which allows for change.

It is important to note that even though both psychodrama and drama therapy are based in the acknowledgement that life is dramatic, and both employ theatrical techniques to support individuals in dealing with their lives, they are not the same (Kedem-Tahar & Felix-Kellermann, 1996). The essential difference lies in the enactment of one's own life in psychodrama while drama therapy is more oblique (Fisher, 2016). Many drama therapists, such as Renée Emunah who may begin her therapeutic approach with being more distanced or oblique, eventually draws on and reenacts real-life situations. Robert Landy attempts to distance the client from themselves which paradoxically allows for greater analysis and thus insight. He suggests that drama therapy is more about adopting the understanding that while one may play many roles in life one can also identify what roles they do not play, affording one the opportunity to observe oneself more clearly (Fisher, 2016).

Robert Landy (2009) is quite clear that his interpretation of RT is through a drama therapy lens and offers more of a postmodern view of life being multidimensional. He understands 'role' to be a pattern of behaviour that is recognised by its distinct archetypal characteristics. Similarly, Carl Jung understood that archetypes came to be because of recurring patterns in human behaviour over generations of human and prehuman ancestors becoming entrenched in our psyches, for example 'the mother', 'hero' and 'death' (Shultz & Shultz, 2016, p. 253). These qualities remain recognisable despite deviations that may be determined by circumstances. Landy (2009) uses the example of Euripides' Medea, who despite being so

overwrought with vengeance towards her husband, Jason, for leaving her for another woman that she resorts to murdering her children, is still recognised as the mother archetype.

Taking this a step further, if Medea had to begin drama therapy with a therapist working with RT, they might help her to identify her mother role considering the circumstances in which she plays this role as well as how aligned she is with other people playing their roles. To facilitate the identification of this role, the therapist would introduce the notion of a counter-role (CR) or the other side of the role to make sense of it. In theatrical terms, the primary role is the protagonist, and the CR is the antagonist who is not necessarily opposite but needs to be confronted to achieve a deeper understanding of the totality of a role (Landy, 2009). In Euripides' play, Medea is the protagonist, and Jason the antagonist whose actions compel Medea to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect her children. Landy (2009) goes on to explain that the last in the triad is the role of the guide whose function is to bridge the role and CR allowing for integration. In *Medea,* the guide may be the female chorus who comment on the dynamics of the relationship, both condemning and sympathising with Medea. In drama therapy, the guide might initially be the therapist but ideally is one's inner voice reducing cognitive dissonance and integrating the role and CR (Landy, 2009).

Renée Emunah (1995) explains that an extensive exploration of different roles is 'normal' and healthy during adolescence as they attempt to reconcile or integrate past roles as a child and envision possible roles for the future. However, this role experimentation can be frightening if the adolescent does not feel like their environment is sufficiently supportive. Using improvisation in drama therapy as well as in drama class, the adolescent can experiment safely with different roles as they are 'just acting' and therefore not tied to any one role (Emunah, 1995, p.159). The essential difference here is the intentionality of the drama teacher as opposed to the therapist. Trying out different roles may be viewed by the drama teacher as finding the character you are good at playing and possibly honing that skill for assessment. Experimenting with different roles in drama therapy would be a liberating experience that is intended to avoid prematurely locking into any one identity (Emunah, 1995).

The roles people do eventually play is determined by biological, psychological, cultural and environmental factors creating a system of roles which, according to Landy (2009), constitute one's personality. Landy's Theory of Personality is dynamic as certain roles are called upon

while other remain dormant or even suppressed in the unconscious owing to a lack of need or intolerable circumstances. When circumstances change, these roles could be brought into consciousness and activated (Landy, 2009). The type of school environment, academic or non-academic stimulation as well as peer groupings are therefore likely to influence personality maturation (Tetzner et al., 2023). At school, the pupil fulfils the role of learner which may feel at odds with the roles they occupy at home or in their friendship group causing a disconnect. Landy (2009) would view this a paradox in roles which may require attention. While it is valuable for drama teachers and therapists alike to be cognisant of the extent of different influences on the maturation of the adolescents in their care, it is important to note that there is no global consensus on the concept of personality (Yunus et al., 2018). While Landy may consider the many roles we are called on to play as influenced by internal factors as much as the social milieu, others see personality only as a set of complex characteristics or traits that influence how individuals think and behave in different situations (Ryckman in Yunus et al., 2018). Yet another interpretation, is that personality equates with morality (Yunus et al., 2018).

In all the different permutations on personality and the influence this may have on the roles people occupy, the drama teacher or drama therapist should not neglect the impact of the expression of different roles on others. While a drama therapist may be more aware of the resultant transference and countertransference between roles, a drama teacher may not. It is, however, likely that they would benefit from this knowledge. Transference can be understood as the externalisation of uncomfortable feelings and assigning them to another while countertransference is the response to the transference which may be owing to the respondent's own issues or simply a reflection of what is being projected (Brown & Pedder in Holmwood, 2012). This is quite common in therapeutic settings and not always a bad thing (Seddik, 2008). Learners and clients alike may transfer how they treat and speak to a significant other to their teacher or therapist. I have often inadvertently been called 'mom' in the classroom, or experienced unexpected responses to requests, which I now realise is likely to be revealing of residual feelings from an event. While this was not problematic at the time, it does serve as a reminder that the roles we play at any given time, collide and intersect in ways that may be unexpected. If the transference goes unnoticed, the teacher or therapist may respond in such a way that clouds and confuses the professional relationship potentially obscuring their objectivity. The process of transference can be harnessed in a therapeutic setting as long as the therapist remains clear on the role they represent, and resists being

overwhelmed by emotion (Landy, 2009). Seddik (2008) suggests that a therapist may benefit greatly from being in the moment with the client, experiencing the unresolved feelings expressed in the present. Landy (2009) suggests that when there is transference, the drama therapist takes it on as a role, whist encouraging the client to be the CR and enact the scene. This would be followed by both client and therapist de-rolling and a conversation about the experience. As the teacher/researcher in this study, I need to consider how involved or distanced I am from the learners to be able to recognise the process of transference. To remain somewhat objective, one possibly needs to find a balance between distance and empathy.

The appropriate distance is often associated with empathy (Jones, 1996), a skill that should be desirable in both teachers and therapists. Empathy involves the ability to engage emotionally with another person, finding points of identification or resonance whereas distance implies disengagement and having more of an objective view (Jones, 1996). It is plausible that one can be both empathetic and distanced to be able to perceive others and reflect on oneself. As a drama teacher, one might encourage their learners to reflect on the role or character they are playing allowing for deeper insight of the character and the context, so that the emotional intensity of the performance is more convincing, or the performance is more engaging depending on the genre of the play. A more realistic piece may require greater empathy as the actor tries to transform themselves into the character or by contrast, a more presentational style that requires more distance. A drama therapist may take this a step further and consider this insight and perspective to be a cathartic experience where the material has aided both the expression of emotion as well as the capacity to engage with the emotion (Scheff in Holmwood, 2012).

Sally Bailey (2021), an educator and author explains that when one performs and experiences a character's emotions it enhances the actor's understanding of their own emotions and motivations as well as those of other people. Role-play and the theatre offer dramatic distance, which is a separate reality where imaginations are engaged, making it possible to reflect on one's own life (Jennings et al., 2005). The amount of dramatic distance is determined by the needs of the client i.e. whether that need is to be closer and more subjective or further away to gain an objective perspective. The fictional space in which the subjective and the objective flow into each other is referred to as dramatic reality (Pendzik, 2006). The goal is to gain insight and perspective to liberate parts of us that may be stuck or

in conflict. Moreno (in Pendzik, 2006) refers to this as ‘surplus reality’, or the simulation of reality in drama. The ability to be spontaneous is key in allowing for this dramatic reality or surplus reality.

Spontaneity

Jacob Moreno (1978) grappled with what spontaneity is and why it is so important. As previously mentioned, Moreno suggests that spontaneity is a psychological energy that cannot be stored and is thus spent after its emergence and application, allowing for more spontaneity to emerge. Moreno suggests that much of the technological advancement in the early twentieth century tended to substitute for spontaneity which relegated its importance as a vital force and needs to be encouraged to emerge afresh. Dani Yaniv (2018) in *Trust the Process: A New Scientific Outlook on Psychodramatic Spontaneity Training* argues that humans tend to think top-down and so spontaneity which corresponds to bottom-up thinking needs to be trained. Top-down thinking or deductive reasoning follows a process that begins with a generalisation followed by a confirmation of something specific, whereas bottom-up thinking or inductive reasoning begins with a specific observation broadening to a generalisation (Goldstein & van Hooff, 2018). These processes follow distinct neurological pathways with top-down thinking descending from the neocortex through the thalamus, while the bottom-up process ascends from sensory or visual stimuli (Yaniv, 2018). Owing to our brains being adaptive, cognition and behaviour is influenced by expectation and generalisations from past observations and events rather than responding to a stimulus and grappling with fresh information (Yaniv, 2018). Because thinking takes effort, social psychologists coined the term ‘cognitive miser’ to explain that people tend to take short-cuts, relying on approximations or good enough answers (Baumeister et al., 2018, p. 649). If one intentionally fosters bottom-up processes one can counter information only being perceived and understood through previous experiences. The exposure to spontaneous activities challenges top-down processes and opens one up to new possibilities and novel thinking that allows for change in cognition and behaviour. In other words, developing the ability to be spontaneous through improvisation and other drama inspired games can prevent one from being stuck and resorting to habitual behaviour.

Creativity

Creativity, according to Arne Dietrich and Riam Kanso in their research entitled *A Review of EEG, ERP, and Neuroimaging Studies of Creativity and Insight* (2010), is at the very core of human civilisation and yet the underlying neurocognitive mechanisms are so poorly understood. Creative thought which includes the generation of a novel idea or a unique solution to a problem can either be spontaneous or deliberate (Benedek & Jauk 2018). There is a third type of creative thinking which Dietrich (2019) refers to as 'flow'. An oversimplification of a complex information-processing network is that flow is the intersection of spontaneous creativity and deliberate creativity where thought feels effortless and appears to bypass consciousness. What distinguishes the flow mode from deliberate and spontaneous creative thinking is that it requires movement (Dietrich, 2019). I mention the flow mode because of the mobilisation that is synonymous both with arts modalities and drama therapy. However, the movement suggested for this mode is that of one who possesses advanced ability and skill to such an extent that the execution of the motion is effortless, almost unconscious (Dietrich, 2019). The flow mode therefore might be experienced by an accomplished musician or athlete who can improvise without consideration of their technique. Deliberate creativity is associated with top-down thinking that is conscious and intentional requiring the activation of the executive functions processed in the prefrontal cortex whereas spontaneous creativity is bottom-up, unconscious and the insight feels surprising (Dietrich, 2019). With the reduction of goal-orientated higher order thinking there is an increased ability to access widespread associations and unexpected connections (Benedek & Jauk 2018). Both deliberate and spontaneous creative thinking need to be fostered as teachers and learners work toward having a creative mindset. This mindset requires openness, flexibility, adaptability and the ability to be in the moment (O'Brien, 2012).

It is important for teachers to be orientated towards creativity to model and emphasise the value of creativity as a counter to rigidity and conformity, and to have the courage to make mistakes and be curious. Creativity should not be thought of as only associated with the arts, rather it is an attitude and way of being. The drama teacher specifically is well positioned to promote and foster creativity both within and outside the arts. O'Brien (2012) cites Sawyer (2012) who suggests ways of cultivating creativity in the classroom. These include a culture of inclusion and collaboration, unpredictable opportunities to learn, a learning environment in

which risk-taking feels safe, learners are given agency and resist conformity, and that ideas are generated through unleashing the imagination and mastering knowledge.

The participants in this study attend a school that emulates what Sawyer is advocating for. However, even with a school providing a non-threatening and supportive environment, it is still the role of the teacher to provide the unpredictable learning opportunities to promote curiosity and spontaneity. Emunah (in Emunah, 1995) suggests that art modalities are a good vehicle for adolescents to liberate their imaginations in a way that feels contained and safe. From a pedagogical perspective, O'Brien (2012) explains that the creative mindset is fostered when the content in the curriculum is applied to plausible social scenarios and is made real for the learners. Actively engaging in drama or other art processes allows for these scenarios to be tangible and grappled with in real time. Jeffrey and Craft (in O'Brien, 2012, p. 317) explain the difference between 'teaching creatively' and 'teaching for creativity'. Both have value, however, 'teaching creatively' suggests a style of teaching as opposed to 'teaching for creativity' which facilitates the ability for the learners to think creatively themselves. By encouraging meaningful experiences that allow for learners to interrogate their social identities and play an active role in their learning, curiosity and agency amongst other creative sensibilities are developed (O'Brien, 2012).

Self-confidence

Confidence is a nuanced metacognitive process that is connected to self-belief and decision making (Ott et al., 2018). Belief in one's abilities is understood to be attributed to the reward system and the neurotransmitter dopamine which reinforces a positive self-appraisal (Mulligan, 2023). As this system is very active during adolescence one can deduce that self-confidence during this developmental phase is impacted. In a 2002 study, Robins et al. indicate that self-esteem can hit its lowest point during adolescence (in Barbot, 2020). Self-esteem and self-confidence are related concepts and can enhance one another. Self-esteem can be understood as a feeling of self-worth (Barbot, 2020). Someone who is self-confident believes themselves to be socially adept, competent, optimistic, self-assured etc. and while this may be true, self-confidence is more about one's judgments and ability to perform tasks (Abtahi & Valladao, 2022). Breaking this down further, Barbot (2020) refers to Albert Bandura's notion of self-efficacy as a belief in one's ability to execute specific tasks. The distinction here appears to be a belief in oneself (confidence) and a belief in oneself in certain domains (self-efficacy). A belief that one is incapable of fulfilling tasks is detrimental to their

ability to motivate themselves preventing them from taking risks and being goal orientated (Snyder, 1995).

Confidence coach, Caroline Brewin (2025), writes in her book *Confident*, about the debilitating effects of low confidence reinforcing why fostering self-confidence is so important. Having low confidence causes people to not only avoid tasks and have low aspirations but also to be more prone to listening to negative reinforcement, are less resilient, procrastinate for fear of failure and tend to be more rigid in their thinking (Brewin, 2025). Brewin is quick to point out that confidence can be confused with loud bravado and that over-confidence compensates for a lack of authentic confidence. Authentic confidence, according to Brewin, is being unapologetic about who you are.

Journalists Claire Shipman and Katty Kay (2014) speak about a predisposition to self-confidence in their book *The Confidence Code.* As they embarked on data collection for the book, they learned that humans have a group of genes that contribute either to anxiety or the anthesis which is self-confidence. Meaning that one can compensate for potentially low confidence by consciously building belief in their ability and thus mitigating anxiety. Self-confidence is therefore not static and can be built up over time and contexts (Shipman & Kay, 2014). Brewin (2025) would agree, suggesting that confidence is like a muscle that needs to be exercised.

