

Theatre skills for conflict management: Using theatre performance techniques to teach college students better conflict management abilities

by

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B.G.S., University of Kansas, 2017
M.A., Kansas State University, 2021

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

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Chapter 1 - Problem and Purpose

Introduction

The path of young adulthood is filled with trials and tribulations. Tremendous pressure is placed on young adults to find their way into the world quickly. Securing good jobs, having stable relationships, and connecting well with peers signify success to the modern young adult. A 2020 study found that young adults felt more stress from daily encounters (bullying, lifestyle choices, economic disruption) than from fear of adverse health consequences associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Shanahan et al., 2020). Many of these prominent issues in the lives of young adults can be tied back to an inability to deal with conflict. The inability to deal with conflict can lead to a deterioration of personal relationships, hinder an individual's ability to succeed in a workplace, and make it difficult to live in an increasingly diverse world (Brinkert, 2016; Saha, 2019; Tulgan, 2015).

A lack of conflict management skills particularly hard hits college-aged students.¹ Making the transition to the world of college is a challenging endeavor within itself. Students are placed in situations where they must make adult decisions for the first time. Decisions such as what they want to do for a career, where they want to live, what classes they want to take, and what social circles they want to explore are all part of a college student's life. College is a time for young adults to develop their identities, all while trying to maintain their schoolwork and plan their future careers (Gottlieb et al., 2007).

If conflict can negatively impact the lives of college students, then it makes sense that universities should teach conflict management. However, this is not always the case. The average

¹ For the use of this dissertation, I align college-aged students with definitions of emerging adulthood, which is the period in a person's life between 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2005).

college freshman does not know much about conflict management because of a lack of proper training and the overemphasis on academic success measured in GPA and graduation rate. Students' success must be considered holistically rather than relying on narrow definitions of academic success. Schreiner (2012) suggests that student success should be assessed in three key areas: academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being. Focusing on these markers instead of traditional ones helps college students deal with the transition to adult life more healthily and productively. It makes sense then to introduce students to effective conflict management techniques during their college careers, as learning how to deal with conflict can contribute to success in all three of these areas (Brinkert, 2016).

Traditional college-aged students need help dealing with problems with no clear solution. They can better tackle problems with tangible solutions (e.g., creating a weekly schedule and keeping up with homework to pass a course) but struggle with problems that are complex and in flux, such as the relational problems associated with conflict management (King & Kitchener, 2004). College students struggle so much with conflict because they are at a developmental point where they are crafting their adult identities. Patricia King (1994) described the identity of a college student as a “kaleidoscope” of ever-changing “skills, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings” (King, 1994). The pressure of crafting their new identities, combined with learning the ways of adulthood, makes the life of a college student a prime location for conflict to arise. However, conflict does not always have to be a bad thing. If students are given proper training on dealing with conflict before they must face it, the chances of these unproductive traits forming can be significantly reduced. Conflict can be as educational and formative when handled correctly as many other parts of the collegiate experience (Bazezew & Neka, 2017). Therefore, teaching students to be reflective thinkers becomes critical to their overall success in college. A

failure to do so can result in a wide array of problems for students as they develop their adult identities.

When the added complication of conflict arises, it can cause negative results for both students' personal and professional development. The inability to manage conflict can lead to decreased satisfaction when dealing with relationships, diminishing feelings of self-worth, and a lower likelihood of success in a competitive job market (Brinkert, 2016; Saha, 2019; Tulgan, 2015). If this is true, universities are responsible for teaching students how to deal with conflict. A real-life instance of the issues that can arise from not teaching students good conflict management can be seen at the midsized, Midwestern research university (referred to as "Midwest State" moving forward) where this dissertation research was conducted. Every year the Midwest State Housing and Dining Services picks a topic for training relating to inclusivity. The 2022/2023 school year's topic focused on better understanding the LGBTQIA community. The choice of this inclusivity topic quickly divided the resident assistants at the university. Students from the LGBTQIA community and Christian religious groups found themselves on opposite ends of this issue, and conflict quickly ensued. The conflict culminated with one RA posting a TikTok video explaining the conflict that went viral with 83,500 views and over 2,000 shares (Latenser & Lenkiewicz, 2023).

Another reason college students struggle so much with conflict is that the current training on conflict management at the high school level could be more effective. In 2014 the Department of Education attempted to teach students how to better manage conflicts by releasing training modules that specifically outlined conflict management plans for grades K-12. These plans ranged from negotiation strategies training to peer mediation. While solid in makeup from a conflict management literature viewpoint, current training modules have two primary problems.

First, they add confusion by making little attempt to explain the complex conflict management techniques they describe. A person without advanced training in conflict management (i.e., most students) would need help understanding the processes described in these training modules (Maier et al., 2017). Second, while the content of these training modules is sound, they lack training in the crucial area of social and emotional intelligence skills required to make the real-life implementation of these conflict management techniques possible. A possible solution to this second problem is to teach college students how to be reflective thinkers and help them develop their identities better. However, for this to happen, social and emotional skills development must be present in conflict management training materials (Kings, 1994, Maier et al., 2017, Bazezew & Neka, 2017).

College students are being sent to universities and expected to quickly adapt to an entirely new adult lifestyle with little to no practical conflict management training. This can make it difficult for them to assimilate into this adult lifestyle from a personal and professional viewpoint. Little has been done to update these conflict management materials since their 2014 release (Maier, et al., 2017). This has become an issue because the world has changed dramatically in the past 10 years. Through a global pandemic, tumultuous political landscapes, and significant advances in technology, the lives of college students are more complex than ever (Birmingham et al., 2021; Cohn, 2021; Talib, 2021). In learning to deal with all these new life elements, the idea of learning good conflict management skills has fallen to the wayside (Brinkert, 2016; Saha, 2019; Tulgan, 2015).

College students need to learn better conflict management abilities so that they can learn how to successfully handle the changes that occur in their worlds, the relationships that they build with others, and so that they can have a better overall understanding of themselves. They

also, on a larger scale, need to have good conflict management skills to be productive and contributing members of society. Higher education institutions are responsible for teaching students career field-specific skills and the social and emotional intelligence skills necessary to become positive change-makers in their communities (Post et al., 2016). A new conflict management curriculum would also need to help students see how learning social and emotional intelligence skills is a viable and time-worthy pursuit. Current curriculums need to illustrate the importance of such learning (Maier, et al., 2017). This importance can be proven by incorporating elements of community-engaged scholarship into a new curriculum. Students need to understand how to be contributing members of a community, and the first step toward this is understanding the communities they are a part of (Morrison, 2020).

Statement of Problem

At its core, conflict management is connected to being able to relate and interact healthily with others. To fully understand the challenges that college students face regarding conflict management training, the underdevelopment of social and emotional intelligence skills must be addressed. Social and emotional intelligence skills are the specialized elements of communication that often fly under the radar of development programs and can be challenging to define. Social and emotional intelligence skills are the nuanced elements of human interaction. Teamwork, cultural understanding, reading the atmosphere of a room, nonverbal communication, etc., are all examples of social and emotional intelligence skills. Without understanding how to utilize these essential communication elements, it makes no sense to expect college students to understand conflict management as they are integral to the conflict management process (Tulgan, 2015). Conflict management training without social and emotional intelligence skills

development is the equivalent of expecting college students to complete an assignment without giving them any instructions or training.

