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Editors

Margaret Macintyre Latta  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, U.S.A.

Christine Marmé Thompson  
Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A.

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## **Drama-based Instruction and Educational Research: Activating Praxis in an Interdisciplinary Partnership**

Stephanie W. Cawthon  
The University of Texas at Austin, U.S.A.

Kathryn M. Dawson  
The University of Texas at Austin, U.S.A.

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### **Abstract**

*Drama for Schools (DFS)* is a professional development program in drama-based instruction shaped by theories of critical pedagogy and constructivism. In 2007, the Director of *DFS* invited an educational psychology faculty member to develop a research and evaluation component for the program. This article discusses and troubles this interdisciplinary partnership through the lens of praxis, the continual cycle of thought, action, reflection and response. In this article, we touch upon implications of activated praxis such as (a) how *DFS* has evolved in its identity as a research-based program model; (b) how outcome measurement was embedded into program implementation; (c) the experience of disseminating findings in both arts-based and educational research spaces; and (d) how long-range planning was guided both by research and program priorities. We conclude with identification of how this process has resulted in praxis for participants across all levels of the partnership.

*September, 2007*

*Dear Diary,*

*After weeks of contacting education professors to discuss our new arts integration partnership in southeast Texas, I finally got someone to answer my email. At last we can have an educational research perspective on this project. Evaluating teacher satisfaction isn't enough anymore; we need to document and understand what is happening during our partnerships and try to better explain our outcomes. Stephanie is a new professor and actually has time for a new project. She has an arts background but isn't currently researching the arts. She asked great questions. I feel like I'm finally having productive discussions about assessment, pedagogy and practice. Our meeting was scheduled for 30 minutes but we talked for two hours. I've got to check into her SSPS license request; I'm sure my department won't have a clue...*

*--Katie*

*September, 2007*

*Dear Diary,*

*What a surprise today has been! In all my time preparing for this role in the College of Education, I never expected to come back to the world of theatre again. A bit of a blast from the past I will say – 15 years ago I lived and breathed life connected to the stage, whereas today my identity is almost entirely in the world of educational research. Meeting Katie was such an exceptional experience, one of invitation, of exploring the HOW of understanding what makes drama-based instruction “work.” I am intrigued, to say the least, to see how the ideas we hold in education about how kids learn are articulated within an arts-based approach to teaching and learning. Methodologically this is daunting, but exciting! I can't wait to see what happens next!*

*---Stephanie*

These imagined “diary excerpts” represent the entry point for the article’s authors, Katie Dawson and Stephanie Cawthon, who came together from two different sides of campus, in the context of a larger merging of two worlds: arts integration and educational research. From the outset of this partnership the authors have been challenged to think critically about the theoretical intersections of arts and education, activated through the productive tensions between pedagogy and practice, and research and evaluation. We look at our work through the lens of praxis, an ongoing cycle of reflection and action that is central to the pedagogical goals of the program model and to our personal approach to practice and research. This article explores a multi-faceted understanding and manifestation of partnership both in the program model itself as well as the relationship between all

participants. Through each form of partnership, we attempt to activate praxis for both parties, identifying both the strengths and the challenges inherent in this effort. A summary of our study model is provided in Figure 1 and serves as a guide to the framework and content of this article.

In this article we discuss how the merging of arts integration practice and educational research resulted in praxis across many levels: (a) how *Drama For Schools* has evolved in its identity as a research-based program model, (b) how outcome measurement was embedded into program implementation, (c) the experience of disseminating findings in both arts-based and educational research spaces, and (d) how long-range planning was guided both by research and program priorities.

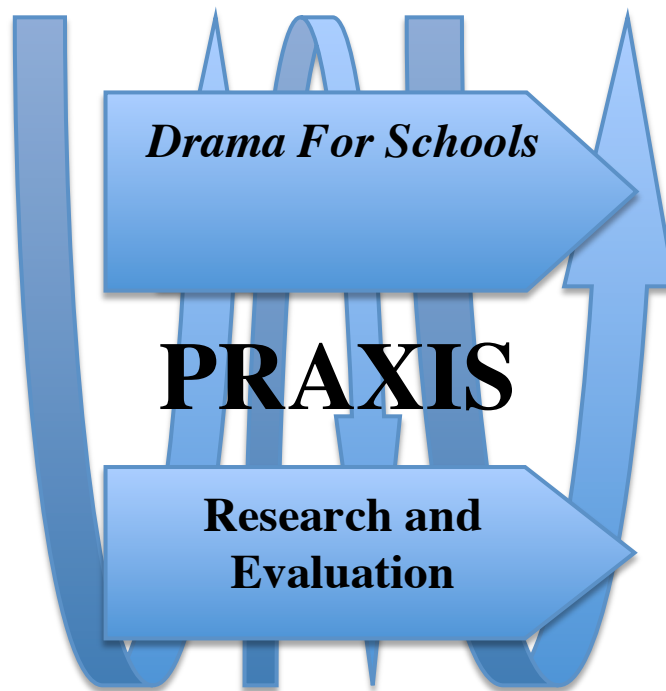


Figure 1. Praxis in the *Drama for Schools* Partnership.