The connection between competence and confidence needs to be highlighted as the more competent one becomes in what they do, the more confident they become (Brewin, 2025). In adolescence this may boil down to reinforcing knowledge and skills, encouraging a belief in oneself and in certain domains. Anna Chesner (2005), who had a special interest in working with clients with learning disabilities, used masks to help those habitually adverse to taking risks or trying something new for fear or making mistakes. Through a gradual process of dramatic exploration, clients prepared and rehearsed with the masks to disrupt their old habits. Confidence is linked to having a growth-mindset that does not catastrophise around failure, rather failure is a set-back implying that one needs to find another route to mastery (Dweck in Brewin, 2025).

The complicated and interconnected networks in the brain combined with the detrimental impact of low confidence in life is testimony to why confidence should be fostered and

exercised at all ages. The rapid neurological development in adolescence may be an optimal time to entrench a growth-mindset, healthy habits and a healthy sense of self.

The common denominator

According to Trofimov et al. (2021), spontaneity is not a separate entity from other personality traits, rather it influences and is influenced by other traits. A superficial understanding of neural processes appears to support what Moreno believed to be the tactical relationship between spontaneity and creativity. If spontaneity is the catalyst for creativity and creativity is critical for human existence (Dietrich & Kanso, 2010) then spontaneity is a vital force as suggested by Moreno. With that said, what is the correlation between spontaneity and self-confidence? It is interesting that Søren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher and existentialist (in Trofimov et al., 2021) claimed that anxiety is the inverse of spontaneity whereas Shipman & Kay (2014) learned that self-confidence and anxiety correlate. Whichever is more accurate, the absence of either spontaneity or self-confidence causes a negative state. It seems to make sense then that if one is rigid in their thinking and lacks the confidence in their own capabilities, they are likely to retreat and possibly ruminate on their own perceived inadequacy (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000).

There does appear to be a link between creativity and self-confidence which can be simplified as the confidence to be creative which many people may relate to (Kelly, 2012). Designer and educator, David Kelly speaks about the confidence to be creative which is as simple as believing that you can do what you set out to do. Kelly (2014) refers to Bandura's 'guided mastery' which not only liberated individuals from life-long phobia's but influenced overall resilience and confidence which he referred to as self-efficacy. One can speculate that Bandura's clients needed to be open and thus sufficiently spontaneous to be taken through the gradual process of facing one's fears as one presumes, they agreed to try something new. The whole experience of entering the unknown, being curious as to the outcome and finally conquering one's fears is an act of problem-solving or a creative process. Halisoy (2024, p. 2988) in their research on *The Importance of Self-Confidence*, concludes that self-confidence is the 'golden thread' that makes ambitions real by rising above doubt and fear. In that case, one is spontaneous and creative when they feel sufficiently self-confident. But what if spontaneity is the initial thread that weaves between and catalyses both creativity and confidence? Another possible permutation is that one's predisposition of confidence combined with a dose of spontaneity, catalyses creativity.

The role of a drama teacher and drama therapist in a school setting

To begin with, it is worth distinguishing between the codes of conduct, scope of practice and ethical guidelines as stipulated by the HPCSA and SACE to comprehend the ethical considerations and the roles a drama therapist and a drama teacher can fulfil.
All practicing drama therapists need to be registered with the HPCSA and therefore bound by their mandate. These include that drama therapists must be adequately trained at an accredited tertiary facility and have sufficient practical experience. The service provided by the drama therapist must occur under appropriate conditions that can ensure their client's dignity and safety (Scope of Professions and Practices, 2025).

In *Protecting the Public and Guiding the Professions - Ethical guidelines for good practice in the health care professions* key points of the code are entrenched in mutual respect for cultural and ethical differences, integrity, truthfulness, compassion, non-maleficence and acting in the best interest of the client, which includes recognising the client's human right to self-determination (Meyer, 2020). Therefore, all clients need to sign consent forms and persons under 18 years must give the drama therapist assent to engage in therapy. Confidentiality is only broken when there is significant evidence of damage to self or others or when legally compelled to disclose private information.

A teacher must have the appropriate tertiary training and be registered with SACE before being employed in either a government school or a school recognised by the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA). To qualify to become a teacher in South Africa, one needs a four-year bachelor's degree in education or a bachelor's degree plus a one-year postgraduate degree in education (Department of Basic Education, 2025c). Pre-service training includes phase specialisation which are Foundation Phase (Grade R-3), Intermediate Phase (Grade 4-6), Senior Phase (Grade 7-9) and Further Education Training (Grade 10-12) which is a prerequisite for a tertiary education. The Department of Basic Education (2025b) reminds educators that teaching is an honourable calling and that their attitude, training and conduct influences the quality of education in the country. Educators are to uphold and promote values consistent with the South African constitution, perform their professional duties and behave in such a manner that does not bring the teaching profession into disrepute.

There are ten interconnected professional teaching standards in South Africa which was promulgated in 2018. At the core of these standards is teaching and learning that is ethical and fair. According to the SACE Professional Teaching Standards (2018), educators need to be subject specialists who are guided by the National Curriculum and need to select appropriate teaching methodologies and effectively strategies to help the learners achieve the learning goals. Therefore, learning needs to be monitored and assessed. Finally, learners have a right to work in a safe learning environment that is conducive to learning.

Di Grimshaw (1995), a member of the executive committee of the British Association for Dramatherapists who worked as a drama teacher explains that there is much in common between the role of teacher and therapist. She is referring to the need to respect, listen and empathise. The difference, however, lies in intentionality. Grimshaw (1995) explains that the role of the teacher is to facilitate an understanding of their learners external, interpersonal relations by providing opportunities to take risks and acknowledge strengths and abilities. The drama therapist guides this as well as an internal understanding of the interpsychic domain (Grimshaw, 1995). In other words, the therapist will help their client to be more conscious of their unconscious thinking.

As the significant overlap in the role of the drama teacher and drama therapist become more evident, we see these two roles in a school environment as spanning from healer, artist, educator and guide (Johnson & Emunah, 2021). Compartmentalising these different roles does not do justice to the potential of the teacher and/or therapist to empower, facilitate identity awareness, and promote self-worth (Grant, 2024). To be able to harness and, if possible, integrate these offerings is to ultimately empower individuals with the necessary skills to function effectively in daily life.

There is little doubt in my mind of the tremendous value of learners experiencing the arts, but my experience has taught me that the responsibility of emphasising the importance of the subject rests with the teacher. Over my years teaching, I gathered that while Creative Arts is fun, it is not as important as language, maths or science, in equipping learners for the future. This speaks to the potential relegation of arts subjects either to being a luxury or somewhat irrelevant in the greater scheme of education. No doubt there are a host of reasons that perpetuate this attitude, ignorance and inadequate training for pre-service teachers included (Jansen van Vuuren, 2018). We may, however, be seeing a shift in this attitude as more

institutions recognise the value of the arts in education. The Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Nomalungelo Gina has advocated for more schools to embrace STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) in schools across South Africa (Mabhele, 2025). The very notion of these key areas suggests a dismantling of how we traditionally see education as compartmentalised into subjects. STEAM speaks more to the multidisciplinary and interconnectedness of learning areas and the value of integrating one's knowledge (Gajjar, 2017). Of course, what is policy is not necessarily translatable into practice unless teachers are equipped with subject specific knowledge and skills.

It is interesting to note the range of educational trends which places 'fun' at the forefront of learning. This is not to say that the role of a drama teacher is to entertain the students but rather to engage them in such a way that is open and dynamic. In her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) suggests that exciting classrooms have teachers that are flexible and spontaneous. Hooks explains, that for pupils to become active participants in their own learning, they need to feel seen and heard and be part of the collective. The collaborative nature of PBL in schools, attempts to encourage the voice and choice of the learner as they grapple with real-world issues that is both relevant and fun. The multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and practical demands of a project encourage students to acknowledge the interconnectedness of disciplines and the importance of integrating knowledge (Gajjar, 2017).

The drama teacher and in fact the subject of drama, is well positioned to support the interconnectedness of disciplines, demands active participation and the integration of knowledge. When preparing a character for performance, the learner needs to gather information about the character. This includes the historical time, the socio-economic and political context as well their immediate circumstance. The learner will also consider the character's internal psyche that influences their behaviour and emotional state. All this information needs to be assimilated and manifested externally through the physical body and presence of the performer in space. Depending on how the learner chooses to stage the piece allows for further engagement with different disciplines ranging from multimedia to modes of performance.

A goal for drama teachers and their students alike is often to totally transform one's body and voice to suit the character with little consideration for the degree of distance that may be

optimal for the individual. Along with this, is the lack of appreciation for the unconscious identification with the character after a performance has ended (Bailey & Dickinson, 2016). Drama teachers need to be more cognisant of the importance of de-rolling to avoid learners taking home the emotions and traits of the character causing role-confusion (Bailey & Dickinson, 2016). Role confusion in this regard is the lack of differentiation and necessary distance required for reflection between the actor and the role (Landy, 2009). De-rolling is important especially if an acting piece has re-traumatised a student. Without being privy to confidential information about their students, drama teachers may unwittingly encourage a role or performance piece that a student does not have the capacity to deal with causing the individual to remain 'stuck' in the role (Bailey & Dickinson, 2016). Emunah (1994) refers to the desire for adolescents to take on 'rebellious' roles which, as has been established, allows them to experiment safely as they seek out an appropriate identity. She suggests that adolescents tend to enjoy being pushed by their directors to access maladaptive characters, fraught with difficult circumstances. Geoff Davies (1983) while he was working with younger children, concurs that in drama, individuals perform certain roles to experience what it is like. The value of de-rolling from these characters allows for students to be able to gain perspective and differentiate when they are in and out of role (Bailey & Dickinson, 2016).

There are various permutations to a drama therapist working in a school. On the one hand, they may work with clients referred by their teachers or parents. In these sessions the drama therapist uses drama and theatre processes to help their client grow psychologically (Emunah, 1994). Another possibility is that the drama therapist may work therapeutically with a group or class building resources, being with each other in a different way and helping learners with skills such as emotional regulation and developing coping strategies.

Some distinction in the roles of the drama teacher and that of a drama therapist appears to be in how they operate within a system. While the skills of being a specialist, managing the space, collaborating, assessing as well as administrative duties (Joeme, 2023) are shared by both the drama teacher and the therapist, the role within the system and the motivation for these skills are different. Both the drama teacher and the drama therapist need to have a deep knowledge and understanding of their respective professions. A drama teacher needs subject specific knowledge and the appropriate skills to teach the content in such a way that it appeals to diverse learning styles and abilities (Joeme, 2023). The general pedagogical approach in government schools in South Africa is aligned with outcomes and intended to be

learner-centred, interactive and collaborative to promote critical thinking and problem-solving (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

The therapist need not be concerned with subject content and explaining the origins of this or that. Rather they need a good knowledge of the practical application of drama therapy theory and techniques appropriate for the needs of their individual client or the diverse needs of a group. The learners are not in a lesson per se, rather they are on a journey of self-discovery, accessing parts of themselves lying dormant. There are many therapeutic approaches, using drama techniques, that one can draw from. In the 3rd Edition of *Current Approaches in Drama Therapy*, the choices in America include Landy's Role Theory, Emunah's Integrated Model, Johnson's Developmental Transformation, Autobiographical Therapeutic Performance, Narradrama and many more (Johnson & Emunah, 2021). The common techniques include improvisation and/or performance, embodiment, expression and containment, role-play and story (Johnson & Emunah, 2021). Relevant to this research is play and spontaneous improvisation which is discussed later.

It is likely in a school that the space used for Creative Arts is the same space dedicated to group therapeutic processes. As the techniques used in Creative Arts and therapeutic processes are the same (Gaines et al., 2015), both require an adequate amount of space for embodiment, vocal and physical expression. It is not the intention of either the drama teacher or the drama therapist to let the learners run around with wild abandon. Rather, the intention is to create a space and thus atmosphere of control and discipline to enhance the learner's cerebral and emotional processes (Davies, 1983). While the space may be the same, the focus of the drama teacher is likely to differ from the drama therapist. If both the drama teacher and the drama therapist were in the same room, each wearing their own hat, there is a good chance that they could recognise both the 'quality' of performance and 'quality' of the roles played, patterns in behaviour and persistent themes. Together they may be able to facilitate an understanding of the learners external, interpersonal relations as well as the internal interpsychic domains suggested by Grimshaw (1995). If there is potential to work synergistically or in collaboration with each other, the drama teacher and drama therapist may fulfil the adage by Aristotle: 'Those that know do. Those that understand, teach' (Good Reads, 2019). The drama therapist appears to be more focused on 'doing' the work, whereas the teacher is compelled to explain the work the learners are hopefully doing, giving the process an academic focus.

The relationship with one's therapist is unique and likely to be somewhat different to the relationship between teacher and learner. Having said that, both the drama teacher and a drama therapist need to be cognisant of factors that impact relationships which include socio-cultural backgrounds, differences in morality and spirituality and possibly even political allegiance (Soldaat, 2019). Traditionally teachers are associated with maintaining discipline in the classroom with the hopes that eventually students will take more accountability and be self-disciplined (Joeme, 2023). This along with the different roles a teacher might be required to perform will influence the teacher-learner relationship. It can be argued that owing to overcrowded classrooms in mainstream education, discipline and thus the opportunity to form relationships is ever more difficult. In 2020 the average Learner Educator Ratio (LER) was standing at 33:1 with some schools as much as 50:1 (West & Meier, 2020). Add into the mix a highly energised and spirited subject such as Creative Arts which requires physical and vocal engagement. However, I might be so bold as to claim that many drama teachers have a good relationship with learners because the subject is so different to any other subject. They are supposed to get messy, noisy and the learning feels effortless. The 'fun' factor allows the teacher to see the learner in a different light and thus begin to build a relationship.

Assessment is important in both drama therapy and in education; however, the purpose of these assessments vary. To begin with a drama therapist would conduct an initial holistic assessment to decide on an appropriate therapeutic intervention or treatment plan. The plan would include broad goals indicating a desired outcome for the process with more specific objectives which are the steps to reaching the goal (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). A drama therapist is constantly and consistently assessing if the objectives are effective in reaching the goal. Depending on the circumstances, these goals may be established in collaboration with the client. If the drama therapist at a school is working with a psychoeducational focus, they may assess the group through activities and games to get a sense of what needs to be addressed as a priority, what objectives would support this and what the final goal is.