The issues college students face regarding current conflict management practices are two-fold. First is a need to understand social and emotional intelligence skills and how to use them effectively. If college students have never been properly taught the concept and how to use the full potential of these skills, it is difficult for them to utilize them to manage conflict (Brinkert, 2016; Saha, 2019; Tulgan, 2015). The nuanced communication elements mentioned above can be challenging to use for college students who have yet to receive social and emotional development training. Better social and emotional intelligence skills are required for reflective thinking. reflective thinking helps students to better deal with conflict (King & Kitchener, 19994). Better dealing with conflict helps college students explore their identities uninhibited by conflict situations (Brinkert, 2016). Exploring their identities without conflict leads to better understanding of self, leading to a better understanding of others. Once a better understanding of self and others occurs, students are prepared to engage in their communities, positively impacting their own lives and the lives of those around them (Post et al., 2016).

Failing to teach college students these skills at this pivotal age sets them up for failure. College students are developmentally at a place where their brains are primed for new ways of thinking (Schwartz, 2016; Gottlieb et al., 2007). However, they need to be more capable of developing these new types of thought processes on their own. They must be taught how to deal with conflict, or instances like the viral K-State TikTok video will continue. Teaching students better ways to handle conflict starts with helping them to understand reflective thinking, a process that starts by teaching them social and emotional intelligence skills.

Second, more than simply understanding correct social and emotional intelligence skills usage is required. Once the general development of social and emotional intelligence skills has been established, students must learn to use these skills to help them when solving conflict specifically (Maier et al., 2017). Students must be educated on combining their social and emotional intelligence skills with proper conflict management techniques to experience the full benefits of social and emotional intelligence skills concerning conflict management. This fusing of social and emotional intelligence development with actual conflict management training is where true self-actualization and, by association, community engagement can occur. The idea behind this is that once students understand themselves and others through better conflict management training, they can positively impact their chosen communities. (King & Kitchener, 1994; Maier et al. 2017; Post et al., 2016).

Speaking of community engagement, teaching one group of students effective conflict management can allow for the education of multiple groups. Students who have learned effective conflict management skills can set an example for fellow students when conflict arises. Those with correct knowledge of conflict management will know how to respond appropriately when an issue such as the one described in the K-State TikTok video emerges. In watching these correct responses, other students learn how to mitigate conflict by association (Brinkert, 2011). Examining community engagement, not only is an effective conflict management curriculum necessary for students to lead fulfilling personal lives, but it is also necessary for entire communities to learn how to engage better and coexist with each other (Brinkert, 2011; Post et al., 2016).

Considering all the above information, it becomes clear that a new type of conflict management training module needs to be created specifically for college students. It needs to be

easy to understand in language and process. It also needs to emphasize social and emotional intelligence skills development. Emphasis will also be placed on helping students better understand various perspectives on community engagement. The focus will be given to the practice of conflict management (as opposed to conflict resolution/transformation), as training in conflict management will provide students with a foundation in conflict studies. Establishing this foundation will give students the entry-level skills required to study other aspects of the conflict field in the future.

As college is a time of change and growth, it makes sense to introduce social and emotional intelligence skills at this age. Going through a process of greater self-understanding is difficult enough without having to deal with the added struggle of conflict that arises between you and those that you encounter. Gottlieb and colleagues (2007) also point out two important discussion points in their article. Their first point is that this is an age range when college students are susceptible to new forms of communicative development. This is because they are restructuring and rebuilding their interactions with the world. Gottlieb et al.'s second point discusses how this is a time in the lives of college students when they are expected to have a strong sense of adaptability and make an extensive range of important decisions quickly (Gottlieb et al., 2007). Having to make important decisions quickly and under pressure can easily create conflict. Introducing social and emotional intelligence skills in this age range can help, as advanced social and emotional intelligence skills can assist with adaptability and quick thinking (Tulgan, 2015).

Between the restricting of their worldviews and the applied pressure of learning adaptability to make solid life decisions, the emerging adulthood period becomes a time of pivotal identity development. It has been theorized that a student's success (or lack thereof) can

be determined during the emerging adulthood phase based on how well a student is able to understand their own identity. If a student can learn good social and emotional skills during the emerging adulthood phase, then hypothetically they are prepositioned to lead healthier adult lives. This ties back to the idea of reflective thinking previously referenced (Hardy et al., 2013).

Just as emerging adulthood is a time when students develop good lifestyle habits, an argument can also be made that it is during this time that students start to develop bad lifestyle habits. During the emerging adulthood phase, students are susceptible to many new schools of thought. Because of this susceptibility, it is important to teach students positive ways of processing their emotions (Sussman et al., 2014). Presenting students with the new type of conflict management curriculum being discussed would help them to better manage their emotions, as well as help them to learn the adaptability skills that are required for good conflict management.

When considering how best to build students' social and emotional intelligence skills, I reflected back on my own social and emotional intelligence skills training. I completed my undergraduate degree in theatre performance. While working on this degree, I learned many aspects of theatre training that could be transitioned to everyday life, the most notable being how the acting exercises I did to create a better stage performance were also highly successful at honing social and emotional intelligence skills. These theatre techniques were also streamlined in the application and explained in the most straightforward language possible to allow performers to achieve maximum performance ability in the often time-sensitive theatre rehearsal process (Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). Taking these easy-to-understand theatre techniques that work well to develop social and emotional intelligence skills, and combining them with existing

conflict management techniques, would solve both issues currently facing college student conflict management training.

Statement of Purpose

This study aims to gauge the effectiveness of the new hybrid theatre performance skills and conflict management curriculum. This will be accomplished through a semester-long workshop conducted with the Midwest State University Housing and Dining Services and the Midwest State University School of Media. The workshop will focus on teaching select undergraduate housing and dining services employees and students who live in the Midwest State dorms the new conflict management curriculum. The entire workshop process will take place during the Fall 2023 semester. Students will then complete the workshop by attending a series of 3 sessions to be spread throughout the Fall 2023 semester. The first session will take place in early October. This session will focus on beginning to explore conflict management techniques and completing 2 theatre exercises designed to strengthen social and emotional intelligence skills (detailed lesson plans for these activities can be found in the Appendix section at the end of the document). The second meeting will take place in mid-October. This meeting will focus on implementing the new conflict management skills learned during the first session through a series of 2 theatre games that will simulate everyday conflict situations. At the end of the month, students will return for one last session that will serve as a debriefing session. Live interviews will take place where students will be asked to explore how they have used the skills taught to them through the previous workshop meetings as they have gone through the semester. Questions will also be asked about how their feelings toward conflict management have changed after completing the workshop. These interviews will be recorded digitally via tape recorder and handwritten journal entries in a research journal created for the workshop.

In addition to the interviews, every workshop session will be recorded via video camera for future analysis. A research journal will also be kept with detailed notes on each workshop session. Ultimately, once the workshop is completed, the data that will be collected can be used to determine the effectiveness of the new conflict management curriculum.

Research Questions

1. What are participants' perceived experiences with conflict in their everyday lives prior to the workshop?
2. What are students' perceptions about conflict situations after completing the workshop?
 - 2A. How do theatre performance techniques impact students' perception of their social and emotional intelligence skills?

Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Concepts

The proposed conflict management/theatre performance hybrid curriculum will be constructed using a 3-stage system to increase specificity as it moves from point to point. The system will start with communication-as-design for a conceptual framework. Using communication-as-design as a conceptual framework will allow for an analysis of how the students interact with the new curriculum, incorporate elements of diversity, and lead to an action plan for conflict management.

