THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS AS PART OF A
SECONDARY SCHOOL MUSICAL THEATRE COURSE

by

William Warren Cook Stokes

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Abstract

This thesis captures the nature of musical theatre in secondary schools in order to understand more completely the intrinsic benefits of the activity. The research surrounds the essence of students’ experience as part of a secondary school musical theatre course, and how students come to understand the meaning of their experience over time. The research design uses a hermeneutic phenomenological lens to capture the lived experience of six former musical theatre students using in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The data is organized in a narrative-like style and analyzed according to the emergent themes, the literature, and this researcher’s personal experience.

The data suggest musical theatre is a journey of self-discovery where process is paramount. The alumni describe the impact of teacher quality on the musical theatre process, the family inherent in the musical theatre cast, the allure of performance and notoriety, and the frustrations toward other students’ apathy. Recent graduates note increased confidence and improved public speaking abilities, but older graduates see musical theatre as something life changing. The intensity of experience, therefore, seems to depend on the number of years students have to reflect on the impact of their experience. Holding these experiences in such esteem, in this study however, decreases the probability of participation in future musical theatre opportunities for fear of their inadequacy. These former students fear they will be unable to repeat the musical theatre experience to the same quality they experienced back when they were in secondary school. This regrettable cycle is unfortunate, but seems to be the reality of how students come to understand this experience over time. The analysis is intended to inform curriculum delivery, advocacy, and alumni relations for future courses in musical theatre.
Acknowledgements

It has been extremely informative for me that I have been a full-time teacher while being a part-time graduate student. Not only has my teaching practice improved as a result of my graduate work over these past five years, but my ability to conduct meaningful research has most certainly been informed by my role as an active music-educator. I am asking very different questions about musical theatre education now then I did at the beginning of this journey and credit my immersion in practice to my success in research.

I would first like to thank my participants for sharing their stories about musical theatre. I would like to thank my colleagues for being the sounding board for many of the ideas presented here. I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Stephen Elliott and committee member Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kaplar for their encouragement and wisdom throughout this long process. Thanks to my family Kim, Chuck, Carlie, Eve, and Bill for their ongoing love and support. Lastly, thanks are extended especially to my beautiful and loving wife Erin for her patience with this work and her unyielding belief in me. Thank you.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In spite of a rich history and tradition in musical theatre, “the products of Broadway have not had much success in the annals of scholarly criticism” (Swain, 2002, p. 6) partly because they may be too low an art form for high-art critics and too mundane an art form for popular-art critics (Walsh & Platt, 2003). Research in musical theatre education is even more limited primarily because musicals are not created for secondary school students; they are created for professional, adult performers (Howard, 1990). What is abundantly clear from the existing literature, however, is that the musical theatre production is one of the most anticipated and sought-after activities on the school calendar (Sjoerdsma, 2004) and so deeper examination in academic research is necessary.

This thesis, therefore, is an effort to contribute to the modest body of knowledge in musical theatre education and to move steadfastly toward improving the scholarly reputation of the art form. This experiential inquiry also comes from a gap in the available literature. Three unique perspectives have helped solidify the direction for this thesis. First, van Houten (1999) identifies that “to date, little attention has been given to the actual experiences of those individuals impacted directly by [musical theatre programmes], the students. In fact, the music education literature lacks examples identifying student perspectives of musical experience” (p. 3). Second, Boyes (2003) suggests that “it would be beneficial…to interview alumni who participated in school musicals to see what, if any, long-term effects the experience had on their lives” (p. 209). Third, the existing research I have observed is limited to extra-curricular musical theatre and not curricular musical theatre. Although this may seem like a small distinction, I
believe it may move participants past trivial issues—such as frustrations surrounding student commitment and behaviour as cited in van Houten’s (1999) and Boyes’ (2003) study—toward some exciting phenomenological data about student experiences within a course on musical theatre.

These gaps in the literature have prompted this particular inquiry into musical theatre education. It is thus with conviction, determination, and trust in the discipline of musical theatre that I am compelled to ask some important questions regarding this experience.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

As a music educator, I have observed that students in secondary schools select musical theatre as part of a rich, artistic education and as a vehicle for their creative expression. Therefore, I seek to capture the nature of musical theatre in secondary schools to understand more completely the intrinsic benefits of the activity. My research questions are as follows:

1. What is the experience of students as part of a secondary school musical theatre course?

2. How do students understand the meaning of their experience over time?

With these questions in mind, my hope is to come to terms with these experiences to inform curriculum delivery, advocacy, and alumni relations for future courses I will teach in musical theatre. I would also like to validate my own personal experience in musical theatre as being part of a larger culture of musical theatre perspectives. If my background in musical theatre is indeed unique, personal, and not representative of the true nature of musical theatre, it will have tremendous impact on my teaching philosophy in the
discipline. For example, I base the structure of my musical theatre course and its delivery on the assumption that it is a worthwhile activity for all students, and has intrinsic benefits for its participants. Certainly, revision in the course will be required if my perspective is uncharacteristic of the typical musical theatre experience of students. On the other hand, I will be more likely to advance the direction of my musical theatre course should the data support my musical theatre teaching framework.

**Defining Musical Theatre**

One concern associated with running a course in musical theatre is the lack of guidance from the Ontario Ministry of Education on this particular subject matter. Ontario curriculum documents fail to identify musical theatre as a single activity, but rather, separate the domains of music, drama, and dance, and segregate them into individual courses of study. This action makes the execution of a musical theatre course rather ambiguous when attempting to align suitable activities to individual strands or expectations. Exacerbating the problem, musical theatre courses operate under different departments depending on the school board. For instance, Toronto District School Board (TDSB) runs most of its musical theatre courses under the drama department while York Region District School Board (YRDSB) primarily allocates its musical theatre instruction to music departments. Most of the ambiguity, I feel, comes from the vagueness of the term itself. The vague term and the inability to determine a clear way of referring to musical theatre across the province may be reason for its inability to find a legitimate foothold in the Ontario curriculum.

This ambiguity has not always been the case. Gänzl (1997) explains:

The description that followed a musical’s title on the playbill was normally intended to give an audience a slightly specific idea of what they could expect
from their evening’s entertainment. So, a musical wasn’t just ‘a musical,’ it was
‘a musical comedy,’ ‘a romantic musical play,’ ‘a burlesque,’ ‘a farcical comedy
with songs and dances,’ an ‘operetta,’ or even occasionally something more
individual and flavorful. A musical-[theatre] bill or title-page in nineteenth-
century France might have carried the mention ‘opéra-bouffe’ or ‘opéra-
comique,’ ‘vaudeville’ or ‘comédie mêlée d’ariettes,’ while the German-language
[theatre] of the same era proffered such categories as ‘komische Oper’ (comic
opera, i.e., music-based play with spoken text), ‘Lebensbild’ (‘picture-from-life’) or
‘Posse’ (‘homely’ musical play) ‘mit Gesang und Tanz’ (as an alternative to
those Possen and Lebensbilder which had no Gesang und Tanz), ‘Operette’ (light
or small-in-subject opera), ‘Zauberspiele’ (magical or fairy-tale play, fantasy),
‘Volksmärchen’ (folk-story), or ‘singspiel’ (musical play). (p. 2)

Walsh and Platt (2003), on the other hand, offer a simplistic definition of musical theatre
as being “composed out of an integrated and vernacular genre of song, dance, and
speech” (p. 5). Consequently, today’s term is “so gloriously unspecific, [and] so
thoroughly and promiscuously all embracing” (Gänzl, 1997, p. 1).

This ambiguity has gone on to confuse the nature of musical theatre in schools.
Specifically, Ontario education boards like York Region publish that musical theatre is
‘music theatre’ and that courses surrounding the production of a Broadway musical must
be identified as such (documents from the Ministry of Education, however, use the terms
interchangeably). Ontario’s three major institutions for the discipline even disagree on
the title. Sheridan College and St. Lawrence College identify their programmes as
‘music’ theatre where Randolph Academy for the Performing Arts labels its programme
‘musical’ theatre. While the majority of Ontario boards typically call their programmes
‘music’ theatre, school boards in British Columbia, for example, generally refer to the
activity as ‘musical’ theatre. There is also the inevitable North American debate on
whether ‘theatre’ or ‘theater’ is the preferred spelling, consequently increasing again the
number of new permutations of the term.
Bawtree (1991) recognizes the current frustration of defining musical theatre and finds it “astonishing that we do not possess a satisfactory generic term to cover the entire art and activity of the theatre in which actors sing” (p. 10). He argues that ‘music theatre’ is, in fact, a new charter of singing theatre. He articulates: “at the heart of the singing theatre, there is a performer who acts and sings a role, in a dramatic performance, with musical support, in a performance area, in front of an audience” (p. 12). From this description, it may be difficult to identify a clear distinction, but ‘music theatre,’ as observed by ‘musical theatre’ audiences, comes off as rather stuffy, avant-garde, and serious “whereas the musical appeals to—or is designed to appeal to—a more general audience” (p. 7). An addition to the host of terms is the American label: the ‘Broadway musical.’ Nevertheless, teachers and students are left with the impossible task to assign identity to their activity and ask their audiences to understand everything involved in the process from the name. Bawtree, however, suggests that this task is not a simple one and that it requires a consensus from all participants to ensure clarity. For the purposes of this research (and hopefully future work in Canadian musical theatre so as to not confuse or step on the laurels of its ‘music theatre’ counterpart), musical theatre, or the musical, will be used to identify productions of Broadway-style musicals in secondary schools, despite its misuse in Ontario and Board of Education policy documents. From here, a review of the relevant theories is necessary in ultimately providing an answer to the research questions at hand.

**Theoretical Framework**

The aesthetic ideas and art education theories that guide this thesis, and indeed this type of human, experiential work, belong to Dewey (1934/2005) and Dissanayake
(1995). These thinkers provide a suitable framework for this study and help situate the experiential research design in a broad body of thinking, helping to validate the overall research concept.

Dewey and experience.

Dewey (1934/2005) introduces the idea of art as an extension of the human experience. He uses the concept of the “live creature” (p. 17) as a way of tracing parallels between humans and animals. He believes these biological similarities are what lay the foundation for aesthetic experience. Further, it is the follow-through of the interaction between the live creature with his or her surroundings that provides the potential for aesthetic moments. The process of these aesthetic moments is considered in terms of one’s past, present, and future because “art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is” (p. 17).

Dewey’s concept of the live creature is basically an examination of the human need to connect to his or her surroundings through the Arts. He also describes experience as “the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment” (p. 22) and suggests that the difference between human experience and the experience of animals is that humans have the capacity to saturate it “with conscious meanings derived from communication and deliberate expression” (p. 23).

Dewey deals with the issues surrounding the live creature within its environing conditions, which can be practical, emotional, or intellectual. The integration of all these elements is what, he says, allows the experience to have aesthetic quality. Dewey highlights emotion as the “moving and cementing force” (p. 44) of experience, and
outlines how this emotion is what provides unity through the contrasting parts of an experience.

According to Dewey, when material “runs its course to fulfillment” (p. 35) an experience takes place. All these experiences are identified by the way in which they are unified. This unity always has a “single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts” (p. 37). Common patterns emerge. Despite the differences of subject matter, common patterns exist in experiences. Dewey refers to these varied parts as ingredients by the way they are linked together. The ends of these ingredients are important not by themselves “but as the integration of parts” (p. 55).

The creation of art is thus connected with the ordering of experience. This ordering is then galvanized into action and reflection, leading to an end. Expression then is not random but is an “urge from within outwards” (p. 64) that compels the live creature to act. Past experiences are, as a result, stirred up within the artist to inform the shaping of materials. Dewey goes on to suggest how the shaping and assembling of materials must be inspired by experience. He also states that the “selection and organization of material are at once a function and a test of the quality of the emotion experiences” (p. 72), meaning that good art would have to be expertly inspired by emotion toward an appropriate or suitable medium.

He refers to art as communities of substance where the percipient is witness to a fusion of elements known as experiences. Dewey, lastly, connects the idea of art as a fundamental human activity within an environment. The material for art is human, and the aesthetic experience derived from this material is a “celebration of the life of a civilization” (p. 339).
Dissanayake makes art special.

Dissanayake (1995) discusses a species-centered view of art where beauty and meaning begin to have biological grounding. She writes about the natural human being, and the paradox of our increasing domesticated selves throughout our ongoing enlightenment. She claims Darwinism galvanizes the species-centered argument where “culture, or the human need for culture, can be considered a biobehavioural adaptation that occurred during our evolution” (p. 15).

From her account, art is enjoyable and is stimulating biologically because if an act is pleasurable, then it is valued thus suggesting “that it must in some way contribute positively to biological survival” (p. 31). She suggests that what feels good is usually in line with what we need as human beings. For example, she uses the model of sexual behaviour manifesting itself into love letters and provocative dress to illustrate her point. Therefore, artistic behaviour can manifest itself in painting, singing, and dancing because of the human need for art. The indicators of its potential are that art (a) feels good, (b) people spend a great deal of time and effort doing it, and (c) it is universal.

Dissanayake outlines how “making special” (p. 39) is at the apex of aesthetic understanding. This process of “making special” is an important factor, for she states that history has an abundance of situations where humans make things or experience “special” (p. 61), and that this caring is a fundamental human proclivity. According to Dissanayake, art is “always an instance of making special” (p. 92). These instances have fundamental human impulses that are somewhat removed from the natural tendencies of humanity so that they may be extra-ordinary.
Musical theatre framework.

These two authors provide a valid rationale for this musical theatre investigation. Musical theatre education would be considered by Dewey (1935/2005) and Dissanayake (1995) as both experiential and special. Dewey’s focus situates the live creature in deliberate expression within a community of substance. Through the shaping and assembling of materials, the live creature saturates his or her experience with meaning to achieve a fundamental human experience. Dissanayake’s focus, on the other hand, surrounds making special the extra-ordinary opportunities of art. Artistic potential is then pleasurable and always in line with what humans need.

Each idea helps construct a solid theoretical foundation for this research design. The framework also helps bring about a point of connection between the literature and this research.
Chapter 2

Context and Literature

Literature dealing with this subject has been difficult to identify. There is no shortage of fully illustrated musical theatre summaries, coffee table books, and un-scholarly websites devoted to the subject, but legitimate authorship of works on musical theatre seem to be overshadowed by a non-peer-reviewed mentality. Williams (2003) states that “the relative paucity of articles on the subject [of musical theatre] in scholarly research journals...is surprising given the pervasive presence of these productions” (p. 67). The scholarly literature may not exist in large numbers because musical theatre has always been created with commercial interests in mind, and is not primarily intended as a teaching tool in public education. Popular culture produces the vast majority of insight on the subject because it is an entertainment-based subject matter. It is perhaps this unfortunate truth that relegates it to a second cousin role to its operatic counterpart and is also possibly responsible for its decline as a credited course in secondary schools across the province of Ontario.

With this conflict in mind, I have organized this rationale into two general strands. The first strand will address the context of musical theatre according to (a) my personal experience in musical theatre as a student and teacher, (b) the historical perspective of musical theatre, and (c) the performance and production perspective present in musical theatre. The second strand will focus on the relevant literature according to (a) musical theatre education, and (b) the effects of student participation in musical theatre. While the first strand will establish the fundamentals of musical theatre and the personal and historical background of the genre, the second strand will address
the meaning students give to musical theatre and the effects of the activity on its candidates. The musical theatre research will form the basis for my research because capturing the nature of musical theatre reflects my questions and will work as the most relevant foundation for crafting the methodology and analysis of my study.

Personal Context

I was in secondary school when I first began to consider musical theatre as a worthwhile activity. I participated in a course called Showtime at a regional arts programme and was immersed in this culture of music until the day I graduated. I was always aware of the importance of this activity as an integral contributor to my academic and social growth as an adolescent. Little did I realize the impact those years would have on my life, and how this activity would shape everything about my future goals, ambitions, relationships, and intrapersonal understandings. Musical theatre has played a major role in my life and the recognition and acknowledgement of this role is what compels me to investigate this phenomenon further. Moreover, I am clearly not alone in my assertion that musical theatre is a worthwhile activity as the discipline is taught as a subject, enjoyed by audiences, studied at academic institutions, and loved by spectators across the globe. How could an entire culture be so misinformed? How could musical theatre not have a place in our conceptual understanding?

It is important to first understand my background in musical theatre to see the evolution of my thinking and belief in the discipline. Without this framework it is impossible to truly understand my rationale for such research and difficult to see why my passion for the discipline is so consuming and sincere. Further, Binnema (1996) establishes precedence for this overview as she outlines her experience of a production in
Sahel Academy in Niamey, Niger, West Africa before explaining that there “is much for students to gain from performing in a musical” (p. 96).

In 1997, having worked with a handful of community theatre groups, I began a musical theatre project called Working (1978). This musical is based on the 1974 book by Studs Terkel (1912-2008), which tells the real life stories of people in their jobs, and why they do the things they do. The novel validates their work experiences and makes the case that, often, the working class will slave through a less than glamorous or ideal profession to create better opportunities for their children. The music is written by a whole host of composers and, as a result, is a somewhat fragmented collection of monologues and songs, but is successfully strung together under the working premise.

Staging this musical in a rather privileged regional arts programme provided significant parallels to the story of my father who was sitting in the audience. He, too, attended a regional arts programme as a secondary student and in his senior year, withdrew to pursue a trade as it seemed to be the only viable option at the time to make a sufficient living. The experience of sitting in the audience years later watching his son perform a song that encapsulated his life was one of the most moving experiences of my father’s life. The penultimate song in the production was entitled “Fathers and Sons” and as the lights dimmed on what was an emotionally charged audience, a photograph of me as a child with my father projected on the rear cyclorama; it was at this moment that I connected with my father on an entirely new level. His choice to take a trade in his youth provided me the luxury and privilege of standing on that stage. To this day, it was one of the most powerful experiences of my life, and upon reflection, was fostered by a medium I previously believed to be superficial and cliché. Musical theatre shaped this moment,
and I began to see it not as another trivial kick line, but as a method of uniting people, moving audiences, and influencing the character, maturity, and drive of its primary participants: its cast. My years in Showtime allowed me to forge some of the most meaningful friendships I have had to date. The cohesiveness of the cast also created a type of family away from home that was unlike anything I had experienced prior. The bestman at my wedding played along side me during those years, and I cannot help but see the long-lasting influence the discipline had on my future.

After graduating from the regional arts programme I attended university. Surprised to learn that the province of Ontario no longer had a Bachelor programme in musical theatre, I opted to attend a Faculty of Music instead and crafted a musical theatre programme from what was offered there, registering a minor in drama, taking dance courses in the evenings, all the while finding any opportunity to perform, direct, musical direct, choreograph, work technically, and produce. This hands-on education led to me eventually securing a career in a secondary school where my primary role is to deliver high quality musical theatre opportunities to students alongside a group of highly trained and skillful music educators.

It should be noted that I have great belief in the possibility of the discipline, but also feel this context is vital in recognizing the potential bias I bring to these research questions. I, therefore, present my purpose with a clear understanding of the predisposition I carry toward the research questions and overall design.

**Historical and Cultural Context**

Finding a starting point for the history of musical theatre is varied and disputed, as the musical theatre industry has been encapsulated under many different, commercially
influenced, terms. The choices of origin are many, for wherever people settle, there is musical theatre (Mates, 1985) inevitably becoming a vital force in that culture (Loney, 1981). Finding one, true, definitive beginning is somewhat of a challenge. Mates (1985) suggests that the “story begins with scattered amateur performances in the seventeenth century and a few attempts at professional ones early in the eighteenth” (p. 11) as do most scholars on the subject (Evertt & Laird, 2002; Gänzl, 1997; Loney, 1981; Walsh & Platt, 2003; Bordman, 2001). Flinn (1997), however, reaches back as far as the fourth and fifth century B.C. identifying Antiquity as a period where music, dance, and drama coexisted in some capacity. This survey begins with Antiquity as well with the research of Flinn.