### What is Drama for Schools?

*Drama for Schools* (DFS) is, at its center, a professional development program that focuses on arts integration for K-12 teachers (Dawson, 2006). The primary goal of arts integration programs is to bring the content of the arts, such as music, drama, or visual art, into non-arts curricula (Brown, 2007; Carey, Sikes, Foy, & Carpenter, 1995; Donmoyer, 1995; Roehler, Fear, & Hermann, 1998). More specifically, DFS trains participants in *drama-based instruction*, an umbrella term for applied theatre techniques that includes the use of interactive games, improvisation, and role-play to critically engage both teachers and students. The pedagogical underpinnings of drama-based instruction primarily come from the revolutionary work of Dorothy Heathcote (1984) and her contemporaries (e.g., Grady, 2000; Miller & Saxton, 2004; O'Neil, 1995). This approach also draws on the liberatory educational practices of Paulo Freire (1970, 1993) and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* arsenal (1992). In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) outlines a radical adjustment in the relationship of power and knowledge between teacher and student in the classroom. He argues against the traditional "banking" concept of education practiced in schools calling instead for a free exchange of ideas where the role of teacher and student are interchangeable. In this collaborative, dialogic style of education, teachers and students "become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p. 80). This perspective contributes to an authentic learning experience for students, with activities that are rooted in a student's cultural and personal context (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

In DFS, teachers learn not just one strategy for a specific lesson plan, but a range of tools that can be adapted to a variety of content areas and contexts. A DFS teacher may use only one strategy in a given lesson, meant to set the stage for the class topic, or may weave multiple strategies together in a complex series of drama-based instructional approaches using a dramatic frame to drive the student constructed inquiry. Consider the following example: Suppose a science teacher participating in the program wants to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of the scientific method, content from the students' previous night's reading. The teacher partners with a DFS graduate student drama specialist to plan a lesson using drama-based instructional strategies: *artifacts* (i.e., simple props used to generate dialogue and inquiry around a theme, story, or content area) and Heathcote's *mantle of the expert* role-playing techniques. Mantle of the expert shifts the experience of the learner in that invites them to take on the role of individuals with knowledge about the situation to be solved. By defining a new role, the "mantle" is given to students in a way that sets their experience in the lesson as different than their usual experience as a learner who does not know the material at hand. In their collaboration, the science teacher and drama specialist might co-create a lesson plan where students activate prior knowledge by becoming "junior detectives," individuals who are highly skilled in the use of the scientific method (i.e., the experts). The dramatic context they create asks students to solve a

problem, the mysterious disappearance of a teenage girl, framed by using the *artifacts* from her locker. They decide to put students in small “detective teams” and ask them to use the scientific method to explore the evidence provided using the *mantle of the expert* role as detectives with training in the field. For the closing activity, they choose to use *image work*, inviting the detectives to infer an ending to their investigation through a sequence of three still images. Through the use of dramatic frame, role-play, and multiple-representations of knowledge, students engage in a rich, drama-based inquiry that brings the scientific method to life.

In DFS trainings, individual instructional strategies are contextualized within the ideas that underpin the program. For example, during the initial DFS training day, teachers participate in the “Great Game of Power,” an Augusto Boal strategy (1992) that is used to explore elements of critical pedagogy. Teachers are encouraged to think about who has agency within their professional context, whose knowledge is valued, and where there are places of resistance to effective change. The group then unpacks the strategy in the frame of how resistance to forms of oppression in education might happen, and as often as not, why they believe that it cannot occur in their current context. In this way, the DFS program seeks provide a *starting point* for systemic change by providing teachers a place of dialog and exploration, a challenge given the hierarchically rigid structure of education in Texas.

As teachers progress through the program, they are encouraged to think more deeply about the agency within their students and how to increase their contribution to the learning outcomes in the classroom. The DFS approach to classroom instruction suggests that teachers need to understand and access a diverse range of cultural knowledge. They must feel comfortable considering alternative forms of knowledge and meaning-making produced by marginalized groups. In doing so, they must acknowledge the diverse identity markers (race, class, orientation, gender, ability) that shape the perspectives and experiences of their students. Over time, students take on new knowledge and understanding through the scaffolded learning process of drama-based activities, trying on new language (first modelled by the instructor) both in verbal and written form (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). In some cases, this shift in roles and knowledge-making can mark students; drama-based work can illuminate where socially constructed markings exist and create space for new marks of self-efficacy to emerge (Thompson, 2003). These marks have the potential to carry outside the life of the classroom and into a community event or other meaningful venue for the students. It is powerful to consider, then, how the opportunity for students to become the co-creator of information, even if not on always on equal standing, has the potential to shift the learning culture of a classroom.