The curriculum will then work downward through the theories chosen to teach students social and emotional intelligence with conflict management. The first of these theories will be an overview of the conflict management techniques chosen for the curriculum. Understanding these conflict management techniques will give students a large-scale overview of conflict management. With this overview, they will be able to recognize conflict situations better and decide which conflict techniques to use for mitigation.

Finally, the final step will explore the theatre techniques for teaching real-life applications. These techniques will help students to develop their social and emotional intelligence skills to make real-life applications more probable. Theatre performance techniques will teach adaptability, emotional awareness, and the importance of partner interactions. The following is a breakdown of the 3 steps encompassing the proposed curriculum.

Communication-as-Design

In this study, communication-as-design will serve as the conceptual framework. Finding a way to teach better conflict management skills (and, by association, better social and emotional intelligence skills) can often feel like a solving puzzle. Multiple disciplines must come together for a new curriculum to be effective (Saha, 2019). Communication-as-design is a conceptual framework that looks at communication puzzles like fusing different concepts together to teach new communication skills. Communication-as-design scholar Mark Aakhus defines communication-as-design in the following way: “Communication as design is about how people resolve communication puzzles of “meaning (how is it that people convey and infer meaning in saying something?), action (how is it that people do things with words?), and coherence (how is it that people coherently coordinate meaning and action?)” (Aakhus, 2007, p. 113). The very purpose of communication-as-design is comparable to the desired outcome of the proposed new curriculum. Resolving communication puzzles requires social and emotional intelligence skills, action is required to mitigate conflict, and coherence can be found when individuals have strong enough social and emotional intelligence skills to correctly use conflict management techniques.

Using communication-as-design as the conceptual framework of the research also allows a space for the consideration of diversity. Each student that takes part in this research will be coming from their own personalized walk of life. The lived experiences that they bring to the

table will influence how they interact with the class (Shaffer, 2022). The conceptual framework used must allow for this expression of self. While the conflict management and theatre performance techniques used may be situated in a Westernized place of academic thought, using communication-as-design as a conceptual framework allows for examining every communication style that various students might bring into the research space.

Communication-as-design looks at theories of intervention as well. Communication-as-design looks at how people communicate, but it is also concerned with how they make choices related to communication style (Barbour & Barge, 2018). The purpose of this research is to help students understand multiple ways of communication. Then, once these various communication styles have been explored, students will learn how to read a situation to determine which communication style is required for effective conflict mitigation. Finally, students will be taught adaptability to react quickly and successfully once the correct communication style has been determined.

Conflict Management Techniques

Conflict is “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals” (Wilmot & Hocker, 2017, p. 9). Based on this definition, it is seen that conflict can arise from multiple factors and evolve into a variety of unproductive situations. When conflict arises, individuals have traditionally been known to try and resolve conflict using persuasion and verbal eloquence. However, these approaches are primarily unsuccessful (Freeman et al., 1992). Instead, it is proposed that those in conflict work with interveners to determine a method of conflict management that is useful for all involved.

A central theme in conflict management literature is the desire to understand different approaches people take when facing conflict. Every instance of conflict is unique, and those involved have personalized management styles that they feel are best. Therefore, it makes sense that the conflict management field is constantly evolving to understand different approaches to conflict resolution (Putnam, 2010). A more in-depth analysis of the specific conflict management techniques to be used in the curriculum will be explored in Chapter 2.

Theatre Performance Techniques

Theatre performance techniques were initially created to help performers better communicate with each other and their creative team when working on a production. They are streamlined in approach and seek to help a performer understand the personal elements of self that need to be brought to a character, to understand the wants and needs of their fellow performers, and to better understand the world around them in which they are acting. Theatre performance techniques seek to heighten a performer's social and emotional intelligence skills to perform better in a theatrical production (Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). Finding a way to utilize the tenets of theatre performance in a real-world setting could significantly increase the likelihood of applying conflict management techniques. A more in-depth analysis of the specific theatre performance techniques to be used in the curriculum will be explored in Chapter 2.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This dissertation will be organized using a five-chapter structure. Chapter 2 will consist of a literature review that examines the various fields from which theories were chosen to help build the new theatre infused curriculum. Chapter 3 consists of the methodology and the design process for the workshop itself. Chapter 4 contains the study data and the analysis of the student

interviews, workshop recordings, and research journal entries. Chapter 5 will focus on future research and implementations.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

My main argument in this dissertation is that if students' social and emotional intelligence skills can be increased, their perceptions of comfort with conflict can similarly be increased. This increase in conflict management abilities gives students a better chance of successfully navigating conflict situations (that would typically have the potential to be destructive to student development) in a positive and potentially enlightening manner. The mechanism used to increase social and emotional intelligence skills will be that of select theatre performance techniques. These theatre performance techniques were chosen because they have been shown to increase social and emotional intelligence and are easy to understand in terms of instruction. Theatre performance techniques also allow for the exploration of storytelling during the conflict, a pivotal part of the conflict resolution process (Opacin, 2022; Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). If successful, the new curriculum being created will help students to better understand both their own identities and the identities of those whom they come into conflict with. Every individual has a story that is uniquely their own. By embracing their own stories and learning to embrace the stories of others, actual conflict resolution can occur (Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013).

It is because of this storytelling element that I view my research as being grounded in the world of interpretivism. I seek to understand better the elements of social interaction between individuals in the modern world. Interpretivism fits as the theoretical groundwork for my research as it is founded on wanting to better understand the social and cultural elements of research that are not allowed by positivism (Bhattacharya, 2017). A need to better understand how people interpret their own stories and those around them has existed in social science for

quite some time. This is evidenced by George Herbert Mead and his student Herbert Blumer's work in how individuals interact with and make sense of the world around them. Exploration of how different concepts, such as types of language, cultural elements, etc., impact peoples' lives are staples of their research. Blumer's approach has become what is today referred to as symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic interactionism fits my research as it seeks to help individuals make sense of the world around them within their defined context created through societal views. Essentially, symbolic interactionism looks at how people view their world while also examining how the world people live in shapes them (Bhattacharya, 2017). This approach mixes nicely with the idea of teaching social and emotional intelligence. To understand and gather knowledge for either of these concepts, individuals must clearly understand themselves, others around them, and their living scene. Symbolic interactionism shares these tenets with the emancipatory nature of storytelling and will help to ground my research. These freeing elements of storytelling can be seen in the research of Robin Clair. In one study, Clair (1993) looks at how new types of communication design models can allow women to share their stories regarding the harassment they have encountered. It was found that women are often trivialized when they share stories of harassment in current communication methods, such as working with an HR department at a company. Their stories are not taken seriously in current models, so a new model type needs to be created. It is through the creation of this new model that real change can begin to take root (Clair, 1993). This study is an example of why my research and the creation of a new conflict management curriculum are relevant today. Students are writing their lived stories every day, and a new method needs to be available that allows these stories to be heard.

Clair furthers this theory by examining how a “traditional” workplace setting is viewed from a set communication model approach. After interviewing several college students, it was found that using a rigid communication analysis method in the workplace discouraged individuality and the seeking of non-traditional jobs. Students felt that they had to approach specific job fields to be viewed as successful, and then as if they had to act a certain way that may not have aligned with their identity to maintain that success (Clair, 1996). This case study shows that non-traditional forms of communication analysis (like the one I am advocating for in this research) are needed to avoid alienating groups of people from spaces that should be inclusive (like a workplace). It also shows that people need to feel as if they are safe to share their stories if they are going to find a sense of fulfillment. While those sharing stories gain peace from the storytelling process, there are benefits for those listening to the stories. It is possible for those hearing the stories to find a more profound understanding of those telling the stories and a deeper understanding of self. This is through a process known as contact theory (Rademaker et al., 2020).