**Classical musical theatre: Antiquity.**

Athens was the epicentre of democracy, philosophy, ethics, and culture in fourth and fifth century B.C. Flinn (1997) chooses to assign musical theatre to this birthplace because, according to the Western world, it is considered the origin of many refined things. In this case, Antiquity is especially significant, since the treatise on dramatics by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), development of tragedy by Aeschylus (c.526-c.456 B.C.), Euripides (c.480-5-c.406-7 B.C.) and Sophocles (c. 495-c.405 B.C.), and the development of comedy by Aristophanes (c.456-c.385 B.C.) and Menander (c. 342-c.290 B.C.) all belong to this period. Most notably, among these Greek forms of theatre, is a striking similarity between specifically Aristophanes’ Old Comedy and various types of musical theatre; the seeds for musical theatre were very much planted in this art form. Flinn attaches Old Comedy most directly to that of vaudeville because Old Comedy’s humour, much like vaudeville, is “earthy, vulgar, and to the Athenians, enormously funny
and entertaining” (p. 13). The great successes of many later forms of musical theatre are attributed to this crude, crass, camp style, making Aristophanes the father of musical comedy in a sense.

The most striking parallel between Old Comedy and musical theatre though is the use of the chorus. The Greek choruses were the singers and dancers of Old Comedy, singing about current events, and proclaiming news of Greek enemies; music and lyrics were thus a vital part of the chorus (Flinn, 1997). Flinn (1997) also accounts, however, for the reduced “integration of song and dance” (p. 18) as Old Comedy gradually became New Comedy with the plays of Menander.

As New Comedy traveled to Roman audiences, it was Plautus (c.254-c.184 B.C.) who restored musical elements back into New Comedy (Flinn, 1997). Plautian style musical comedy would dominate popular entertainment until the fall of the Roman Empire. With the decline of the Roman Empire came the evanescence of poets and playwrights, and the assertion of a Christian Church quite intent on informing people of the evils inherent in secular theatre. The Christian Church would, as a result, succeed in conquering intellectual and moral attitudes of the Middle Ages through sacred drama. These sacred dramas presented “biblical stories, Christian myths, and religious ceremonies for the edification of its congregation” (Flinn, 1997, p. 24) and would have a ten-century hold on theatre thereafter (Flinn, 1997).

Meanwhile, secular performers were displaced and “took to the streets, roaming the towns and villages of Europe and England” (Flinn, 1997, p. 23). These itinerant performers included singing, dancing, juggling, mime, and magic in their act, and by the
eleventh century, these acts would be performed in the local vernacular (Flinn, 1997). These plays existed until the sixteenth century eventually evolving into the folk play.

While secular drama thrived, Flinn (1997) explains that peoples’ desire for entertainment leading into the Renaissance gained strength. Their secularization “had set the stage for the greatest flowering of cultural activity” (p. 29) and by the later Renaissance, had established many of the forms that are responsible for musical theatre as it exists today. For example, Flinn recognizes vaudeville in the Old Comedy of Aristophanes, but this is an indirect comparison. Minstrels, on the other hand, come directly from these itinerant performers waiting in the marketplace during the transition from secular, to sacred, and then back to secular theatre. “Traveling minstrels put their stories and news into song” (Flinn, 1997, p. 23) making it one of the first recognizable, and most widely accepted, origins of musical theatre.

The minstrel show.

Along with many other musical theatre forms at the time, the minstrel show developed and relied on music (Everett & Laird, 2002) to tap into emotions that would be inaccessible through normal speech (Knapp, 2005). This practice continued into the eighteenth century where music would be at the forefront of a sometimes very fragmented drama. William Brooks offers an insightful analogy into the experience of watching these dramas for the audience:

A…modern analogy is television—television as watched by a crowd of cronies at a bar, perhaps. Television provides an astonishing variety of fare in the course of a single evening—comedy, drama, music, spectacle—all back to back with no attempt made to integrate. Television, too, has its own sets of interpolations in the form of commercials, announcements, and previews. It’s obvious that these, like their eighteenth-century equivalents, offer distractions from the principal material; they give the viewers a chance to get food, do some work, talk, snuggle, and otherwise act as their eighteenth-century counterparts might have. But it is
also true that these television interludes, together with the incidental music within shows, help to ‘glue’ the evening together….Much the same thing occurred in the eighteenth century. Then, too, there was a class of musicians skilled in manufacturing the musical ‘glue’ that held theatre evenings together. (Loney, 1981, p. 38)

These fragmented, but very musical eighteenth-century minstrel shows were carried by circuses or commercial showboats (Mates, 1985), and by the nineteenth century were “the first form of American style entertainment for which important popular music was written” (Ewen, 1968, p. 3). This style of entertainment would lead to the first full minstrel show in 1843 (Loney, 1981). Many imitations followed. These entertainments were spearheaded by Thomas Darmouth Rice (1808-1860) as the character Jim Crow, and Daniel Decatur Emmett (1850-1904), the father of the Virginia Minstrels in New York City, beginning in 1843 (Mates, 1985; Knapp, 2005; Everett & Laird, 2002). The Virginia Minstrels were a performing troupe who solidified the performance techniques and traditions of blackface minstrelsy, primarily through the influence of the character Jim Crow and the ‘Jim Crow Jump’ specialty number, establishing a clear, commercial benefit to imitating blacks (Knapp, 2005, p. 50). Interestingly, Walsh and Platt (2003) credit Charles Matthews (1776-1835) with the first Negro impersonations in America in the 1820s, but do concede the “minstrel show format was shaped by American troupes in the 1840s” (p. 21).

The minstrel show was a somewhat educational experience for white men as Walsh and Platt (2003) and Mates (1985) describe; the early objective in these shows was to portray black men accurately from real life (Walsh & Platt, 2003). Mates suggests that:

The actual basis for the minstrel show was the attempt to emulate the dress, the manners, the speech, the song, and the dance of blacks from various parts of the
United States…But at the beginning, the appeal of the minstrel show was…the ‘educational’ experience…The minstrel show was to entertain and to educate, the latter through the accurate presentation of blacks in song and dance. (p. 80-1)

The minstrel show did undoubtedly move “steadily toward a more frank and vicious racism” with the “Civil War, the abolition of slavery, and the reconstruction of the South” (Walsh & Platt, 2003, p. 27).

Interestingly, the social agenda tied to this type of musical theatre had commercial implications as well, allowing blacks to be employed in a predominately white-centered entertainment industry (Jones, 2003). For example, a white man named W. H. Lee organized one such company in April 1865 where black performers could sing, dance, and act. The company was the Georgia Slave Troupe Minstrels and was the first black company of its kind. Of course, this troupe did little to change the attitude of white America toward Jim Crow as the shows “cruelly mocked and denigrated black Americans in a way that had long-term social consequences” (Loney, 1981, p. 95). The genre would, however, establish the foundation for several other forms of entertainment, despite the minstrel show’s “black slave culture and its intermingling with a white colonial potpourri” (Porter, 1997, p. 3).

The minstrel show’s contribution to other forms of musical theatre was paramount. As Ewen (1968) explains:

The ‘olio’ part was the embryo from which grew vaudeville. The ‘fantasia’ section was the predecessor of the Broadway revue. And the burlesque finale was the prototype for travesties later put on so successfully by comedians. (p. 4)

Big minstrel companies eventually grew into staging operatic burlesques (Loney, 1981), but perhaps the most relevant connection lies outside the blackface and plot lines.

Minstrel shows connected the theatrical stage to popular American music in a way no
other genre had accomplished. Further, the music of the minstrel show was mirrored by thoughtful and narrative choreography (Knapp, 2005).

The theatrical music of the minstrel show established a tradition of integrated musical theatre, and a passion for taking highbrow sensibilities and turning them upside down. This perversion would influence other early forms of musical theatre: mainly burlesque, extravaganza, and vaudeville.

**Other early forms: burlesque, extravaganza, and vaudeville.**

Burlesque, or travesty, grew from the finale, early parodies, and travesties of the early nineteenth-century minstrel show by predominately two comedian teams (Ewen, 1968). Edward Harrigan (1844-1911), an actor, lyricist, and playwright, teamed up with actor Tony Hart (1855-1891) to create a genre unique to them (Everett & Laird, 2002). This tradition would later be carried into the twentieth century by Joe Weber (1867-1942) and Lew Fields (1867-1941) who mainly performed lower-class burlesques with thick Dutch accents (Engel, 1975). During the time of Harrigan and Hart, however, satire and humour was at its best (Everett & Laird, 2003). The Harrigan and Hart, and Weber and Fields burlesques satirized history and grand opera (Mates, 1985), but were musically more innovative and inventive. They also included a completely original score (Bordman, 1982) unlike the minstrel shows that employed popular repertoire for their soundtracks.

One of the first burlesques on an American topic was John Broughman’s *Pocohontas* (1855), but the first to establish itself as a true musical theatre predecessor was J. Cheever Goodwin and Edward E. Rice’s *Evangeline* (1874) at Niblo’s Gardens in New York City—although Knapp (2005) describes this show, not as a burlesque, but as
an extravaganza. Interestingly, Bordman (1982) calls *Evangeline* a “slapdash affair” and a “very free theatricalization of Longfellow’s popular poem” (p. 21) as this particular burlesque sends its lovers to unusual places like Arizona and Africa. Following *Evangeline* came *Adonis* (1884), which was the best of burlesque, yet also the last of a genre destined to succumb to the other thriving musical styles in America at the time (Bordman, 1982). Burlesque disappeared as a popular entertainment by the 1930s (Walsh & Platt, 2003), mostly via the success of the revue. Mates (1985) suggests that perhaps the “rise of television as an entertainment medium” (p. 145) contributed to the decline. Regardless, burlesque’s most significant contribution to the modern musical stage was certainly the establishment of, perhaps even, the idea of musical comedy.

Ewen (1968) gives the extravaganza, or spectacle “more durability than the burlesque, surviving well into the 1920s” (p. 51) with shows like *The Black Crook* (1866). They featured, like burlesques, American topics, characters, and used music to ingrain events into topical comedy (Knapp, 2005). The flourishing extravaganza also included impressive stage machinery, attractive costuming, elaborate décor, and exciting production numbers.

Extravaganza’s *The Black Crook* is most commonly accepted as the precursor to the twentieth-century musical (Everett & Laird, 2002; Ewen, 1968; Knapp, 2005; Mates, 1985; Walsh & Platt, 2003). The show was inspired by Carl Maria von Weber’s *Der Freischutz* and Goethe’s *Faust* (Everett & Laird, 2002). It ran for an astounding 474 performances at Niblo’s Gardens thus becoming “a shining emblem of the potential for commercial success in American musical theatre, widely imitated and often revived in the following decade” (Knapp, 2005, p. 23). *The Black Crook* commercialized popular
theatre, and established the theatre as a profitable business (Walsh & Platt, 2003). Knapp (2005) expands:

What makes *The Black Crook* a viable candidate for the honor that has been duly if mockingly accorded it, as the rather unlikely ‘first American musical,’ has as much to do with its adroit balancing act between seriousness and frank frivolity as with its specific blend of music, dance, drama, and spectacle. By the same token, however, the latter specifics turn out to matter tremendously to future developments, which might easily be traced to the show: a dramatic line presumed to be central, but which is eminently capable of serving as no more than a convenient vehicle…Music in the popular style of the day, elevated perhaps through its association with a specific dramatic situation; dance that includes not only important solo work, but also a synchronized chorus whose female contingent is dressed in either extremely elaborate or extremely revealing costumes (or both); and elaborate stage machinery, seen by many to marry technology to art, and often seen as well to be both a measure or relative importance and fundamental to any expectation for commercial success. (p. 29)

This commercialization was instrumental in the development and success of Broadway, and accomplished this management mentality by appealing to “those with a taste for nudity” (Mates, 1985, p. 141).

Extravaganzas’ success was no doubt influenced by “showing the female leg to its best advantage” (Flinn, 1997, p. 83). The sexuality of extravaganza certainly marked the genre as a lucrative business and has manifested itself into a commercialized Broadway. It also seems likely that extravaganza may have whetted the initial appetite of, what is now, a multi-billion dollar adult entertainment industry.

Vaudeville, or the earlier variety show, came from the olio section of the minstrel show (Ewen, 1968) and “operated on an altogether more respectable level [than burlesque and extravaganza], which allowed it to attract and keep a huge and, even more importantly, socially varied audience” (Walsh & Platt, 2003, p. 18). There were 2,973 vaudeville theatres in America by 1913 which catered to this varied audience seeking “clean family entertainment” and “popular amusements” (Mates, 1985, p. 163).
Performance techniques were uniquely American and were an amalgam of many other forms of musical theatre. But most importantly, vaudeville became a more genteel showing of attractive women that could actually carry a plot forward (Loney, 1981). Harrigan and Hart tried their hand at vaudeville on Broadway from 1873 to 1896 (Flinn, 1997) but it was George M. Cohen (1878-1942), the father of the American musical’s writing of vaudeville that established the core of the musical theatre (Flinn, 1997).

By the start of the twentieth century George M. Cohen was at the height of his vaudeville success and by his third show, Little Johnny Jones (1904), he had solidified the form and introduced what “is often credited with being the first American musical” (Everett & Laird, 2002, p. 30). The show premiered at the Liberty Theatre. The material was more free and more American (Loney, 1981) than it had ever been previously. Ewen (1968) comments on the uniqueness of the show:

Little Johnny Jones was neither extravaganza nor burlesque, neither operetta nor revue. This was a completely new form, combining some of the elements of all these branches of our musical [theatre]. From the extravaganza, musical comedy took attractive costuming, mountings, and production numbers; from burlesque—travesty, satire, and chorus girls; from operetta—romance and glamour, a world where good always triumphs over evil and the boy always gets the girl; from revue—the star system and the set routines for principal performers. (p. 65)

The show’s plot tells the story of Tod Sloan, a jockey who expertly changes the techniques of horseracing, but unfortunately falls from grace due to gambling, and a whole host of enemies that he acquires along the way. The story also has romance when Sloan sacrifices the English Derby to search for his kidnapped dearest in San Francisco (Bordman, 1982). Thus Porter (1997) not only calls George M. Cohen, “Mr. Broadway” (p. 7) due to the marketability of his shows to the early twentieth-century audience, but because of his subject matter and story lines that feature the common man.
Melodrama and the revue.

The legitimate theatre of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was melodrama, which employed highly stylized forms of drama, music, dance, and pantomime (Walsh & Platt, 2003). Audiences knew what to expect from melodrama, much as modern audiences know what to expect from a situation comedy or a game show on television (Mates, 1985). Yet the most significant contribution of melodrama to musical theatre is the dance and *melos* in the form (Everett & Laird, 2002). *Melos* is the type of programmatic music that underscores dialogue and thus heightens its emotional effect. This style of thematic music was originally a mid-eighteenth century French technique, likely borrowed from Theseus’ *Ariadne Abandoned* (1797) in New York (Everett & Laird, 2002). Regardless, the music was instrumental in elevating the dramatic and emotional effect of melodrama (Mates, 1985), and in turn, the dramatic and emotional effect of later genres of musical theatre.

Pantomime, on the other hand, derived from the British popular theatre, characterized by an absence of music and dialogue, relied on movement and dance to express its story. Melodrama too borrowed from pantomime, making melodrama a musical theatre form that included expressive, narrative, and structured dancing (Everett & Laird, 2002). This rehearsed dancing was significant because “the very pantomimic style of acting in melodrama required a balletic and physical approach” and the “dance proper was performed both as part of scenes and in entr’actes” (Walsh & Platt, 2003, p. 31). Dance became more or less another character in the melodrama, setting it apart from the provincial dancing of other musical theatre genres. This fully integrated musical-theatrical form melded all forms into one. Despite it belonging primarily to the dramatic
arts, it featured a rich repertory of song and dance. Latter genres such as book musicals are especially melodramatic with their emphasis on programmatic music and dance, and owe a piece of their longevity to this form.

The revue, on the other hand, was a satirical family entertainment spearheaded by Florenze Ziegfeld and his brain child, The Ziegfeld Follies (Ewen, 1968; Flinn, 1997)—a production company that reached its height in 1917 (Jones, 2003). These revues were so successful that George M. Cohen of vaudeville even jumped on board to write revues by 1915 (Engel, 1975). His twist of allegiance was not surprising as vaudeville and burlesque died in perfect unison around the turn of the twentieth century (Mates, 1985). Furthermore, revues appeared to audiences as a more “refined vaudeville show” (p. 147) according to Mates (1985) or “nothing more than vaudeville in fancy dress” (p. 58) according to Ewen (1968). Ziegfeld’s revues were a powerful performance medium. They dictated the fashion of the American woman, defined the current aesthetic, and created a tasteful style of American wardrobe (Walsh & Platt, 2003). This influence would continue until the notable persuasion of the “movies of the 1930s,” but until that time “every revue entrepreneur was an arbiter of taste and the source of beauty and advice” (Loney, 1981, p. 155).

The revue probably arose from ballad opera, but most certainly died with the rise of the cinema and the Great Depression. Interestingly, the revue would become the cabaret in France, which had more sustainability oversees than in America. Distinguishing the revue from other forms of musical theatre in America, however, was its unique use of songs, dances, and sketches satirizing the events of the day. Even potentially serious topics could be satirized. For example, Jones (2003) explains how
“revues began taking potshots at Prohibition even before the Eighteenth Amendment went into effect on January 16, 1920” (p. 56). But the most appealing characteristic—one that most clearly mirrors modern audiences’ current perceptions of the musical theatre—is what Walsh and Platt (2003) call the “readily exploitable commercial possibility” of the revue (p. 35). The revue was a highly lucrative enterprise that would certainly affect the attitudes of future musical theatre aficionados and their critical decisions. Ziegfeld would especially influence this commercial preoccupation in musical theatre with Jerome Kern’s (1885-1945) and Oscar Hammerstein II’s (1895-1960) first thoroughly modern musical Show Boat (1927), which was, in fact, a Ziegfeld production (Flinn, 1997).

Operatic influences.

While the performers of minstrelsy, burlesque, extravaganza, vaudeville, pantomime, melodrama, and revue were taking their respective bows, there was an entirely different form of musical theatre operating, which provides another perspective toward understanding the all important context of musical theatre. The operatic genres are a completely alternative way of approaching musical theatre’s origins, despite the occasional and inevitable cross-pollination.

Italian opera-seria dominated eighteenth-century Europe (Loney, 1981) most notably due to its intermezzo (Gänzl, 1997), which was a comic, operatic interlude entwined in an otherwise tragic plot. The success of these interludes established an audience for opera-seria’s rival form, the French variety opera bouffé, which was an operatic form sprung from the Italian commedia dell’arte.
Opera-bouffé’s first production, *Orphée aux Enfers* (1858), was in the burlesque tradition. This show was a modern telling of the myth of Orpheus (Gänzl, 1997) and was performed at the theatre Bouffês Parisiens. Later, opera bouffé became dominant in New York with Jacques Offenbach’s (1819-1880) *La grand Duchesse de Gerolstein* (1867) after which “opera bouffé from France flooded the New York market for a decade” (Ewen, 1968, p. 7). These productions worked to fill a gap between the two entertainments, burlesque and romantic opera. Opera bouffé successfully merged the “musical substance of the operatic shows” with “all the lively spirit and style of…popular entertainments” (Gänzl, 1997, p. 22). When London’s William Schwenk Gilbert (1836-1911) and Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842-1900) tried their hand at the French opera bouffé, however, their work produced and defined a new comic opera (Flinn, 1997), and opera bouffé became a thing of the past (Gänzl, 1997).

Gilbert and Sullivan’s first bouffé was *Trial by Jury* (1875), but by the time of *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), operetta was flourishing in America (Walsh & Platt, 2003). Offenbach would try his hand at operetta in 1867 with some success, but little longevity because of Gilbert and Sullivan’s overwhelming and dominant success. *H.M.S. Pinafore* was first performed at the Boston Museum on November 25, 1878, which is a date many scholars feel is of the utmost importance. Ewen (1968) calls it the date on which “American musical theatre may be said to have been reborn” (p. 8). Everett & Laird (2002) claim it “marks a turning point in the history of American musical theatre” (p. 24). Knapp (2005) calls the operetta the “most successful European import in the nineteenth century” (p. 20). Bordman (1982) states that “*H.M.S. Pinafore* sailed forth to forever change English-speaking musicals” (p. 20). Walsh and Platt (2003) claim “it was only
with the British operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, starting with *H.M.S. Pinafore*, that operetta took off in America” (p. 36). Jones (2003) deems it to be “the most all-around satisfying piece of musical theatre entertainment the United States had yet seen” (p. 8).