Drama therapists use a host of different methods and tools to reveal the mental state, strengths and resources available to their client (Pendzik, 2006). Susana Pendzik's Six-Key Model for Assessment considers all angles pertaining to dramatic reality and its connection with real life (Oren & Pendzik, 2020). Pendzik developed this model to guard against drama therapy simply being a collection of techniques but rather a therapeutic approach. She looks at the client's ease with which they can enter or exit dramatic reality and the quality of their

'as if'. 'As if' can be understood as engaging in make-believe or pretend play (Pendzik, 2006). As explained, Pendzik considers Mooli Lahad's 'BASIC Ph' coping mechanisms and Sue Jenning's EPR which allows her to perceive what the client is experiencing internally and externally (Oren & Pendzik, 2020). Pendzik will be able to note the content of the dramatic reality, for example, if scenes tend to be problem saturated. Following this is a reflection on the scene with the client and finally a meta cognitive reflection where clients can consider the relationship of the scene to real life (Pendzik, 2006). The Six-Key Model emphasizes the importance of helping the client develop the ability to meaningfully engage with dramatic reality which Pendzik believes is necessary for drama therapy to be conducted in the first place (Pendzik, 2006). The ability to enter, exit, and maintain a 'good enough' dramatic reality aids clients in building the ego strength to manage life's hardships and develop healthy coping mechanisms (Winnicott, 1995; Lahad, 2006 in Oren & Pendzik, 2020, p. 238).

In education, a teacher might start with a baseline assessment to ascertain prior learning or the range of competency in the group. This helps with where and how to begin the learning process. They will also conduct informal or formative assessments throughout the year as a way of monitoring pupils to ensure their learning needs are being met. Owing to time constrains in Creative Arts (1 hour/week), these informal assessments need to form part of the learning process and need to be more practically orientated (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

The practical application in many drama classes and in drama therapy revolves around play and spontaneous improvisation. In their book, Dickinson and Bailey (2021) *The Drama Therapy Decision Tree,* suggest that childhood experiences impact the stage at which individuals play. Mildred Parten's associative play is the first type of play that involves giving and taking as opposed to solitary play in which one is not actively participating with others (in Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). This new engagement includes asking for explanations or demonstrating a willingness to share. The next stage is co-operative play which is more interactive and requires an understanding of what is socially acceptable in different contexts. The stages of play may vary for neurodivergent adolescents, whose brains function in such a way that learning, navigating and processing is different to that of a neurotypical brain (Grant, 2024). Depending on the type of neurodivergence, it may take longer to effect any necessary behavioural changes (Chasen, 2005), meaning they may remain at certain stages of

play for longer. The type of play encouraging spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence in this research is intended to affirm all the learners and not to draw any distinctions between the unique ways in which they think, feel, or process material. I anticipated that the learners involved with the study are at the co-operative stage of play. Having their developmental stage in mind, one can ascertain the extent to which the learners can be spontaneous in the type of play. The games, improvisations and activities I planned, fall into different types of play. Bob Hughes breaks down the different types of play into physical, constructive, expressive and dramatic play (in Dickinson & Bailey, 2021).

Dramatic play is a relatively complex type of play which requires abstract thought and imagination. Learners may need greater assistance in accessing this type of play, hence the need to first encourage entering a dramatic reality, then accessing a character and finally developing a scene (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). Before dramatic play and the eventual call to perform, Emunah (1994) encourages spontaneity and interaction which she considers essential for dramatic play. Emunah separates dramatic play from scene work in her Integrated Five Phase Model, dramatic play being the first phase and scene work the second. It is clear, however, that these phases are fluid and do not necessarily unfold in a chronological fashion. According to Emunah (1994) the first phase is intended to build confidence, self-awareness and trust through spontaneous games that are easy, fun and failure-free. The emphasis is on the 'healthy' parts of oneself setting the foundations for the next phase in which one inhabits a fictional realm (Emunah, 1994). Adolescents need encouragement to enter dramatic play as they tend to opt for more competitive and rule-based games over dramatic play (Emunah, 1994). Emunah does stress that an environment where trust can be developed must be playful and non-threatening. While this study is only focused on phase 1 and 2, a therapist working with Emunah's model would continue to phase 3 - role-playing personal situations and events, phase 4 - psychodramatic enactments in which themes in one's life are explored and ending with phase 5 - dramatic ritual which brings the process to termination (Emunah, 1999).

Valente and Fontana (1994), in their study *Drama Therapist and Client: An Examination of Good Practice and Outcomes* break down the role and valuable qualities for a drama therapist to have. They believed that a knowledge of these qualities and a comprehension of the role could facilitate a professional self-examination for those working in the industry. Ranked in the top five qualities were self-insight, motivation, empathy, sensitivity and spontaneity.

These qualities resonate with what is necessary for a strong therapeutic relationship with a client. Before one can be accurately empathetic, it is valuable to have self-insight or to know yourself (Valente and Fontana, 1994). While this may sound contradictory it simply means that one cannot be available or present for someone else if you are too busy grappling with your own emotions. Motivation in the study mentioned above refers to the physical and creative demands on the drama therapist. Another interpretation may be that the therapist motivates their client to be goal-orientated in building on their own strengths and recognising their own resources. The relationship between clients and their therapist is considered fundamental to the therapeutic process. Humanist Psychologist Carl Rogers, who is known for his work on therapeutic relationships, claimed that the three core qualities for a client-centred relationship was congruence or genuineness, show unconditional positive regard and empathy (Grimshaw, 1995). To break this down simply: the therapist is not the expert in the room ready with all the answers to cure the client (congruence), instead they accept the client without judgement (unconditional positive regard) and be empathetic. Empathy can only be achieved if the therapist is able to put aside their personal way of experiencing and perceiving the world and viewing them as the client might (Mearns & Thorne, 2007). These features require an openness that is evident in spontaneity.

Keith Johnstone (1981) in his book ‘Impro’ talks at length about a lack of spontaneity resulting in ideas being blocked owing to rigid and inflexible thinking. Johnstone is referring to performers when they improvise but this can be applied to the director, teacher or therapist who is trying to control the outcome. Johnstone is particularly scathing of schools in the 1980s in the UK saying that they offer an ‘antitherapeutic environment’, censoring the pupils as teachers attempt to set a standard for what is considered developmentally appropriate (Johnstone, 1981, p. 105). Geoff Davies (1983) too explores the difference in drama teachers who give orders and ask questions despite knowing the answer and those who listen, are willing to be questioned and can be wrong. The type of teacher who can be challenged and even criticised is the type of teacher who thinks their student’s ideas are important (Davies, 1983).

Having forgone conclusions and rejecting creative output seems counterproductive when considering important roles of a drama therapist to be listening, observing, supporting and identifying issues (Valenta & Fontana, 1994). Emunah (2020) considers the role of the drama therapist first and foremost to create a rapport with the client and to actively create an

environment that is creative, tolerant and engaging for all. In this case, relationships are key. This is reminiscent of the therapeutic relationship advocated by Carl Roger's person-centred approach (in Grimshaw, 1995). In the initial stages of group therapy, clients are encouraged to be interactive and engaged to build relational skills and to expand their perspectives (Emunah, 2020). In both the classroom and the therapy space there is likely to be resistance. Students who shy away from participating may require acknowledgment that their contributions are valuable and have the potential to bring about inter and intrapersonal change (hooks, 1994).

Hooks (1994) understands the value of relationships in the classroom and that getting to know one's students is important in inspiring academic rigour. To listen, observe, support and identify issues are therefore common roles of the teacher and the therapist. Valente and Fontana (1994) include in the role of the drama therapist to be able to create an atmosphere, guide, question and confront. Both hooks (1994) and Joeme (2023), as evident in his break down of *Seven Roles of a Teacher in South Africa,* would agree that teachers need to inspire personal growth in the learners through guidance and recognising potential in the learner. This is achieved through sufficient feedback and support. The teacher therefore needs to recognise strengths and areas for growth (Joeme, 2023).

Psychoeducation in South African Schools

Dr Chetty (2025), educational psychologist and Vice-Chairperson of the Society for Educational Psychology of South Africa, writes about the significant imbalance of pupils in need of mental health support and psychologists in South Africa citing a ratio of 1:10,633 of psychologists to clients. Dr Chetty believes that the situation is aggravated by many health practitioners being in private practice. This ratio alone points to the desperate need for psychoeducational programmes to be implemented in schools across the country as well as the temptation to encourage teachers to offer therapeutic interventions. Considering the ethical implications and scope of practice of teachers this would be ill advised, however working in collaboration with registered health practitioners may contribute to a solution. Coetzee et al. (2022) asked various stakeholders what the focus and practicalities would be of implementing a universal school-based psychoeducational programme in South Africa. I chose to look at this study to ascertain an appetite for psychosocial and mental well-being programmes as a preventative measure in burgeoning mental health issues in children and

young people as well as how this may be implemented practically. Despite the context of the study deviating somewhat from this research, in that it is looking at two government primary schools, it reveals how the school and respective stakeholders view psychosocial programmes within a school system. This allowed for better insight into how a drama therapist might function in a school, be it in conducting ad hoc psychoeducational programmes or establishing and implementing ongoing programmes.

To begin with, the counsellors at the participating school in the Coetzee et al. (2022) study, expressed that mental health deficits should not be emphasised in a psychoeducational programme as pupils tend to over identify which has an adverse effect. Abigail Shrier (2024) might concur as she feels that the focus on deficits in Social and Emotional Learning programmes (SEL) in American schools, lead teenagers to ruminate. In fact, she feels that schools should not be involved in mental health at all. While Shrier has been largely criticised for her opinions in this regard, she is pointing to the value of a strengths-based approach that empowers learners to be more attuned and make healthier choices. Shrier is careful to point out that pupils struggling with significant or diagnosable mental health deficits should not be denied therapy. The approach suggested by the counsellors leans more towards the psychosocial support and mental health well-being of the pupils and teachers as recommended by the South African government. This is intended to promote well-being, provide social and emotional learning, identify learners at risk for referrals and mitigate mental health issues from escalating (Department of Basic Education, 2025).

The findings of the study conducted by Coetzee et al. (2022) highlights the need for mental health programmes, but that it must fit into the schools existing schedule, cater for large groups, should involve parents or guardians as far as possible, and facilitated by health practitioners outside the school. It is interesting that the school counsellors who are understood to be trained professionals working within the system to support students with social emotional troubles as well as academic concerns and career choices (Oparah, 2021) felt that the psychoeducational programme should be facilitated by outsiders. This may point to the need for mental health practitioners not to be aligned with the existing systemic structures of the school. The question that emerges is whether drama therapist should be complicit in upholding the status quo of the school. Surely, if a drama therapist is invited by a school, they have an obligation to serve the needs of the school? The answer, I would imagine, becomes murkier when considering all the intersecting micro systems of the learner.

What the findings of the Coetzee et al. (2022) study could allude to is the fact that mental health programmes, while desirable need to fit systemically. To begin with, a programme that needs to fit into the school's existing schedule indicates that there is no real dedication to making time for an authentic, deep dives into the well-being of the learners. This is not to say that short-term work that is time sensitive is not valuable, on the contrary, any work is better than nothing, but this can only happen when timetables and school schedules are adapted to accommodate a focused programme. The fact that work must be in large groups as suggested by the school, undermines the need for learners who may need more individualist attention or are intimidated, even inhibited to share in large groups. One needs to consider if there is an element of stigma surrounding individual therapy.

Having parents involved appears to be a good idea as it completes the triadic relationship between the school and the pupil. Certainly, supportive parents can contribute greatly to the mental health and well-being of their children, but they can just as easily be overinvolved and intrusive, perpetuating anxiety (Abreu, 2023). There is also the acknowledgement that the parental figure might be the source of the mental health challenges, especially if the home is fraught with abusive behaviour, the parents are absent or not available to their children, or unable to regulate their own emotions (Coetzee et al., 2022). Despite this, parental education around mental health is likely to yield more positive than negative outcomes.

The idea that the programme needed to be delivered by outsiders was reinforced by the counsellors who emphasised that the learners would not disclose delicate information to their teachers. This indicates either that the learners do not trust or feel sufficiently safe with their teachers. If this was the case, the teachers may not be upholding the SACE professional code of conduct. The teachers contested that their presence was important to maintain discipline and control in the sessions to ensure that the learners take the programme seriously. Once again this speaks to the psychoeducational programme potentially upholding the status quo. It cannot be denied that the primary focus of schools is education and therefore an expectation of academic pressure (Keiller et al., 2024). Schools' codes of conduct, hierarchical structures and the demand for teachers to be respected does not align with a therapeutic setting in which the relationship is one of mutual respect, trust is fostered and free expression encouraged.

With the terrain of drama therapists working in school settings being by and large unchartered in South Africa, the onus may be on the individual to curate their role to best

serve all the stakeholders and themselves as professionals. Can one hold multiple roles and be both a drama teacher and drama therapist? A teacher who is trained in arts-based therapies and understands the therapeutic benefits of building personal resources is likely to be hugely advantageous to the learner. However, navigating how one works within the system carrying both roles is likely to be challenging and potentially contravene confidentiality and other ethical concerns of holding a dual role. Whatever the set-up, the literature suggests that there is little debate as to the value of working to foster global functions and recognising the interconnectedness of spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. What remains to be revealed is how these functions that support self-awareness, adaptability and other valuable ego strengths in adolescents can be integrated in a school environment and the necessary clarification of the role of the drama teacher and drama therapist.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Practice as Research aims to create opportunities for a practical experience. It is in the doing, that new knowledge can emerge. Barrett (2010) explains that knowledge can be derived from active engagement as well as an intuitive and sensorial awareness. Friedman (2000) considers this to be tacit knowledge that contributes to the creation of explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is knowledge that has not yet been codified or collated sufficiently to be interrogated or viewed objectively (Friedman, 2000). The tacit knowledge in this research, resides in both the learners and in my ability to engage with them. This knowledge is made explicit and open to further objective interrogation by the reflection and reporting on the embodied process. Robert Landy's theories along with Jacob Moreno's S-C theory as well as Susana Pendzik's model provide the lens through which the data was analysed and interpreted. The data that emerged was codified according to the spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence that the creative sessions generated.

The selection of Practice as Research is appropriate for this study as it is both generative in nature and highlights the fundamental relationship between theory and practice (Barrett and Bolt, 2010). Practice as Research, according to Nelson (2006), is the opportunity to test what words cannot. The various games used, and the structure of the sessions were drawn from a range of practitioners, including August Boal, Susanna Pendzik, Renée Emunah and Robert Landy as well as a host of games recommended by Dickinson and Baliey (2021). The process was a series of creative sessions with adolescent students at their school which is a strengths-based school that offers a safe and secure environment.

Before any research occurred, permission to capture data was obtained. As mentioned above, the methods for data collection in this Practice as Research include improvisation, role-play, embodiment and discussions. Tools for capturing what emerged in the sessions and recording data included a rubric assessment tool and field notes. The field notes recorded any remarkable physical embodiment and vocal engagement. These observations were captured in a journal and were used to identify emerging patterns. These reflections allowed for an evaluation on the research question regarding the distinguishable roles of a drama teacher and drama therapist and by extension, the function a drama therapist could serve in a school environment. Finally, the data was compared to existing literature deemed appropriate for the

purposes of the research as well as the information gathered in the interviews with registered drama therapists.