Ramiah and Hewstone (2013) describe contact theory as a process by which two different groups of people are exposed to each other in a controlled environment with a mediatory presence. The groups can observe and learn about each other from this exposure in a safe environment. The hope is that the groups can interact and begin sharing lived experiences from this exposure. It is from these interactions and shared stories that peace is found. Their research found that while contact theory was effective, it could not be a fully functioning form of conflict management (Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013).

In tandem with Ramiah et al., Rademaker et al. (2020) found contact theory useful in building relationships between groups at odds. Rademaker et al. advocates for contact theory to

help students with disabilities to assimilate into learning in a traditional classroom. Research has shown that students with disabilities struggle with the social aspects of classroom learning. Connecting with their peers is incredibly difficult. Their research found that the use of contact theory can help students with disabilities learn the social and emotional skills necessary to connect with their traditional student peers. Subsequently, the use of contact theory also helped traditional students come to understand the perspectives of students with disabilities better. Through the type of controlled exposure advocated for by contact theory, both groups grew to understand the other better (Rademaker et al., 2020). People want to connect better, but the issue remains that a catalyst is needed for this connection to occur. This catalyst can be found in the process of storytelling for peacemaking. The idea of storytelling for peacemaking fits well with my research and the idea of using theatre performance (a story driven medium) for better conflict management.

An essential part of why contact theory works so well is because it allows participants to meet and share stories. As stated, storytelling is a necessary and effective approach to conflict management (Opacin, 2022). Storytelling for conflict management can be highly effective. Researcher Nerkez Opacin (2022) looked at how storytelling could help children dealing with trauma related to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The children were brought together and encouraged to share stories of their lives. A trained professional remained in the room and oversaw the process. The hope was that the children could find relief in sharing their stories and that the group could better understand the concept of trauma. The approach was successful as the entire group had cathartic and informative conversations (Opacin, 2022).

This study shows the powerful healing that can occur when combined with contact theory and storytelling. It stands to reason, based on the literature reviewed, that for a conflict

management curriculum to be truly effective, it would need to incorporate elements of both these perspectives. That is where the theatre techniques come into play. They encourage storytelling and creating a shared experience with partners to create the best performance possible- i.e., they promote social and emotional intelligence building. The theatre techniques are also easier to understand in language and procedures when compared to current conflict management techniques.

While storytelling in tandem with theatre performance techniques may lead to increased conflict management abilities through social and emotional intelligence improvement, a theoretical framework is required to build and dispense a curriculum that accounts for the many elements of these theories. The framework would also need to be inclusive so that students from varying walks of life can all equally participate in the curriculum. I propose that the answer to this fluid and inclusive framework can be found in Communication-as-Design. The remainder of this chapter will start by examining communication-as-design as the conceptual framework for the study, then examine the conflict management techniques and select theatre performance techniques chosen to create the new curriculum, and finally end by exploring the college student development field to show the research's importance to its chosen demographic.

Communication-as-Design

What it means to be a good communicator is a constantly changing process. Yes, there are base procedures that are followed when communicating with individuals/groups, but it is the nuanced elements (personal stories of those communicating, format, location, etc.) that shape how the communication plays out (Aakhus & Bzdak, 2015). Because the model for “good” communication is in a constantly liquid state determined by the situation it is occurring in, there needs to be a way to analyze instances of communication that account for these situational

variances. (Jackson, 1998). Essentially, a new type of design intervention needs to occur that recognizes that there is no one set way to communicate. Emphasis needs to be placed on understanding the unique elements that compose an instance of communication. If this is to occur, individuals will need to possess a sense of adaptability and an ability to quickly track conversation. I am proposing that the way to accomplish this is to develop the social and emotional intelligence skills of those communicating. But how is a process that develops social and emotional intelligence skills created?

The argument can be made that the best way to find this new social and emotional intelligence skills development process is to first look at defects in current communication models (and then create a new communication model that resolves them). CAD allows for both the diagnosis of problems pertaining to current communication models, as well as the steps needed to find a solution. CAD first analyzes current communication models for problematic structure, and then allows for the re-building of these structures seeking to fix the issues found during analyzation. This is useful because using this process can lead to theoretical refinements, as well as highlighting problems with the real-life application process. Once this analysis of actual model has taken place, the creation of the new model can begin (Jackson, 1998). In order for this improved model to be created, there must first be a base understanding of the communication process that is taking place. The theoretical framework of communication-as-design goes through this exact process when looking at various communication models. A communication model is examined, holes in its process are discovered, then communication-as-design can be used to correct these defects (Aakhus, 2007).

As the very basis of my research revolves around building a new conflict management curriculum to address holes in current conflict management models, the intervention and

invention elements of communication-as-design are a natural fit for this research. The remainder of this section will be broken down into two parts First, I will explore the history, definition and constructs pertaining to communication-as-design (referred to as CAD moving forward). Second, I will analyze relevant studies of CAD in relation to how it can be used as a way of organizing a curriculum that has the intent of addressing complex social issues. My goal is to prove that CAD can be a useful theoretical framework in designing interventions for college-aged individuals working through and learning about conflict management via theatre performance techniques.

CAD rose to prominence in the 1990s. The advocacy of its process was primarily driven by scholar Mark Aakhus. CAD was created as a way of deconstructing and better understanding communication puzzles. Aakhus (1999) states that “communicative norms can be scrutinized, re-designed, and tinkered with in order to cope with puzzles of decision-making” (Aakhus, pg. 22, 1999). Basically, CAD is useful in understanding the nuanced elements of communication. As communicative processes are constantly changing, it becomes necessary for having a process that allows for in depth analysis of this change. Without a process such as CAD, it would be difficult to understand new types of communication (Aakhus, 1999).

The following quote gives context and definition to CAD as a process:

“Design is an activity of transforming something given into something preferred through intervention and invention. An interest in design reflects a concern for creating useful things and the process of creating useful things. Design is a way to understand communication and an approach for investigating the social world from the standpoint of communication. This claim has implications for theorizing communication “problems”” (Aakhus, pg. 112, 2007).

Using this quote, we can determine that CAD is a process that is used both to resolve existing problems with communication models, while allowing new models to be born. I believe that the above definition not only does a great job of defining CAD, but it also explains why CAD makes sense as a theoretical framework for my research. CAD primarily deals with how people create communication from a specific context. This means that each instance of communication design within a group will differ depending on the given situational context (Aakhus, 2007). Basically, an instance of communication is unique because it is compiled of the individual circumstances that birthed the communication. No two instances of communication are alike, so there must be a process to analysis individual characteristics associated with a specific communication.

Summarizing, CAD looks to consider these individual characteristics and design a new communication process based on the communication taking place. While this may seem abstract, that is because CAD is dependent upon the situation in which it is being used (Eddington et al., 2020). It is this attention to detail that melds CAD well with my research. Much like instances of communication, each instance of conflict is unique, and the theatre performance techniques being used to mitigate conflict allow for the personalized analysis of the conflict situation that CAD defines as so important. In teaching students this process, an intervention is occurring with current conflict management processes, and the invention of a new process is taking place.