Alternatively, scholars also point to ballad opera—a form derived from comedies of manners (Flinn, 1997), which used “folk tunes to convey the social and political content of its theatre” (Walsh & Platt, 2003, p. 16)—and John Gay’s (1685-1732) *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) as having this same level of influence on musical theatre. For example, Mates (1985) states that “*The Beggar’s Opera* will serve scholars as a suitable origin of musical theatre” (p. 135). Flinn (1997) also asserts that *The Beggar’s Opera* “not only began musical comedy…but nearly marked its highest point as well” (p. 157). The importance of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Beggar’s Opera* is also not meant to distract attention away from the significance of *The Black Crook* (previously presented with extravaganza) as a landmark show for the beginning of musical comedy, or George M. Cohen’s *Little Johnny Jones* (previously presented in vaudeville) as the first American musical.

Operetta, however disputed and confusing, marked mainly by *H.M.S. Pinafore*, seems to be the most useful stepping-stone toward musical comedy. Knapp (2005) argues for *H.M.S. Pinafore* over *The Black Crook*, for example, to help explain the value attached to this particular operetta. Bordman (1982), on the other hand, believes that Gilbert and Sullivan’s operettas were closest to musical comedy than other genres and were sustainable as they always advanced a “relevance and a consistently high degree of inspiration and craft” (Knapp, 2005, p. 32), which is likely why they are still performed intact today. They told captivating stories of the real world (Ewen, 1968) allowing
audiences the opportunity to connect to their plots and emerging themes. Lastly, Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were thoroughly entertaining and were considered the pinnacle of high culture (Knapp, 2005) in the last half of the nineteenth century.

By the turn of the twentieth century, operetta continued to flourish as it influenced popular culture with operettas by Sigmund Romberg (1887-1954) and Rudolf Friml (1879-1972). Yet, as operetta started to be overshadowed by other emerging musical theatre genres in the 1920s, they became “a tremendous source for imitation in either pastiche or parody” (Everett & Laird, 2002, p. 61). Fewer and fewer composers participated in writing operettas, and by the 1930s, “it was the [Great] Depression that finally killed it, by making its particular form of escapism unattainable” (Walsh & Platt, 2003, p. 59).

**Musical comedy, musical play, and musical theatre.**

After the influence of operetta diminished in the early 1930s, a new era of musical theatre, one more recognizable to the modern researcher, was ushered in. A host of well known, classic shows top the catalogue of musical theatre belonging to this era. It is clear that this specific point in history becomes too dense and multifaceted to completely capture all its various intricacies. With this challenge in mind, it would be impossible to cite all the important composers, shows, theatres, and sub-genres that make up this exciting milieu. Rather, the relevant points of history that begin a sub-genre or transition to another sub-genre will be explored. These delineations will help highlight the necessary chronology needed to understand the context of musical theatre sufficiently.

A great many influences have previously been explored that have affected the progression of musical theatre, but none with the impact of Tin Pan Alley. It helped to
construct a unique American musical theatre beginning in the 1890s (Everett & Laird, 2002). Monore H. Rosenfeld coined the term Tin Pan Alley, which described a genre of popular song that prevailed until the advent of rock and roll. The term, however, “referred specifically to the high concentration of music publishers on 28th Street in the 1890s, where showrooms filled the streets with the din of upright pianos banging out their offerings” (Knapp, 2005, p. 71). Tin Pan Alley, as a result, built an army of composers equipped to create lyrical, memorable melodies that could be featured on the radio, the gramophone, and in the cinema. The songs from this period also helped keep the entertainment medium relevant throughout the years (Hischak, 1995). These composers entered American musical theatre with extraordinary ties to mainstream audiences, which helped connect the popular music consumer to the theatre going public (Walsh & Platt, 2003). Its commercial success sparked the success of The Gaiety Theatre in London (Bordman, 1982; Walsh & Platt, 2003) and the Princess Shows in America, for example. They allowed the genre “to step forward in the art of the American musical that was taken just after the turn of the century” (Flinn, 1997, p. 162).

The Princess Shows were at their height between 1915 and 1918. They were sophisticated and intelligent (Ewen, 1968) and were spearheaded by Jerome Kern (1885-1945), Guy Bolton (1884-1979), and P.G. Wodehouse (1881-1975). These Princess Shows were performed in a 299-seat theatre and employed intelligent plots, and integrated musical comedy techniques (Bordman, 1982) with elegant flair. Kern, Bolton, and Wodehouse effectively created a philosophy (Jones, 2003) for their musical comedies using middle class material for its inspiration. The shows resembled George M. Cohen’s boy-meets-girl format (Jones, 2003) but were updated to appeal to 1920s audiences.
Irving Berlin’s (1888-1989) *Watch Your Step* (1914) also galvanized the musical comedy movement in America (Loney, 1981), which continued with George Gershwin (1898-1937) and Ira Gershwin’s (1896-1983) musical comedy *Good News* (1927). The Gershwins’ impact on American musical theatre was twofold; first, they were more realistic and more popular (Bordman, 1982), and second, their musical comedies used new song styles and integrated recitative (Walsh & Platt, 2003). George and Ira Gershwin essentially created musical comedies that appealed to nearly every type of theatregoer seeking enjoyable entertainment.

Early examples of Cole Porter (1891-1964) are in this musical comedy style, and were among the first shows to lift the comedic spirits of those most affected by the Great Depression. As his career continued, he became one of the most celebrated and respected composers of his time (Ewen, 1968). His perfectly crafted *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948) moved further away from musical comedy and more toward the musical play. *Kiss Me, Kate* was regarded as “his most brilliant, highly integrated body of songs ever for a Broadway musical” (Loney, 1981, p. 263). Swain (2002) declares it is “a musical which takes a complex production idea, the Shakespeare play within a play, and with it tells a simple story, and the skill required to turn that trick is quite enough to admire” (p. 164). This production also established an audience for the musical play (Bordman, 1982). Artists such as Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964), Frank Loesser (1910-1969), Alan Jay Lerner (1918-1986), and Frederick Loewe (1918-1986) continued this transition from musical comedy to musical play. However, it was Richard Rodgers (1902-1979) and Oscar Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* (1943) that allowed this duo to fully realize this vibrant American art form (Ewen, 1968). Their shows like *Oklahoma!* brought dance to the
foreground (Mates, 1985) and contained fully integrated songs and stories (Bordman, 1982).

This musical play or book musical genre began with *Show Boat* nearly two decades earlier, but was made most popular by a great many shows in the 1940s. These shows were artistically mature through the “restless imagination” and “daring” (Ewen, 1968, p. 169) of the creators. With Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The Sound of Music* (1959) and later with Leonard Bernstein’s (1918-1990) *West Side Story* (1961), book musicals solidified themselves as the dominant form on Broadway (Walsh & Platt, 2003). The genre was also very successful because of its reflexivity with its audience (Ewen, 1968). Book musicals provided escapism for audiences, which allowed the genre to thrive on the musical theatre stage for many years. The libretto-driven art form brought integrity back to plots, and allowed music and dance to assume a dominant role in storytelling. The book musical contained all of the sophistication of high art, so it is no surprise that the new establishment of the concept musical, the rock musical, and the megamusical by the 1970s and mid-1980s would chip away at the dominant Broadway form as it sought to titillate the book musical’s middle class audience again.

**The future: concept musical, rock musical, megamusical, and revival.**

It was Stephen Sondheim’s (1930-) *Company* (1970), that solidified the form, or rather the lack of form, for the concept musical (Swayne, 2002). *Company* explored fragmented characters in fragmented ways (Jones, 2003), which became synonymous with the modernist form. These concept musicals were built to coddle and exploit audience narcissism (Jones, 2003). Interestingly, Studs Terkel’s *Working* belongs to this genre as well due to its absence of framework, suspense, and staging (Flinn, 1997).
Working's introspection thus requires fragmentation, but is ultimately responsible for its authenticity and charm. *A Chorus Line* (1975) by James Kirkwood, Jr. (1924-1989), Nicholas Dante (1942-1991), Edward Kleban (1939-1987), and Marvin Hamlisch (1944-) too belongs to this genre because of its fragmented story.

Concept musicals are successful because of their ability to separate high-level plot events with low-level plot events (Swain, 2002). For instance, the absence of a few monologues from *Working* would have no significant effect on the overall show. James Rado (1932-), Gerome Ragini (1935-1991), and Galt MacDermot’s (1928-) concept musical *Hair* (1967-8) was one of the first concept musicals, but this show used rock music as the basis for its introspection.

*Hair* represented the hippie life-style of the sixties on the musical theatre stage, and was the first commercially successful rock musical on Broadway (Knapp, 2005). Although, the musical theatre community “did not embrace rock brazenly” (Bordman, 1982, p. 181), Broadway did strive to mirror popular music as much as possible (Gänzl, 1997). Therefore, shows such as *Bye, Bye Birdie* (1960) by Michael Stewart (1924-1987), Lee Adams (1924-), and Charles Strouse (1928-) captivated youth culture and significantly affected the direction of Broadway culture for years (Walsh & Platt, 2003).

Rock musicals were often trivial attempts to string rock and roll music together with sub-standard artistry and finesse. Jim Jacobs (1942-) and Warren Casey’s (1935-1988) *Grease* (1971-2), for example, is purely frivolous entertainment. Stephen Schwartz’s (1948-) *Godspell* (1970) uses “a Christian religious message on which to found its idealistic conception of love” (Walsh & Platt, 2003, p. 148). Andrew Lloyd Webber’s (1948-) *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971) established a foothold that fused youth
culture with rock and roll on such a profound level, that the genre was launched steadfastly toward the megamusical.

Megamusicals are often nauseating productions (Lowerre, 2004) that create a theatrical experience similar to watching a Blockbuster movie (Swain, 2002), where anything can happen, and where little to no thinking is required of its audience (Jones, 2003). The shows are epic, but epic and drama have always been at odds with one another “for all the defining features of an epic are precisely what the [theatre] cannot have” (Swain, 2002, p. 385). Fortunately, the megamusical genre was short lived, but has certainly left its mark on Broadway in that the commercialization of musical theatre has entitled audiences to expect spectacle from theatre indefinitely. Further, audiences’ expectations of predictability leave future productions with the impractical task of meeting this standard with each and every show, and each and every performance.

Within the last twenty-five years, with the exception of Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd* (1979) and Jonathan Larson’s (1960-1996) *Rent* (1996), musicals have not been written with the same quality of that of *West Side Story* and *Oklahoma!* The reason may be that the best writers currently work for pop music, television, and movies instead of for the Broadway stage. This decline in authorship is the fault of “undiscerning producers” who largely embrace “the lowest common denominator of greediness of the mass marketplace with pathetic gusto.” Audiences are also to blame for “they continue to settle for less and less” (Singer, 2004, p. 267). The musical is, however, a living breathing form, and does continue to adapt to capture audiences.

The most striking manifestations are the current, almost ‘neomusical’ reversions back to musical comedy through the use of the revival or adaptation. Shows like Mel

**Culture: Canadian musical theatre.**

As an American genre, it may seem odd to consider musical theatre as having a Canadian perspective. While I concede the vast majority of productions in Canada are re-presentations of American musical theatre, it is worth recognizing the limited, but noteworthy influence of the Canadian musical theatre industry and research to not only celebrate its small victories, but to identify its shortcomings as well.
The most famous Canadian manifestation of the Broadway musical format is most definitively Lucy Maud Montogmery’s (1874-1942) *Anne of Green Gables* (1964). The musical version of this tale was the brainchild of Don Harron (1924-), Norman Campbell (1924-2004), Elaine Campbell, and Mavor Moore (1919-2006). *Anne of Green Gables* is the longest running Canadian musical having been played every summer at the Charlottetown Festival at the Confederation Centre of the Arts since 1965. It has toured London, New York, Japan, and Toronto, to name a few, and has the honour of playing worldwide as the pride of Canadian musical theatre. With the exception of *Anne of Green Gables*, Canadian’s have been rather quiet about the creation of new musical theatre works. Our forté seems to be in the re-presentation of American works on the Canadian main stage with companies like Toronto’s Mirvish Productions—a company which is responsible for Toronto’s ranking as the third largest musical theatre capital next to New York and London.

Canada’s mark on singing theatre, according to Robinson (1988), is “neither opera nor musical theatre.” Our most influential work is based in “the natural outgrowth of a need felt by people working in the opera / musical theatre field for works of greater complexity of plot and character, by people who wish to investigate non-narrative forms and by people who are dissatisfied with both opera and musical theatre as we know them” (p. 13). Interestingly, it seems to be the singing itself that determines the quality of the art form in this case because *Les Miserables* (1980) is quite obviously sung by ‘musical’ theatre singers and *The True Last Words of Dutch Schultz* (1994) is appropriately sung by ‘music’ theatre singers (Salzman, 2000). This simple distinction is
profoundly thorough when considering the differences between the two genres. It also remedies the misuse and interchangeability of the terms in Canadian media.

Canada’s influence in ‘music’ theatre, although slight, is a unique strength, but still a matter of controversy because secondary schools and tertiary musical theatre institutions continue to mislabel musical theatre, exacerbating the confusion for participants and audiences. Bawtree (1985) concludes that “there are signs—as America catches up to Canada and begins to apply her wonderful energies to this field—that the pains of pioneering may be nearly over in this country” (p. 22). As that divide between American musical theatre and Canadian music theatre becomes clearer, further distinction should ensue. Furthermore, the continued sharing of our two singing theatre mediums should allow Canadian secondary schools to embrace American musical theatre in a more precise way.

Surprisingly, secondary schools participate in the staging of musical theatre quite blindly. Given the lack of specific research to aid secondary school musical theatre educators in improving their practice in the field, it is surprising to learn of the number of successful productions in Ontario. Much of the research available to Ontario musical theatre educators focuses on the promotion of original Canadian school musicals (Todd, 1988). Ontario’s quarterly journal for music educators, for instance, published by the Ontario Music Educator’s Association (OMEA) *The Recorder*, in the last forty years has printed only five articles that touch on theatre that is musical. Banks (1971) asks how operettas may be selected and scrutinized. The British Columbia Regional Office of the Canadian Music Centre (1993) provides a detailed list of Canadian musicals and operettas for school uses that include works from Clifford Crawley (1929-), R. Murray
Schafer (1933-), and Ruth Watson Henderson (1932-) to name a few. Krajewski (1998) discusses using story in music teaching providing educators with “a simple but effective framework for integrating all knowledge” (p. 77). The catalogue of shows and discussion of creative balance certainly helps the musical theatre educator to ease show selection and strengthen musical skill, but it does not replace the real experiences of students immersed in Ontario musical theatre programmes.

The two Ontario accounts in published, peer-reviewed journals are about creating an opera with seventh graders, and about having a pit band for school musicals. Hower (1999) outlines how creating an opera with seventh graders was a rewarding experience. She points out that students’ overwhelming sense of accountability, ownership, and pride are paramount in her findings. She explains:

The students know from the beginning that they will be [onstage] at the end of the semester performing what they have written. Many are nervous or excited and many express disbelief. But whatever their emotions, they are encouraged to believe in themselves, trust themselves, and have fun. Accountability is probably the biggest factor in assuring success. (p. 26)

Although a result of an opera, she concludes that “the impact of these creative experience will undoubtedly serve as a springboard for other challenging and ultimately rewarding experiences in the students’ lives” (Hower, 1999, p. 27). Hower was published in an Ontario journal but the classroom experience took place in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. McCluskie (1987) seems to be the only Canadian writing about musical theatre in the most widely read journal for music teachers in Ontario. She documents the pit band experience as being very beneficial for students, but highlights the sacrifices “made in the regular music [programme] to accommodate this intensive activity” (p. 165).
The lack of a Canadian voice, or an Ontario one for that matter, regarding the benefits, the rewards, the drawbacks, and the experience of musical theatre is striking. Musical theatre goes on consistently in schools without, as it seems, the lack of relevant Canadian published research and the necessary discourse that allows the teaching of an art form to truly blossom. If we wish to see musical theatre flourish in Ontario schools, proponents of it must articulate the experience in an open way through writing, research, and professional dialogue. As well, this debate needs to take place within the historical context provided here. Only through completely understanding the history of musical theatre can its participants fully appreciate its intricacies and therefore move forward with a Canadian musical theatre identity. Only then will the practice of musical theatre in public schools, as a credited course, be validated as a worthwhile activity, and be clearly defined as an experience allowing students the privilege of learning, authentically, about the musical theatrical arts.

**Performance and Production Context**

The performance and production aspects of musical theatre are not only instrumental to the experience, but also make up the majority of the literature. Through an examination of the relevant literature, themes emerge surrounding the behind-the-scenes roles, the creative roles, and the performing roles. Although somewhat simplistic in their execution, these sources on planning, producing, and performing musical theatre continue to be published, and it would, therefore, be irresponsible not to address this body of literature. Further, given the historical context presented earlier, it is important to have some conceptual understanding of how musicals are actually staged once the
repertoire has been created (Miller, 2000). It is a multifaceted process that certainly has its degree of complications and complexities.

**Behind the scenes: production, selection, and technical considerations.**

The most important and potentially under appreciated role in musical theatre is the producer. As Novak (1988) states, “a musical consists of just words and music on paper until a producer takes an opinion on the show and starts the process of turning the book, lyrics, and score into a production” (p. 27). The actualization of the production, therefore, starts with the producer, and the sole responsibility of ensuring all the parts operate seamlessly rests with him or her (Engel, 1983). The quality of interdisciplinary planning, mixed with a humble ability to compromise (Oneglia, 1973), are vital in this role as the producer is ultimately responsible for the successful outcome of the musical in an indirect way; the producer assigns capable people into the roles that actually realize the show. The producer, therefore, may or may not have any direct responsibilities with the cast and crew, and is essentially the puppet master—hidden from the audience, masked by the title, but responsible for all the goings-on in the production itself.

The task of assigning suitable people into roles is one of the most serious decisions a producer will make in his or her tenure. As these people will execute the overall vision for the show, the producer must ensure they will be an agent for an overall concept of the musical that is bigger than any one person. Laster (2001) calls for a production team of an artistic staff and production staff:

The ideal staff arrangement for a musical theatre production involves a production team made up of the artistic staff—the director, the musical director, and the choreographer; the people involved with the technical aspects of the production, the technical staff—the set designer, the lighting designer, the costume designer, and the props person. If the production is amplified or has any type of sound effects, there will be a sound engineer. (p. 3)
Other roles according to Engel (1966), Robinson and Poole (1990), and Williams (2003) may include the vocal director, stage manager, assistant stage manager, set builder, publicity staff, marketing staff, sponsorship staff, programme designer, and programme printer. Once this team is assembled at the pleasure of the producer, the artistic team typically secures the cast, orchestra, rehearsal pianist, and dance captain; the technical team secures the running crew, construction crew, scenic painters, pyrotechnics supervisor, and seamstresses.

The secondary school musical theatre structure, however, finds the majority of these production roles rolled into one, all encompassing title—the teacher. More specifically, it is the choral director that is given the responsibility of preparing the school musical (Laster, 2001). This teacher must be able to manage the show, in addition to their regular teaching commitments, but also micromanage students’ “part-time job” (John, 1971, p. 38) and “exam schedules” (p. 37), for example. Despite the potential frustrations of the role, the teacher / producer is cited for his or her enthusiasm for such productions especially as musical momentum builds in a school culture (Sample, 1964).

According to Fields (1970) the producer will be compelled to create this kind of experience for young people when the following recommendations can be met:

It is recommended that the producer and staff (1) define the aims and objectives of a production during the early part of the planning period; (2) present productions that have educational value; (3) make long-range plans that provide for continued growth and development of the participating students; (4) assure that musical activities retain their proper perspective in the total school [programme]; (5) strive for cooperation between musical activities and other areas of learning; (6) make the musical production open for participation to all students in [secondary] school rather than limiting it to students who have had previous experience in choral groups, ensembles, or drama; and (7) make the production a cooperative effort of all departments of the school. (p. 291)
Fields accurately captures the spirit of the teacher who assumes the role of the producer. Although subtle, the producer is one of the most integral parts of the overall musical theatre experience, and its continued success depends on those who stand up to pull the strings.

In consultation with the creative team, the producer is often heavily involved in the show selection process. It is a process that is of the utmost importance because a well matched show will become a superb production in the end (Filichia, 1997) whereas a poorly matched show will wreak havoc on the performance company.