Interviewing registered drama therapists was a necessary source of comparison to the literature, the data gathered during the Practice and Research and what therapists were experiencing on the ground in South African schools. Interviewing is used in qualitative research as a relatively easy means to gather personal insights, however, as Mann (2016) warns, difficult to be proficient. This I can attest to and will elucidate on later in the chapter.

At this point it is worth ascertaining the subtle differences between reflection, reflective practice and reflexivity and how each pertain to the methodology employed in this study. At its simplest, Mann (2016) points out that learning through the process of reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's experiences. Reflexivity, on the other hand, is the ability to reflect on the extent to which one's own positionality and role as a researcher influences the research process and outcomes. These three processes occur before, during and after the event (Mann, 2016) or in this instance, the planning, facilitation and post-mortem of the creative sessions and the interviews. The devising of the sessions was determined by past teaching experiences and past research experiences which were in and of themselves influenced by the time and trends, my education and experiences of having my own sense of spontaneity and creativity fostered as a drama student, affording me the belief and confidence in my abilities. The ability to engage with the drama therapists was no doubt supported by a privileged background, stable homelife and access to resources as well as role models.

The interrogation of the data was certainly influenced as I actively looked for meaning and the underlying hope that insights regarding the value of promoting spontaneity, confidence and creativity would emerge. I looked for the learner's ability to imagine and even visualise alternative lived experiences and noted their ability to be flexible and adaptable in the moment. The enthusiasm and confidence to engage with the drama games were considered a good indication of their self-esteem and potential inhibitions that could point to the developmental stage which may be exacerbated by neurodivergence or to another issue. It is important to note that the scope of this study remains in the developmental stage of adolescence and not an investigation into neurodivergence or other issues such as trauma. Mention of neurodivergence points only to a belief that all teachers and therapists should consider this possibility and not a fait accompli. Scrutiny of the interviews with the drama

therapists registered with the HPCSA, included seeking connections with what I was practicing as a drama teacher, what I was avoiding as a training drama therapist as well as trying to understand how they each understood their role of being a drama therapist in their respective schools.

The learner participants were between the ages of 13 and 16 with six learners being in the Senior Phase and two about to begin the American High School Diploma (AHSD) course. The composition of the group of eight was mixed, representing different genders, race, culture and ethnicity. The school is a fee-paying cottage-styled school that follows both the CAPs curriculum and AHSD, with a strong focus on experiential and immersive learning, inspired by nature and encouraging creative and artistic output. The eight 1-hour sessions were intended to be fun, directive, non-threatening, with the goal of encouraging spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. The broad session plan, outlining the developmental and therapeutic benefits, can be found in Appendix C. The games and activities ranged from being physical, constructive and expressive, imaginative and symbolic as well as dramatic. The dramatic play includes both structured and semi-structured improvisation. Improvisation in this context, is understood as a spontaneous dramatic enactment without a script or rehearsal

Permission to play and improvise requires trust, an appropriate mindset and a willingness to adapt (Sorensen, 2021). To achieve the appropriate trust and mindset, the sessions needed to provide a predictable structure while encouraging a safe space to experiment. To set the tone and establish a structure, routines such as getting into a circle and checking-in as well as reflections and farewells at the end were established. The check-ins were thematically, energetically and stylistically linked to the type of play focused on in the session. Traditional trust games like mirroring each other and guessing the leader are also deemed to encourage individuals to work as an ensemble and thus find connections with each other. Each session was intended to build towards dramatic play and improvisation.

The initial sessions, inspired by the first phase of Emunah's Integrated Model which she refers to as dramatic play (Emunah, 1994), were intentionally scaffolded to focus on encouraging spontaneity and interactive engagement. These included physical games such as playing with hula hoops, and chasing games such as *Duck, Duck, Goose* and *Cat and Mouse* followed by construction and expressive activities such as building machines with their

bodies and cloth and body sculpting. These verbal and non-verbal interactive games were intended to allow for evidence to emerge regarding the group's ability to play, interact, compete and most of all, have fun. The construction and expressive activities were selected because they encourage problem-solving, self-efficacy, stimulate imagination and encourage emotional regulation (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). If the construction and expressive games were not successful, then this may indicate either that the learners required more of a warm-up for this type of play or that they were not yet comfortable with each other. Once the learners demonstrated they were more at ease partnering with a range of different people we could move into more imaginative play.

Symbolic and imaginative play according to Dickinson and Bailey (2021) foster the ability to focus, initiate action, encourage impulse control, inspire cognitive flexibility and develop listening skills. The games employed were inspired by a sense of civil disobedience (Boal in Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). These require individuals to think quickly and offer alternative opinions. This would facilitate the gathering of data that pertained to novel thinking and the extent to which the learners were comfortable contradicting each other. At this point, the sessions are still building towards the learner's drama readiness for dramatic play, being confident in their abilities and to engage creatively.

I designed a tool for assessment (see Appendix A) which was intended to be used informally after the first two weeks. A drama teacher might use such a tool to evaluate the 'competency' of their learners. The rubric 'measures' the quality of spontaneity by what is observed physically and how the learner interacts with their peers during an improvisation. The assessment is totally subjective (tacit) which is reminiscent of a drama teacher judging a product in isolation, without moderation. I chose not to assess at this point as, firstly, it was too soon and second, it felt somewhat contrived. I was not convinced that it would 'prove' anything in terms of the research when I considered that while the learners had engaged in impromptu activities, they had not yet participated in a drama improvisation. Rather than simply omit this from the research report, I have chosen to keep it in as evidence of a reflexive thought process that points to the influence of positionality of the researcher on the research. This will be elaborated on later. While untested, there may still be value in using such a tool if these sessions were part of a term long module. Using these types of tools for informal, continuous assessment, the teacher may be able to track the learner's spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence.

I opted rather to experiment with the second assessment tool (see Appendix B) which was inspired by four of the keys of Pendzik's Six Key Model (2006) as a type of summative assessment and was based on what I had observed at the beginning of the process and what I could observe at the end. While this is still subjective, it at least tracks progress from one point to another. It is important to note that the creative sessions and games were not repeated. This may only have revealed proficiency in the games as opposed to progress.

The third week of the creative sessions is informed by Emunah's second phase of her Integrated Model which is play that is more dramatic in nature. In other words, improvising and devising scenes. These three or four sessions require 'as if' activities. 'As if' can be understood as engaging in make-believe or pretend play (Pendzik, 2006). Dramatic reality gives the 'as if' an actual form, so that it can be perceived by other people (Oren & Pendzik, 2020). I kept the assessment tool (Appendix B) in mind throughout the next few sessions so I could observe the extent to which the learners could engage in dramatic play and the ease with which they could enter and exit a dramatic reality. This assisted in keeping me focused on the purpose of the research which is to establish the value of fostering spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence in learners and to distinguish between the role a teacher may play as opposed to a drama therapist in fostering these functions.

The dramatic play in the last few sessions included activities that required attention, physical engagement, decision-making, observation, sequencing and working memory (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). The sessions were once again scaffolded to first activate spontaneity and build self-belief followed by prompts that encourage novel thinking. This choice is supported by the understanding that being physical energises the body and mind to engage with stimuli. An example of this is an activity called *Celebration* found in Dickinson and Bailey (2021). In pairs, participants devise a handshake (decision making) which they need to remember (working memory). This is labelled 1. They then find another partner (getting comfortable working with a range of people) and decide on a unique way to 'high-five' each other (novel thinking) which is labelled 2. Finally, with a third partner they devise an emote, which is a short celebratory dance (physical) inspired by the video game *Fortnite,* which is labelled 3. The leader then randomly calls the numbers as the participants scramble to find their appropriate partner (sequencing) to execute the corresponding action. The participants ideally become less inhibited as they quicky move to execute the next action. I believe this activity falls into a few of the warm-up categories Moreno (1955) describes in his theory of S-C.

These are undirected - as it is physical and relatively chaotic, action and reaction - as the participants respond to each new partner and novel thinking - as each pair devises unconventional movements. This activity paves the way for another activity that I have used for many years.

The activity is inspired by Keith Johnstone's understanding of 'status'. Johnstone (1981) dedicates an entire chapter to 'status' in his book *Impro* in which he explains that status motivates every choice we make in how we speak and move when we present ourselves and interact with others. By placing status at the forefront, the learners become acutely aware of their own and the actions of others, what they say and how they say it. It also allows for insight into how it looks and possibly even feels when one is asserting their dominance or being made to feel inferior. The status game in the session requires the participants to enter the room with a status in mind (1 being low and 10 being high), sit on a chair and wait for the observers to guess and motivate why they understand the action to demonstrate a particular status. This activity allows the learners to convey a 'character' without the pressure of thinking about which character they want to play. The status alone allows for a backstory and context to naturally emerge as they think through how to portray a certain status. There are both conscious and unconscious decisions in selecting a status followed by conscious choices of how to physically portray the status. The observers themselves draw on their past experiences and intuition to assess the action as well as the confidence to motivate their opinion on what they are witnessing.

The status activity is a good foundation for the dramatic improvisation which is the enactment of a court trial. All that needs to be decided on is the nature of the crime and then everyone will select which role they will play. The role each learner selects will demonstrate the extent to which they wish to engage. The ease with which they enter the dramatic reality, the quality of different offers and their actions and reactions to these offers can be noted. There is also the demand for impulse control as while the trial is potentially inflammatory, there is a time and place to speak. If the learner in a role cannot control an outburst, they can be brought to order by the judge. There are no hard feelings as it is not personal, it is simply the demands of the context. Quick and novel responses from the learners playing lawyers can be noted as well as the strength of their argument. The learners can demonstrate the extent of their conviction and the ability to convince and persuade. The activity concludes with an oral reflection revealing the extent to which the learners were immersed in the dramatic reality.

Whether the learner is thinking as their character or remaining themselves, points to the required aesthetic distance (Landy, 2009). Those that were over-distanced would require more opportunities to aid the emergence of emotions to be able to engage with them and those thinking as their character may indicate that they need to be under-distanced to feel more capable in their abilities to listen and be goal orientated. Either way, by experimenting with different roles, there is a hope that the desired qualities of the role are integrated, developing greater role flexibility.

The assessment tool (Appendix B) offers evidence of learners who demonstrate obvious and observable shift in attitude and behaviour. It is important to note that the learner is not aware of the assessment tool because it is less about their performance and more about keeping the teacher, guide and ultimately, the researcher focused on the study and the distinction between the role as teacher and guide with respect to fostering spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. As the teacher, it may be gratifying to note any shifts in behaviour. However, for the guide, this difference is not viewed as an end point. The 'before' captures what is observable at the beginning of a process and can be conceived of as an initial assessment when goals and objectives are established. The 'after' column reflects the learner at the end of a process. This 'end' point lends itself to future planning to meet the goals of activating spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. To the researcher, this assessment tool indicates if the research objectives are serving the aims which was dependent on the observation of the learners.

The assessment tool can be used in much the same way as Pendzik's Six-Key Model for Assessment (Pendzik, 2006). The first four keys of Pendzik model focuses on observing the client's ability to enter into and exit from a fictional space, the quality or standard of spontaneous play, roles and character – that is the ability to be flexible enough to play different characters or take on different roles in the scene and lastly, creativity or rather a novel take on predictable scenarios. By observing the creativity, spontaneity and self-confidence as a point of departure it can assist in setting objectives to meet future goals. A drama therapist working in a school could use the tool to recognise the need for ongoing application in developing these global functions in the learner and thus be able to set goals for the future.

While observations of the participants can reveal the role drama teachers and drama therapists can play in fostering global functions, it does not allow for a comprehension of the role a drama therapist may fulfil in a school as opposed to that of a teacher. Hence, the need to compare what I was experiencing with the experiences of practicing drama therapist in their respective school settings. I reached out on the SANATA WhatsApp group asking if anyone one working in a school would be willing to be interviewed. Fortunately, the positive responses were from drama therapists practicing in very different school settings across the country.

The interview questions are inspired by Landy's RP assessment instrument which views the self through the many roles people play (Landy et al., 2003). I adapted these prompts to read as follows:

Landy's Role Profile Assessment (Landy et al., 2003, p. 156)	Adapted Questions
	1. What is your understanding 'of a role to play' in a school environment?
1. This is who I am	2. Describe what your role is at the school
2. This is who I am not	3. What does your role not include?
3. I'm not sure if this is who I am	4. Is there any blurring for you in terms of your role at the school?
4. This is who I want to be	5. What would you like your role to be at the school?

Looking at column 2: Adapted Questions

Question 1 is ambiguous as it attempts to elicit responses regarding either a generic value of a drama therapist in a school environment or the interviewees understanding of their role in the school environment. In other words, it can reveal what the role of a drama therapist could be in a school.

Question 2 points to how the interviewee is currently being utilised in their respective schools.

Questions 3 and 4 build on this, hoping to elicit responses that show a connection between what their roles do not include and a potential blurring of expectations from the school. This may include responses that pertain to the daily running of the school, conventional teaching

or even diagnosis. The knowledge that could emerge here is the importance of finding alignment between the practical expectations and needs of the school and the role of the drama therapist.
Question 5 was intended to elicit a range of responses as it alludes to a personal take on the ideal role of a drama therapist in a school. There was a hope that the myriad responses could elucidate on the need for each drama therapist to carve out their niche role in the school that is based on the needs of the school as well as their strengths and styles.

In summary, the interviews served to complement the Practice as Research, allowing for a deeper understanding of the role of the drama therapist in a school setting, the challenges they have being in a system and the expectations placed on them. The hands-on, creative sessions allow for the researcher to experience using multiple theatrical techniques that have the potential to build resources and foster spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. The overall objective is to investigate the value of fostering these personal resources as well as elucidate on the distinction between the role a drama teacher and a drama therapist may play in this regard.

Ethical considerations

This study falls into medium risk which considers that sensitive topics may prompt emotional distress or the potential for trauma. The age of the participants falls into a vulnerable category requiring many ethical considerations that ranged from what I was planning to do in the sessions, how I was to document the process through to provisions to support the learners during the creative process.

Permission needed to be obtained from the school to conduct the research with their learners, as well as informed consent from the parents/guardians as well as the learners themselves. As the school is not registered with the Gauteng Department of Education it was appropriate to ensure I had permission from the head of the school. Parent/guardian and learner participant information sheets were prepared which allowed for a deeper comprehension of the study. Along with this were the consent and assent forms that were signed expressing a willingness to participate and the acknowledgment that participants could withdraw at any time.