It is important to note, however, that the DFS program often falls short of the larger goals of critical pedagogy. The analysis of the conflicting forces that shape education, the call to challenge normative assumptions and illuminate systems of power, and the greater goal of identifying the ideologies and assumptions in our historical contexts are encouraged but not solely privileged in the program model. At times, these goals are subverted by the very problematic systems it is trying to change. In particular, teachers' voices are often not represented when decisions are made about what is valued in their practice. For example, a teacher's desires to identify and challenge ideologies about their classrooms often diminish during the extended high-stakes standardized assessment period that occurs each spring. This assessment context focuses on uniform curricular content that presumes a very fact-based form of achievement, one that is often at odds with the multiple perspectives encouraged by critical pedagogy. Teachers say that they feel they cannot afford the time to engage their students in extended inquiry, often replacing the DFS approach with the kinds of traditional rote memorization tasks that match the structure of the standardized assessments. Instead of resulting in a change in the system, *DFS* can become subsumed into the system's didactic reform initiatives.

Because of the limited extent to which DFS extends the underpinnings of critical pedagogy into action beyond individual teaching moments, *constructivism* is also a crucial part of the articulated DFS theoretical framework. Constructivism is based on the idea that cognitive development and knowledge acquisition is built through interactions between individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). What makes this approach distinct from its contemporaries is the shift away from perception towards a process rooted in shared language and communication systems. We view constructivism and critical pedagogy as complementary frameworks, though with different articulated goals. Constructivism, like critical pedagogy, suggests that we must invent and reinvent our learning, discovering meaning through a socially constructed environment. Ideally, investigations and projects should come from students' lived experiences and actively constructed through opportunities for dialog. Furthermore, the problem solving process is seen as a way to create a frame for inquiry and growth in understanding (Marlowe & Page, 2005). The language of constructivism is woven throughout the DFS program, represented in many of the drama-based instructional strategies, the format of our trainings, and in teachers' own reflection on priorities in their practice.

### **Places of Praxis with Research and Evaluation**

Given the characteristics and intentionalities of the DFS program, what kinds of research and evaluation approaches support and expand on program goals? Arts integration outreach programs, particularly those in public schools, work within a context where student academic outcomes are highly emphasized (Donahue & Stuart, 2007, Van Eman, Thorman,

Montgomery & Otto, 2009). In part because resources are finite, both in terms of time and money, and in part because “objective” student outcomes matter a great deal in schools, evaluating the impact of work with teachers and students now has a significant role in the life of arts integration programs (Beyer, 2002; Gordon, 2005; Popham, 1974). Yet a traditional program evaluation model is, at times, at odds with the constructivist or critical theory epistemological nature of arts-based education programs (see Guba, 1990; for an arts-based evaluation methodology example, see Simons & McCormack, 2007). Program evaluation designs depend greatly on (a) clear identification of programmatic goals and (b) rubrics to quantifiably assess whether the goals have been met (Christie, 2003; Posavac & Carey, 2003). In other words, what you choose to measure and how you measure it matter when one tries to describe the effects of a school program. In contrast with the objective, summative emphasis of many traditional evaluation models, arts-based forms of research emphasize *process* as a way of knowing and the role of aesthetics in meaning making. This shift forces researchers to examine their own subjectivity and bias in the construction and sharing of their findings (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008). Additionally, there is a desire for stakeholders to move from the “researched” to “co-researchers” as they help to develop strategies to maintain the sustainability of the program (Cawthon, Dawson, Judd-Glossy, & Ihorn, under review; Nastasi & Hitchcock, 2009).

In *Drama for Schools*, the ontological underpinnings of the program both inform and complicate its partnership with research and evaluation. DFS had been working in local communities for nearly 10 years before a formal, external research component became a part of its structure. The program’s desire to understand its role in the lives of teachers and students was a pivotal moment in the life of DFS. Would the epistemological needs of empirical research interrupt the critical pedagogical and constructivist framework? Could the episteme continue to be a process in a constant act of becoming (Eisner, 2009; Freire, 1970)? Where did places of praxis arise as a result of this partnership? This discussion touches upon praxis found in (a) the evolution of DFS identity as a research-based program model, (b) embedding measurement into program implementation, (c) the challenges and opportunities of results dissemination, and (d) plans for sustainability guided both by research and program priorities.