There are many reasons why shows may be poorly matched to the talent available in performance companies. The lack of published scripts and creative teams’ own naïveté about the available repertoire are contributing factors in poor show selection (Lucha-Burns, 1986). To assist the show selection process, licensing companies are available for musical theatre productions which hold the performance rights to all amateur and professional musical theatre titles. The four largest companies are TAMS-WITMARK Music Library, Inc., Music Theatre International, R&H Theatricals, and Samuel French, Inc. One of these four companies hold the performance rights to nearly every musical theatre title available and they issue the perusal materials, scripts, scores, and orchestral arrangements. They also take care of the royalties associated with the public performance of these copyrighted works. Some companies also do what they can to assist in the show selection process. For example, Music Theatre International has a show selection tool on their website, allowing potential clients the opportunity to search for shows given a variety of parameters. These parameters can include the cast size, the gender of the performing lead, the parental ratings, the number of acts, the difficulty of
the music, the difficulty of the dancing, and etcetera. Ultimately, however, the decision lies with the production team, who will have to live with the choice they make at this early stage of the production.

Picking the right show is not a science, but must consider the talent, the budget, and the potential audience (Engel, 1966). Further, the artistic abilities of the cast must be at the forefront of the decision (Laster, 2001; Burnau, 1966) as they will ultimately be the face of the production in the end. The correct musical will make the directors job much easier, and a successful production imminent (Janicki, 1982). It is Boland and Argentini’s (1997) hope that the primary consideration will rest in “the essence of the show’s music” (p. 5), as music is one of the unique factors that makes musical theatre so memorable. Therefore, the quality of the music is perhaps the most convincing marker of a flawed show.

Once the show is chosen, the technical team takes on the task of bringing the director’s vision to life. This process is typically supervised by the stage manager (Engel, 1983) and is carried out by the technical director. The technical team creates the musical theatre world on which the performers play from their innovation and creativity (Engel, 1983). Aside from the odd lighting, sound, or staging cue in the script, it is up to the team to invent this heightened world and allow it to complement the overall vision of the show. The team, consequently, must use the clues in the script to piece together the reality of the show. The rental agencies do not send an instruction manual for set construction, but rather send a script so that creative imagination can be galvanized in the team, and an entirely new frame for the musical can be built.
Additionally, proper sound amplification is vital to the overall production. Qualified sound engineers are absolutely necessary to minimize vocal fatigue in young singers (Sjoerdsma, 2004) through the proper use of monitoring. Capable sound engineers are also important as audiences rarely forgive poor sound quality in musical theatre productions. Much like all technical elements, when the technical elements work, they are invisible to the audience, but when the technical elements are lacking, it has a lasting negative impact on the audience.

All behind-the-scenes roles essentially have this same permeating quality: when they are exceptional they exist “faceless and unappreciated” (Engel, 1983, p. 27), whereas when they are poor, the quality of the production, and the merit of the experience suffer dramatically. These behind-the-scenes roles are often not glamorous, but are the reason the lead character can take his or her bow and an audience can stand and applaud his or her efforts. It is clear, therefore, that the essence of the production is only as strong as its weakest member permits it to be, which truly calls upon all participants to excel in their part of the production to the best of their ability, and make every aspect of the musical theatre experience, in their own little way, special.

**Creative team: roles of the director and musical director.**

The musical theatre director is at the apex of the artistic production. The director is typically chosen by the producer to fill the role because of the director’s background, experience, leadership, and ability to cooperate (Engel, 1983). Musical theatre directors must be like coaches of an athletic team as they are the organizers and disciplinarians (Novak & Novak, 1996) of the production. The director must have firsthand, intimate
knowledge of as many musical theatre roles as possible so that he or she may direct from an informed point of view. Fields (1970) concludes that a director must know how to:

(1) select the appropriate production, (2) select a cast, (3) conduct rehearsals, (4) construct sets from the available materials, (5) make suggestions for effective and authentic costuming and make-up, and (6) use basic lighting techniques. In addition, he [or she] should know how to create student confidence, enthusiasm, and pride. (p. 1)

Those individuals with this varied experience, balanced with intelligence, leadership, creativity, and sensitivity almost always make excellent directors.

The primary responsibility of the director is to work with the cast in a collaborative realization of the script. While the director will lead other areas of the musical as well, their biggest influence lies in the relationship they built with the cast in their efforts to make students’ world more extra-ordinary (Boland & Argentini, 1997). Directors have that power because of the rehearsal process (Boyes, 2003). Especially in amateur productions, the rehearsal schedule will make up the majority of the time, so a quality rehearsal process, as led by the director, will create a valuable experience for all involved. The rehearsal process is where most of the learning takes place (Grote, 1986), and the end product is often thought of as a chance to show family and friends what has been happening in the lives of the cast and crew for the past several months. Directors who overlook the process, and only value the product, often rob students of a valuable and educationally rich part of the musical theatre experience. A valid process gives students the opportunity to transcend themselves (Lee, 1983) and shine in all areas of the production.

With the director’s preoccupation in process underway, the musical director is typically more product driven as he or she will be ultimately responsible for driving the
show in performance. The director, after having exhausted every last morsel of rehearsal time from the schedule, is left to sit in the audience on opening night and watch the cast interpret the director’s work. The musical director, on the other hand, conducts the end product from the orchestra pit (Engel, 1983) and has a tremendous amount of authority as a result. It is incumbent on the production team to ensure that the musical director not only is a competent conductor (Hoare, 1993), but also a calm, cool, and collected personality.

Other considerations on the part of the musical director ought to include a collaborative environment between the musical director and the other creative roles (Leist, 1958), with an insistence that the musical director be included in the show selection process (Hoare, 1993). The collaboration should include discussions on all stylistic markings (Trytten, 1988) prior to rehearsals to avoid disagreements in front of the cast.

The musical director should accompany the rehearsals whenever possible to solidify the tempos used in orchestral rehearsals. If the musical director is not a proficient pianist, a rehearsal pianist should be hired (Trytten, 1988; Laster, 2001). The accuracy of the rehearsal accompaniment will also help familiarize the musical director with the score, as the music is typically not written in open score (Laster, 2001). Given a thorough understanding of the score, the musical director can more suitably function as a conductor for the musical event. Musical direction is thus a powerful communication medium. The role brings the music to life in a performance, and also acts as the filter between what the cast constructs onstage and what the crowd perceives in the audience (Hoare, 1993).
The two directorial roles combined (in cooperation with the choreographer still to be outlined) make up the creative forces in the musical theatre experience, and their skills and leadership allow musical theatre to thrive on both professional and amateur stages.

**Performing: singing, dancing, and acting.**

The triple threat performer is the most visible role in musical theatre. He or she is trained equally in singing, dancing, and acting—although most favour one discipline over another (Janicki, 1982) based on their familiarity and comfort level. They are talented, passionate individuals (Boardman, 1987; Boland & Argentini, 1997) who are called upon to suspend spectators’ level of disbelief as they transform themselves onstage to delight audiences.

Captivating these audiences according to the research, however, often comes at the expense of vocal health. For instance, Alt (2004) writes that although musical theatre singers are skilled “in transitioning in and out of belt voice, the development of a full workable range, and the ability to sing in a variety of popular...styles” many do not “understand their vocal technique well enough to sustain eight performances per week” (p. 389). Balog (2005) speculates this gap in technical understanding comes from performers’ misunderstanding of the similarities of musical theatre singing and classical singing. Others suggest training programmes fail to prepare students for work as musicians by teaching through rote (Alt, 2004). In general, a healthy, well-produced tone should be the objective (Catania, 2004) for the triple threat, and their technique should align to Boardman’s (1987) recommendations:

The musical [theatre] singer’s voice should be pleasant, open, and resonant, never harsh or brittle. It should be easily produced, and therefore based and carried on moving air supported by the muscles of the ribs and the diaphragm, and impelled
by the abdominal muscles. In other words, the singer should have a healthful, body-based breath technique. (p. 63)

When teaching, training, and technique is operating well, musical numbers are at their best (Boland & Argentini, 1997).

The triple threat is also responsible for dancing and interpreting the movements and gestures of a choreographer to develop the drama of a musical (Sagolla, 1992). The success of the dancing performer, therefore, depends greatly on the creativity and musicality of the choreographer.

The choreographer is unique as he or she invents their work from the cues present in the script, much like the technical designers. The choreographic position is unique. Whereas both the director and musical director are handed their material from the script and score, the choreographer must invent his or her material from scratch (Berkson, 1990). The sources for the choreographic material come from the script and the score (Berkson, 1990), but are interpreted innovatively as miniature one-act plays—each dance with its own conflict and resolution bringing clarity to the overall story (Berkson, 1990). The strongest triple threat dancers are often brilliant because of inventive, creative, and suitable choreography. When choreography is at its best, it acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses of its performance company and puts performers in a position to succeed (Berkson, 1990), thereby improving the overall quality of the performance and process for everyone.

The triple threat performer as an actor or actress is certainly the most memorable figurehead from a show experience. These triple threat performers in secondary schools are of great interest, and as alumni, are the intended participants in this research design. It is important to realize that although the triple threat’s role is the most visible, their
experience is one that must be supported by the roles around them. For example, musical theatre enthusiasts remember Fred Astaire, Frank Sinatra, Ginger Rogers, and Judy Garland, yet rarely remember the directors and producers responsible for supporting these legends in the first place. But there is something magical about these performers, which is likely why so many young students flock to musical theatre opportunities in secondary school, to perhaps have their moment of stardom and see their name in lights.

**Musical Theatre Research**

An examination of the relevant musical theatre research reveals authorship in the social outcomes of musical theatre. These social benefits will be examined through the educational advantages, and the effects of musical theatre on its participants. This educational based evidence seems to be structured using four themes. Its authors write about (a) musical theatre in the education system; (b) training trends and deficiencies; (c) student frustrations; and (d) the impact of teacher quality on the musical theatre experience.

**Musical theatre education.**

Musical theatre, if structured correctly, “more nearly fits into the total scheme of education than any other form of artistic endeavor” (Fields, 1970, p. 12). As aesthetic education comes to be appreciated further (Grote, 1986), musical theatre seems to be an appealing response for school teachers and administrators who strive to bring about integrated arts experiences in the education system (Howard, 1990). Musical theatre is already one of the most popular events in a school year (Sjoerdsma, 2004) as scholars observe an upsurge of interest in school programming when a musical is on the horizon.
(Watkins, 2005); some have even considered using musical theatre as a recruitment tool (Watkins, 2005) to attract both music and non-music students into the department.

Often, musical theatre teaching becomes the common concern of the music teacher—especially the vocal teacher (Williams, 2003)—therefore, “it becomes clear that haphazard training for a craft which demands some very specific skills is not an effective method of education” (Snider, 1995, p. 37). Not only does this haphazard training affect the delivery of musical theatre teaching and learning, but its design as well; unqualified musical theatre teachers often call out for a standards-based course curriculum (Snider, 1995) for the subject matter. This type of rigid curriculum development can only lead to a removal of hands-on musical theatre experiences (Timmons, 2004), which is at the very centre of musical theatre instruction. Musical theatre teaching and learning ought to have a certain level of flexibility to adapt its instruction into individual school climates. Proper teacher training in sound musical theatre pedagogy, therefore, allows the art form the opportunity to thrive intact and with merit, and concurrently, be tailored to the individual needs of the school and community without having to conform to a rigid standards-based curriculum, which may, or may not, have the best interest of musical theatre in mind.

As teachers struggle to perhaps combat their own deficiencies, while demanding none in their students (Snider, 1995), students themselves carry a certain amount of frustration when rehearsal periods, as run by unqualified musical theatre teachers, are unsatisfactory. Students cite a lack of preparedness and poor time management (Boyes, 2003) as negatively impacting their experience. Moreover, further empowering the role of the musical theatre teacher, van Houten (1999) accounts for the differences between
successful and unsuccessful musical theatre programmes; she cites the musical theatre teacher as most significant factor in valid musical theatre processes.

van Houten’s (1999) study highlights students’ experiences in musical theatre programmes, and it is amazing how influential the quality of the teaching is to the students’ impression of the experience. One group of students in the study, while adoring their teacher and appreciating the chance to be part of the production, disliked their teacher’s sarcasm and overall attitude. Generally, students were frustrated by their teacher’s temperament, even while admiring their director’s ability to make their production run each year. Another group of students observed their director’s apprehension toward working with parents, other staff in the school, and community members.

van Houten (1999) did observe positive musical theatre programmes, which differed almost entirely due to their musical theatre coordinator. The most favourable musical theatre teacher had proper musical theatre training and utilized parents and the community as part of the production process.

What becomes clear as a result of van Houten’s (1999) investigation “is that it is not musical theatre, per se, that requires careful scrutiny, but the process used to achieve its ends” (p. 423). Those individuals responsible for the process contribute to the success or failure of the experience greatly (Watkins, 2005). It is vital, therefore, that competent musical theatre instructors be infused into schools so that all students may have the opportunity to experience this exciting process in a positive way. van Houten concludes:

Ideally, directors should provide their students with an educationally rich musical theatre experience that results in a high quality performance. Yet…this is not often the case, particularly when the appropriate resources are not available. Yet, for many of the students, the allure of the stage, plus the social and personal
benefits inherent in the ensemble effort, seem to compensate (most of the time) for any deficiencies in the [programme] (or director) itself. While this should not be accepted as an opportunity for promoting poor quality and educationally lacking [programmes], in many cases, these factors are the primary reasons why many students invest enormous amounts of energy and time into their [secondary] school musical theatre [programme]s each year. (p. 424-5)

**Effects of student participation in musical theatre.**

The effects of musical theatre on students are significant and seem to permeate the literature using six general themes. Those who write about these effects provide evidence for (a) why musical theatre is good for education; (b) student reactions to musical theatre; (c) the notoriety students receive as part of a musical theatre programme; (d) the appeal musical theatre carries for students, teachers, and audiences; (e) students’ social maturity as a result of participation in the process; and (f) students’ sense of being part of something bigger than themselves when part of a musical theatre process.

Musical theatre is good for education because it involves students in an arts-rich activity (Sample, 1964) that moves beyond traditional classroom work. In no other discipline are students asked to participate in such a variety of tasks than in the theatrical arts, while concurrently developing skills needed for all areas of life. Heinig (2001) observes that students improve their “poise, self-awareness, confidence, self-discipline, and communication skills” (p. 23) during the process. Snider (1995) notes that musical theatre helps “to increase [students] confidence and teach them to take risks” (p. 29). Sample (1964) writes that “participation in a contemporary musical can make a significant contribution to the adolescent’s search for identity” (p. 39). Students also enjoy an “educational and socially positive experience” (van Houten, 1999, p. 137) within a “reflective learning process” (Boyes, 2003, p. 14). This educational tool gives
students such a tremendous measure of accomplishment that all kinds of students benefit from its distinctive features.

Although student performances will always be somewhat inferior to professional productions, they are still worth doing (Laster, 2001). There is also an emotional attachment to the process that causes students to come back to the course year after year. In fact, an unintended effect of doing a secondary school musical is a desire to do it again the next year (Boyes, 2003). The emotional attachment to the experiences, according to the research, is overwhelming.

Even students’ own reactions to the musical theatre experience mirror the educational benefits. For example, many students experience a boost in self-confidence and a feeling of success (Boyes, 2003) having completed a musical theatre production. The musical theatre experience also seems to solidify new friendships and improve students’ confidence in public speaking (Boyes, 2003). Students apparently need to feel satisfied with their performance, however, through validation from peers and respected authority figures in order to maximize the experience (van Houten, 1999).

The degree of notoriety, therefore, contributes to students overall enjoyment of the process, and is sometimes an influential factor when considering becoming involved as potential cast members (Boyes, 2003). Musical theatre also, according to Watkins (2005), is students’ answer for social recognition, which stirs great confidence in young people. This personal growth appears in the research no matter what specific responsibilities students held during the process (Sample, 1964). Notoriety also continues well after the show’s closing (van Houten, 1999).
Musical theatre’s appeal to students comes from not only the interdisciplinary elements that enrich the lives of its participants (Lynch, 1994) but because the musical theatre process is one which constructs a setting to meet new, like minded friends. For instance, a participant in Boyes’ (2003) study removed herself from a negative peer group and joined a positive peer group as a result of her participation in the school musical theatre production. Alternatively, the appeal of the musical can also be in its format, which pushes its students to strive for perfection (Watkins, 2005) in each rehearsal and each performance. Musical theatre helps students feel good about themselves as they affirm their place on the performance stage.

As a result of these experiences, students gain a certain amount of social maturity (Sample, 1964). Most students develop “tolerance and understanding” (Watkins, 2005, p. 65) and a clearer understanding of how to approach the challenges life presents. Self-concept, personal growth (Watkins, 2005), self-confidence, social interaction, (Boyes, 2003), motivation, attitude, and academic achievement (van Houten, 1999) are other areas addressed though participation in musical theatre. Further, Fields (1970) matches this increase in social maturity with the fundamentals of good citizenship:

These qualities include the development of individual initiative and group cooperation, respect for authority, respect for achievement of others, punctuality, faithfulness and a sense of security in belonging to a group that has a definite responsibility for the success of the production. (p. 10)

The sense of group and the sense of belonging are other powerful factors in musical theatre (Boyes, 2003). There is a “special unity” (Watkins, 2005, p. 115) among student performing groups where each and every student contributes to the whole (Leist, 1958). The students create a community and family together (Timmons, 2004) where they “develop social relationships, desirable conduct, feelings of responsibility and a
spirit of group cooperation” (Fields, 1970, p. 10). The entire musical theatre process gives rise to a common goal that places value on each and every student while putting them in a position of achieving success.

I could not fathom a more perfect activity—given the personal, historical, cultural, performance, production, and social contexts presented here—for students’ growth, enjoyment, and development than the experience of musical theatre.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This research strives to capture the nature of musical theatre in secondary schools through students’ experiences. For this study, I shaped the research design through a hermeneutic phenomenological lens to capture the lived experience of musical theatre participants (Patton 2002). My research direction addresses van Houten’s (1999) call for more experiential data of musical theatre students as the study “aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of…everyday experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9) and how culture, in this case, the culture of musical theatre, affects us. It is also noteworthy that this hermeneutic phenomenology is retrospective and recollective (van Manen, 1990), asking candidates to reflect on experience that they have already lived—a vitally important distinction based on the participants in this study. For instance, former students of musical theatre act as participants in this study and consequently address their memories and the nature of their experiences, not merely how they receive material.

Patton explains:

[Hermeneutic phenomenology] is a focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning. This requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. (p. 104)

Patton discusses the importance of interviews in hermeneutic phenomenology, and how these interviews must be of people with direct experience of the phenomenon. Moreover, ways of grounding this method typically involve the researcher experiencing the phenomenon as directly as possible, reinforcing even further the importance of my musical theatre background. As a result of my background, I interpreted and made sense
of my participants’ experience as I have a thorough grasp of the vocabulary, techniques, traditions, and experiences that my interviewees referenced.

I studied and interviewed six former students of McKinney Secondary School’s musical theatre programme—a secondary school in Southern Ontario. These students shared a common experience that helped isolate the permeating shared experience between not only the participants in the study, but the current students enrolled in the programme as well. Boyes’s (2003) study also called for the choice of the intended participants.

In order to secure a purposeful sampling, I chose candidates who were former students of the musical theatre programme and who played lead roles. This step ensured that only information-rich cases were chosen purposefully and strategically because, while the experience of the chorister is similar and equally valid, leads have more experiential details to help carry the interview and make the data more tangible and meaningful for the reader. For example, one of the questions asked participants to reflect on their experience during Saturday rehearsals. Chorus members rarely participate in these weekend rehearsals and would consequently have little to say about these practices. Additionally, another question focused on the bow on closing night. While a chorus member participates in a group bow, a lead has their own bow at the end of the show often resulting in a surge of applause. A chorus member’s recollection of this moment would, therefore, likely be haphazard and distant.