Mitigating harm is an important ethical consideration. I arranged for a professional drama therapist who is registered with the HPCSA to be available should the learners require support during or after a session. Drama therapists are both trauma-informed and trained in containing and regulating vulnerable clients. Being trauma-informed is the ability to recognise trauma in a person and can support clients as they recover from trauma by fostering techniques to manage emotions and assist in developing effective coping mechanisms (Yadav & Gunturu, 2024).

Another key ethical concern is confidentiality. In the consent and assent forms it was made explicit that while absolute confidentiality could not be ensured owing to the group dynamic, pseudonyms for the learners would be used in the write up of the findings of this research. Parents/guardians indicated the extent to which the learners could be quoted and that the findings of the research could only be used by other researchers if ethics were obtained by following the same rigorous process for this study. All data collected for the purpose of analysis is kept on a password protected computer and the field notes and journal to be stored in a lockable cupboard.

Owing to the sessions being part of the learner's school day, I needed to be cognisant that the students may feel compelled to attend. The lesson allocated for the study had previously been dedicated to Project-based Learning (PBL) which was attended by the learners invited to participate. To guard against coercion, the class teacher agreed that the group would not be disadvantaged academically by participating in the study, nor would they be disadvantaged if they do not participate. The learners were not expected to do anything beyond their participation in the session. Freedom of choice was explicit, and the agency of the learners was respected and honoured by inviting the learners to join each new game or activity.

Having worked with some of the learners prior to the study, I needed to guard against pre-conceived notions and past experiences of these learners as we embarked on the research. This was partially mitigated as my role had shifted from the PBL teacher to drama teacher, guide and researcher. While I cannot attest to how the learners saw me, my focus had shifted from encouraging academic engagement to observing the extent to which they engaged with the creative sessions and if there was any noticeable difference in their spontaneity, creativity or self-confidence.

The three registered drama therapists I interviewed are all currently working in schools in their capacity as health care practitioners and not as teachers. Participant information sheets and consent forms were prepared for the interviews requesting permission to audio record and if necessary to quote or paraphrase them in the research report. The drama therapists had a choice to remain anonymous in the writing of the report.

Limitations to the study

There are limitations to this study, both in the methodology and the process. In terms of the methodology, the sample size is small, potentially increasing the margin for error in the study. Eight adolescent learners is a very small representation of a population group restricting the emerging data. The learners attend a strength-based school which is significantly different from the mainstream schooling system in South Africa. The observation of the learners in the creative sessions is a subjective measure of their process. At a minimum there should be two observers to allow for moderation and the mitigation of potential bias. My previous experience working with adolescents may provide some standardisation but not entirely. With the time sensitive study, there is no measure for the longitudinal effects of fostering

spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. The three practicing drama therapists interviewed reflect their personal experiences in a range of school environments. With the sample size being small and the data self-reported, the data may not be sufficiently robust. The role of a drama therapist in a school is going to be relative to the different needs of the school. Depending on any number of factors, including affluence or a focus on special needs, the drama therapist may find themselves working in a multidisciplinary team. A study on these differences would be valuable for drama therapists moving into the schooling system and integrating mental health with education. Needing to go back to basics, this study only looks at the distinction between the drama teacher and the drama therapist and the role they can play, within their scope of practice in fostering personal resources.

Another limitation is the lack of comprehensive understanding by neuroscience and psychology alike on the process of creative thinking (Dietrich, 2019). Much of my understanding therefore leans towards a holistic concept of creativity and how it potentially emerges. My view on creativity is therefore not on the standard of the creative thought but on the unpredictable or surprising novelty of the thought which is relative to my own worldview and perceptions.

This study, however, is a start and, I believe, has potential to be scaled up significantly. Further research in a range of mainstream schools both government and ISASA, across the regions, with a larger sample size, and comparing emerging data will allow for a better representation of the value of fostering the resources acknowledged in the study. A longitudinal study may reveal the benefits of fostering spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence later in life.

Chapter 5: Empowering adolescents through spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence

What becomes evident when one starts working with learners in the type of school environment that I was in, is that the learners are all there for a reason. They either struggled to cope in a mainstream school because of an incident, social dynamics or learning challenges. While there is value in knowing if any of the individuals you work with have a diagnosis or what their respective challenges are, I appreciated not knowing the reason. This allowed me to work from a strength-based perspective, considering the psychosocial context as opposed to individual deficits (Seligman, 2002). This allowed for the progress of the learners to be based on what I observed at the beginning of the process and at the end without judgment against a norm or the influence of knowledge of a deficit. I was, however, privy to the conditions at home for some of the learners allowing for a greater appreciation of how they were presenting on the day. I acknowledge that not knowing much about the learners can be seen as a limitation and that the approach was somewhat blind to the cultural, racial and gender differences. However, I was not attempting to foster spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence to get everyone on the same level. Complicating this is the notion that adolescents desire to belong, resulting in the need to conform (van der Zanden et al., 2020). Thus, I chose not to highlight the differences and instead worked towards a gradual appreciation of each other's differences in how they engage with the material. Everyone's strengths will naturally emerge when using a range of different games and allowing for a multidisciplinary approach. The World Health Organisation (2021) cite several benefits from using this approach, including strengthening interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills and building resilience. I found I could recognise the shifts in the learners, particularly the ones I was meeting for the first time, so profoundly that I was reassured there certainly is value in working with adolescents to foster spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence.

Jané Nash (2024), a drama therapist doing an internship at a school in Gauteng, offers a compelling argument for recognising the whole person in a school system, particularly if that system is somewhat 'fixed' with little manoeuvrability or flexibility. She speaks of the demand to advocate for teachers and learners who need to be equipped to understand and cope within a system. When there is no acknowledgment or intention for the system to change, the responsibility rests with the individual to transform or change to fit into the institution. The repercussion of this is that the individual is problematised. Nash likens the experience to having to deal with a fight between two people and attempting to resolve the

conflict by only looking at one of the fighters, ignoring or even absolving the potential role the opponent played in the fight. What this highlights is the need for a drama therapist to consider the individual as part of the school system and a part of a family system to better build their ego strength. The drama therapist, as a priority, would need to establish both the environmental and psychological influences on their clients.

Certainly, one cannot accredit the changes in the learners in this study to the creative sessions alone. Their school environment, their regular teacher, curriculum content and teaching methods, peer group, and their home and spiritual life all play a role in contributing to the development and inhibition of creative output (van der Zanden et al., 2020). What is significant is that none of the learners regressed during the study. An understanding of the rapid neurodevelopmental changes allowing for rational, hypothetical, abstract, and metacognitive thinking in adolescents can contribute to an appreciation of how quickly some of the learners responded to the sessions (Kleibeuker et al. in van der Zanden et al., 2020).

It was intended that spontaneity and creativity permeate all the sessions with each game selected presumed to foster these global functions (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). By scaffolding within each session and building up to the next session, I hoped to see greater self-confidence emerge. Before embarking on this study, I thought self-confidence was the ability to be more expressive, audible, willing to engage etc. but as the sessions unfolded, and looking to the literature, I realised that self-confidence was about an unspoken belief in one's ability that motivates action (Maclellan, 2014). If the role demanded, then they become more expressive etc. however, being loud, outspoken or expressive is not the benchmark for confidence, it was the belief that the learner could play the role (Brewin, 2025). I wondered if the secret ingredient, this unspoken belief, is spontaneity. Is it spontaneity or confidence that permits one to play? Is spontaneity really the vital force that Moreno (1978) refers to or is it confidence? What I witnessed in the learners was the ease or dis-ease with which they entered the dramatic reality and inhabit a role. I had to consider if this was low confidence or was it linked to Moreno's S-C theory (1955) that the warm-up was inadequate to alleviate the learner's anxiety to perform or that they were struggling to enter the dramatic reality because they could not sufficiently suspend their disbelief which requires ego strength.

Each session started with a check-in, encouraging the learners to focus within and identify what they were feeling and expressing it symbolically. The value of thinking in symbols or

symbolically unlocks the imagination, encouraging the learners to express themselves in a way that challenges conventional descriptions (Jones, 2007). For example - if you were a road sign today, what would you be? This check-in was interesting as it revealed far more about me in the research than unlocking the learner's imagination. On this day I had felt particularly rattled by the time I arrived for the session, owing to an unanticipated traffic detour. A learner immediately picked up on my energy and pointed out that there are no positive road signs preventing them from having a positive symbol for expressing their internal world. I realised at this point how I had negatively influenced the group. I was, however, grateful for a few things: 1) that the learner had felt comfortable enough with me to point out my mistake, bringing me back to the here and now and 2) that this learner was feeling positive and desired to express that, standing in direct contrast to the others who expressed negative road signs. This sharing of positivity must have been contagious as the mood of the group shifted allowing for enthusiastic engagement. The impact of the teacher's energy, which suggests the quality of a teacher is as important as the role they play. My lack of self-insight at that point potentially compromised my ability to observe and even empathise had I not been 'called out'. In this, is the realisation that fostering spontaneity and creativity in learners is as important as fostering it in the teacher and therapist. Jané Nash (2024) speaks about the importance of being present and in the moment and to acknowledge what is happening in the space.

Starting with physical play, I realised, is a powerful tonic to energise learners but the transition from physical play to dramatic play is awkward (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). Physical play is vitally important for adolescent learners who have pent-up energy and are fiercely competitive. To play a physical game not only allows for a reset but can be quite revealing on where the adolescent is in terms of their physical strength and ego strength. One can observe their balance, co-ordination, speed and dexterity as well as how effectively they tolerate each other, control their impulses and their emotions while navigating the rules of the game (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). However, the leap from enthusiastically participating in rule-based, highly energised, physical engagement to thinking symbolically and telling stories is too far. The learners are sufficiently exhausted and satisfied after running around that the ask to be 'creative' felt like hard work. The warmup, as Moreno (1955) suggests, needed to be appropriate for the type of experience or engagement. I realised that accessing the necessary level of spontaneity to be open to dramatic play is quite different to simply

activating spontaneity. The warm-up needs to be call and response orientated as well as activate novel thinking (Moreno, 1955).

I was intrigued with how hard the learners found dramatic play. From being relatively fluent in check-ins to being mono-syllabic when asked to tell a story about an image they selected was surprising. On reflection, this could be owing to any number of factors ranging from ineffective warm-up, as mentioned above, to a fear of failure which may suggest low confidence (Brewin, 2025) or in the case of neurodivergence, an indication of a slower processing speed (Grant, 2024). I changed tact in the next session to working with what Siegel (2011) proposes to be a desire to challenge the status quo and exercise some civil disobedience (Boal in Dickinson and Bailey, 2021). After asking the learners to do the opposite of what I say in the warm-up, we went onto play a well-known game *Prop Game*. This game is great for challenging perceptions by transforming objects from their intended use to something more imaginative. I added another dimension in that the learners had to repeat what was suggested just before by saying 'this is not a …' and then 'it is in fact a …', the next learner of course then contradicts who went before them suggesting another iteration of the prop. Not only did this activate their working memory, force them to listen to each other, and be spontaneous with the prop but most importantly it allowed them to hear their own voices in the room. Working in a contained space, I believe, contributes to a different attitude to experiences. Interestingly, the smaller space facilitated engagement as perhaps there is nowhere to hide or that the space represents something different to the garden where you run around. I had intentionally moved the group from a large open space to a smaller more contained space to see if this changed how they engaged and especially because we were moving towards more dramatic play and scene creation. The choice of space is significant when considering ethical concerns around confidentiality and safety. When the classroom or space in a school setting does not meet the necessary standard, it may require flexibility in the choice of dramatic processes until an appropriate venue can be secured.

Owing to all the games and experiences building towards dramatic play, the learners were ever more comfortable with each other, however, expectations were being established. For example, Luke would always claim he does not know, or Liam would do something physical. It was worthwhile to recall that behaviour is influenced by how we perceive ourselves and by how we are judged in the role occupied (Anglin et al., 2022). These two learners were playing into the expectations of their roles as the class clown or the athlete. By encouraging

them to ‘do the opposite’ or asking to ‘offer an alternative idea’, these expectations were challenged. This element of surprise gave the learners the self-confidence they needed to be flexible in their respective roles. No longer was there a perceived judgement from others or judgements of their own actions as they were required to be non-conformist… it was the ‘rule’. This idea was reinforced later in the session by dividing the group in half and asking the learners to freely interpret a tableau created by their peers. The tableau was a representation of a new story that emerged out of combining each of their different stories rendering the stories quite bizarre. The learners had to hold a frozen position that they felt captured the essence or an aspect of the new story. Once again, each interpretation of the tableau had to be distinguishable from each other. I marvelled at how the learners each took ownership of their ideas, confidently speaking through their interpretation and motivating why they understood the image in the way they did. The teacher in me saw the academic gains of this session as I witnessed the power of the learner taking responsibility and owning their thoughts and opinions as opposed to ingesting those of another. I realised that a lack of self-confidence potentially prevents learners from fully engaging in their own learning. What became evident, is that you need self-confidence to share your own opinions and even more self-confidence to motivate why this is your opinion. Over and above this, the learners need to be open to the experience. As with Bandura’s ‘guided mastery’ (Kelly, 2014), there was an agreement, an openness to a methodical and manageable increase of exposure to having a voice, trusting their voice to finally producing a novel idea that required both an explanation of the scenario and a rationalisation of why it was important. The therapeutic gain of such a session is the promotion of ego strength. This was achieved by enhancing the courage to have an alternative point of view and a sense of control over the consequences of your actions (Markstrom & Marshall, 2007).

Working with learners in a specialised school environment highlighted the undeniable value of fostering spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence. The question, however, is if the creative sessions are transferable to an environment that is not conducive to building personal resources. Certainly, the sheer number of students in mainstream schools compromises the impact on this type of work. A solution, I believe, is reliant on schools making space and time for dedicated psychoeducational programmes facilitated by a team of drama therapists or health care practitioners. Schools may be more open to experiences such as these when they recognise the academic gains of developing personal resources. When learners trust in their ability to inhabit a new role and trust their own voice, there are noticeable shifts in

confidence and engagement (Brewin, 2025). The key is a holistic approach to self-confidence, spontaneity, and creativity, enabling learners to fully engage in their learning and embrace their potential.

Below is the completed assessment tool reflecting a learner at the beginning of the creative sessions and at the end. One can note the definitive shifts in behaviour owing, in part, to the intentional application of activities that targeted the global functions of spontaneity and creativity as well as building self-confidence. One can see distinct improvements in engagement, both in their verbal and physical participation. While this learner is clearly quick witted, there is a shift towards their wit being channeled into the dramatic reality and not as an afterthought. The learner appears to be less inhibited, embracing their natural inclination towards being non-conformist.