### ***Program Identity as Praxis***

DFS has evolved in a number of significant ways as a result of its addition of an educational research perspective. The first change is that of DFS as a *research-based* professional development model, both in name and in practice. DFS is housed at a “research one” institution, where a significant component of faculty responsibilities are connected to research productivity. As a result of the added research component in the program, DFS can, with greater confidence and specificity, speak to its effects on teachers

and classroom learning environments. Because of this context, despite its critical pedagogical and constructivist ontology, DFS must strive to gather empirical proof through traditional, hierarchical research methods. Each identified outcome is tied to student learning via logic models that draw from *both* the arts integration and educational psychology perspectives. For example, DFS now measures changes in teacher efficacy, student engagement, and authentic learning, adding to the lenses possible in which the program situates itself.

Moving from logic models to program logistics, a second identity change was found in the broadened set of goals to be met in DFS program implementation. In order to embed measurement and data collection into DFS, these components needed to be an accessible and (relatively) seamless part of how teachers experience the program. From a logistical perspective, the data collection was, at times, an additional step in what was already a multi-step professional development sequence. Each data collection effort offered an opportunity for the team to include the graduate students and district participants in a clearly defined conversation about program intentions. *Why are we asking these questions? What do we hope to learn from this process?* Planning for each program component thus required communication and cooperation between the drama specialists, participating teachers, and the evaluation team members. This necessitated weekly meetings for The University of Texas at Austin team members and training time conversations for the larger participant group -- a large time overhead-- but useful in generating further dialogue about the shape of the program model with the new evaluation tools. In essence, the partnership widened the “we” of the identities of those invested in the program, creating a larger network of perspectives to share the responsibility of meeting the broadened set of program goals.

At the beginning of the partnership, stakeholders saw the role of the researcher in different ways, depending on their need for data about the outcomes of the program (Campbell & Mark, 2006). School district administration typically saw the researcher’s role as summative, asking for evidence of successful academic outcomes in a similar vein as they use standardized assessments in school reform. To further strengthen this perspective, sometimes there would be an offer by the administrators to use the district’s large-scale assessment data to draw conclusions about the effects of the program (information not gathered by DFS). Teachers also saw the researcher as an external role, perhaps due to the very limited contact they had with her during trainings and in-classroom modeling (there were many time constraints and conflicting schedules that limited this possibility).

Yet DFS desired to give school district clients and community members information about *teacher experiences* of drama-based instruction. This focus respected the learning curve of



teachers who were largely new to the drama-based instructional approach. As a result, the evaluator role changed to focus more on the *process* behind the scenes and within the program. With this shift in research content and goals came a change in the role of the researcher on the project. Behind the scenes, especially with the program staff, the researcher plays a much more integral role. The researcher often participates in the initial needs assessment with the district, looking for ways in which the measurement could help to serve the needs of the program and the partnerships. She attends planning meetings on a regular basis, particularly when program goals for a new site are being developed. These meetings are an opportunity to create, shape, revise, and tailor research tools to the characteristics and needs of the specific site, but also to strengthen the intersection between research and program implementation.

### ***Measurement as Praxis***

The DFS measures reflected the notion of praxis and cycles of early reflection leading to subsequent inquiry. Program implementation was carefully documented, with an eye for how program goals adapted to the real-time context of the school or district (Nastasi & Hancock, 2009). Tools were designed to measure both the short term (e.g., is our approach meeting teachers' needs?) and long-term (e.g., how is it changing how teachers teach?) outcomes of DFS. We found that program elements planned at the outset sometimes shifted due to the feedback gained through the formative evaluation data collection. For example, in the following email exchange between the DFS Faculty Advisors (Stephanie and Katie) and the graduate student drama specialists (Lauren and Sally) as part of the faculty/graduate student partnership, we see a dialog about how research tools can possibly be responsive to the needs and priorities of the teachers as well as sharpen the kinds of questions being asked about the impact of the program:

From: [stephanie.cawthon@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:stephanie.cawthon@mail.utexas.edu)  
Subject: Lesson Plan/Unit/Skill pre and post evaluation  
Date: Tue, 25 Sep 2007 13:34:19 -0500  
To: [kathryndawson@austin.rr.com](mailto:kathryndawson@austin.rr.com)

Hi!

I have been working with some ideas for how to have teachers quickly evaluate their lessons both before the addition of a drama component and afterwards. The hope is that the tool can be a) flexible enough to be used for things with a variety in scope and b) give us some measure of meaningful change if it is there (at least in the teacher's perceptions of change).

Are there any questions on here that you think will not work? We can think of the fall as a time to refine the instrument, but it would be good to have something in place for the training.

See attached!

Thx.