The hermeneutic phenomenological nature of my research questions called for in-depth, semi-structured interviews of this purposeful alumni sampling of the musical theatre course at McKinney Secondary School. I selected these six former students who
played lead roles at different times spanning 2001 to 2009 to ensure information-rich cases (Patton, 2002, p. 242-3). I also developed many similar interview questions in multiple ways to increase the validity of my data. For example, instead of asking participants to describe the rehearsal process in general, I asked them to describe a typical dance, drama, and music rehearsal in separate questions. Finding patterns in the responses from these similar questions aided the trustworthiness of my analysis.

The interviews were semi-structured (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) allowing flexibility in the wording and interaction between the interviewer and participant (Appendix A). A sample of the interview questions included:

1. Can you describe your feelings during the audition and casting process?
2. Tell me a story about being at Klein Exhibition Grounds.
3. Tell me about performing onstage.
4. Tell me about a friend you have kept from your years in musical theatre.
5. As a graduate of the programme, what advice would you give first year musical theatre students?

The study occurred in the late Fall of 2009 at the Klein Exhibition Grounds. I used this location because it was one of the areas used for rehearsals and set construction. It allowed the alumni to situate themselves in a space very familiar to them, especially while speaking about their experiences in and about musical theatre. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained as the facility was not occupied by the secondary school until December 2009. I contacted the alumni by phone (Appendix B) to see if they were interesting in participating in the study. Ethical issues were addressed by interviewing former students of the programme and not current students intending on
registering for the 2009-2010 course. Former students helped outline the experience
without creating an unnecessary ethical issue regarding the assessment of current
students. Moreover, I was clear to the participants of exactly my purpose and
representation during all stages of the research process. If participants agreed to
participate in the study, a Letter of Information (Appendix C) was sent to the participant
by email. I had access to the contact information of the participant pool and had a right
to access that information. My right to access student information did extend to
information about former students as these data were not secured with the administration
of the school, but rather the departmental records. For example, the music department
communicates with alumni regarding fundraising, concerts, upcoming events, and
opportunities available in the programme; this research opportunity was certainly one of
those unique opportunities for alumni.

I had been given ethical clearance to conduct the research (Appendix D) so began
the interviews with a Consent Form (Appendix E). During the interviews, I used
password protected recording equipment to secure a record of the data, and used those
recordings to create transcripts of the interviews (Appendix F & G). Although
participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study, no one withdrew.

I handled matters of confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms because
participants speaking of their own experiences in musical theatre used their names,
others’ names, and show titles to reference the experience. I was the only one able to
match the identities to the data using a transcript key. This step ensures that readers
cannot match the participant’s identity to the information.
Making sense of the transcripts involved converting the transcripts to a password protected FileMaker database and manually coding emerging themes within the interviews, and then comparing these emerging themes with the literature. I compared these codes across all the interviews as well to determine the true nature of the activity, and lastly, considered these themes based on my own experience. Having collected and synthesized the data, I proceeded with the writing process.

I originally wanted to write about these musical theatre experiences in the format of a director’s log—a type of memoir the creative team of a musical theatre production keeps about their experiences. These logs can include anecdotes, quotes, frustrations, endearing moments, and candid accounts of the musical theatre experience. After collecting the data and beginning the writing process, however, I found difficulty applying the data as a director’s log. The director’s log required changing the perspective of the data, which made the data sound cliché. I found too often that I needed to move away from the data to connect and weave the narrative together. Consequently, I wrote the data in the third-person leaving me out of the data completely. I wanted to tell their story without artificiality. The writing still has a narrative-like quality but more accurately captures the nuance of the interviews themselves because the data did not have to be reframed to fit the design of the director’s log. I believe the change served the data more honestly. Furthermore, the writing of the data use smaller excerpts of transcribed text rather than longer passages to ensure not only the clarity of the participants’ ideas, but the flow of this thesis from chapter to chapter.

van Manen (1990) explains “a good phenomenological account is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience—is validated by lived experience and it
validates lived experience” (p. 27). The data thus exact the “fullness and completeness of
detail” (van Manen, 1990, p. 17) needed to outline this human phenomenon: musical
theatre. Fontana and Frey (2005) also discuss this narrative-like framework as a valid
way of interpreting interview data as it can allow for the autobiographical nature of the
shared experience to shape the dissemination of the data.

Overall, the inductive analysis of the data took me from fieldwork, to data, to
coding and categorizing, to development patterns, to the finding and identifying the final
narrative-like structure (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). It is within the narrative-like
structure that I intend to tell the story of musical theatre.
Chapter 4

The Performer’s Stories

McKinney Secondary School’s musical theatre programme began when the school opened in 1990. The school has an average population of approximately 1,200 students, is located in Southern Ontario, and is situated in an affluent and culturally diverse area.

The musical theatre programme is dynamic and has gone through changes over the years: refinements that ensure the optimum balance between student experience and show quality. At its heart, however, the core principles of the course remain constant, which is why former students spanning an eight-year period can accurately reflect upon the same set of interview questions. The core experiences of the course, those experiences I targeted in the interviews, are unchanged.

As it runs today, the programme is a credited course as part of the music curriculum at McKinney Secondary School. It is team taught by two teachers, one who is responsible for the production and direction, and the other who is responsible for the musical direction and choreography. The class size is typically between 45 to over 60 students ranging from grades ten to twelve. The directors and students create the product given 120 total in-class hours, approximately 64 total weekend and holiday hours, and approximately 30 total theatre hours. The average budget for a production ranges from between $20,000.00 to $26,000.00 per year with, on average, 92% of the funds generated from student fundraising and ticket sales. The shows are performed at Lynwood Theatre, a local professional centre for the performing arts, and are always fully licensed, full scale Broadway style musical librettos. The calibre of the shows is exceptionally high as
they are framed by professional technicians and pit musicians. These professional supports ensure students experience as much success as possible because they are able to concentrate on their performance without worry of technical issues or accompaniment difficulties.

Students are responsible, as part of this locally developed curriculum, to participate in performance and non-performance aspects of the shows. Any student may choose the course in their timetable, but all must participate in an audition for placement in the show consisting of a monologue, a song, and a group dance sequence. Once casting is announced, students rehearse daily with both the director and musical director, breaking down each scene and each musical number in the show itself. All the while, students are responsible for generating sponsorship, selling programme advertisement space in the programme, and selling tickets to help recover the costs of the show. As well, students are required to select a non-performance role such as costuming, props, or set construction in consultation with the directors’ visions. The majority of the full cast rehearsal and set construction takes place at Klein Exhibition Grounds and usually occurs on Saturdays and during the Christmas holidays.

Term assessment is based upon work in performance and non-performance material respectively. Final summative assessment is generated from the actual theatrical performance itself. The final summative grade consists of the individual student’s self-assessment, the directors’ combined assessment of the show, and a professional adjudication of the closing night performed by an expert in the industry according to established assessment criteria. The final mark in the course is determined by a
combination of the term mark and the final summative mark. This grade is awarded in cooperation with a final individual student conference during the examination cycle.

The data presented here are a collection of six experiences in this very course spanning a period from 2001 to 2009. Their individual experiences, although spanning an eight year period, reflect the experience gained in the course outlined above, and are exciting windows into their musical theatre worlds.

**Andrea**

Andrea was part of McKinney’s musical theatre programme from 2007 to 2009. Her experience began with overcoming serious anxiety during the casting process, but she eventually became more comfortable with the casting and audition process over the next two years. She would “hide in a corner and practice forever” in preparation for her audition but “got more confident as the years went on” as she chose more humorous repertoire in later years. She began with chorus roles, but was able to move to lead roles in later years following her self-developed hierarchy of role assignment; she knew her place and recognized that older students deserved leads before she was entitled to receive them. As a grade ten student, she was disappointed to not receive a lead role, but never revealed her disappointment. As a grade twelve student, however, she experienced great excitement at receiving a lead, but her excitement had to remain a secret in order to keep up appearances between her and the other candidates who auditioned for the role.

Andrea’s rehearsals were directed by Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Foss. While Mr. Sullivan rehearsed dramatic material, Mr. Foss musical directed and choreographed. Despite Andrea’s apprehension toward dancing, she connected with the choreography particularly because of its ability to include every cast member as a whole. For example,
she felt how creative it was to have one’s own character interpret a common choreography in his or her own way. She was always invested in the rehearsals as well and was particularly frustrated toward apathetic cast members. Andrea also found vocal rehearsals quite difficult, especially in front of her peers, because she was deeply concerned about their impression of her vocal work. She was awarded a lead role and needed to prove she was musically worthy of that privilege bestowed upon her. Lastly, the rehearsals on weekends and at the Klein Exhibitions Grounds—a location off school property—were the highlight of Andrea’s experience, as this was when she felt her true bonds were made with cast members. The quality of her experience increased exponentially each day. The experience got better and better with each stage of the rehearsal.

Preparing for each show took work in non-performing areas as well. Andrea had fun performing these tasks as she enjoyed the solitude of the work. She enjoyed having time to think and reflect despite being freezing cold on her hands and knees, cleaning paint rollers, or priming flats. She also enjoyed the ownership of certain set pieces she had a hand in creating. She even kept one of her paint-covered sweaters from those years as a memento to her time at the Klein Exhibition Grounds.

The time spent in the theatre was the height of the musical theatre experience for Andrea. She felt a sense of inevitability, knowing that the show date finally arrived and that it was all “for real.” Despite distressing dress rehearsals each year, the experience of being onstage overshadowed any negative experiences she had during dress rehearsals. Andrea recognized the importance of the relationship between the actor and the audience and loved “being the entertainer.” Performing was so invigorating. Anything could
happen onstage, which allowed each show to be memorable in its own way. For instance, during *The Boy Friend*, Andrea had to invent a whole section of dialogue to disguise a missed cue. She improvised dialogue about a character being in the bathroom and successfully managed to steer the show back in the right direction.

Taking a bow on closing night was “one of the best feelings” for Andrea. She was glowing. She had never felt so happy. She also appreciated the applause and the audiences’ comments after the show very much. Compliments from perfect strangers were particularly special, especially from smaller children because she felt like she had really inspired them and made a memorable difference in these kids’ lives. Everyone’s positive reassurance meant a lot to Andrea, as it validated her work onstage, and encouraged her to continue to participate in the musical theatre programme each year.

Andrea’s experience allowed her to connect with people and develop close bonds with them. Even though post-secondary school made it hard to remain close with her fellow cast mates, her time in the programme led to unique and unlikely friendships. When given the opportunity to act “crazy together” Andrea’s friendships clicked. For example, the experience of musical theatre enabled Andrea to learn about make-up and was a place where she met and connected with students from other grades, both younger and older.

Andrea saw from the beginning that “something about [musical theatre] was different from other courses.” It was one of those rare courses where the experience and the memories were paramount. Andrea learned to do things she had never done before as part of a team, because as a team they would succeed or falter during the performance run. This security allowed her to connect to her peers like a family. Andrea’s experience
allowed her to develop another family, coming together though a common goal. The structure of the course has, additionally, been the catalyst for her post-secondary training as a future music educator. It was the unconventionality of the course that significantly contributed to her enjoyment of the course, and remains as a “golden” memory in her young life.

**Bridget**

Bridget was involved in McKinney’s musical theatre programme from 2001 to 2003 and was an actress in the programme during a transitional time between an older teacher, Mr. Clark, and a newer teacher, Mr. Sullivan. During her years, the course was only available to grades eleven through to grade thirteen (a grade phrased out in 2003 called O.A.C. or the Ontario Academic Credit). When Bridget finally reached grade eleven in 2001, rumours were circulating that *Fame* was the next production. Seventy people quickly signed up for the course causing Mr. Clark to split the course into a junior and senior level show. This decision, however, caused most of the junior students to withdraw leaving only eleven students in the junior course. A smaller ensemble show called *Snoopy!!!* was then chosen for the grade elevens’ as a result.

Bridget performed a small role the next year in *The Wizard Of Oz* and played the lead in *Grease* with her new director Mr. Sullivan.

Bridget’s first two years of musical theatre were very different experiences than her last year; “the teacher made a big difference.” In *Snoopy!!!*, for example, the show was blocked primarily by the students themselves because the teacher was not present most of the time. Bridget found this very frustrating because “personalities clashed,” which caused the rehearsal process to become “a little chaotic.” The student stage
manager Lauren was empowered with the majority of the directorial responsibilities and had a very strong personality that “got very commanding at times,” but when Mr. Clark was present, everyone was on their best behaviour because he was a very commanding presence; he was a “bit of a drill sergeant.” Bridget believed that Mr. Clark’s concern in the course was “putting on a good show rather than the experience for the students.” Despite the excellent quality of these two shows, the students did not enjoy the process of rehearsing for the show. When Mr. Sullivan came along, however, he was “far less commanding” and consequently, made the experience far better for Bridget. She definitely enjoyed the experience a lot more in Mr. Sullivan’s course, and got much more out of the process with Mr. Sullivan as the director.

All three years carried with them a similar audition and casting process. There was a formal audition in all three years complete with a song, a monologue, and a group dance sequence. Bridget, though, knew the roles her teachers intended for her before she auditioned for them. Mr. Sullivan hinted to Bridget that she would be receiving the lead, which she did indeed receive. With Mr. Clark, however, he hinted she would be receiving the lead as well, but ended up with a small chorus role instead, which she found thoroughly infuriating. Her casting in a chorus role, however, allowed her to get involved in other non-performance aspects of the show that became her niche in the end.

Bridget got particularly involved in the non-performance elements to avoid the monotony of rehearsing the same four songs repeatedly over four months. She immersed herself in set decoration and really enjoyed the time spent after school hours painting in the music room alone. She “actually liked the solitude of it” and felt it was her main contribution to the show that year, beyond that of her chorus role. She also designed all
three programme covers and posters for her shows, and interestingly enough, became a graphic artist as an adult. Her time at Klein Exhibition Grounds was also quite memorable. Bridget enjoyed taking pictures of her classmates’ pants covered in painted hand prints.

Although rehearsals trailed into holidays and weekends, Bridget loved every minute of the rehearsal process. Often it was the silly things that were highlights for her. For example, she found it hilarious when her car was sealed in plastic wrap during a rehearsal one Saturday. Her car would also be mysteriously but affectionately moved to other parts of a parking lot during rehearsals by her classmates. Lastly, her cast mates posted her phone number to the neighbouring community regarding the sale of her laptop without her knowledge. These antics were some of her most memorable, but she still sought friendly revenge against Ethan, the mastermind of the pranks, during an actual show. During a scene where Ethan had to read a newspaper, she taped seductive photos of men from a calendar into his newspaper and watched delightfully from the wings as Ethan tried to remain in character while onstage.

The shows were performed at both Westville Playhouse and Lynwood Theatre. Moving into the theatre was fun for Bridget. “It was all fun” for Bridget. Despite the theatre experience being “hectic as usual,” it was a very exciting time. Dress rehearsals were long and tedious and sometimes resulted in a show that seemed six hours long. She was always concerned with how the show could run a normal length by the next day, but to her delight “it always worked out in the end.” Bridget really loved performing onstage. She used to be nervous singing solos in concerts, but because she was so well
rehearsed in the show, she was actually able to “enjoy the moment.” The feelings she had “just before the performance were just anxiousness and excitement.”

Bridget’s bow on closing night was “one of the best feelings in the world.” She compared it with getting married, not only because there was not “quite anything like it” but because she was “up in front of everyone” and “everyone clap[ed] in the end.” She was also fulfilled having audience members come up to her in the lobby after the show and praise her performance. She would even receive compliments about her performance from perfect strangers at her part-time jobs around the community, which made her feel like a “local celebrity.”

She kept in contact with a lot of her cast mates over the years. In fact, she met one of her closest friends while in musical theatre. Her husband was also involved in the course years before Bridget entered the programme, which gave them a point of connection within their circle of friends.

Musical theatre is where Bridget found her niche. She transferred to McKinney, abandoning ties from elementary school, specifically for the musical theatre programme. She invested two years in a school, knowing absolutely nobody and waited for grade eleven when she was finally allowed to take musical theatre for the first time. It was not until her musical theatre experience in grade eleven where she really found her close knit group of friends.

She credits musical theatre for her confidence in speaking in front of people—something she is constantly called to do in her current profession. To this day, she has not missed a single McKinney show because they mean so much to her. She misses musical theatre very much and hopes her unborn child will get involved in something like
musical theatre one day so that her child may also have such wonderful life experiences.
She believes the course is one to be taken seriously despite the fact that on the surface it
may appear to be a “bird course.” She believes musical theatre is something with which
one must be fully invested in order to get anything out of the experience. She believes
musical theatre is something to be taken very, very seriously.

Caitlyn

Caitlyn’s experience at McKinney started in 2006 as a chorus member in
_Oklahoma!_ and ended as a lead in 2008 with _Candide_. She fell in love with the idea of
McKinney’s musical theatre programme when she saw their production of _How To
Succeed in Business Without Really Trying_ two years earlier. She thought the production
was “so cool” and really looked forward to the time when she “would be able to be a part
of something like that.” When she finally got the opportunity to participate in the show
during her grade ten year, she was surprised at how close she became with the older
students in the course. The class became a community that transcended grade lines, and a
lot of her amazing friendships came from this inclusive, musical theatre environment.
Caitlyn was introduced to a “whole new world” in the musical theatre classroom, which
made her “so happy.”

The audition and casting process was a very tense time for Caitlyn, however, with
the stress of the audition and the casting process complete, better times were ahead. She
looked forward to actually getting her hands on the real script.

Rehearsing this script involved working with Mr. Sullivan. Caitlyn “soaked in
everything” during these rehearsals, “observing everything and fixing whatever need[ed]
to be fixed.” She especially enjoyed how the dance rehearsals at Klein Exhibition
Grounds allowed everyone to come together cohesively as a cast. She also appreciated the calm pace of Saturday rehearsals, finding they also allowed the cast to “get to know each other [even] better.”

Caitlyn’s experience in a non-performance role over the three years changed drastically. During her first two shows, she did not participate actively in a non-performance role, but participated fully in a non-performance role during her last year because she was cast as a lead. She found it more interesting working in a non-performance role that year because she felt more ownership having a hand in building her own set. She finally recognized that helping with painting and set building, for example, helped contribute to her sense of accomplishment during the run of the show. Caitlyn lovingly got more paint on her classmates than on the sets and kept her paint-splattered clothing as her treasured keepsake.

Caitlyn loved Lynwood Theatre. She felt “intensity” in the space because of the casts’ overwhelming excitement and uncertainty. Not knowing how the show would “fair out” caused her the most anxiety. She saw the whole product come together during that short week and that process epitomized the reality of the theatre for her. The juxtaposition between the solemn work of the theatre and the silly antics of her cast made her experience memorable. For example, Mr. Sullivan’s dress rehearsals would usually involve some kind of “flip out” because of the frightening state of the show, but in the same moment be calmed by the boys’ leotard runs through the girls dressing rooms. Caitlyn always knew the show would be fine in the end and knew a certain amount of fear would drive the cast to success. Despite the best efforts of the boys in leotards, the experiences before opening night were “never really a fun thing” at all.
Performing onstage for Caitlyn, on the other hand, was unlike anything else in the world. Something came alive in her. She had so much fun and enjoyed all the moments immensely. It was definitely one of the best times of Caitlyn’s young life and she will remember it forever.

Caitlyn had other opportunities to perform in music concerts after McKinney’s musicals, but nothing was quite like that experience, for it was in a completely different realm. For instance, using a costume to transform oneself in a role helped move the performance experience past any other for her.

Standing onstage and taking a bow on closing night was particularly poignant for Caitlyn. “It [was] the best.” That was a special moment; especially as a lead, it was her moment. Caitlyn did not join the course for the bow but found it very humbling to have the audience stand and applaud for her. She also enjoyed being able to applaud for other people as well and appreciated having that moment all together.

There was so much joy and love after the show, which was very rewarding for Caitlyn. Receiving compliments from former cast members of McKinney shows meant the world to her. These compliments were special because they too had lead roles in the past and knew first hand what it took to be successful in a lead role. She also signed an autograph for a little girl on the back of her programme, which was a “really sweet” moment for Caitlyn. Despite the fact that today her fellow cast mates have gone their separate ways, they are still good friends with each other. Caitlyn knows, however, that they are obviously not as close now as when they were in musical theatre together.