Before	**After**
Adaptability & flexibility – Spontaneity	
Dramatic reality	
Tendency to withdraw from participating but does engage	Proactive, keen to get involved
Response time	
Quick witted when the focus is off them	Quick to respond
Quality of offers	
Few offers, happy to watch	Strong offers - direct & forthright
Attention to detail	
Good attention to detail	Thoughts appear more organized
Awareness of others	
Aware of peers - tends to play the clown	Aware of others – responsive
Performance style -Confidence	
Playful	
Lighthearted, Entertaining	Remains humorous, relaxed
Facial expression	
Face is quite a mask although enjoys being seen	More animated, like to be seen
Body language	
Engages body, but tends to highlight limitations	Engages body, draws less attention to body
Takes risks	
Tries everything	Tries everything
Audibility	
Tendency to mumble	Clearly audible
Resourcefulness	
Combine or synthesize existing ideas	
Clarity of thought but little verbal expression	Often the only one to grasp a game when instructions are vague

Original & unique	
Ideas are often quirky but lack commitment	Views the world differently, stands out from others
Unpredictable offers	
Unclear but offers don't conform – likes to be different but tends then to say nothing at all	Innovative & divergent – seems to prefer being different
Reactive and proactive	
Unclear	Awareness of consequences, listens intently to others,
Visualisation	
Good ability to engage with a different environment	Good ability to 'see' the environment, immersed in the dramatic reality

Much has been covered on the value of stimulating spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence in adolescent learners. The academic gain of a creative pedagogical approach empowers students to take ownership of their learning and ability to be innovative. This results in a tremendous sense of achievement when they do. But what are the therapeutic benefits of fostering spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence? For a start, the literature confirmed by the creative sessions, indicate a reduction in anxiety, adaptability, resilience, decision making, relationship building and independence. However, what the experience with the adolescent learners also revealed was the need to give oneself permission to be spontaneous. Once they have permission, they can get themselves out of a self-imposed rut and release themselves from expectations of how to behave.

Chapter 6: Playing with paradox

The urge to conform, driven by fear of judgment, can be understood as a form of self-preservation, leading individuals to retreat from authentic expression. The same can be said for efforts to mask neurodivergent behaviour. A step towards giving oneself permission to be spontaneous and therefore non-conformist, I believe, is to build up the resilience to making mistakes. Chesner (2005) suggests that this may be a gradual process as one rehearses risk-taking through dramatic play. The learners in the study leapt at opportunities to run around and play physical games of their own devising and yet became stuck when improvising a scene. There appeared to be an unwritten code about what made a good improvisation, or what idea is sufficiently creative. With access to so much on the internet and the incredible wealth of diversity and novelty in video games, it is difficult to comprehend anything truly original anymore.

To overcome this self-censorship, I needed the learners to spontaneously enter into a dramatic reality without fear of failure. I chose to explore Johnstone's (1981) idea that there is always status at play in any relationship, no matter how amicable. At the very least, the learners could start thinking about status and if they were to play a character, what that status might be. I invited the learners to each enter the classroom with a status in mind, sit down on the chair and let their fellow learners guess the status. On the one hand, this eliminated the need to be 'creative', and they could 'play around' with a status that is not necessarily their own. While there was a 'correct' answer, which appeals to the 'pupil getting it right' scenario it also opens the possibility that the performer 'did not get it right'. While this feels counterintuitive for overcoming making mistakes, it in fact frees the learners to interpret and to recognise that how you perceive another is just that – how *you* perceive them. This activity is interesting on so many levels as the learners started to consider the difference between one's internal status and what they project to others and how this may differ in different contexts and social settings (Johnstone, 1981). This also helped to release the concept of 'getting it right' because there is no right or wrong, it is both. This activity gives permission to be spontaneous even in the face of judgement. In this case, the learner holds the key to the meaning of their actions. While the audience attempts to discover the truth, there are so many different variables that they will never be totally accurate and that is okay. Listening to the feedback from the audience the performer could internally reconsider what they may do differently in the future, suggesting that they need not rely on habitual behaviour. One of the

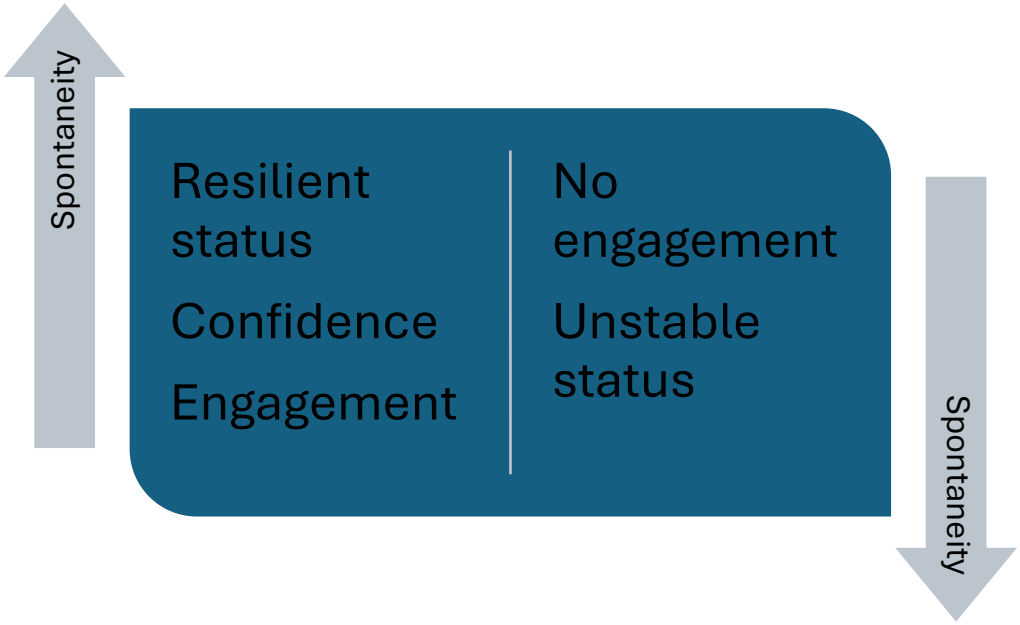
more reserved learners, Cheryl, opted to take another turn, indicating to me that she wanted to offer more clues for her classmates meaning that she would need to be more expressive. If Cheryl was needing to 'get it right' then she was displaying a growth-mindset as she was not giving up, striving for mastery in her performance. Cheryl was not afraid of failure, withdrawing because the class could not guess her status. As with everything in life, there exists a paradox or symbiotic duality – fear of failure versus getting it right or failure versus success. Fear of failure can be debilitating whilst getting it right shows determination.

I have intentionally slipped into theatre speak, referring to audience and performer because this activity is an excellent tool for a drama teacher to get into character work. The exercise encourages learners to think about how to physically externalise internal material and how to interact and engage with other characters on stage allowing for the performance to be more representational and authentic (Johnstone, 1981). For a drama teacher this would likely be in preparation for a product that will be assessed. Thinking about status and the interpersonal games people play when trying to get the upper hand or indeed how they may play a lower status if this serves a purpose, allows for the drama student to access multiple characters in performance. A drama teacher might decide to hone this skill as the student becomes more adept at their craft.

The therapeutic gains of the status game are made clearer when one considers that role and status are intrinsically linked. Every role occupied has a status that is playing out against another role and another status which may cause conflict if not acknowledged. As suggested by Johnstone (1981), status is never equal, there is a perpetual status game at play in every relationship. I am extending the theory to the potential of status conflict to be internal as well. An example may be a teacher at a school where there is a hierarchy. In this school, the head and senior management hold a higher status in the system to the teacher. The teacher has their own internal status which may be low or high potentially creating conflict as they need to work within the system. At home, that teacher may have a difficult spouse who puts them down, making them feel less capable as a partner and professional. The internal status of the teacher is destabilised impacting their behaviour on their return to perform their role at school. Acknowledging the complicated status web can begin a process of disentanglement and greater self-awareness (Rock, 2009). One can then take ownership over what serves them best in each environment and each situation.

I believe there is alignment here with Landy's (2009) notion of role repertoire. If the teacher from the previous example takes cognisance of the different roles they play and how they feel in each role, they can become more adept at slipping between roles. There needs to be an awareness that the discomfort in a role may be owing to the conflicting status perpetuated by external factors causing an internal destabilisation. Does one find themselves trying to assert their dominance or do they feel their status constantly threatened, preventing them from engaging? As suggested by Landy (2009), playing the many different roles, increases one's role repertoire, allowing for a more fluid transition between the multiple roles one is called upon to perform in daily life. A drama therapist might invite the client to reflect on what has come to light when playing different roles and to consider what status these roles tend to have. Using Landy's Role Theory (2009) they could consider the counter-role, which is likely to have a different status to the roles they occupy in life and attempt to integrate the two through the help of a guide. I did not get to this point in the creative process with the learners as we were still very much working with activating the spontaneity and self-confidence to enter the dramatic reality. However, by portraying a fictional role with a different status to one's own, the learners could consider the many different roles and status that comes with the role.

It occurred to me that there is a link between status, spontaneity, creativity and confidence. Brewin (2025) reminds us that people may avoid engaging if they feel their status is being threatened. We know from Moreno (1955), that those lacking spontaneity fear engaging and Chesner (2005) alludes to the aversion to trying something new being connected to the fear of failure. Rock (2009) suggests that the fear of failure is tantamount to a threat to one's status. If authentic confidence, as suggested by Brewin (2025), builds resilience to status interplays, then by the same token, a belief in one's ability, combats the threat of their status being challenged. I propose that the more one activates spontaneity to be creative, the more capable one feels, the less vulnerable they will be to their status being challenged.



A schematic representation of the impact of spontaneity

As Emunah (1995) suggests, when adolescents are acting, they can experiment safely with status dynamics which reveals habitual behaviour and possibly even levels of discomfort. By performing different roles with a different status one can experience the impact of asserting dominance and what it feels like to relinquish control (Johnstone, 1981). The adolescent may then recognise what roles and what circumstances provoke different behaviour. This will ideally allow for self-awareness as well as an awareness of others and what might be needed in a situation to maintain one's dignity and integrity.

I spoke in the previous chapter of expectations the learners had of each other. This suggests that they each had a role expectation in the group. Anglin et al. (2022) discuss role expectations, and the judgements placed on these expectations. These expectations can cause the adolescent to get stuck in a role in which you feel the need to conform to social and societal expectations taking them further from feeling authentic. If one wanted to challenge these expectations and take on a new role, they may worry about raising a few eyebrows. However, if a new role can be experimented with, in a safe and contained environment, surely no one will question or even suspect anything. As Anna Beck (2022) might say - it's only acting after all. An adolescent client may not even realise that, in fact, they are rehearsing different identities or a new version of themselves. In the taking on of different roles there is opportunity for the adolescent to experiment with taking risks. They can 'act out' both risky behaviours, by taking drugs or fighting as well as taking the risk by being

different and making unconventional or non-conformist choices. The argument made here by Anna Beck (2022) is that even though one is ‘just acting’ they are, in fact, doing what is needed but in a safe a contained environment.

A dramatic improvisation in one of the final sessions afforded the opportunity to witness learners ‘act out’ risky behaviour as well appreciate the value of aesthetic distance. The risky behaviour or violent outlet was being played out by a more physical learner in the role of Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast*, who was determined to fight and to win and to fight again, much like the character in the story. Of course, as Emunah (1995) indicates, it was preferrable that this pretend fight was in the safety of the improvisation. What was clear, was that there was no real danger of the fight escalating as the opponent, Beast, was not being drawn into the reality of the moment, keeping a good sense of humour and physical distance. Neither did I sense anything sinister in the action. It seemed that the learner playing Gaston, simply could not visualise what might happen next. Perhaps as Landy (2009) indicates, the learner was stuck in the stereotype of the role, or they were stuck in the fight. Either way, this lack of flexibility speaks to the need for the learners to extend their role repertoire. It would be important for the therapist to notice this and possibly even interject, or coach from the side, encouraging the learner to find an alternative solution to the conflict. As the researcher, what was more interesting here, is that even though both learners had entered the dramatic reality their distance to the content was different. The learner playing Gaston, was far more representational in the fight as opposed to Beast who was using more of a presentational style of performance. With Beast having more of an objective view on the fight, he could hear the comments from the director as opposed to Gaston who was in the thick of it, could not, or chose not, to hear. As the drama teacher I might be thrilled that the learner playing Gaston likes to take risks and get physical. I might even push the performer to take on more realistic roles to develop this skill. As for the learner who played Beast, I might see a penchant for comedy or someone who opts for a more demonstrative performance style. While I doubt there is much harm in developing these natural abilities, the therapist is likely to reflect on the selected distance from the role and consider, as Gaines et al. (2015) emphasise, the extent to which these choices are beneficial in supporting their client to be sufficiently subjective and objective. Finding the appropriate aesthetic distance can afford the client the chance to reflect on the role and any emotions that emerge.

On another occasion, I was afforded the opportunity to observe learners rehearsing different identities or a new version of themselves. '*Courtroom Drama'* was adapted from an improvisation designed by Emunah (in Dickinson and Bailey, 2021) in which the learners selected which role they were to play in the scene. Before embarking on the scene, the learners played the status game as I thought there is no place like a courtroom where everyone's status is apparent. The role of the judge was taken by Luke, who invariably opted not to share and the lawyer by a learner who is confident and enthusiastic but shies away from offering too much detail or interrogating anything too deeply. As the scene played out, I was struck by these two individuals. Firstly, the lawyer became systematic and strategic in their questioning of the witnesses, methodically building a case for their client and ultimately winning the case. The joy of achievement for this learner was tangible. Second was the judge, who I had suspected might be hiding behind a façade of ignorance and reluctance, transformed into an articulate, opinionated, astute interrogator (we were not following strict courtroom protocol) and the ultimate decision-maker who sentenced the guilty and exonerated the innocent. The containment of the courtroom drama had undoubtedly offered a safe space to be assertive and decisive as the literature by Emunah (1995) suggests. The two learners specifically, were excited that their opinions were valued in the scene which in turn means they can be valued in life. If one was to consider Pendzik's Six Keys Model (2006), the change in behaviour was triggered by the learner's ability to enter the dramatic reality. The reflection session directly after the enactment confirmed the level of excitement as each learner spoke about what resonated with them in the drama. Some spoke about their love of watching a series that covers real-life courtroom dramas and others commented on how funny they thought the different approaches of the lawyers were and all remarked on how good they thought the judge was. It was requested by the group that they enact another courtroom drama confirming they enjoyed the process. We did eventually dramatise another courtroom drama with the class recommending that the same learner play the judge again confirming an appreciation of their performance and possibly an acceptance of the new behaviour.