As CAD is based on meeting a communication process where it is at and building intervention from there, CAD also allows for diversity and inclusion to be included in the curriculum building process. Students will learn to mitigate conflict on a case-by-case basis. Scholars Aakhus and Bzdak (2015) argue that trying to force set patterns and preconceived notions onto various communication situations limits the possibility of solutions. Each problem faced is unique, therefore the communication patterns they use to solve the problem need to be

unique and crafted once the issue arises (Aakhus & Bzdak, 2015). This agrees with the new conflict management curriculum being crafted, as it is based on a conflict management/theatre performance approach, which both analyze individual viewpoints.

Conflict management considers the views of every individual involved in a specific conflict. Essentially, this means that an approach to conflict resolution is always newly created (Opacin, 2022). Similarly, theatre performance is all about analyzing a scene, figuring out the needs of the characters in the scene, and then finding a way to create a performance from their interactions. Actors will always bring their different lived experiences to the scene creation process, so no two scenes will be alike (McGaw et al., 2012). Because conflict management, theatre performance, and CAD all seek to analyze and better understand individual situations, it makes sense to use CAD as the conceptual framework for this study. What follows are examples of the CAD process playing out in real life.

Eddington et al. (2020) studied how CAD could be used to create organizational change in undergraduate engineering programs that would lead to greater equity and inclusion. A series of design sessions were held with university stakeholders to discuss the idea of incorporating equity and inclusion into the programs. Interviews were then completed where 19 stakeholders were interviewed to gauge their perceptions of the design process used to hold difficult conversations and create meaningful change in the programs. It was ultimately found that using CAD as a starting point for these sorts of conversations could lead to impactful change if stakeholders were open-minded and approached the conversations with positive viewpoints (Eddington et al., 2020). This study serves to highlight that real change is possible when CAD is used as an approach to discussing difficult material. CAD is specifically designed to be applicable to situations where an intervention needs to occur so that a new form of

communication can be created. In the above instance, the undergraduate engineering programs needed to be more inclusive. CAD presented difficult and controversial problems (such as equity and inclusion) not as mountains that need to be climbed, but as solvable puzzles that can be completed through collaboration (Eddington et al., 2020). This study proves that CAD works as a framework for my research. Just as CAD looks at communication breakdowns as puzzles to be solved, conflict management looks at conflict situations as instances that allow for collaboration and resolution for both sides. In fact, it is said that when entering conflict resolution, you should think of the person you are in conflict with as your “partner in conflict” rather than your adversary (Brinkert, 2016).

Relating to the idea of partners in conflict, scholar Tyler Harrison (2014) makes the case that CAD is helpful in terms of the ombuds process. The ombuds process is the process by which a third-party steps in and helps settle a conflict between individuals who are usually of unequal power. Harrison’s work dealt with disputes between students and faculty members, focusing heavily on the student experience elements of the process. Harrison feels that CAD is necessary for this type of work as each case being examined differs. The students come to the ombuds person with complaints of varying severity levels and are looking for solutions on a wide spectrum. While set conflict resolution systems are in place in these situations, these personalized elements call for a more intricate approach as offered by CAD (Harrison, 2014).

Harrison’s case study relates directly back to my research in a few ways. While he looked at enhancing the ombuds process at a university, and I am looking to build a new conflict resolution curriculum for undergraduate training, the sentiment is the same: all people are different, so the conflict situations they find themselves in will be different. For actual, impactful conflict resolution to occur, these elements must be recognized, respected, analyzed, and

incorporated into the resolution process (Harrison, 2014). In terms of my curriculum, these individual experiences are equally complemented by the incorporation of theatre performance techniques. Harrison discusses how good conflict management comes from understanding the life stories of those in conflict. Theatre performance techniques allow for this story analysis to occur as they are designed to help better incorporate character motives, while CAD allows the freedom necessary for this process to occur (Harrison, 2014; McGaw et al., 2012).

While Harrison used CAD relating to wide-scale university issues, let us now look at CAD on display in the classroom. Scholar Gamze Yilmaz (2021) felt that CAD in the classroom was necessary because students in the Gen Z age range (the demographic I plan to work with for my research) do not feel that traditional styles of education are preparing them for the real world. Specifically, there needs to be a better way to teach them critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration (all skills related to conflict management) (Putnam, 2012; Yilmaz, 2021). Yilmaz advocates for using CAD because it encourages students to think outside the box and see the conflict they encounter in life from multiple viewpoints. Their claim is that modern day students' ability to solve complex problems hinges on their capacity for creative thinking (Yilmaz, 2021).

It is this idea of creating thinking that melds so well with my research. Studies have shown that the teaching of theatre performance techniques can increase creative thinking in students (Sternberg, 1998). Creative thinking is also necessary for good conflict management as individuals in conflict must understand the stories that their partners in conflict bring to the table (Brinkert, 2013). Moving forward with the idea that creative thinking is required for good conflict management, and that the teaching of theatre performance techniques can increase creative thinking, it makes sense to use CAD as a theoretical framework for this research. CAD

allows for students to explore the communication process behind both conflict management and theatre performance. In doing this, not only do students come to better understand the skills required for conflict management, they understand the processes associated with the methods. This leads to deeper critical and creative thinking (Brinkert, 2013; Sternberg, 1998; Yilmaz, 2021).

Suppose CAD is effective at encouraging creative thinking, this would in turn lead to dialogue concerning difficult situations. In that case, what happens when an organization does not approach problems with a framework such as CAD? Aakhus and Bzdak (2015) discuss how in corporate settings, leaders do not take the time to analyze issues as they arise, instead opting to try pre-planned resolution methods that keep stakeholders happy. This ultimately leads to a communication breakdown because, as CAD states, each issue is different and requires its own communication style. The same can be said for conflict management techniques. Yes, basic approaches can be learned to mitigate conflict, but each conflict situation must be treated as a new occurrence (Brinkert, 2016). This requires a fluid resolution method.

Jackson and Aakhus (2014) discuss this need further by looking at communication as a meta-model. The design of different communication processes can lead to theory development (as discussed by Jackson, 1998). Design is diverse and can take many forms regarding the type of communication that emerges (Aakhus & Jackson, 2014). Operating under this principle, using CAD to design the new conflict management curriculum makes sense. Conflict is multifaceted and can take many paths toward resolution.

As shown, the theoretical framework used to explore a new conflict management curriculum would also need to be open to various resolution styles. Specifically, the resolution style being examined in this study is the use of theatre performance techniques. Theatre

performance allows for the fluidity that CAD states as necessary to set the conflict resolution scene. Speaking of preparing a scene for performance, many personalized elements are at play. The author of the script placed their personal story in the text. The director of the piece reads the text through their lived experiences, and finally, the performers try to bring the text to life by calling upon their inner memories to connect with the characters (Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). A new type of performance emerges from mixing shared visions, just like a new type of communication theory can emerge when different communication processes are considered (Aakhus & Jackson, 2014).

In an example of the real-life mixing of various conflict resolution styles, Aakhus and Rumsey (2010) discuss using CAD to examine conflict in an online cancer survivor support group. They argue that this sort of space (both due to content and virtual setting) is non-traditional for conflict management. Because of this, a lens of analysis that is not open to various communication paths would make an observation of this online conflict difficult. A flexible framework is required (Aakhus & Rumsey, 2010). While flexibility was required in this case study due to an online setting, the argument remains the same: Conflict is a constantly evolving thing. If it is going to be examined and a new sort of conflict management curriculum created, the same sort of flexible framework is going to be required. It is this flexibility that makes CAD such a natural fit for this dissertation research.