Caitlyn still cannot believe she played the lead in her secondary school musical. She is definitely a lot more confident now, not only as a singer, but as a person as well.
She also feels that working in an environment where no one can do anything on their own has helped her work as part of a team over the years. Caitlyn has especially enjoyed watching McKinney shows in the past few years to see the progression of her former cast mates. Although it is hard not to be critical, she gets a tremendous amount of enjoyment seeing how the next generation of musical theatre students have grown in all areas of theatre.

Caitlyn misses McKinney musical theatre enormously and encourages any prospective student to “absolutely do it.” She is living proof that the most amazing rewards come from getting involved in the programme “so dive in there.” Caitlyn knows that there are moments of great stress, but the stage wipes away any previous frustration making the experience all worthwhile in the end. She concludes: “the moment you hit the stage, everything just falls away and you are fine. And you’re alive. And you’re just so filled with joy, excitement, and it’s unreal.” Caitlyn looks back on McKinney musical theatre as such an incredible time, full of memories that will last her a lifetime.

Darren

Darren was a cast member of McKinney’s musical theatre programme from 2006 to 2008 and specialized in comedic roles during those three years. His musical theatre experience began because he needed to diversify himself amongst other music courses due to his interest in pursuing music education in post-secondary school. He was an instrumentalist, so experience in vocal music was necessary. As well, he was concerned at a young age with his lack of confidence and felt musical theatre would help him “break out of [his] shell.”
Darren’s preoccupation during his audition did not rest with his own performance but rather, with where he ranked against the other students, which affected his nerves greatly. Darren’s concern about his overall competency extended into his second and third year auditions as well, but for different reasons; he was now pressured to repeat his success from the previous year—he did not want to be known as the actor who could not repeat being offered a lead role. In each case, however, he did receive lead roles and progressively gained confidence with each rehearsal.

Darren’s rehearsals never ran successively according to the libretto, but rather were selected by the directors based on what numbers they deemed to be hardest. For example, key numbers were rehearsed over and over again, which was a huge asset for Darren: he found that unlike other courses where material was taught once and then appeared on an exam, the musical theatre approach allowed students to “continually work on [material] throughout the weeks and months leading up to the performance.” Although the rehearsal format allowed Darren to feel comfortable with the show and his role within the show, he found some rehearsals trying, particularly those rehearsals during which he believed that he was working harder than his cast mates. This inequity was frustrating for Darren.

The flow of the experience improved during his Saturday rehearsals. Not only did the Saturday rehearsals build commitment in the cast members, but they were also enjoyable. Darren felt that the Exhibition Grounds really helped move the whole group toward the final goal because, unlike courses that ran solely within the school timetable, giving up one’s Saturday or Christmas holidays to work on some aspect of the show took effort on the part of all the students, reinforcing the team environment of which Darren
was so fond. The fun in the rehearsals came from seeing his teachers outside of the classroom environment. For example, Darren thought seeing his teacher shoot a nail gun into a wall just for fun was a special moment. He especially enjoyed atypical aspects of the course such as fundraising. Darren treated fundraising not as a burden, but as an opportunity to brag to the community about this wonderful production he was in. Darren wanted to share his experience with everybody.

Darren thought the theatre itself was very intimidating. He also felt it was a sobering experience because he knew opening night was near and could no longer hide behind months of rehearsal. The show had arrived. He considered moving into the theatre as the calm before the storm because the dress rehearsal, to Darren, was characterized by a lot of yelling. The majority of the yelling was directed toward the state of the dance numbers and toward lethargic cast members. Darren’s first dress rehearsal was his most frightening because it was the first time he witnessed unprofessional behaviour from the director. He was concerned that if his director could get this flustered, then things could certainly go wrong during the show itself. Darren believed the discipline, however, was a “hidden blessing” because despite the intimidation, the yelling focused the cast and got “them to smarten up” in the end.

Darren had heard other performers talk about the rush they experienced when they were onstage, and his first time onstage was his first experience with this phenomenon. He loved feeding off the audience and knowing that four-hundred people loved everything he was doing. Darren felt gratified through performing and was especially emotional during closing night. He wished there were more opportunities to perform the show but did not let that attitude cloud his sense of accomplishment. He particularly
enjoyed signing autographs for children after the show as it made Darren feel almost famous.

There were two unintended consequences of Darren’s participation in musical theatre. They surrounded his role as a future audience member and his role as a male student in a predominantly female cast. Firstly, Darren now watches musicals from a different perspective; an average audience member is only concerned with what is presented to them on the stage, whereas Darren now thinks about the set changes behind the curtain, the actor running around “with their head cut off trying to get into a costume,” and the musicians in the pit accompanying the singers. Darren’s concern is not only for the beautiful singer, but for how long that beautiful singer took to learn her part. This perspective has given him a unique point of view that moves him beyond the basic storyline: Darren now follows the whole play. Secondly, Darren experienced a significant amount of peer pressure regarding his involvement in the course. Other students questioned his sexuality, for example, when he expressed a desire to participate in a course where he was required to dance. This harassment gave him pause. Darren would have dropped the course if it were not for another teacher dismissing their comments as juvenile and uninformed. Encouragement from his father also helped Darren remain in the course. He now knows that dropping the course would have been the worst mistake of his life and hopes other males in musical theatre will “stick with it” despite any peer pressure they may experience.

Darren was accepted to a music education faculty in post-secondary school and attributes that success to his time in musical theatre. He has applied many of musical theatre’s great lessons to his life both socially and emotionally. He has become less hard
on himself as he has developed ways to deal with the issues that come up in everyday life. For instance, he feels that learning how to improvise on the spot has helped him deal with tense situations more easily. As a result of being onstage and having to deal with scenes that do not go quite right, Darren has effectively learned to transcend petty differences and focus on what is important. He believes musical theatre has completely made him who he is today because it effectively showed him who he is “as a person.”

Ethan

Ethan experienced musical theatre by accident. Intending to play saxophone in band, he was enrolled into vocal music by mistake by the guidance department, mistaking him for his brother who had been a successful vocalist in the programme years prior. He stuck with it and ended up enjoying the musical theatre world in the end. He participated in McKinney’s musical theatre programme from 2001 to 2003 and played lead roles during all three shows.

Ethan was always having fun in musical theatre. He actually felt like he was “cheating school by being there because it was so much fun.” What made the experience so enjoyable for Ethan was the group work inherent in his musical theatre rehearsals. Ethan most enjoyed when he was working in a group, but was most timid when he had to work by himself in a solo situation. He never appreciated being singled out in auditions, for example, and was pleased as the years went on that teachers stopped asking him to audition all together; his teachers already knew that Ethan would expertly perform the lead role. In fact, Ethan’s audition experience differed greatly from that of his cast mates. He was among a select few who were pulled aside and told what they were to perform in the show without a formal audition.
Each of Ethan’s shows were directed by a different person. *Snoopy!!!* was primarily directed by a student. *The Wizard Of Oz* was directed by Mr. Clark, and *Grease*, his debut production, was directed by Mr. Sullivan. Despite having different directors, each show had similar blocking, directorial, and choreographic techniques, and each included Saturday and holiday rehearsals at the Klein Exhibition Grounds. Ethan enjoyed these Exhibition Grounds rehearsals very much not only because he took pleasure in them, but because he thought of them much like a “secret meeting or society.” Ethan and his cast understood they needed to invest time and effort at the Exhibition Grounds and, consequently, devoted many hours to this work. Due to his extra effort at the Exhibition Grounds and despite his somewhat limited work in a non-performance role, he did manage to gather a well “rounded view of what goes into a production.”

The theatre itself was the breaking point for Ethan. The looming opening night caused Ethan to be quite nervous, which usually manifested itself in adolescent antics. For instance, Ethan and his best friend would eat and drink ridiculous things before the show; before *Snoopy!!!* they drank an entire two liter bottle of Hawaiian Punch and ate a whole can of whip cream. This lightness, conversely, was typically overshadowed by a “yelling director.” Ethan was troubled by “a lot of shouting matches in dress rehearsals,” but believed it was all part of the experience. He believed this yelling was part of the dress rehearsal experience from the way directors behave in television. It does not make him angry to reflect on it today, however, as “it was all inclusive…it was all part of it.”

Despite the experience during dress rehearsals, alternatively, the actual experience of performing onstage was “awesome” for Ethan. Performing onstage was his favorite thing about the course, which is why today he still seeks out performance opportunities.
with his rock band where ever he can. He especially enjoyed the feeling of knowing other people were really enjoying his performance. Ethan could always sense this enjoyment. He could always sense that someone was being affected by what he was doing onstage. It was all a humbling experience for Ethan, especially the final bow and the roar of the applause. He appreciated everyone clapping and screaming when he walked out onstage to take a bow because, to Ethan, closing night was not just the closing night of three or four days of shows, it was “the closing night of months and months of work coming to an end.” Performing these shows made Ethan feel really good and even a little narcissistic.

Ethan met his best friend in musical theatre. Even though they do not act the same way as they did in secondary school, they still enjoy each others’ company and still work together on musical projects. They have matured a great deal since secondary school because their humour back then was quite ridiculous, whereas their humour now is quite “stealthy.” Their foolish humour, however, is what Ethan remembers the most from musical theatre. For example, in a performance of *Snoopy!!!*, while the two were respectively playing the roles of Woodstock and Snoopy, Ethan and his best friend completely forgot their lines. There was dead silence for about two minutes. Then, in a desperate attempt to break the silence, Ethan tweeted and his friend barked. Then they had a conversation in tweets and barks until the lights went out. It was perfect and the audience loved it. He also enjoyed plastic wrapping Bridget’s car during one Saturday rehearsal. All the silliness came back to haunt him, however, during a scene in *Grease* when Ethan opened a newspaper that revealed several “half-naked” men that his cast mates had cut out of magazines and applied to the pages. Ethan had to hold the
newspaper in front of his face until the scene was over so that he would not burst out laughing. There is always talk of a reunion of his years in musical theatre, but jobs and careers seem to interfere. Ethan, as a result, has come to appreciate more completely the years where his friends were in the “same place everyday for the same amount of time.”

Ethan still misses the course and, when reminiscing with other friends from his years in musical theatre, he realizes that they all miss it too. He credits musical theatre for his level of confidence; he learned that even if something went wrong, the audience would still congratulate the cast in the lobby after the show. Ethan’s family would still hug him and shake his hand. The unconditional support given by others was reinforced over and over again each time Ethan went into the lobby after a show. His cast became another family though their support of him. Ethan credits musical theatre for bringing people of the same mentality together in an environment where they are free to drop their inhibitions and actually open up to each other.

Faye

Faye’s musical theatre experience between 2003 and 2005 was somewhat backwards. While some students begin onstage and work toward stage management, Faye started in musical theatre as a stage manager, and ended her experience with the lead in City of Angels. She entered the course because she loved musical theatre from the very beginning. She was also encouraged to participate by her teacher Mr. Sullivan who recognized the genuine love she had for the musical arts.

Faye was a confident performer all through public school, so she was surprised at how terrified she was of the audition process. She entered grade nine keen and full of confidence but over the years lost some assuredness in her voice; she found it especially
nerve-wracking singing in a one-on-one situation. Despite the fact that Faye always sought lead roles, Mr. Sullivan wanted her to be a stage manager in her first year. She did such a wonderful job of stage managing her first year that she was asked to do it again her second year. She was a little hurt by this request, so Mr. Sullivan promised her one of two lead female roles during her last year. She was again confident and became close with Mr. Sullivan, knowing her impending role in *City of Angels* before anyone else.

Rehearsals were very independent given Faye’s role in *City of Angels*. Mr. Sullivan’s attention was often elsewhere in the show so Faye was left, along with her friends, to run through scenes on their own. Their choreography was also very basic as it was dependent on the expertise of students and Mr. Sullivan himself. Most of the time, her choreography was merely “walking back and forth,” and at times when big dance sequences were called for, the choreography was again effective but “very, very basic.” Faye’s favorite rehearsals were, therefore, not the school rehearsals, but the Saturday rehearsals at Klein Exhibition Grounds. She enjoyed coming to these rehearsals because she did not have to worry about school for the day. She also thought these rehearsals were much more “laid back,” which helped make them more enjoyable. She especially enjoyed paint fights and painting other people. In fact, Faye liked everything about the Exhibition Grounds, except the cold.

Faye’s non-performance contribution involved painting and fundraising during *City of Angels*. Her non-performance contributions during her first two productions, however, were entirely in the stage managing realm. She learned a lot though this experience and credits her calm demeanour to her stage managing success. She also
taught others how to be calm in their role, a skill that has helped Faye learn to tolerate people with strong personalities, who are abundant in everyday life.

Dress rehearsals were always stressful. Each year, someone in Faye’s productions, “had a major freak out about something.” The dress rehearsal for City of Angels was a particularly bad experience. Nothing went right. People were not at the stage on time, there were giant pauses in the scripts, and people were singing out of tune. The dress rehearsal was certainly a little nerve-wracking for Faye, but by the next evening, miraculously everything was fine. The students “got an ear-full,” but then “knew what to do, and what not to do” making the show all the more successful in the end.

Being onstage and being in character was an indescribable feeling for Faye. She was nervous, but because she was so well rehearsed, and had embodied the character for so long, it became natural to her. Faye also found it strange to be in a romantic relationship with a friend of hers onstage. Although they did not have to kiss in the show, she felt that having a romantic relationship with a friend of hers was thoroughly “weird.” In spite of any awkwardness, however, it was all “breathtaking” and made her very emotional. Faye felt an enormous sense of accomplishment that everything she had worked so hard for had finally paid off in the end.

Today, Faye always has music in her life. She is always singing, humming, or whistling. She sings to herself in the car everyday, but has not had a musical theatre performance opportunity since secondary school. She is very nervous about singing in public now because she has been away from it for so long. In fact, Faye’s musical theatre experience is one she holds so near and dear to her heart that to experience anything less
than perfect would be hurtful; a musical theatre experience today would have to meet or exceed the standards of her memory, otherwise the experience would not be worth doing. McKinney musical theatre was a high point in Faye’s life. She is very moved watching musicals now, not out of sadness, but because she misses the musical theatre experience so much. She gets “so involved.” “It encompasses” her.

Musical theatre was an amazingly rewarding experience for Faye. The experience remains an important part of her life, one that taught her not to discredit any experience and one that showed her how powerful the musical theatre medium actually is.
Chapter 5

Conclusions and Connections

My participants enrolled in musical theatre either because of the allure of the stage, the need to diversify their musical experience, or simply by accident. Andrea, Bridget, Caitlin, and Faye all became involved in musical theatre to have a special experience driven by their love of theatre. Darren and Ethan, on the other hand, became involved in musical theatre for more practical reasons: either to broaden their musical experience or to initially satisfy timetable requirements in the school. In each case, however, the participants were excited to be involved in musical theatre from the beginning, or in Darren’s case, at least once the momentum of the course began and his level of comfort increased.

While each participant recalled an audition of some kind, upon reflection, only Andrea and Caitlin seemed to participate in an authentic audition process throughout their three years. Bridget, Darren, and Faye all participated in some kind of quasi-audition, but were always privy to the director’s casting decisions; they all knew their roles before being asked to perform an audition. Ethan was exempt from auditions all together as the years went on; his directors already knew what part Ethan would perform.

All six participants favored the Klein Exhibition Grounds rehearsals on Saturdays and holidays over regular rehearsals during school hours. Each felt these rehearsals were more relaxed and helped to build camaraderie among the entire cast. Darren and Ethan expressed resentment during the very beginning of the Saturday rehearsal schedule but both enjoyed the rehearsals once they were underway. Faye’s only complaint about the Saturday rehearsals was regarding the cold temperature in the building. Each participant,
however, had some endearing story to tell about these rehearsals, such as Darren’s nail gun story, or Faye’s paint fight.

All participants felt nervous during some point in the musical theatre process. Some felt nervous during early rehearsals, especially having to sing by themselves in front of their cast. Andrea, for example, was concerned about her competency as a solo singer, which made full cast rehearsals nerve-wracking. Others felt nervous during the audition. Caitlin and Faye, for instance, were most nervous during the audition and having to perform in a one-on-one situation. Darren and Ethan were somewhat nervous during the show itself, which manifested itself in forgotten lines. Bridget was confident during the entire process as any feelings she experienced were only anxiety and excitement. Despite any nervousness the participants experienced, anxiety was not a factor in deciding to take the course again the following year.

Some participants, Andrea, Bridget, and Darren specifically, expressed frustration at other students’ apathy in the course. Andrea’s main frustration came in rehearsals during which other students would simply not stop talking. Bridget resented students who did not take the course seriously as they believed it to be an easy credit to earn. Darren also disliked other cast mates who did not seem to contribute fully to the process.

The director completely dictated the quality of the overall experience. Bridget especially noted the difference between Mr. Clark and Mr. Sullivan, and Andrea and Darren noted the more positive attributes of Mr. Foss. While Mr. Clark focused on the product to the detriment of the process, Mr. Sullivan focused on the process, which made the overall experience more enjoyable for his students. Interestingly, the quality of Mr. Sullivan’s productions were still comparable with Mr. Clark’s productions. Mr. Foss,
with his focus on a reassuring process, too helped keep the experience enjoyable for students.

The participants all tolerated their non-performance roles. Each participated in painting, set-construction, and fundraising. The size of the performing role, as in Caitlyn’s case, seemed to dictate the investment in the non-performance area. If students were fully rewarded with a lead role in the final show, they were more willing to participate in the non-performance aspects. Darren acknowledged his non-performance contribution in fundraising, for example, as an opportunity to brag about his show to the community. He would certainly have been less likely to brag to others had his performance role been smaller or non-existent.

Being in a real theatre was important for each participant as it increased the intensity of their musical theatre experience. Andrea, Caitlyn, Darren, and Ethan knew the show was real the moment they moved into the theatre. Bridget and Faye experienced great excitement moving into the theatre because they were so eager. In all participants’ cases (except Bridget’s) moving into the theatre was joyous but the dress rehearsals were not.

The dress rehearsal experience was almost always consistent in my participants’ accounts. While Bridget’s dress rehearsals were merely long and tedious, others found dress rehearsals to be frightening and nerve-wracking. Andrea found dress rehearsals difficult because students were yelled at a lot. Caitlyn and Darren characterized dress rehearsals by the degree of shouting. Ethan conceded that a screaming director is simply part of musical theatre; he called them shouting matches. Faye thought dress rehearsals were extremely stressful because someone would always yell at the students. The
participants came to expect a certain amount of yelling during dress rehearsals and felt it was simply a part of the process.

Performing onstage, on the other hand, seemed to make up for any emotional distress students experienced during their dress rehearsals. Being onstage was invigorating, incredible, natural, and epic for my participants. Something came alive in Caitlyn specifically because performing onstage was unlike anything else she had done before. All the participants loved being onstage and considered it one of the best times of their lives.

Taking a bow was also a valuable experience for all my participants. They described the experience as being very gratifying, humbling, and breathtaking. Andrea never felt as happy as when she was taking a bow. Bridget compared the feeling of accepting applause to that of getting married. Caitlyn thought taking a bow onstage was one of the best feelings and she was extremely humbled by the experience. Darren felt an enormous sense of accomplishment in accepting an audiences’ applause. Ethan found the experience very humbling and particularly enjoyed the roar of the crowd. Faye thought that is was breathtaking to feel the support of an audience.

Additionally, notoriety in the lobby after each performance was a wonderful experience for the participants. Receiving compliments from perfect strangers and accepting praise from them gave my participants a sense of reassurance that they had done a good job. Faye especially required validation in her performance to feel proud of what she had done. Caitlyn, Darren, and Ethan particularly enjoyed signing autographs for small children; it made them feel almost famous.
Other than Ethan, whose best friend was part of the musical theatre programme, all the participants felt remorse in drifting away from their fellow cast mates over the years. Each recognized a family of peers in their cast, and regretted that their musical theatre family was unable to remain intact over time. Each cited jobs, careers, or distance as a factor in their inability to remain as close as they were when they were in musical theatre together.

My participants credited part of their confidence, self-assuredness, and poise to their musical theatre experience. Andrea, Caitlyn, and Ethan are certainly more confident in front of people as a result of their musical theatre experience. Bridget is especially more confident in public speaking, which is a requirement in her career. Caitlyn and Faye now work as part of a team more naturally. Darren and Faye deal with everyday issues in a more calm and more calculated way. The collective belief in themselves increased since being in musical theatre.