Stephanie

---

From: [sallyvgl@hotmail.com](mailto:sallyvgl@hotmail.com)

To: [stephanie.cawthon@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:stephanie.cawthon@mail.utexas.edu); [kathryndawson@austin.rr.com](mailto:kathryndawson@austin.rr.com)

CC: [laurenbkane@hotmail.com](mailto:laurenbkane@hotmail.com)

Subject: RE: Lesson Plan/Unit/Skill pre and post evaluation

Date: Tue, 25 Sep 2007 16:21:07 -0500

Stephanie and all,

I think these tools are really interesting. Could there be space at the bottom to comment on any of the circled items if teachers want to? To qualify their choices? Would that complicate things?

Best!

Sally Vander Gheynst

On Sep 25, 2007, at 4:42 PM, Lauren Kane wrote:

Stephanie and all!

I think these tools are a great starting place. I have a question that may be ridiculous. The first time a teacher fills this out the pre-survey will give us some great information, but, what happens when they fill it out for lesson 5? The pre-survey may not reflect their original teaching practice because they are (hopefully) immersed in *DFS*. Did that make any sense?

Lauren

*Lauren Kane*

*MFA Candidate Drama and Theatre for Youth*

*The University of Texas at Austin*

CC: [sallyvg1@hotmail.com](mailto:sallyvg1@hotmail.com); [kathryndawson@austin.rr.com](mailto:kathryndawson@austin.rr.com)  
From: [stephanie.cawthon@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:stephanie.cawthon@mail.utexas.edu)  
Subject: Re: Lesson Plan/Unit/Skill pre and post evaluation  
Date: Wed, 26 Sep 2007 10:14:21 -0500  
To: [laurenbkane@hotmail.com](mailto:laurenbkane@hotmail.com)

Lauren,

Good insight. I think that's a reasonable research question: Does the teacher's teaching practice change over the course of the lesson planning? I doubt that one semester's worth of training will change teaching practice, particularly on content area/lesson plans that have not yet been tried out, but it would be good to see if there is any change in the PREs across lessons as well as between the PRE and POST for each individual lesson.

Thoughts?

S~

To all:

I think this is especially tough with those returning teachers who have really started to adopt the foundational philosophies behind this kind of practice. But I think it's ok-- we can't measure change in practice for every PD experience they've had-- just THIS application of drama, just THESE trainings. And maybe we continue to encourage those returning teachers to stretch themselves in learning so that we get more training-specific results.

Other thoughts?

Best!

Sally Vander Gheynst

Dialogs such as this one were an increasingly commonplace event in the planning and implementation of DFS. Looking at research tools critically, particularly at the level of specificity required to answer manageable questions about what is happening, is an integral part of the DFS program. All stakeholders were encouraged to comment on and shape the research tools through an ongoing process of practice and reflection; the teacher

participants also offered specific feedback on measures, often resulting in removal of certain questions and revisions of others.

The context of DFS shaped choices about what to measure in research and evaluation of the program. We spent more time identifying “active” constructs (e.g., whether DFS strategies led to authentic instruction, a documented facilitator of learning) than establishing criteria for success (e.g., students of DFS teachers will have higher test scores than students of non-DFS teachers). This was partially due to the need to clearly understand what learning processes were activated in the DFS professional development model, as well as the voluntary aspect of program participation. In fact, the end-of-the-year reports for each district became a formative space for us to evaluate what we had done and how the program and district conceptualized future work together. But beyond these realities, we wrestled with a central question: *Is summative evaluation possible with a professional development program rooted in critical pedagogy?* DFS as a program is reflective and reflexive in a nature; we choose to situate our work and process in Freire’s (1993) constant “state of becoming” with a focus on praxis as the major element of critical pedagogy. As a result, we may always be looking beyond a fixed end point that is often assumed in summative evaluation. In praxis, action and reflection occur simultaneously (Freire, 1993) and for our work to be evaluated through summative measures, we may need to assume a pause or even an end point that is not possible when the goal is praxis. We continue to trouble this question throughout the development of evaluation plans and in the dissemination of research describing program activities.

However, there is still a question of whether any sort of traditional data collection that includes categories and questions largely determined outside of the participants completing the forms is truly critical pedagogy. These measures are bounded by sets of assumptions, defined by the program staff, which may not match the experiences of teachers in the program. For example, one of the DFS research frameworks focuses on teacher self-efficacy. In this context, self-efficacy is the teacher’s belief in their own capacity to facilitate learning with their students. We chose this construct based on the research literature that indicates the importance of self-efficacy, particularly when adult learners take on new and challenging tasks in their professional life. We measure what happens using a quantitative instrument that has been normed on populations of educators over the years. Yet the decision to measure self-efficacy was not arrived at jointly by the teachers, students, or other stakeholders. We have our own limitations in knowledge and understanding of where teachers experience their own praxis, and this bias steers the measurement and evaluation process. Even beyond the views of the persons developing and implementing the research process, the authors acknowledge these contradictions and share

in the concern whether traditional methods of educational measurement can truly represent a critical pedagogical framework.