The discussion thus far has revealed that role and status are intrinsically linked as is the paradox of the fear of making mistakes and getting things right. The connection to spontaneity and self-confidence in adolescents can be considered key factors in challenging the debilitating threat of losing status in a group as well as the potential conflict of status that goes hand in hand with role (Fournier, 2009). I would agree that spontaneity catalyses creativity as hypothesised by Moreno (1955) but would add that confidence is just as

responsible. The common denominators here are spontaneity and confidence that drive creativity. Creativity as suggested by Dietrich & Kanso (2010) is the necessary action that produces change. Embracing spontaneity and belief in one's abilities therefore ushers in resilience to making mistakes and reduces the fear of failure. I agree with Landy (2009) and Emunah (1995) that a safe space for experimentation, allows learners to challenge their habitual behaviour which in turn, extends one's role repertoire, fostering flexibility between roles and the opportunities to explore novel solutions to life's challenges. The newfound ability, in some participants, to articulate, strategise, and express themselves confidently is a testimony to value of fostering spontaneity, creativity and confidence. The therapeutic benefits of these activities lie in the increased role repertoire, allowing learners to reflect on the various roles they play in life and experiment with new ones in a supportive environment. Educators and therapists play a crucial role in encouraging learners not to withdraw for fear of judgement.

Chapter 7: Teacher, guide, researcher and learner in role

There are multiple layers when unravelling the role of teacher, guide and researcher. To begin with, it needs to be reiterated that owing to the Practice as Research being conducted in a school environment which is strengths-based, intimate and offering an alternative to mainstream education, the research was always going to be limited. The data gathered from the interview with registered drama therapists working in schools provided deeper insight into working within mainstream institutions. Working in a school where there were no systemic hoops or bureaucratic obstacles to navigate allowed for the active experimentation of the role of the drama teacher working as educator and that of a guide working therapeutically. There is, however, an inference that the guide working therapeutically may reveal the role of a drama therapist in a school setting.

Throughout the sessions, I observed myself using techniques that foster spontaneity and creativity. The difficulty of this endeavour, however, was identifying my own bias in what these roles should look like and how they were perceived by others, the impression I made on the learners and the extent to which they influenced my roles when they are playing their roles of learner, adolescent and any other role they occupy in life. At times, the only judgement I could make was the insight afforded when subjectivity and objectivity flowed into each other (Pendzik, 2006). This was when I was able to 'see' myself in action and could question the way I had engaged with the learners in real time. This self-reflexivity can be upsetting and fraught with self-doubt if one does not deal with decisions with kindness.

On reflection, I realised that the three roles I occupied were of my own construction. These were somewhat influenced by preconceived notions of what these roles may look like and how I should behave. I have never seen a researcher in action, and I am still learning to be a therapist hence the feeling that I am more a guide, but even of that I have few examples. I have only ever been a teacher and so the other roles were possibly constituted around some idea of what I would not want to be like. I thus worked towards creating the type of relationship I wished to have with the learners and how I wanted to be seen. This is reminiscent of Moreno's and Goffman's understanding of role (in Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017). I wanted to be liked, but I also desired for both the research and the researcher to be respected. Finding the balance with this and being client-led was a challenge. The less I felt the research was being respected, the more directive I became which may point to my own

transference and countertransference within the process. The more undermined I felt, the more determined I was to demonstrate the value of the research. Being directive no doubt points to my being more familiar with the role of drama teacher and therefore need to consider the extent to which this impacted the outcomes of the study.

An aspect to being directive is that it is conducive to working with time constraints which both the drama teacher and drama therapist in a school need to be aware of. No matter how accommodating and gracious a school is, they do have schedules and a need to find a balance between all the different subjects to meet the respective outcomes. Educators are driven by outcomes, finding the most effective methods to prepare the learners to meet the required standards and produce appropriate evidence for learners to progress. This speaks to and exposes my background as a teacher and the initial intention of using the assessment tool in Appendix A. On reflection, the assessment could have served as a type of baseline assessment, allowing for a recording of the current levels of spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. However, with there being no benchmark to compare the levels to, the results remain inconsequential. Even so, a teacher could use this information to reflect on their own teaching methods and if necessary, adapt their planning to accommodate the learners' needs. The most important realisation to emerge from this is that I was fixating on the standard or excellence of the drama when I needed to also focus on the quality of the roles the learners were adopting. The role of the therapist needs to be less critical of the standard of dramatic play and more focused on who is doing what and wondering why.

While a drama teacher is required to get the best performance out of their learners, not all learners are the best performers. The drama teacher ideally works towards the learner competing with themselves by finding performance pieces that both suit and challenge their ability and preferred style. This might bring the drama teacher into greater alignment with the drama therapist as they both consider the needs and appropriate methods to employ. Certainly, I selected games that I knew were likely to be effective in activating spontaneity, followed by the different types of play building up to dramatic play. This, I believe, was in alignment with Emunah's model (1994) which uses fun, fail-safe games to build spontaneity and the ability to engage, followed by a selection of techniques that build drama readiness.

No doubt the intersection of the drama teacher, researcher and guide, along with all the other roles I play in my personal life influenced how I conducted myself with the learners which

both Moreno (in Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017) and Anglin et al. (2022) observe in their study of role and role expectation in a group. What was interesting is that the teacher role is an expectation when working in a school setting. If I did not call the group to attention, the learners themselves would take on a more authoritarian role, bringing the group to order. This revealed to me that one is either the teacher, or the student will become the teacher, or the student will make the therapist the teacher. When the drama therapist is enrolled as a teacher, they may find that learner behaviour shifts to fulfilling expectations, for example the 'naughty student' or whatever the case may be. Nash (2024) reinforces the idea that learners themselves tend to enrol the therapist as the teacher, skewing the relationship and potentially compromising the authenticity of the therapeutic process. As Nash was a teacher prior to becoming a drama therapist, she recognised when the learners had enrolled her, resulting in her adopting a more authoritarian role which was counterproductive at that point. This incident also highlights the importance of being able to identify when learners or clients project onto their teachers or therapists and the value of being able to name the transference and potential counter transference so one can deal with it. There are, of course, occasions when the drama therapist may well need to assert their authority or contain the situation to keep order and focus as suggested by Geoff Davies (1983). Containing the situation is likely to be necessary if learners are struggling with impulse control, tolerance and emotional regulation.

When learners are behaving in ways that do not feel conducive to effective learning, the teacher might feel compelled to be more authoritarian and bring the class to order. The amount of time teachers have with their learners determines how long the class can afford to spend on tasks, requiring the teacher to insist that the class behaves in a certain way. While I felt compelled to drive the creative sessions forward as the research was also time sensitive, the learners had the freedom to participate or not as there were no tangible consequences. Interestingly, as we got deeper into the experience, and I made a concerted effort to be more of a guide and less of a teacher, their attitude shifted to being more introspective and respectful of each other. In other words, the more I steered from behind, the more ownership the learners took, the better behaved they tended to be. The relationship, however, is different. I realised that focus and order can be maintained by encouraging mutual respect, being genuine, showing unconditional positive regard and being empathetic.

Nash (2024) raises the point that over and above the relationship being different, so too are the goals of the drama teacher to those of a drama therapist. On a basic level, both the teacher and the therapist need to be goal-orientated which means that each will have a dedicated and methodological way of working. She draws attention to the therapist being present, person-centred and responsive in the moment. Being present and person-centred is being mindful and empathetic towards the needs of everyone in the group. Being responsive is often associated with being a teacher and implies reactivity. This is the quick reaction to and managing of unexpected challenges. Being present, person-centred and responsive are valuable attributes when working with teenagers. What then are the different goals? One the one hand, the therapist is focused on the specific objectives to meet the therapeutic needs of the client, whilst on the other, the teacher will be finding ways for the learner to retain and apply information. For the drama teacher, this would manifest in the quality of the learner's performance as they apply their knowledge of the character, the historical time and theatrical genre creatively. When the learners in this research were in the phase of dramatic play, they were more conscious of producing quality work that was sufficiently creative which, as previously mentioned, impacted their desire to engage. My challenge as the guide was to steer away from judging the quality of the dramatic play and focus instead on their readiness and willingness to improvise.

'Drama readiness' is a key focus for Renée Emunah (1994) in the first and second phases of her integrated model. This involves building up the client's willingness and confidence to engage in 'role play' which is Emunah's third phase. What I soon realised when we started to improvise scenes, was that, while the participants were sufficiently spontaneous and enthusiastic, they were unable to develop scenes very far. This was despite their experience with activities that required advancing and colouring. Advancing suggests that the plot moves forward, and colour is to offer more detail. In one of the improvisations, the learners struggled to advance the main action beyond the protagonist dying, ending the scene. When I called for the scene to advance, the dead character rose up and the scene continued or rather looped back to the moment just before the untimely death. As I was trying not to coach from the side, I asked if any of the other less involved learners wanted to direct the scene, in the hopes that there could be more action involving more of the learners playing a role in the scene. The learner who volunteered, unfortunately, lacked the necessary vigour to intervene in the scene prompting another learner to ask permission to take over directing the scene. The learner graciously agreed and seemed content to take on another role. It struck me that despite

these learners being quiet and reserved, they were sufficiently confident and spontaneous to be involved, no matter what that role was. In fact, they were less stuck than some of the other learners who could only manage to convey one physical and emotional state in the scene. My role as a guide at that point, was to recognise the learners' versatility in playing multiple roles and not be seduced into only focusing of the more stereotypically confident and extroverted learners performing the 'action' in the scene. As the drama teacher I may have taken over directing the scene to both improve the quality of the performances and to ensure that more of the learners were involved, capitalising on the little time we had. I would believe that this is my role anyway as it is quite clear in the CAPS document that it is the drama teacher's responsibility to build performance skills (CAPS123, 2021) and not to recognise if learners are stuck in a role and confused about their identity.

I found my involvement with the learners and the creative tasks to be influenced by the respective roles I adopted. As the teacher, I tended to dive in, get too involved and realise that I had not actually observed anything. As the researcher, I withdrew, reminding myself that I was supposed to be objectively collecting data. The result was that I felt too removed and the observations were clinical and void of personality. As the guide, I found more of a happy medium tending towards being client-led but remaining directive in my invitations. At one point, I asked the learners if they preferred for me to be in the action, coaching on the side or observing from outside, and their response was that it really made no difference. Perhaps they were so accustomed to having adults in their space at school that they hardly noticed where I was. This I took as a compliment as the learners did not feel threatened by my presence, nor did they feel the need to perform in a certain way for me. One is reminded that there is the potential for learners, or clients for that matter, to feel judged by an 'expert' which Rogers warns against (Grimshaw, 1995). It is, however, important for teachers and therapists alike to consider the impact they are making by stepping in and out of the action or in and out of role. A drama teacher who constantly intervenes to demonstrate, is likely to produce a replica of themselves in performance. A drama therapist who keeps on adding in their own experiences and emotions is not empathising with the client. This recalls both Carl Roger's understanding of an effective therapeutic relationship in a person-centred approach (in Grimshaw, 1995) as well as Landy's (2009) understanding of aesthetic distance.

Empathy and distance are as important for a researcher to consider as one's judgement can be clouded by their own thoughts and expectations. When I was too involved in the activity or I

was too close to the action I struggled to fulfil the role of a researcher. Similarly, when I was too distanced, I felt like a passive observer with little investment in the process. The same can be said for the interaction with the drama therapists in the interview. On reflection, I may have exercised my role as researcher more, setting aside my own bias towards how drama therapists 'should' function in schools. Having said that, what I did learn from the interviews certainly shifted me away from my preconceived notion that one person could play dual roles in a school. Nonetheless, I realised that the role of therapist and researcher need to work towards finding the appropriate distance to be simultaneously subjective and objective to gather data, be it of a client or for a research report.

Along with the teacher, guide or researcher playing a role, so too does the space in which they operate. This study highlighted the effects of the space in inhibiting or liberating the attitude of the learners. Brick and mortar do not make a classroom or a therapeutic space but rather it is a) what happens in the space and b) how it happens. I have already mentioned the difference between working in an expansive garden and then moving to an intimate space and recognising what is appropriate in each. A classroom is a place of academic learning, be it experimental, conventional, or skills based. The learner's attention and attitude shifts gears when they are in a different space. It is the responsibility of the teacher or therapist to set up or rather, to enrol the space to be conducive to the type of work they are doing. When I was teaching drama prior to this research, I refused to have desks and chairs and shoes were not allowed. This immediately changed the attitude of the leaners when they entered the drama classroom because it was different from their other classrooms. A therapeutic space is likely to look very similar to this type of drama classroom, but the difference is in how things happen in the space. In this study, the learners very quickly realised that the desks needed to be moved out the way and that they needed to make a circle for a check-in. This ritual of opening sessions set the tone for the engagement that lay ahead while inviting and validating their feelings in the space. It is therefore the role of the therapist in the school to carve out their space wherever they are, impressing upon their clients that there are certain ways in which they will work. It is the boundaries and discipline that encourage cerebral, emotional and physical engagement (Davies, 1983). While it would certainly be a luxury to have dedicated therapy rooms, this is unlikely even in an affluent school in South Africa, making it imperative to enrol the space.

The discussion thus far has focused on the distinction between teachers and guide/ therapists and their role in a school setting, with little being said on the influence of the different roles' learners play that influences their behaviour and impact perceptions and relationships. I wondered if there was any validity in Goffman's theory of how individuals behave 'frontstage' and 'backstage' (Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017). Do the learners present a positive aspect of themselves at school and when they return home and there is no audience, they can step out of character? What is front and back of the stage behaviour? Frontstage, I have interpreted as, behaviour that is 'in role', it is not necessarily being good or bad, rather it is the social role, the role that has been endowed or adopted at school. Backstage, I understand as a time when one sheds that role and can be authentic. It was clear when the participants played the 'good learner' role, as the role demands attentive, respectful behaviour, even authoritarian when needed. The roles I struggled to identify were those whose attention would drift, talk over me and approach the activities with a lacklustre attitude. The learners were not being naughty, nor were they being malicious. Perhaps they were playing the stereotypical adolescent, 'too cool for school' role, but I did not think so. This may point towards a neurodivergence in terms of attention deficit, or they were afraid to be seen as less capable, and thus were less capable (Anderson et al., 2012).

I recognise the ability to downplay one's skills from teaching drama in the past and always found it particularly interesting. Adolescents who doubt their ability tended towards acting 'as if' they were less capable, or resorted to being the class clown, sometimes looking the worse for it. I realise that the root of this is likely to be self-confidence. If the learner felt more capable, would they act 'as if' they are capable and therefore look good? My thinking is that, if the learners were sufficiently spontaneous to act 'as if' in the first place, then it must be self-confidence that is holding them back. The role that each learner plays at school must surely be tied to what they believe they can achieve.

With each new type of activity over the course of the creative sessions, I could witness the learners' strengths, self-belief and openness to experimentation ebb and flow. For example, when we played with hula hoops, the participants generally became more confident and experimented with creative ways to play with the hula hoop. Their roles would then shift to either being more of a leader or a follower, impacting their behaviour and thus relationship with each other and myself. This was evident when one of the learners who would always gravitate to work with the same person, was recognised as the star hula hooper. Her role

shifted out of the shadows and into the limelight as she found herself being admired for her skills and was asked to teach those less capable how to control the hula hoop. It is worthwhile pointing out that her status in the group in that moment, was elevated. This reinforces the interconnectedness of role, status, spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence.