The real need for this flexibility comes from the fact that every instance of conflict is tied to an individual or group's personal story. All members of a conflict are bringing different lived experiences to the potential resolution process. As stated previously, traditional college aged students are going through a process of identity development. In developing their identities, they are writing their stories. At its core, if this new conflict management curriculum is going to be

successful, it has to take this story writing process into account. True conflict resolution occurs when these different lived experiences are examined and folded into the resolution process. CAD makes sense for the theoretical framework of a new conflict management curriculum because it allows for this examination of the different student stories being written as they develop their identities in the youth development phase of their lives. What follows is an examination of the various conflict management styles and theatre performance techniques that will be used to create the new curriculum. In opening there will be a short summary of the conflict field as a whole and the resolution process of peace education. Then there will be a transition to the specific conflict management technique of conflict coaching and its theatre performance counterpart, improvisational theatre. Finally, the section will end by examining conflict management styles and how knowing various styles of conflict management in tandem with understanding of Stanislavski's action verbs approach to acting can help to successfully mitigate conflict.

Conflict and Peace Education

Putnam (2010) puts forth two important factors when examining conflict management. First, it should be considered what those in a conflict situation wish to avoid. Second, collective stories can create a sense of unity among disputants as they allow for shared experiences to create common ground (Putnam, 2010). While Putnam is correct in this analysis, I argue that there are two additional qualities that good conflict management practices require: They must be composed of language and instructions that layperson practitioners easily understand. Conflict management practices must also have clear steps for actual implementation. This means they must include training in social and emotional intelligence. Justification for why these additional

steps is needed can be found by examining current conflict management techniques being taught in the American public school system.

In creating a new curriculum that meets all the listed requirements, peace education's specific conflict management field emerged as a practice that could accomplish the job. The practice of peace education is a multi-faceted undertaking. There are multiple degrees of approaches and applications that encompass peace education. Ultimately, the sort of peace education practiced depends upon the factors of the situation that have necessitated the approach. Peace education can be thought of in three distinct camps of practice: Peace education is a practice by which to change mindsets and increase respect and tolerance among former adversaries. Peace education can be used to teach/heighten skill sets. Introducing conflict resolution practices into a classroom for example. Finally, peace education (mainly in Third World countries) promotes human rights (Salomon & Nevo, 2002).

While all approaches to peace education are valid, for this research, the second interpretation will be given focus. This focus is justified through the end game of the research: To create a new peace education-based curriculum that can be used to increase social and emotional intelligence in college students and in turn, provide them with greater conflict management abilities. The driving factor in this new curriculum will be the theatre performance techniques. These theatre techniques are easy to understand in makeup and promote the social and emotional development necessary for the real-life implementation of conflict management. One of the key elements that peace education shares with theatre performance is that of storytelling. As has been established, allowing individuals to share their stories can resolve conflict.

Combining theatre techniques with existing conflict management techniques brings about the best of contact theory, storytelling for peacebuilding, and the conflict management field. The next section of this literature review will explain the proposed new curriculum and be organized as follows: The conflict management technique of conflict coaching will be examined alongside its theatre counterpart, improvisational theatre. Then the conflict management technique of conflict styles will be examined alongside its theatre counterpart, Stanislavski's action verbs. Each of these four techniques are their own, contained fields and should be read accordingly. Each technique is being given its own section of the literature review in order to provide context for the approaches that will be used to create the new curriculum. While synthesis of the various techniques will eventually occur, the below sections are for explaining each individual field. Chapter 3 will discuss the actual workshop process (to be broken down into two modules). Module 1 of the workshop utilizes the synthesis of conflict coaching and improvisational theatre, while Module 2 utilizes the synthesis of conflict management styles and Stanislavski's action verbs.

Conflict Coaching

Conflict coaching is a relatively new form of conflict management (developed in the 1990s). While it has existed in various forms as early as the 1970s, it did not start to be considered as its own independent technique until a 1997 study at Macquarie University in Australia brought it prominence. Conflict coaching has two primary approaches. First it can be used when conflicting parties cannot be in the same room together. A mediator meets with each party separately and tries to help them resolve the conflict without ever having to meet. Its second use seeks to prepare an individual on how to deal with conflict before it happens. This approach is often used in the private business sector to help upper-level officials learn to deal

with conflict between themselves and those they manage so that they are prepared if conflict should happen. Trainees meet with a mediator and discuss different solutions to potential conflicts that may arise in their profession (Brinkert, 2016).

In a test of its real-world applicability, conflict coaching was used to help head nurses manage conflict in the medical field. Trained conflict coaching mediators went into a hospital setting and met with head nurses. They walked the head nurses through different types of conflict management techniques utilized under the conflict coaching method. After the head nurses completed their training in conflict coaching, they were assigned a lower-level nurse supervisee to train in the same conflict coaching techniques they were taught. By first starting with the head nurses, and then having them train their supervisee nurses, it was found that a positive trickledown effect took place in the hospital. This training hierarchy was intentional as the hope was that the head nurses would pass their knowledge of conflict management on to lower-level nurses, thus creating a hospital ecosystem devoid of conflict (Brinkert, 2011).

Conflict coaching can also be used in the business sector. Brubaker et al. (2014) make the argument that the field of conflict coaching is ripe for invention as it has seen a large increase in popularity in recent years. Leaders in the business world want to know how to deal with conflict before it ever arises. They hire specialists trained in the world of conflict management to teach them the social and emotional skills necessary to better connect with and understand their employees. If those in power can better connect with their employees, productivity increases. The employees feel appreciated by their employer, and the employers genuinely care about their employees because they have learned to see the world from their perspective (Brubaker et al., 2014).

Given the success that the conflict coaching process has found in the fields of business and medicine, scholar Priyanka Saha (2012) advocates for trying its approach in a school system setting. She advocates for conflict coaching as a method of eliminating bullying in schools, saying that it is a healthy alternative to criminalizing the student doing the bullying. Saha points out however, that in much the same way that contact theory cannot survive as a conflict management technique on its own, conflict coaching also has holes in its approach that need to be filled (Saha, 2012). Brinkert (2016) makes that case that bringing in the use of storytelling can solve the issues had with conflict coaching in a similar way to how storytelling assisted contact theory (Brinkert, 2016) With all this in mind, it makes sense to partner conflict coaching with a theatre technique that allows for role playing, open and honest communication with partners, and that helps individuals learn how to better mitigate conflict through exposing them to it in a controlled environment. It makes sense to incorporate elements of improvisational theatre.

Improvisational Theatre

Use of improvisational theatre to train college students in selective fields related to their choice of major has become increasingly popular in recent years (Reddick & Smith, 2020). It has been proven that practicing improvisational theatre can lead to a direct increase in social and emotional development and the ability to adapt and react intelligently in high-pressure situations (Leonard & Yorton, 2015). Improvisational theatre has been a staple in the theatre community for many years. Some of the best and brightest actors working in the industry today got their start studying improv theatre.

The popularity of improv can largely be attributed to a theatre practitioner by the name of Del Close. Del Close was born in Manhattan, Kansas in 1934. He began his career doing small improv theatre shows in St. Louis before finally moving to Chicago. It was in Chicago that he

began his work with The Second City Improvisational Actor Training Institution. It was while at Second City that Del Close worked to develop the form of improvisational theatre that is utilized today (DePasquale & Lewis, 2012). While the process that Del Close developed was a useful tool for actors, it wasn't long until it was realized that his approach to improv could be utilized in aspects outside of theatrical performance.