### ***Dissemination as Praxis***

A third area of praxis within *DFS* was rooted in the spaces in which the program disseminates its work. As a drama-based instructional program based in a College of Fine Arts, *DFS* is aligned with other arts outreach programs such as those from the Kennedy Center for the Arts or programs that focus on teaching artists and their work in school districts. In an arts-centered space, the addition of a research component shifted the conversation about *DFS* from a descriptive model of how the arts are taught in schools to an evaluative model of impact on students, teachers, and classrooms. For example, in a recent publication in *Applied Theatre: Research in Drama and Education*, the authors situated *DFS* within the frame of the learning culture in a classroom. This article investigated how *DFS* facilitated change in (a) teacher identity, (b) pedagogy, and (c) teacher perceptions of their students. Data sources in this study included monthly written reflections and focus groups by *DFS* participants. In our analysis of their responses, we found that teachers did not appear to change their views or beliefs substantively over the course of the year. However, instructional strategies did shift in distinct ways, often reflecting the constructivist nature of the drama-based strategies. Furthermore, we found that teachers reported that *DFS* strategies facilitated risk-taking by all members of the classroom. As a result, the roles of *teacher* and *learner* in the classroom became more fluid during drama-based instruction. To our audiences in the arts, our goal was to illustrate how teachers experienced and drew upon the drama-based instructional strategies in their practice.

Presentations in an educational research space took on a different feel and purpose for the *DFS* team. The use of critical pedagogy and constructivist approaches to arts-based learning is a fluid space, one that can be challenging to “pin down” into an observable, measurable form privileged in the educational research field. This challenge was particularly acute when looking for quantitative measures of teacher change as part of the *DFS* experience. When we have disseminated findings in an educational research space, we have, thus far, been most connected to dialog with other arts-based researchers who are also working across arts and education contexts (Dawson, Cawthon, & Baker, 2011). For example, one publication (Cawthon, Dawson & Ihorn, 2011) used mixed methods to investigate changes in *student engagement*. Analysis of the teachers’ written responses revealed that teachers were better able to articulate examples of student engagement for *DFS* revised lessons than in their traditional practice. When responding to the question about student engagement for their original lessons, teachers often gave vague responses

about difficult to observe behaviors such as, “I know students are engaged if they are paying attention” or “I know students are engaged if they are listening.” More precise initial responses often involved a final product that the student would complete (e.g., homework, classwork, notes), or verbal interaction with the teacher (e.g., answering or asking questions). In contrast, teacher responses to this for DFS revised lessons were generally longer and include a wider variety of specific, observable behavioral indicators from their students. However, these interpretations reflected the limited scope of both the DFS program and its staff. To truly equate this shift in teachers through the lens of critical pedagogy, examples would need to reflect teachers’ awareness of cultural context in their engagement with the drama-based instructional strategies. The responses were not explicitly political in nature nor did they suggest a challenge to normative structures and understandings. However, teachers’ beginning awareness of students as more complex individuals, capable of independent thinking based, partly, on their lived experiences was evident. This, we might argue, is the very beginning of the revolution—a start to what is hopefully a much larger future change.

As the research component of DFS has grown, so have the opportunities for interdisciplinary dissemination. Within the 2009-2010 school year, stakeholders from across the program also participated in presenting findings about the work in public forums: TETA (Texas Educational Theatre Association), AATE (American Alliance of Theatre and Education), SCEA (Southeast Center for Education and the Arts), AERA (American Educational Research Association), and District board meetings. This multiplicity of perspectives reflects the critical pedagogical and constructivist framework of the program design and research approach. For example at the TETA conference, graduate students, the program director, and participating teachers modeled drama-based instruction strategies and discussed ways to create cross-curricular trainings. At the SCEA Forum, the UT DFS leadership team facilitated two keynote presentations on critical pedagogy and the adult learning literature in arts-based professional development while two graduate students facilitated a featured session on the DFS program model interrogating the benefit and challenges of the cognitive apprenticeship model (Dawson, Lee, & Cawthon, 2009a & b).