The intensity of the emotional impact as a result of their experience, however, seemed to depend on the number of years the participants had been out of the programme. For example, Bridget and Faye had been out of the programme for the longest time and thus valued the musical theatre experience in a very genuine and sincere manner. Their collective experiences were vitally meaningful to them and they witnessed the impact of the experiences in their lives over time. Ethan, on the other hand, seemed indifferent to the impact of musical theatre on his life as the memory seemed to be more about enjoyment rather than how it impacted his life. Darren, Caitlyn, and Andrea each acknowledged the tremendous experience of musical theatre, but have not yet had time to truly reflect on the impact that musical theatre has had on their lives. The meaning and
importance of the experience has not fully manifested itself in their understanding. Their collective understanding, therefore, can be organized in three distinct ways:

1. Darren, Caitlyn, and Andrea each experienced a familial feeling amongst the cast, acknowledged the amazing benefits of musical theatre, and recognized the self-actualization inherent in musical theatre. Each, however, were vague in identifying the permeating significance of their experience over time. They all, on the other hand, are currently involved in music in tertiary education and believe their involvement in musical theatre partly paved the way for their success.

2. Ethan, although away from musical theatre as long as Bridget, recognized the impact of the family atmosphere inherent in musical theatre, but did not move past the enjoyment of the experience to identify the significance of his experience over time. Ethan has pursued music as a career, however, and does acknowledge the limited role of musical theatre as the springboard to his success.

3. Bridget and Faye appeared to be influenced by the experience in that it has since affected their attitudes and emotions. Each cites the extra-ordinary and special impact of musical theatre on their lives and refer to the experience with honesty and sincerity. Bridget would only hope her unborn child will have such an amazing opportunity for solidarity, and each believes musical theatre has had a hand in crafting them into who they are today. Bridget’s and Faye’s experiences, therefore, are the most
information-rich cases and confirm my claims and conclusions in this study.

The experience of students as part of a secondary school musical theatre course was one of self-discovery for my participants. All entered musical theatre lacking confidence, musicianship, or artistic understanding, but left the programme having built upon these skills. Their experience too became a lasting and valued memory. Through the accounts of my participants, it is clear that these former students took their bow and entered the world more steady and prepared to accept the challenges this world offered them. They succeeded after secondary school in part because early in their academic careers they had a history of participation in real problems, with real consequences; they devised real solutions to these problems, while constructing a real product that instilled a tremendous sense of value and pride in each former musical theatre student.

The participants came to understand their experience differently over time, however. The more time spent away from the safe walls of McKinney Secondary School’s musical theatre programme, the more time they had to reflect on the impact of that experience. The recent graduates saw the benefit of their improved confidence, public speaking skills, and general demeanour, but older graduates saw the experience as something life changing. Their memory of musical theatre produced a fire within them galvanizing success. They seem to owe something to musical theatre and cherish their experience with each passing day. Unfortunately, holding these experiences in such esteem also seems to have caused these former students to avoid future opportunities in musical theatre. Former students, therefore, seem to become reluctant toward musical theatre the longer they are away from it; they become frightened that they will be unable
to repeat the musical theatre experience on the same level that they experienced back when they were in secondary school. This regrettable cycle is unfortunate, but seems to be the reality of how the students in this study come to understand this experience over time: the experience becomes heightened, diminishing the probability of participation in future musical theatre productions for fear of their inadequacy. The experience becomes so increasingly meaningful that former students prevent discrediting their experience by avoiding a less than superior adult opportunity; their understanding of the experience becomes far too idolized for that to happen.

**Connections to the Theoretical Framework**

There are six points of connection between the data and the theoretical framework of Dewey (1935/2005) and Dissanayake (1995). These points of connection are regarding (a) enrollment, (b) facilities, (c) teachers, (d) performance, (e) notoriety, (f) and communities.

Andrea, Caitlin, and Faye all became involved in musical theatre to become part of something special. Bridget too remembers being assigned the lead role as a special experience for her. Every instance of musical theatre, whether it is the rehearsal process or the product itself, is an instance of making special. Dissanayake’s concept of making special helps defend the caring and investments each participant experiences. The way in which each participant makes their musical theatre experience special is why their experiences are remembered and cherished over the years.

All participants appreciated the opportunity to build and rehearse at the Klein Exhibition Grounds and to use Lynwood Theatre for the actual show. In each case they favoured these locations in lieu of the school cafeteria or gymnasium because these
locations were the setting for their extra-ordinary experiences. Dissanayake’s concept of extra-ordinary includes these locations because they are unlike the regular locations used in secondary school courses. Andrea knew from the beginning that musical theatre would be different from other courses. Ethan felt being at the Exhibition Grounds was like being in a secret society. Caitlin loved Lynwood theatre so much. Each location was extra-ordinary marking it significant in the participant’s accounts.

Bridget connected the quality of the experience to the quality of the director. The director’s ability to shape and assemble the experience for students, therefore, determined the intensity of student’s connection to the experience. For example, the most significant meaning took place when the director created an environment where students could make connections between themselves and all the other elements of the show. According to Dewey “the end…is significant not by itself but as the integration of parts” (p. 55), so a director’s ability to effectively pull all the strings of the production and not just the strings of the product creates a valued experience for students. The process is then the fundamental human experience needed to complete the interaction between the live creature (its students) and it (musical theatre).

All participants loved being onstage and took great pleasure from the experience. Dissanayake believes this kind of activity is in line with what we need as human beings and because that need is pleasurable, it has value. Each participant described being onstage very passionately: Andrea thought being onstage was “so invigorating.” Bridget “loved performing onstage.” Caitlin believed that “something [came] alive” in her onstage. Darren described it as a “rush.” Ethan described it as an “amazing feeling.”
Faye called it an “indescribable feeling.” Each participant articulated sentiments of pleasure that they valued years later.

Caitlin thought taking a bow was “one of the best feelings” in the world. She would certainly have done musical theatre for its own sake having experienced such a transformative moment. Dissanayake’s indicators for artistic potential are clear in Caitlin’s bow and her experience is quite universal: anyone would enjoy the experience of taking a bow for a roaring audience. Caitlin’s bow felt great. Her bow could also be viewed as the culmination of an activity in which people spend a great deal of time and effort.

Lastly, each participant thought of their peers and cast mates as a family. This family in musical theatre is also a community of substance. Dewey’s fusion of elements is very much the integration of likeminded individuals all working toward a common goal. The participants’ sense of ensemble helped shaped the experience and helped make connections between one another and the experience itself. The participants likely recalled their experience because they made these connections as a family. The participants created meaning because they did it together.

There are points of connection between these two thinkers and the data as well. While Dissanayake considers extra-ordinary opportunities as the manifestations of our natural inclinations, Dewey considers these extra-ordinary opportunities as the interaction of the live creation with his or her environment. Dewey’s thinking also surrounds the connections of the live creature and that those connections allow experiences to stand out from normal experiences. Each thinker, therefore, not only defends musical theatre individually, but their collective ideas work to provide a foundation for this inquiry.
Connections to the Personal Context

I am pleased to see that the importance of musical theatre is not lost on today’s students. All my participants saw musical theatre as an important part of their secondary school education and realized the intrinsic benefits of participation in such an activity; I am truly thankful for that. From Ethan finding his lifelong friend to Andrea choosing music education as a career as a result of being in musical theatre, the parallels to my own life are many. It validates, in some small way, my musical theatre experience in secondary school as more important, and magnifies it as part of the broader body of experiences in which students may benefit. My hypothesis of the impact of students’ experience as part of a secondary school musical theatre programme was not lost in this research. I was, however, completely surprised by how students came to understand their experience over time, as I had never considered the meaning of my experiences in this manner.

I have come to appreciate my secondary school musical theatre experiences more completely over time, but never considered that it perhaps contributed to my lack of performance in musical theatre from the time I finished secondary school until now. True, I tried to involve myself in musical theatre during tertiary education, but since that point, as an adult, I have never been onstage again. It is amazing to think that after all these years my rationale for staying away from musical theatre was perhaps to preserve my memory. Now that I have had time to reflect upon it, I realize that this conclusion could not be more true.

I am a teacher of musical theatre but no longer a musical theatre performer, even though the experience was one of the most rewarding and life-changing experiences of
my life. Never before had I thought that staying away from the performance world of musical theatre could perhaps be a coping mechanism for maintaining the significance of my musical theatre memories.

It strikes me as odd that years ago I had the opportunity of obtaining an archive video of *Working*, and for reasons that were unclear to me at the time, I refused it. It never occurred to me that, perhaps subconsciously, I did not care to see the video because it may have undermined my memory. What if the performance was not like I remembered it? What if I came to understand my experience differently given my new perspective? I am confident that part of me did not want to de-value my experience by recognizing deficiencies through a video. So I dismissed receiving the video, allowing me to preserve that treasured part of my memory intact and unchanged.

I think in some way this self preservation is part of human nature. The more, or the further, we are away from something, the more we come to value it. As we then come to value it more and more, the less likely we are to participate in it again because of the fear that we will be unable to recreate the experience we have valued for so long.

Although Andrea, Caitlyn, and Darren, for example, are all in post-secondary school programmes for music, none of them participate in musicals anymore, and none of them are quite sure why. Bridget and Faye, on the other hand, adore their musical theatre memories perhaps because—as this research shows—they have been away from it for so long. Especially for Faye, the memory has intensified causing cautiousness about participating in another show. Bridget has “thought often over the years about getting involved in some kind of community theatre,” but then quickly changed the subject and avoided articulating the cause of her lack of interest. Faye went one step further in her
analysis. When asked if any other experience had equaled her experience of musical theatre, she replied:

You know what, nothing. I think that was a real high point in my life and probably one of the highest points in my life, which sounds ludicrous when I say that I haven’t done anything with it since. But I think I just hold that so near and dear to me that an experience that wouldn’t meet those standards would just feel weird I guess. I guess I’ve put it on such a pedestal because it was just such an amazing experience for me. I guess I’d want to meet or exceed that, and I’m too afraid that I’d fall below it.

Faye’s apprehension is understandable and has allowed me to come to terms with, possibly, my own lack of involvement in the actual performance side of musical theatre.

The connections of this research to my personal experience have been eye-opening. The research has affirmed my personal experience, but radically changed how I have come to understand that experience—or lack of continued experiences—over time.

**Connections to the Historical and Cultural Context**

Four points of connection become clear from the data to the historical and cultural contexts presented earlier. These points of connection are via (a) the sexuality in extravaganza and burlesque, (b) the suitability of operettas, (c) the prevalence of book musicals given the expectations of popular musical elements, and (d) the lack of Canadian content.

Gray (1988) views musical theatre as a successful teaching device to help motivate students. Mates (1985), however, recognizes that English teachers seem to have the sole responsibility of teaching the literary and historical significance of these works. The musical theatre repertoire certainly does have merit “and if aesthetic criteria for this most popular of American art forms do not exist, then who teaches, who learns, and how do we pass on a tradition and a heritage?” (p. 6).
When asked to reflect upon typical rehearsal structures, the participants in this study never focused on academic or historical memories because they were not taught. Rather, the participants focused on the practical and kinesthetic memories: historical surveys do not exist as part of the course. It comes as no surprise, then, that teachers hesitate to include comprehensive historical surveys as part of musical theatre courses given the blatant sexuality present in extravaganza (Everett & Laird, 2002) and burlesque (Mates, 1985) particularly; the risqué material does not serve the needs of students and educators well.

Interestingly, participants in this study refer to musical theatre shows of the book musical genre save *Candide*. Operettas, however, such as *Trial by Jury* (1875), *The Sorcerer* (1877), *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), *Patience* (1881), *Iolanthe* (1882), and *The Mikado* (1885) are excellent material (Walsh & Platt, 2003; Knapp, 2005) and are overlooked in the catalogue of secondary school musical theatre repertoire. These plots and musical scores employ pedagogically sound dramatic and musical elements for its student singers and musicians, making them a perfect and often unutilized fit for secondary school musical theatre productions.

The participants’ involvement in book musicals dominate their experience, yet they seemed to invest an inordinate amount of time in non-performance roles such as set-construction and painting in the realization of these book musicals. Their non-performance investment likely comes from the expectations placed upon them through rock, concept, or megamusical’s techniques (Walsh & Platt, 2003), which are certainly more alluring to young musical theatre students. Secondary school musical theatre productions, however, should not and should never try to compete with these grand
productions as they fail to address the educational needs of students both musically (Swain, 2002), dramatically, and literarily. Their spectacle increases the audiences’ general interest in musical theatre, but this spectacle has no constructive place in education for it favours the ends of the product and not the ends of the process.

The participants in this study, as well, cite only American productions and do not reference any Canadian content in their experiences. Although the Canadian musical theatre repertoire is limited—and students would likely have a difficult time in realization of ‘music’ theatre (Bawtree, 1985)—students’ immersion in some Canadian content would add a cultural significance to their musical theatre understanding.

The points of connection from the data to the historical and cultural contexts have primarily demonstrated issues of repertoire selection. For the secondary school musical theatre educator, few shows produced over the last decade have a place on the amateur stage mostly because of their content, language, and mature themes. Moreover, musical theatre’s immersion in public secondary schools must be able to tout some educational merit for the longevity and security of the programme as any attempt to legitimatize the most current musical theatre repertoire is typically a fabrication. Thus historically, musical theatre educators seem to situate their show selections in the golden era of musical theatre—*Oklahoma!* through to *West Side Story*—with the odd rare gem that comes from the later repertory such as the new works from Jason Robert Brown (1970-) (Singer, 2004).

Throughout the show selection process, therefore, the educational merits must be at the forefront of the decision making. This task is difficult, however, because students are the intended audiences of the shows musical theatre educators are trying to shut out;
given the option, students would choose a staging of David Simpatico’s *High School Musical* (2007) before opting for a classic musical theatre selection or an operetta. Educators who can hence persuade students, parents, communities, and administrators to support a traditional production are further ahead than those who succumb to popular opinion in their annual musical theatre selection. The improved repertoire fosters a richer rehearsal process, which creates a richer product as well. Musical theatre educators must, therefore, look to musical theatre history and not popular culture as a barometer of the possibilities of musical theatre.

**Connections to the Production and Performance Context**

I have noticed three points of connection from the participants’ experience to the production and performance context presented earlier. These points of connection are via (a) the teacher, (b) the rehearsal process, and (c) the vocal pedagogy.

According to Laster (2001) teachers often find themselves assuming the role of the entire production team and the data from my participants support Laster’s claim. Andrea and Faye refer to Mr. Sullivan, for example, as their musical director playing the piano and helping them with their songs. Bridget calls Mr. Sullivan her producer. Mr. Sullivan was Ethan, Faye, and Bridget’s choreographer. Faye and Bridget remember him as their casting director and as their stage manager. Caitlyn and Bridget refer to him as their director. Andrea also calls Mr. Sullivan her technical director. Musical theatre teachers certainly find themselves in multiple roles throughout the production that move beyond the traditional responsibilities of the classroom music teacher.

Grote (1986) indicates that the rehearsal process is where the real learning takes place. Lee (1983), as well, validates the process itself as the mechanism for student
transcendence. The data suggest, through Bridget’s account, that the process makes a big
difference. Bridget explains:

Well musical theatre with Mr. Clark was…for him it was all about the show, and
putting on a good show rather than the experience for the students. One thing I
can say about his shows is that they were of a high quality, they always had very
good sets, but often the students didn’t enjoy the process of rehearsing for the
shows because he was very demanding…So he was kind of a bit of a drill
sergeant, so that’s how he ended up with a good product in the end, but as I said,
the experience was very different. When Mr. Sullivan came along, he’s a far
more fun person. Far less commanding…even though that first year was his first
year (he didn’t have a lot of experience) and the quality of the show may not have
been up there with Mr. Clark’s shows, the experience was far better for us. We
definitely enjoyed it a lot more, and I think got a lot more out of it.

A teacher who focuses on process and not product makes all the difference to the
students. Valuing the product, while at the expense of the process, certainly does have an
adverse affect on the overall enjoyment level of its students.

Lastly, Alt (2004) discusses the poor training students receive in vocal pedagogy
and vocal health throughout their musical theatre experiences. He cites a lack of proper
training in voice technique as the primary factor in musical theatre vocal abuse. Andrea
states that her nerves were entirely caused by a lack of confidence in her singing voice.
Additionally, Faye’s vocal confidence was completely dependant on her technique. For
example, Faye’s voice cracking was a big part of her anxiety toward future musical
theatre opportunities. Proper voice training as part of a regular musical theatre process
would have, perhaps, alleviated some of that anxiety in both Andrea and Faye’s
experiences. Concern, therefore, for the short-term result at the expense of the
development of students’ long-term skills furthers apprehension in students.
Connections to the Musical Theatre Research

There are five points of connection between the data and the musical theatre research. These points of connection concern (a) the course itself, (b) the confidence of students, (c) the notoriety, (d) the family within ensembles, and (e) the discipline in musical theatre.

Sample (1964) applauds musical theatre for giving secondary school students an experience beyond the traditional classroom. Andrea specifically appreciated this opportunity to move beyond the traditional classroom and appreciated that the structure of the course was indeed different. Caitlyn always wanted to be part of something unconventional like the musical theatre course and Ethan even thought he was “cheating school” given the format of the course. The course itself was unlike English and Math courses they had taken. It gave them a model for success during their secondary school careers.

Researchers cite improved confidence as a product of any musical theatre experience (Heinig, 2001; Snider, 1995; Boyes, 2003). Bridget and Caitlyn specifically credit musical theatre as the vehicle for their improved confidence. Both Bridget and Faye also discuss their improved confidence in public speaking as a byproduct of their musical theatre confidence.

Boyes (2003), Watkins (2005), and van Houten (1999) all acknowledge the notoriety students receive after a performance as the key to students feeling good about their experience. This social recognition gave Caitlin a tremendous surge of support and helped Andrea feel as though she made a difference. The notoriety made Darren feel
famous and Ethan feel a sense of support. Faye was also more confident in her performance after hearing positive reinforcement from others.

Boyes (2003) describes the sense of group in musical theatre casts. Watkins (2003) calls the ensemble a “special unity” (p. 115). Timmons (2004) refers to the musical theatre students as a family. It is not surprising then that Andrea felt as though she had never had a better opportunity to bond with her extended family than through the opportunity of musical theatre. She calls her cast her family. Additionally, Ethan thought of the rehearsal experience as having a family feeling. He recognized a closeness, or what Boyes (2003) called a “like minded peer group” (p. 199) when he noticed that everyone in musical theatre had the same mentality; they were similar people, which helped bring them closer together more easily.

Dress rehearsal experiences were consistently tough and aggressive, which aligns to van Houten’s (1999) research. van Houten observed that although students adored their teacher, they were frustrated by their sarcasm and attitude. Student perspectives regarding Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Clark seem to support this assertion. Although students admire Mr. Sullivan dearly they never seemed to appreciate attitudes during dress rehearsals. Bridget’s negative experiences with Mr. Clark were also a result of attitudes and unbalanced discipline. In all six participant cases, however, each returned the next year to the musical theatre stage because of the power of the experience. van Houten (1999) agrees the benefits of the theatrical experience often give way to the deficiencies of the programme or the director itself.
Implications

The implications of this study are drawn from the personal connections, the historical and cultural connections, the performance and production connections, and the musical theatre research and data connections. The implications ask musical theatre educators to consider some ideas regarding musical theatre education. These implications are derived directly from the connections in this study.

One key implication of this study comes from the personal connections presented earlier. The number of years away from the musical theatre programme seems to dictate the intensity of students’ memories. Musical theatre departments are well advised, therefore, to target students who have been away from the programme for five or more years to maximize the level of their contribution toward their Alma Mater.

Five key implications are based in the historical and cultural connections in this study. Firstly, musical theatre teachers are advised to include carefully selected historical subject matter to help diversify students’ experience in an academic realm. The absence of rigorous historical material makes the justification of a university level grade twelve credit suspect. Secondly, including operetta in the catalogue of musical repertoire, in addition to book musicals, is recommended not only because of the suitability of the material, but because of the suitability of the vocal demands for young singers. Thirdly, teachers are warned of recreating the spectacle of rock, concept, or megamusicals in secondary school musical theatre productions. Secondary school productions can never meet the expectations of a professional audience and this investment in the product will always be at the expense of the process. Fourthly, inclusion of some Canadian content in musical theatre courses of study is advised, as it would bring about a cultural
signification within the course. Lastly, researchers and educators must disseminate ideas about musical theatre to the teaching public more readily and frequently in publications like the OMEA Recorder.