The work of NYU researchers Ronica Reddick and Daniel Leeman Smith underscores the value of improv in the college curriculum. Reddick and Smith are working to create a training module that focuses on enhancing social and emotional development using improv. Their target demographic is college students pursuing a bachelor's degree in business. While they are focused on teaching how to better thrive in one's career, the approach they use can easily be applied to conflict management training. The core concept of their research revolves around participants playing an improv theatre, role playing game that attempts to highlight the different sets of social and emotional development skills that may be needed in their chosen business professions (Reddick & Smith, 2020). The question then becomes: What skills specifically can improv teach? Also, what does this teaching process look like?

The argument made is that those who receive training in improv have increased reaction, adaptability, and understanding of others when dealing with conflict. This is thanks to the tenets of improv. In its simplest form, improvisational theatre is two actors creating a scene where there was not one before. No script exists, character backstories are not discussed prior to the performance, the actors simply must perform in a space where they have no safety net other than each other. For a performance to succeed, things such as non-verbal cues from your partner, the energy that the audience creates in the room, and the ability to quickly process and respond to the various twists and turns of the story being created around you are a must (Leonard & Yorton,

2015). These improv tenets are so effective in training students in conflict management because they promote social and emotional development and are easy to understand and put into practice.

Second City CEO Tom Yorton and Second City vice president Kelly Leonard describe how improv can be useful in non-theatre settings in their book, *Yes, And*. Leonard and Yorton (2015) felt validated in sharing the improv training techniques utilized by Second City after a New York Times article was published describing what Google looks for when hiring new employees. The article stated that Google looks for those who have the ““ability to process on the fly,” a willingness “to relinquish power,” ease with “creating space for others to contribute,” and individuals who can “learn how to learn from failure”” (Friedman, 2014). All these abilities are related to social and emotional development and can be taught through improv (Leonard & Yorton, 2015). While there is validity in Leonard and Yorton’s research, they are primarily focused on building social and emotional intelligence among adult, working professionals to help them better succeed in their places of work. What about young adults just starting in their chosen career fields?

A recent study concerning young professionals in the medical field examined these beneficial elements of improv. It was found that young medical professionals often view themselves as “different” from other members of the medical field. This “othering” can lead to a disconnected staff and make it difficult for a medical establishment to offer the best care possible for patients. A proposed solution was to try and teach these young professionals empathy through improv theatre training. A training workshop was created and those that signed up were taken through an eight-week training session that focused on teaching “empathy” and how to “resonate” with the emotions of others. This is not unlike the core concepts of contact theory described at the start of this chapter. The medical professionals felt different from their patients,

but through undergoing improv training, they learned how to better understand their patients and in turn became better care givers (Zelenski et al., 2020).

The connection between conflict coaching and improvisational theatre is clear when one considers the many similar characteristics the two methods share. Both use elements of role play to simulate real world situations. They also both use facilitators to help with scene creation and the overall learning experience. By combining these two fields, the storytelling elements of improv fill the holes in the conflict coaching method that Brinkert (2016) discussed. Social and emotional intelligence building is inevitable when participating in improv exercises. The rules of improv are also clear and easy to understand, fixing the issue of overly complex language as had by other conflict management curriculums. The synthesis of these two approaches creates a new, user friendly guide to conflict management.

While conflict coaching and improvisational theatre work well for resolving conflict, as stated previously, conflict is an actor with many different faces (Putnam, 2010). Because of this fact, it makes sense to provide students with multiple conflict management/theatre performance techniques to use when dealing with conflict. The following is an additional theatre performance hybrid approach to be taught in juncture with conflict coaching and improvisational theatre.

Conflict Management Styles

One of the best ways to deal with conflict is to understand the different approaches, or styles, that you and those you come into conflict with may implement to manage conflict. In researching conflict management styles, one must take into consideration the work of Robert Blake and Jane Mouton. In 1964 Blake and Mouton created a way for business managers to determine what type of management style they possessed when it came to dealing with conflict. They summarized that an individual's wanting to manage conflict existed in two dimensions and

could be illustrated on a grid. One dimension on the x-axis involved concern for people, and the other dimension on the y-axis involved concern for production (Nicotera, 1993).

In 1976 Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann furthered their research by creating the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. This is in essence a test that helped individuals determine the conflict management style they gravitate toward, while also helping them to learn about different styles available when faced with conflict. The various styles included: Avoiding, Compromising, Accommodating, Competing, and Collaborating (Hastings et al., 2019). With each of these styles there are pros and cons. What follows is a breakdown of each of the five conflict management styles as defined by Thomas and Kilmann:²

1. **Competing:** A combination of assertive and uncooperative. When a person uses a competing conflict management style, they are power-oriented and mostly concerned with their own goals. Competing can mean standing up for your rights as an individual, but it makes it hard to function in a group dynamic.
2. **Collaborating:** A combination of assertive and cooperative. This style involves finding a solution that will make both parties in conflict content. Often issues will be examined on a deeper level to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem. This approach is good for maintaining a relationship but can be time consuming and mean giving up some of your personal ground.
3. **Compromising:** A combination of assertiveness and cooperativeness. This style is all about finding the middle ground. While it can help to find a solution that both parties are okay with, it does not examine issues as in depth as the other styles.

² A graphic example of the conflict management styles being discussed can be found in figure 2.1 on the last page of the chapter.

4. **Avoiding:** A combination of unassertive and uncooperative. With this style a person does not try and address their concerns or the concerns of others. This style is good when trying to be diplomatic or avoid a threatening issue but does not yield many solutions to problems that require actual discussion.

5. **Accommodating:** A combination of unassertive and cooperative, this style is the opposite of competing. With this style a person lets their own concerns go in order to appease the concerns of another. This style leads to a high degree of self-sacrifice and selfness but can leave an individual feeling unfulfilled in some situations.

While all these styles have merit in certain situations, understanding how to use each style and when to use them can be difficult. It comes down to understanding the problem-solution format associated with different types of conflict (Thomas & Kilmann, 2012).

While the Thomas-Kilmann model of conflict management styles has been well received, it is not without its critics. Nicotera (1993) critiques the two-dimensional approach used in both methods. She asserts that a two-dimensional plotting system (concern for people and concern for production) is too narrow of a measure to try and categorize conflict motives. If there are any number of elements that can lead to the creation of conflict, it makes sense that there would need to be multiple dimensions of classification. She proposes a new system composed of three wider-ranging dimensions: attention to one's views, attention to the other's views, and emotional/rational valence. This approach melds well with the principles of Stanislavski's action verbs (discussed below), as their very purpose is to define the objectives of the individuals in a scene and to establish the emotional elements that the actor is portraying (Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010).

The need for this approach was further solidified in a study done by Hastings et al. (2019) where it was noticed that first-year pharmacy school students had a lack of empathy when concerning conflict management. The research team theorized that making students aware of conflict management styles might help increase empathy when dealing with conflict. This hypothesis was tested by asking students in a Patience-Centered Skills course to take the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode test. Performance in the class was measured against students' predetermined conflict management style to determine if some conflict management styles had a higher disposition toward empathy than others. The results supported this hypothesis. Students who exhibited a conflict management style of "Compromising" had a higher propensity toward empathy (Hastings et al., 2019). This experiment validates the idea that it is useful and worthwhile to help individuals understand the traits associated with all five of the Thomas-Kilmann conflict management styles. Educating individuals on all conflict management styles gives them multiple angles from which to approach conflict management.