One of the goals of DFS is to provide an open space for dialog about the relative strengths and weaknesses about the program, with a focus on process and places where there is room for improvement. Teacher feedback about the program, albeit framed by questions devised by the DFS staff, was shared with all program stakeholders and the district school board. Each stakeholder was asked: *What is the Drama for Schools program? What is drama-based work? How does it engage you and your students?* The filmed answers were distilled

into a representational edit and shared with the VISD school board and stakeholders as part of presentation in May of 2010. A brief transcript excerpt from this video is below:

*District Learning Facilitator: Drama for Schools is taking the content areas of math, science, social studies, and language arts and taking activities and incorporating them into the classroom where kids are getting away from like doing worksheets and lectures that a lot of teachers do and really getting the kids engaged in learning.*

*English Teacher: As a teacher Drama for Schools has helped me become more creative*

*Resource Math Teacher: It's about how to present concepts and ideas in different ways and trying something new.*

*Social Studies Teacher: I think I'm having more fun in class than I have had in the past, I think the students are having more fun.*

*Math Teacher: We do have behavior problems in our classes. And really—it's helped me because it's taken away a lot of these behaviors and actually made communicating easier. Students want to learn.*

Overall, program participants were enthusiastic about the opportunities that had to “learn new strategies” and “engage their students.” In other words, the program’s intentional goals were often the areas where teachers felt there was the greatest support. However, the expectation of a uniformly positive experience was not the reality faced by teachers in DFS. Like all professional development programs, DFS is situated within the political context of the teacher’s school building, district administration, and state educational systems. Even though one of the goals of DFS is to help enact systemic change, teachers often felt as if the context around them was insufficient to do so even at the classroom level. In their rating of program goals, some of the lowest scores were assigned to questions that characterized levels of district support. This speaks towards the often unspoken difficulty of moving away from normative educational practices in a system that doesn’t effectively support change or innovation. Furthermore, while teachers do participate in the process of dissemination, it is in a defined role and does not include extending findings beyond their accuracy in representing their individual points of view. If DFS released control of the data, for example, giving them the interview transcripts for synthesis, analysis, and interpretation, there might be different conclusions drawn. Teachers may also select different “places” within education in which to make an impact. DFS does not ask

teachers to break their bonds and own the information they have about the experiences. It is because of this that we ask ourselves: Are we selling our participants short?

### ***Sustainability as Praxis***

The final representation of praxis in the DFS program that we discuss in this article is the grant development process and its relationship to long-term program planning between all participants. The place of praxis here was in how we created a vision for the future of DFS by drawing on the strengths and attributes of the multiple members in the partnership. The shift towards a research-based model of professional development was accompanied by a desire to build infrastructure to continue the program, including its research, on a larger scale. Infrastructure in this case includes an expanded research component to focus not just on teachers' experiences with drama-based instruction, but also on student and family outcomes. This kind of data collection requires substantial funding beyond what district participants can support in their purchase of professional development sessions. The motivation behind grant preparation was thus to fund components that would lead to the long-term sustainability of the DFS program and more substantive, contextualized research activities.

What soon became clear, however, was the utility of grant application process in clarifying the goals of DFS and acting as a catalyst for articulating the larger goals of the program. In a sense, the times of grant preparation became times when the process of praxis would move DFS forward in its identity, activities, and vision. The research perspective became embedded not just in what districts wanted to know about program impact but also on how the program viewed its own purpose and significance. For example, the grant applications requests for proposals encouraged articulation of the ways that the funding would build upon current program components. The DFS program team responded to these calls with long-term vision planning, infrastructure development, and explicit conversations with current and future program stakeholders. Often the plans put forth in the grant proposals would become the model for the DFS program in subsequent years, even without successful funding. For example, a grant application (unfunded) resulted in the design and implementation of a Summer Institute for teachers who want an intensive experience learning DFS strategies. This Summer Institute component has now become a central point of convergence for department course offerings, DFS program staffing, funding initiatives, and plans for future partnerships with districts throughout the region.

For all of the clarity and goal setting that is a useful product of the grant writing process, there are also some ways in which it pulls DFS away from its critical pedagogical and constructivist roots. For example, the infrastructure required to develop and submit proposals for federally funded research both implicitly and explicitly requires a top-down



process. While there is collaboration between the DFS program director, the educational researcher, and at times, district administration, there is very little, if any, input from students, teachers, and parents. The people whom we hope will most benefit from the new DFS programming are essentially removed from its development process. The power to decide what is proposed is also geared towards what is currently fundable. As a result, beyond the intellectual merit of the proposal, the values of the granting agency are transmitted through its approval and rejection process. For example, if funders (and by extension, federal legislators) wish to see an emphasis on science and technology education, this becomes the focus of the grant proposal and the resultant program. Furthermore, the goals of federally funded often emphasize the evaluation aspect of data collection, with primary interest in “objectively” measuring “success” of the program. This approach rarely honors measurement outside of a positivist framework. To more fully embrace sustainability through a critical pedagogical framework, teachers would need to take greater ownership about the role, function, and support of the DFS program in their district. This would include how resources for instructional support are sought after and allocated within their professional context.