Three key implications emerged from the performance and production connections of this study. Firstly, teachers of musical theatre are well advised to split up the non-directorial responsibilities to other staff; this delegation would give the primary musical theatre teacher more time to devote to the students and the process itself. Secondly, musical theatre educators must maintain the overall process as the most important part of the experience in lieu, but not at the expense, of the actual show product. An extremely poor product would also leave a lasting negative and embarrassing impression on its students. Lastly, musical theatre teachers should integrate sound vocal pedagogy and technique classes into the regular musical theatre curriculum.

Nine key implications arise from the actual data and the musical theatre research. First, musical theatre teachers should recognize that the first weeks of their course are the most important as students will be more likely to remain in the course once they have been assimilated. Second, musical theatre teachers should include a rigorous audition process and ensure it is consistent for every cast member; for example, Bridget and Faye became disappointed when actual audition results differed from what they were told by teachers. Third, off-site rehearsals are positive and should be included in a musical theatre course schedule whenever possible. Fourth, nervousness does not seem to have an adverse affect on future enrolment in the course; memories of nerves during auditions, dress rehearsals, and shows do not cause students to stay away from the experience the next year. In fact, it increases their feeling of accomplishment having overcome
something challenging. Fifth, curricular musical theatre as part of the regular school timetable saw no differences from extra-curricular musical theatre in terms of cast preparedness, engagement, and focus. Students were equally as juvenile in a course on musical theatre as compared to an extra-curricular opportunity in musical theatre (van Houten, 1999; Boyes, 2003). Sixth, the capacity of the musical theatre teacher is paramount and novice musical theatre teachers are advised to develop their skills equally in music, drama, dance, and stagecraft to maximize students’ learning experience. Seventh, leads are more likely to participate in non-performance work than chorus members. Targeting leads for this work, therefore, is more advantageous than trying to motivate chorus members to build a set for a show in which they play a small part. Eighth, real theatres help to maximize the student experience. Using Lynwood Theatre, for example, advances the show experience beyond what the school cafeteria would be able to offer. Lastly, teachers are advised to maintain professionalism during dress rehearsals, for although students will likely return to the course the next year, the yelling certainly becomes a stain on an otherwise marvelous experience.

These implications suggest that the core experiences within the musical theatre classroom are working, but that perhaps still more work ought to be done to refine its process because (according to this research) the process is fundamental to the students’ recollection of their experiences. If musical theatre educators and researchers can move forward from this point, educators of musical theatre may continue to strengthen their practice and maximize the experience for their students.

My suggestions for further research in the area of musical theatre include how the alumni experience of men may differ from woman. Ethan, for example, despite being
away from the programme as long as Bridget and Faye, seemed to lack a degree of meta-
cognition. It would be interesting to determine if this difference was related to gender.
Future research should test the possible experiential differences between leads and non-
leads. Additionally, further research is needed to determine the validity of alumni
apprehension when considering future musical theatre opportunities. It is my hope that
this research will allow for more informed curriculum delivery, advocacy, and alumni
relations for future courses in musical theatre.

**Moving Forward**

I am about to begin another year of teaching musical theatre at approximately the
same time I finish this research. The timing of these two events has caused me to think
about how this year will differ from other years. I have often thought, for example, of
what I will say to my students when they walk through the door on the first day. I feel I
owe it to them to share some of the insights I have gained in this research. It would be
empowering for them to know now what my participants have only just learned years
away from secondary school. I wish for them to benefit from what I have learned from
students who were once in their shoes.

I want my students to know how special musical theatre really is. I want them to
know how important these years will become to them as they grow older, to savour every
minute of it so that not a single experience goes unremembered or to waste. I want them
to appreciate every moment so that when they too sit in an audience as alumni they know
without a doubt they did all they could do to make their years in musical theatre as
significant as possible.
In much the same way, this research has given me the confidence to go forward with my ideas about musical theatre. To keep refining the process but to maintain those core ideas that simply make musical theatre work. I am very proud, as a result, to teach musical theatre alongside a dedicated, passionate teaching team and am encouraged to have compelling research supporting our collective process and performance based beliefs. It is exciting to think of where our program will go, and how my upcoming students will be the ones to help us get there.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What prompted you to take the course?

2. Can you describe your feelings during the audition and casting process?

3. Describe a typical drama rehearsal in musical theatre.

4. Describe a typical dance rehearsal.

5. Can you describe a typical chorus rehearsal?

6. What were the Saturday rehearsals like?

7. What was your experience in a non-performance role like costuming, set-construction, programme design, and/or fundraising?

8. Tell me a story about being at Klein Exhibition Grounds.

9. What was moving into the theatre like?

10. Could you tell me about your experience in dress rehearsals?

11. Tell me about performing onstage.

12. Describe what it is like to stand onstage and take a bow on closing night.

13. Talk to me about going out into the lobby after the show.

14. Tell me about a friend you have kept from your years in musical theatre.

15. Could you recall one of your most memorable events in the course?

16. What did you take away from the course?

17. As alumni watching others’ perform in McKinney musicals, what is going through your mind when you sit in the audience?

18. As a graduate of the programme, what advice would you give first year musical theatre students?
Appendix B

Recruitment Phone Script

Hi, it’s William Stokes calling from McKinney Secondary School. I’d like to gage your interest in participating in a research study about your experience in McKinney’s musical theatre program. I’m calling you because I’d like to better understand the experience of students as part of the course, and being a former lead in our shows, your experience would be great.

The study will require one interview of approximately 45-60 minutes in length. I’ve got your email on file from our archive musical theatre records, so do you mind if I send off a Letter of Information?

I look forward to hearing back from you.
Appendix C

Letter of Information

This research is being conducted by William Stokes under the supervision of Dr. Steven Elliott in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario.

The purpose of this research is to understand students’ experience in a secondary school musical theatre course more completely. Additionally, this research is an attempt to uncover how students understand the meaning of their experience over time.

The study will require one interview of approximately 45-60 minutes in length. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study. There are no known or anticipated direct benefits for the participants that may arise from this study. There is no remuneration or compensation allocated for this study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may also completely withdraw from the study at any time, and/or decline to answer any questions. If you withdraw, your data will be destroyed.

Your data will be secured throughout the study. When the research is completed the data will be retained for five years as per the requirements of Queen’s University, after which the paper data will be shredded and electronic data will be deleted.

Your interview will be recorded using computer software and password protected upon completion to protect your privacy. Only the researcher, in consultation with the research supervisor, will have access to the data. Your responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms throughout the entire writing process. In light of the kinds of anecdotal responses that will be elicited, however, it is possible that your identity may still be deduced by readers (especially by other former classmates) even though you will be given a pseudonym and the names of the shows will be changed.

Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the summary of the research findings. If you are interested in these findings, please indicate your interest on the Consent Form and include your email address to receive the summary.

The results of this study will be published in academic journals, a thesis, and may be presented at conferences.

This research has been reviewed and given ethics clearance from the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board. Any questions about study participation may be directed to William Stokes at 905-4**-7*** or (3****@queensu.ca). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-5**-6*** or (C****.G***@queensu.ca).

Thank you. Your interest in participating in this study is greatly appreciated.
Appendix D

Ethics Approval Letter

October 9, 2009

Mr. William Stokes
Master’s Student
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen’s University

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-470-09
Title: “The Experience of Students as Part of a Secondary School Musical Theatre Course”

Dear Mr. Stokes:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled “The Experience of Students as Part of a Secondary School Musical Theatre Course” for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPG) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (details available on webpage [www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/adverse_event_form]). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or an unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that any adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at [http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/adverse_event_form]. These changes must be sent to Linda Frid at the Office of Research Services or FRID@queensu.ca prior to implementation. Ms. Frid will forward your request for protocol changes to the appropriate GREB reviewers and / or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board
Appendix E

Consent Form

Name (please print clearly): ________________________________________________

1. I have read the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called “The experience of students as part of a secondary school musical theatre course.” I understand that this means that I will be asked to participate in one interview of approximately 45-60 minutes in length.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time and/or decline to answer any questions. If I withdraw, my data will be destroyed.

4. I understand there are no known risks associated with this study, and there are no known or anticipated direct benefits for the participants that may arise from this study. I understand there is no remuneration or compensation allocated for this study.

5. I understand that I will be recorded during the interview and that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future. I also understand that in light of the kinds of anecdotal responses that will be elicited, it is possible that my identity may still be deduced by readers even though I will be given a pseudonym and the names of the shows will be changed.

6. I understand that I am entitled to a copy of the summary of the research findings. If interested in these findings, please initial below, and include an email address to receive the summary:

   I would like to receive a copy of the summary of the research findings (initial): ________

   Email address to receive the summary: ________________________________________

7. I understand the results of this study will be published in academic journals, a thesis, and may be presented at conferences.

8. In the event I have any questions about my participation, I may contact William Stokes at 905-4**-7*** or (3****@queensu.ca). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-5**-6*** or (C***.G***@queensu.ca).

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research:

Signature: _______________________________ Date: ______________________________

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to William Stokes. Retain the second copy for your records.
Appendix F

Interview Transcript Sample 1

S Can you tell me about performing onstage?

B I always loved performing onstage. In the beginning I was often nervous, and I’m often more nervous actually when I go up just to sing a solo then I was with musical theatre, because musical theatre, I guess I was just so well rehearsed and so prepared that I didn’t even have to think about what I was doing and I just enjoyed the moment. Any feelings I felt just before the performance were just anxiousness and excitement, and not even nervousness.

S Describe what it’s like to stand onstage and take a bow on closing night.

B Wow, there isn’t quite anything like it (pause). I don’t really know other than it’s one of the best feelings in the world.

S Have there been other experiences that would compare?


S Leave it to performers to think about ceremony that way. Nice. Can you talk to me about going out into the lobby after the show?

B Well that was always lots of fun with everyone coming up to you and saying how great you were. There’s really not much better than hearing people compliment your performance.

S Do you remember something someone said, like a kid, or parent, or someone you didn’t even know compliment you?

B I don’t remember specifically in the lobby after the show but I worked at a couple of part time jobs. I’ve worked at Canadian Tire and Kelsey’s and I remember that once in a while I would get a customer that would say: “Hey, I think I saw you in that show. You were great,” which is kind of cool. It’s like: “Wow, I’m a local celebrity.”

S Can you tell me about a friend you’ve kept from your years in musical theatre?

B I keep in touch with a lot of them actually. Probably my closest friend from there is Laura Dunlop. She’s now teaching. A music teacher. We chat a lot. But I also keep in touch with Ethan and Clara and Helen and Kyle and all of them. Of course I’m in kind of a unique situation where my husband Danny is very close friends with several of their older siblings. So for instance, Danny’s best friend is
Ethan’s older brother. So we’ll always have that kind of connection. And
Danny’s also very close friends with Clara’s older sister.

S Had Danny gone through any of those musical theatre years?
B He did. He was three years ahead of me all with Mr. Clark. He did Divorce Me,
Darling!, Chess, and High Society.

S Could you recall one of your most memorable events from the course?
B Well, musical theatre was where I really found my niche. Before I got into
musical theatre in grade nine…like I told you, I went into a high school where I
knew absolutely no one. And for grade nine and ten I kind of had friends that I
hung out with now and then and had lunch with or what ever it was, but it wasn’t
until grade eleven when I joined musical theatre where I really found my close
knit group of friends. So memories of getting close with them over the
years…and particularly in OAC during Grease we had a whole prank war going
on, which was kind of fun.

S What was that?
B Well, it was kind of guys against girls and it went on throughout the semester and
kind of ended with a big “Gotcha back” kind of thing during the show.

S What was it? Do tell.
B Well, (laughs) okay, a couple of the things leading up to the show: I drove
around this little Buick Century in high school and the guys would sometimes do
things with my car like Saran Wrap it. Actually one time I was rehearsing the
finale scene for Grease so I was the only one there with the younger guys that I
was doing the scene with, and they managed to come in and steal the keys from
my purse and move the car from the front where I parked it, to the back so that I’d
come out and find my car was gone and not know where it is. And then, the guys
actually came out…I have to give them a lot of credit for this one…I started
getting these strange phone calls on my cell phone from people looking to buy my
laptop, and I was like: “I don’t have a laptop. What’s going on here.” And it
turned out that they had made posters and posted them all over the school, and
even in some people’s mailboxes around the neighbourhood advertising this great
deal on a laptop and they had put my phone number on it. So, (laughs) the way
we got them back during the show was a scene in Grease where…it was mainly
Ethan who was kind of the mastermind of it all. So there was a scene in Grease
where he had to read a newspaper and so (I think it was Helen and I) went and
bought one of those calendars, you know, with the guys, you know, half naked
and whatever, in different occupations and we cut and paste them on all the pages
of the newspaper with little speech bubbles. And I remember, for instance, there
was one guy dressed up as a cowboy and we put a little speech bubble saying:
“Hey Ethan, can you help me find my needle in this here haystack?” or something
like that (*laughs*). So he opens the paper and sees this. And I have it on the video
and you can see his face...he opens the paper and he’s just like...and you know
he switches the pages thinking he’ll find a page with nothing on it and he
discovers that it’s on all of the pages. He can’t escape it. And we’re just at the
side laughing our asses off.

S: That’s a fantastic story. Outside of the experiences, there are a lot of skills you
take away from the course. You mentioned graphic art. Are there any skills that
came out of musical theatre for you?

B: Well actually, when I was in university for graphic design we had to do a lot of
presentations in front of the class, so obviously that was a great skill that I
acquired in musical theatre. Just having the comfort to go up and speak in front
of people. We did lots of critiquing and that sort of thing, which is something I
had gotten used to throughout that process, so it certainly made it a lot easier for
me. Even now as a designer I have to go to clients sometimes and present a work
and kind of back up what I did and that kind of thing, so it definitely gave me the
confidence to be able to do that.

S: Have you seen a McKinney show since graduating?

B: Every one.

S: Every one?

B: I go every year.

S: As an alumni watching others perform in McKinney musicals, what’s going
through your mind when you sit in the audience?

B: (*sighs*) Oh, I miss it. I’ve thought often over the years about getting involved in
some kind of community theatre. But mainly, yeah, I miss it a lot, and those kids
look like they’re having a great time, and I can’t wait to have my own one day go
through something like that, and kind of get involved again.

S: As a graduate of the programme, what advice would you give first year musical
theatre students?

B: Oh my goodness. I would tell them that even though it’s a fun course it’s still one
to be taken seriously because it always disappointed me when students came in
and clearly didn’t take it seriously and they didn’t show up to rehearsals. They
thought it was going to be a bird course and they only did the bare minimum
because it wasn’t the same you know. I think that it’s really one of these courses
that you really have to get fully involved in, and you really commit to in order to
get anything out of. So I would say definitely, take it seriously and get involved
as much as possible.
Appendix G

Interview Transcript Sample 2

S Can you tell me about your experiences in dress rehearsals?

F Dress rehearsals were stressful. I think every year somebody had a major freak out about something, and I think for City of Angels our dress rehearsal sucked. It was bad.

S Why?

F Either City of Angels or How To Succeed. I can’t remember. No, it was How To Succeed. Nobody was at the stage on time. I didn’t know to call people because I was at the side of the stage where you had the microphone to you know: “All office staff to the stage” or what ever. So Mr. Sullivan was very…nobody was at the stage. We were waiting, there were pauses, people were out of tune. This might have happened with City of Angels too, it probably did because again everybody’s learning the stage, and learning: “Don’t be here at this time, but you have to be here for this point…you can’t be late.” Timing…everything. So definitely a little nerve wracking.

S So what happened?

F Opening night, the night after what ever show it was that all this bad stuff happened. It was fine. Everything was fine. I think we got an ear full and we knew what to do, and what not to do. People were at the stage and I knew when to call people and I knew the timing. It was definitely an educational experience. But a little jittery on opening night.

S Tell me about performing onstage.

F To me, it’s such an indescribable feeling, being onstage, and being in character, but also still being yourself. You have the nerves. I had the nerves as Faye but the accent and the mannerisms of Oolie. I was singing and I was really sick for I think Friday. I got really sick so opening night I was pretty sick and so I was terrified about my voice cracking. But then you get onstage and you kind of fall into your character because you’ve been this character for so long…so long like four months. And it just happened, like everything…I’d rehearsed I knew what I was doing and it was just…it felt so natural for me. I loved it. I just love that feeling. Singing, and you know. As egotistical as it is when the audience applauds for you, and I had friends in the audience, so that was such a cool feeling because people had come to see me, and all the other friends that they had in the show. It’s just…I don’t know…I miss it a lot actually to be honest. But it’s very cool and it’s very interesting to act. I didn’t kiss anybody, but that’s a weird thing to experience too. To have this romantic relationship with this friend of mine which was totally platonic, just totally, totally, but we had to have a romantic
thing going on. So that was interesting too, but I guess that was more rehearsal, but once it came to the play it was fine.

S  Tell me what it’s like to stand onstage and take a bow on closing night.

F  Just breathtaking. I think about it sometimes and it almost makes me cry. It just makes you feel so good in the sense that everything that you’ve worked so hard for has paid off. And even just to feel the support of people who have come to see you, or that have never seen you before and really enjoyed your performance. I think that was really cool too. To be…you know, somebody came to the theatre and enjoyed it so much. It’s a cool feeling.

S  You mentioned earlier that you missed it. Have you had another opportunity to be onstage since high school?

F  No. No I haven’t, well, other than karaoke. My grandpas birthday was a couple of years ago…they’re a very musical family and I sang for them…he had his eightieth birthday and they had a big party. It was really interesting because I’m really nervous about singing in public now because I haven’t for so long. I mean, I sing to myself in the car everyday. There’s always music in my life. I’m always singing, humming, or whistling but I’ve never had the guts to go back and try out for another musical. I almost did this year with Montgomery Theatre Company, and then…well, there was a little miscommunication because I checked too late for the auditions. They were over by the time I checked, but I had checked two weeks before or something. They hadn’t even announced the musical. I missed the window. But I don’t know if I had the…given the opportunity, I don’t know if I actually would have gone.

S  Why not?

F  I guess I’ve lost confidence in my voice because I…I mean…it’s kind of…it’s one of those things I hold so near and dear to me that if I were to, let’s just say I were to go and…but if they were to laugh at me, I would feel like…it’s such a big part of me I would feel like it would, kind of crush that. I know, it’s very a psychological thing. And I mean, I wanted to get back into lessons with an old teacher of mine, an old voice coach of mine, but she was really busy and never got back to me and I never tried again. These experiences were really important to me…very important to me. It’s weird that I haven’t gotten into it anymore, but I just…I had a really bad performance one time in first year. It was this dumb thing in our rez, and it was a music open-mic kind of thing, and I was so nervous, and my voice cracked. At the end of the day it’s really not that big a deal, it’s just a voice crack, every vocal performer has a voice crack every now and then, but after that I didn’t sing in public for a good two years. It was weird.

S  Talk to me about going out into the lobby after the show.
It’s very nerve-wracking because you’re excited to see everybody, but you’re also kind of nervous to hear feedback. Well, I was. I knew my parents would be so ecstatic so that was nice, and my friends were really great about it. So once actually...being out there it was so powerful. It was like at the end of the play and hearing applause. It was the same kind of feeling all over again. It was really cool though. Even a couple of years later my Mom would run into people and she’d get talking and they would remember that I was in that show. You know: “She did such a great job.” That’s not really lobby related. I still do to an extent, but at that time I took so much pride in my performance as a whole, not just singing but as acting, nailing the part and making it believable, and so when people told me that I did what I was intending to do it was an incredible feeling. Just totally indescribable. Amazing.

Can you tell me about a friend you’ve kept from your years in musical theatre?

Yeah. I’ve kept a couple. Mark Allison.

Was he the lead alongside you?

No.

Who did?

Keith Eastman. I’m still friends with him actually. He went to Western and we hung out a bunch of times at school, so that was fun. He’s a good guy. Katie Crawford, Ethan’s sister, me and her are still friends. And then very on and off with a bunch of people, but it’s mostly Facebook, not...I don’t hang out with them. But those are probably the main ones that I still keep in close contact with.