This important realisation brings me to the crux of the distinction between the role of drama teacher and that of the drama therapist in a school setting. It is, as pointed out by Grimshaw (1995), and as expressed by Nash (2024), in the intended goal of the work. Interestingly this was one of my first insights when I found myself wondering why a learner had reacted or behaved in a certain way. As a drama teacher, I was watching *what* the learners did, judged the quality or standard of their ability to collaborate, be spontaneous, problem solve etc. Whereas, as the guide, I was wondering *why* they were doing what they did, viewing the action without judgement and simply observing strengths or areas that may require more attention. I was wondering about the participant's mental states and their ability to self-regulate and tolerate each other, their resourcefulness and resilience. Over and above this, I was looking for dramatic skills or 'drama readiness' to move onto the next level of play as we moved towards dramatic improvisation. I was looking at both the *what* and the *why*, or what I came to refer to as 'both and'. In the book *Current Approaches to Drama Therapy (3rd ed),* the concept of 'yes and' is used when referring to the various drama therapeutic approaches not being in opposition with each other but rather that they can be viewed as working synergistically (Johnson & Emunah, 2021). I am extending this concept both to how a drama therapist works and to how and why a drama teacher and a drama therapist could work in collaboration in a school environment.

With both the roles of drama teacher and drama therapist being shaped by confidentiality, ethical and professional scopes of practice, one might be quick to assume that each role serves the same function in the school. However, what is evident from the literature on Professional Teaching Standards (2018) and Scope of Professions and Practices (2025), confidentiality, ethical considerations and scope of practice have different ramifications for each of the roles. Having said this, a registered and practicing drama therapist interviewed, suggested that trained drama therapists potentially make fantastic teachers as they consider the internal turmoil that is likely to be linked to what is manifesting externally. However, there is still likely to be a conflict of interest between academic demands and therapeutic benefits. A drama therapist teaching the learner in an academic capacity, needs to take the

utmost care not to inadvertently divulge sensitive information, or that academics are steered in a direction that is suited to the client only. Over and above this, is client-therapist confidentiality. A client may consider the convivial relationship with other teachers to be a potential threat to confidentiality, impacting the trust between the client and their therapist. The status dynamic between the client and their teacher/therapist is another consideration. The empathetic relationship built on mutual respect would need to be the standard in the classroom with all the learners and not only with the client. This, I believe is good practice and likely to enhance the relationship between the drama teacher and their learners. However, unless the educational system in South Africa is radically overhauled, the status quo of the teacher being superior and authoritative in the classroom will be upheld. This is reinforced with the teacher being obliged to judge, mark and give critical feedback to parents and other stakeholders in the school. The teacher/therapist would need to tread with flair and finesse to avoid contravening confidentiality or their ethical obligations to their client and to the school.

A more robust alternative to having a dual role in the school is to have both a drama teacher and a drama therapist working in collaboration. With each wearing a different hat, having different responsibilities and areas of concern, they could form a powerful alliance that will benefit many learners in their care. Working together on devising workshops or facilitating psychoeducational programmes, as suggested in one of the interviews, there can be a two-pronged approach of focusing both on the external dramatic quality and expression as well as the internal psychic worlds of the learners (Grimshaw, 1995). These sessions could initially be allocated to the timetabled Creative Arts slots, curtailing the time infringing on other academic subjects. The bonus of having both a drama teacher and a drama therapist employed at a school is that they can still fulfil their primary scope of practice over and above the psychoeducation programmes. To be clear, I am not proposing that psychoeducational processes be marked, this would be counterproductive and fly in the face of the therapeutic scope of practice. In fact, all the drama therapists interviewed agreed that there should be no academic pressure attached to the role of a drama therapist in a school. Should a drama teacher need to fulfil the academic rigour and demands of their subject, this would be outside of the programme but could emerge from it. The drama therapist could also continue to work with clients whose needs may come to light in the workshop or the psychoeducational programme. Admittedly this sounds idyllic where everyone wins a prize. This scenario would no doubt require clear management and negotiation with the respective stakeholders in the system.

Equally important, is for all the stakeholders to know their respective roles. A licensed and practicing drama therapist in a school in Johannesburg shared that the role of the educational psychologist and the drama therapist are often confused by certain stakeholders. A way to mitigate this is to establish a rigorous referral and reporting protocol which will allow for appropriate and effective interventions. It is their experience that teacher referrals pertain to behavioural issues in the classroom which often stem from academic pressure. Therefore, much of the work they do tends towards mediating between the client and their teacher or the client and their parent or guardian. What needs to be made clear is that a drama therapists' role at the school is less about developing tools and techniques for academic advancement and more about dealing with stress and anxieties that emerge. What is apparent, however, is the mutually advantageous potential of the well-being of the learners translating into academic gains. Another factor that may point towards roles being confused by various stakeholder was raised by the above-mentioned drama therapist. This is the distinct similarity in the use of play, particularly in the primary school, by both occupational and drama therapists to develop coping techniques and build personal resources appropriate for the developmental stage.

Each drama therapist interviewed expressed their vision for how they desired drama therapy to function in a school environment. This ranged from clear protocols and a department that is honoured and respected, being a healer or shaman, operating outside of structures and red tape and lastly enabling the comprehensive training of health and arts practitioners to facilitate psychoeducational programmes in the school, allowing for the drama therapist to engage with both group and individual therapy. Despite this variance, all drama therapists spoke about the need for more psychosocial support for the learners and the benefits of developing good relationships. These relationships are between themselves and their clients, themselves and other staff as well as facilitating the learner's relationship with each other.

The overriding takeaway is that an understanding and appreciation of the different roles within the school and the dynamic interaction between the stakeholders can contribute to drama therapy being established in school settings. What is key to creating and carving therapeutic spaces that are distinct from a traditional classroom, involves more than just the physical setting; it requires an intentionality in what happens and how it happens. This can be achieved in such a way that validate the learners' feelings, encourage them to be brave and participate in activities that build personal resources and allow emotions to emerge to be

interrogated and integrated. Further to this, is the concept of 'yes and', which advocates for a synergistic approach where therapeutic and educational goals can coexist and complement each other. Collaborative efforts between drama teachers and therapists can create powerful psychoeducational programs that address both an external dramatic quality and internal psychic worlds. This holistic approach ensures that learners are supported in their overall development, fostering creative expression and emotional well-being.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

While there are still so many questions, the study has revealed what was suspected all along. I can confirm that yes, spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence are immensely valuable to foster in adolescent learners. However, the study does not offer the antithesis of what happens if these are not fostered. Certainly, we can surmise the collateral damage but what is the actual extent of the impact on mental health and ego strength if the global functions and traits identified are not attended to in adolescents? I would imagine that there are many adolescents in South Africa alone, that face all number of circumstances and need to sink or swim setting the trend for future behaviour in adulthood. The mental health statistics in South Africa coupled with limited access to psychological and health services that Dr Chetty (2025) cites, begs for the need to have personal resources fostered in school. The research questions now serve to advocate for the added benefits of having spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence fostered in schools.

With regards to the interconnectedness of spontaneity and self-confidence, I am left with a 'chicken and egg' conundrum as to what comes first – spontaneity or self-confidence? Added to this is the question of where and when creativity fits in? I am no neuroscientist and thus am relying on the limited knowledge I have gleaned from the research to attempt to understand the feedback system in the brain. From a lay person's perspective, I deduce the following possibilities: 1) spontaneity comes first because it requires bottom–up thinking which all humans rely on before the prefrontal cortex is matured. As we mature, we become cognitive misers, and we need to relearn how to be spontaneous. We can trust our instincts again when the thoughts are less goal-orientated, however, if these instincts are wrong, our self-confidence may take a knock, suggesting one needs spontaneity to be confident 2) self-confidence comes first because it is a trait that is predetermined, however malleable, and it is not a psychic energy like spontaneity that needs to be activated. Lastly 3) does it matter? With this not falling into the scope of the research it is just 'fun' to wonder. This debate, in my mind, represents the creative act or the creative process that was catalysed by my curiosity. I think 'curiosity' is a powerful motivator in education and in life and should have been given more airtime in this research. Curiosity, however, is closely aligned and possibly as intangible as spontaneity. This openness to new experiences and is often associated with creativity which is the novel output that brings about change. Without the creative output, spontaneity is just a rush of energy with nowhere to go.

The ‘fun’ factor has been referred to on numerous occasions throughout the study and I feel that this too should be considered in the mix. ‘Fun’, to be clear, does not necessarily mean ‘kicks and giggles’, ‘fun’ is engaged and interactive. If anything, ‘fun’, is the creative output that is courageous and liberated from a fear of failure. Depending on who you are, fun can be climbing a mountain, working out quantum physics or playing drama games. When one is having fun, the experience feels effortless whether the activity was deliberate or spontaneous. Pausing and noticing when one is having fun, I believe, is a key ingredient to accessing parts of ourselves that can otherwise become stuck and rigid. Both the drama teacher and the drama therapist should attempt to make their work interactive and engaging for the learners or clients respectively.

In a school environment, there needs to be appreciation that the type of techniques a drama therapist uses is going to be analogous to the techniques a drama teacher uses. This is because both are drawing on drama and theatre processes. It is likely then that the creative sessions offered in Creative Arts and therapeutic processes will be welcome during the school day. What is important to acknowledge is the difference in the motivation for using certain techniques and to what end. The marks the teacher produces at the end of the year reflect the learners’ achievements in retaining content knowledge, the ability to apply the knowledge and the dramatic skills acquired for performance. All this will ascertain their readiness to progress to the next grade. The therapist’s report will reflect where the client is currently in meeting their goals. If they are not meeting their desired goals, the therapist will need to reevaluate the treatment plan.

What is likely to look quite different is the relationship between the drama teacher and their pupils and the therapist and their client. The therapeutic relationship requires confidentiality which can be frustrating for a school, however, if there is any inclination of harm to self or others, the relevant parties would be notified. Drama therapists are bound by the same ethical code as any other professional health provider registered with the HPCSA. This highlights the need for clear communication and possibly a contract between the school and the drama therapist defining the relationship and a recognition of the scope of practice in a school which needs to be monitored and reviewed over time.

There are tremendous benefits to having a drama therapist placed in a school. Whether they are working with individual clients or large groups with a psychoeducational slant, the

learners will experience something different to what they have come to expect in school, even if the school has an alternative approach to education or follows a creative pedagogy. The holistic development of spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence on the one hand fosters dynamic and adaptive learners, capable of navigating various obstacles and opportunities. On the other, unconscious thoughts or unrealised strengths and resources that had potentially been relegated to the back of the mind, can be brought into the light. A positive feedback loop between spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence in adolescents will allow for their essence to be satisfied, building well-resourced, regulated decision-makers that will hold their own as they encounter any number of circumstances and people in a world that is perpetually in flux.

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Appendix A: Marking Rubric

	2 – advanced	1 – adequate	0 - unable
Adaptability & flexibility - Spontaneity - making offers, accepting and building on peer offers			
Present and in the moment - Suspension of belief			
Response time - Quick thinking			
Strong offers			
Attention to detail			
Incorporates all players			
Total /10			
Performance style -Confidence			
Use of space			
Facial expression			
Body language			
Visualisation			
Audibility			
Total /10			
Thinking - Creativity			
Able to progress the story			
Original & unique			
Unconventional			
Takes risks			
Reactive and proactive			
Total /10			

Appendix B: Improvisation – Assessment tool

Before	After
Adaptability & flexibility – Spontaneity	
Dramatic reality	
Response time	
Quality of offers	
Attention to detail	
Awareness of others	
Performance style -Confidence	
Playful	
Facial expression	
Body language	
Takes risks	
Audibility	
Resourcefulness	
Combine or synthesize existing ideas	
Original & unique	
Unpredictable offers	
Reactive and proactive	
Visualisation	

Appendix C – Session Planning

week 1	16 Jan		
	what	focus - type of play	Therapeutic benefits
	PIS explanation questions stop/go/jump/clap Red light/green light	 stage of play? ethics - check interest & introduce approach	 level of creativity, spontaneity, cooperation, competition
week 2	21 Jan		
	1. Amoeba - random groupings 2. Mirror 3. strike a pose - 3. spot the leader 4. emo handshake 5. 1994	 trust, getting to know each other, ensemble play	 Focus, physical control, tolerance of others, follow instructions, observation, collaboration, memory (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021)
	23 Jan		
	1. hula hoops - step back 2.duck, duck, goose 3. cat & mouse 4. large cloth shake off	physical play co-ordination, strength, holistic connection - body & mind	awareness of self in space, empowering belief in own ability, locus of control, decision making, regulation (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021)

week 3	28 Jan		
	Blurt 10 sec object build a machine & thought tracking body sculpting Blast Off	constructive & expressive play association, creative imagination physical awareness & control	problem-solving, self-efficacy, stimulate imagination, emo regulation & control, awareness of others focus & observation, regulation, physical engagement, follow instructions & listening (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021)
	30 Jan		
	Civil disobedience - do the opposite of the command (Boal, 1992) use the prop tell a story from an image physically capture essence in tableau	symbolic & imaginative skills imagination &visualisation listening & focus creativity, physical engagement verbal & non-verbal communication	focus, initiate or inhibit, impulse control, physical control, dynamic thinking - finding alternatives, listening, locus of control (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021)
week 4	4 Feb		
	pass story on - yes and... say an ode to the object selected from the bag Two places calling out emotions (Emunah, 2020)	 dramatic play - accepting/ blocking offers	enter dramatic reality & abandon conscious control (Pendzik, 2006) focus, listening & observation, verbal & nonverbal communication, collaboration, emotional engagement & regulation (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021)
	6 Feb		
	celebration enter room with status in mind character actors & emotion actors (variation from calling out) Court Trial (Emunah, 2020)	Dramatic play: characterisation memory, creativity, authentic performance - characterisation engaging to watch	focus, observation & listening, awareness of self & others - empathy, physical engagement problem solving & making decisions, sequencing & reasoning, conflict resolution, social interaction, memory, inhibition & Initiation,

		physical & emotional engagement verbal & nonverbal expression Focus, observation & listening	emotional control verbal & nonverbal expression (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021)	
week 5	11 Feb			
	1. but then... pass on the story 2. What if... 3. Change the Perspective on a known fairytale/ 4. act out new version of the story	Dramatic play: scene development memory, creativity & imagination authentic performance - characterisation engaging to watch, focus & energy physical & emotional engagement verbal & nonverbal expression observation & listening	social skills & listening, thinking skills, visualisation, empathy, reframing, communication - verbal & non-verbal (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021)	
	13 Feb			
	shower of appreciation	Closure		