### Conclusion

This article discussed ways in which a partnership between a drama-based instructional program and research evaluation process shifted professional practice for both parties. As a community outreach program housed in the Department of Theatre and Dance, *Drama for Schools* is rooted in a theatre perspective. The addition of an educational research perspective establishes a dialog between fields that enriches both parties. Over time, DFS program has shifted in its identity, with an emphasis both on the partnership with teachers from diverse content areas as well as a partnership with a research team. By activating praxis in multiple ways, DFS foregrounds the ongoing cycle between practice and reflection that is core to the identity, implementation, dissemination, and long-term vision of the program model. In turn, the evaluation team has learned to trouble questions about education in a critical pedagogical and constructivist context, an approach that is radically different than the post-positivistic perspectives found in many educational research circles. Not only does the research approach seek evidence of the effects of drama-based instruction; it is, slowly, beginning to ask questions about its own shortcomings and places where praxis has not occurred.

The result of this partnership is perhaps no more salient than in the perspectives of the Project Director and Project Researcher, the authors of this article, whose imagined personal correspondence began this document. We have both expressed on repeated occasions how our working relationship has broadened our theoretical perspectives and strengthened our work within our respective disciplines. The partnership has provided a

shared language built from the expertise and scholarly repertoire of our two traditions. We are also continually aware of how we as individuals have changed and grown as a part of our ongoing collaboration. From the Project Director's perspective, working within an evaluation space provided new ways to clarify and think about the purpose of her work within the program and her own sense of inquiry. Although research was already a part of her professional practice, the partnership provided a catalyst for using theoretical frames from education and learning sciences that were complementary to the original underpinnings of the project. The tools from educational research, and the assumptions behind them, encouraged the Project Director to think about how different research questions drive their own data collection processes. She also realized that research could be complimentary to practice, steeped in the productive and complicated action of praxis.

From the Researcher's perspective, work with the *Drama for Schools* program gave her an opportunity to connect research practice to a community-based learning environment. Contextualizing research questions and evaluation methods in such a systemically oriented, reflective space has been a challenging but engaging experience. It has been exciting to see the intersections of meaningful questions in our data collections; each inquiry leads to a new angle, a deeper place of understanding about the process of arts integration and DFS program model. As a result, we get to see, as with light through a prism, how praxis allows for a variety of stories to be told about the "evidence" in evidence-based practice. It has also had a direct effect on her own teaching methods, challenging and opening up new spaces to engage her own students through the use of drama-based instructional strategies.

From a higher education perspective, particularly one rooted in a "research one institution," there are compelling places and spaces for further development and exploration. Joint work across university colleges raises unique questions that may not have otherwise been salient if faculty and students shared the same ontological and epistemological perspectives. Within this structure, graduate students in education have the opportunity to work, in situ, with graduate students from the arts. Students from both backgrounds work in the "living laboratory" of DFS as it is implemented in the school setting. The project director and evaluator mentor all students on the project, creating a dynamic space for learning and inquiry. Drama specialists are working towards Masters degrees in Fine Arts (MFA), a degree that integrates both theory and practice. DFS provides a space to apply their theoretical knowledge within a complex school system. Because of the evaluation partnership within DFS, the MFA students are mentored in and trouble a comprehensive research process, one that is embedded in their own field. As students progress in their degree program, the project evaluator models and mentors students in their own research inquiry processes as part of their MFA thesis research. For students in education, coursework in research methods provides a foundation for measurement and evaluation in

an applied setting; interaction with the project director and drama specialists raises their awareness of the collaborative nature of professional development and implications for educational research. They take time to participate and reflect on the act of instruction and thus have the opportunity to trouble instructional practice beyond theoretical perspectives and case studies read in class. The critical pedagogy underpinnings of DFS changes the professional practice of the evaluation team, encouraging them to explore ways to design collaborative research and tools that reflect the theoretical frame of the program.

Throughout it all, praxis is activated: in classrooms by teachers who use the arts with students to connect content to the human condition; by graduate student drama specialists who use the arts with teachers in professional development settings to connect instructional goals with instructional practice; and, by UT faculty from two different campuses who strive to be better through partnership.

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### **About the Authors**

Dr. Stephanie W. Cawthon (first and corresponding author). Dr. Cawthon is an Assistant Professor in Educational Psychology and is the Director of Research for *Drama for Schools*. Cawthon has a background in language and literacy development and educational psychology. Her research strategies include both quantitative and qualitative methodologies including survey design, classroom observations, teacher interviews, focus group studies, and policy analysis.

Kathryn M. Dawson. Ms. Dawson is a full-time Lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Dance and is the Director of the *Drama for Schools* program. Her areas of research include applied theatre, museum education, professional development and teaching artist praxis. She is a professional actor, a published playwright, an experienced museum educator and former arts and non-arts classroom teacher.

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