A separate study focused on helping law students better understand negotiation techniques revealed similar results. One exception of this study was that it also discovered the benefits that students gained when they could understand the conflict management styles of those they came into conflict with. Combining knowledge of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument with basic negotiation tactics resulted in the discovery that students had a higher ability for empathy when understanding different conflict management styles. This was because they could better understand the approach being taken by those they were in conflict with. Recognizing and understanding the tactics that a counterpart would use during conflict helped the law students to visualize better the point of view of the opposite party (Brown, 2012).

While helpful for an individual to understand their own disposition toward conflict management, the definitions of the five conflict management styles set forth by the Thomas-Kilmann model are at best ambiguous. For instance, how Thomas and Kilmann define “compromising” could vary greatly from how an individual trying to learn about their own conflict management style might define it. Also, an element of emotion (as Nicotera points out) must be considered when dealing with conflict. Conflict management styles can help you frame how to approach a conflict, but they do not address the emotions an individual might feel when in a conflict. This is what is known as emotional labor, or how a person manages the emotions required to fulfill the requirements of an emotional job (Hochschild, 2012). This ambiguity combined with a need for better understanding of emotional labor makes the conflict management styles set forth by Thomas and Kilmann difficult to understand and even harder for actual application (Nicotera, 1993).

In order to solve this problem, a theatre concept can be implemented again. Just as conflict coaching fits well within a theatrical framework (improv), conflict management styles work equally well with the theatrical method of Stanislavski’s action verbs. This is due to their reliance on a clear understanding of the objectives and actions of individuals within the conflict. The critique of the Thomas-Kilmann model draws parallels to the issue once had in the acting community where how an actor would define a desired emotion on stage was different from how a director would define it. The solution proposed by Konstantin Stanislavski was to no longer think of acting in terms of single word emotions, but rather as a series of playable action verbs determined through concrete script work (McGaw et al., 2012).

Stanislavski’s Action Verbs

Konstantin Stanislavski was a 19th century, Russian theatre practitioner widely considered to be the father of modern-day theatre acting (Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). He earned this title by developing what is known as the “Stanislavski Method” of acting. Much of his method revolves around the idea of playable actions that a performer can use to bring a scene to life. Stanislavski asserted that all good theatre was centered around conflict. In its simplest form, conflict had to arise between two characters for a scene to be entertaining. The entertainment for the audience is then gathered from watching the conflict play out (Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). For instance, think of a scene that is all about two people fighting over an apple. They are both starving, and a singular apple is all the food left to their disposal. The conflict is set, both characters want the apple, but how do the actors portraying these characters go about playing out the conflict?

Stanislavski believed that the best way to create an entertaining performance was to create a list of playable actions beginning with the preposition “to.” He believed performers needed to avoid playing emotions as everyone could interpret them differently. Playing actions however, creates a more concrete process. Actor A will try “to intimidate, to convince, to scare, etc.” Actor B into giving up the apple. Once a playable action has been chosen, the actor proceeds to act it out on stage. It is important to note that determining the best action comes from reading the context of the world in which the play exists (McGaw et al., 2012). Combining Stanislavski’s style of acting, with the way that the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument labels conflict management styles, would result in a method that could be used by participants to determine a list of actions associated with each of the conflict management styles. This would make it easier for individuals to utilize any of the five methods when called for by a certain situation.

Scholars Mandy Rees and John Staniunas (2002) also raise the point that utilizing Stanislavski's method helps individuals to control emotions better when in conflict. In the moment, if fully embraced, emotions can feel "thrilling" and "energizing," but the ultimately lead to confused action on stage (Rees & Staniunas, 2002). This is because emotions are hard to define. They look and are felt differently by everyone. An argument can also be made that when an individual is fully engaged with their emotions, they are not thinking rationally. The goal is not to eliminate emotions entirely but to understand how to use them correctly and appropriately. Essentially, Stanislavski's action verbs are trying to teach actors how to utilize their emotions on stage, much like how Hochschild (2012) advocates for higher emotional intelligence to better deal with situations that require great emotional labor. There is a certain amount of sporadically initiated reaction when emotions are involved. Sometimes this approach is effective, but often it just leads to more confusion. Utilizing Stanislavski's method makes intentions clear to both parties involved.

In summary, if conflict coaching is combined with improvisational theatre and conflict management styles are combined with Stanislavski's action-verb approach to performance, a new sort of conflict management curriculum can be created that best serves the needs of college-aged students. This is because the theatre performance techniques are easy to understand in instruction, and they increase an individual's social and emotional intelligence skills as has been proven as necessary for correct conflict management. The select theatre performance techniques also encourage the ideas of storytelling and acknowledging worldviews different from one's own. It is this combination of storytelling, acceptance, real life applicability, and practical instruction that give my conflict management curriculum value. Let us now explore the

intended demographic for this new curriculum, so as to better understand the need for the curriculum's existence.

College Student Development

The average college freshman does not know much about conflict management because of a lack of proper training and the overemphasis placed on academic success measured in GPA and graduation rate. Rather than relying on such narrow definitions of academic success, students' success must be considered more holistically. As Schreiner (2012) suggests, students' success should be assessed in three key areas: academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being. Focusing on these markers as opposed to traditional ones helps college students to deal with the transition to adult life in a healthier and more productive way. Considering this, it makes sense to introduce students to good conflict management techniques during college as learning how to deal with conflict can contribute to success in all three of these areas (Schreiner, 2012; Brinkert, 2016).

Generally speaking, students in the traditional college age range have difficulty dealing with problems with no clear solution. They are better able to tackle problems with tangible solutions (e.g., creating a weekly schedule and keeping up with homework to pass a course), but struggle with problems that are complex and in flux such as the relational problems associated with conflict management (King & Kitchener, 2004). A solution to this problem can be found by teaching students to think reflectively. Researchers Patricia King and Karen Strohm Kitchener (2004) introduced the reflective judgement model in 1994. Just as one of the main goals of conflict management is to get individuals to embrace the often-uncomfortable nature of conflict in an effort to learn from the experience, the goal of the reflective judgement model is to get individuals' thought processes to be rooted in the reflective thinking stages.

The reflective judgement model is based on Dewey's idea that people make reflective judgements to bring closure to situations that cause them cognitive dissonance. The model categorizes the student thought process using a multi-tiered system consisting of seven stages, which are then divided into three subgroups: Pre-reflective thinking (stages 1-3), Quasi-reflective thinking (stages 4-5), and Reflective thinking (stages 6-7). Pre-reflective thinkers do not recognize that knowledge is an ever-changing thing, quasi-reflective thinkers recognize that knowledge can change but have difficulty defining their own beliefs, and reflective thinkers use data to form conclusions as they believe that knowledge is constantly being reconstructed (Patton et al., 2016). The question becomes: Why wait to teach this approach to college students as they go through the collegiate experience? Would it not make more sense to teach them reflective thinking at the start of their college careers?

Relating to starting college, it was once believed that people developed their identities during the time of adolescence (ages 10 to 18). However, new studies show that the age period of 18 to 25, known as emerging adulthood, is where most identity exploration occurs. This age range is the age where people develop their worldviews, begin to explore more complex emotions, and start to cultivate a way of processing thought that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives (Arnett, 2000). Because of the identity development that takes place during emerging adulthood, it is important that students have good conflict management skills during this phase. Without conflict management skills, potential conflict can occur and hinder identity development (Putnam, 2010).

With so much identity development occurring during the emerging adulthood period, it is a time when students are prone to poor decision-making. It is during this period that students are

most likely to develop substance abuse problems. Arnett's (2005) hypothesis is that this is due to 5 developmental stages that young adults go through during the emerging adulthood period:

1. The age of identity exploration
2. The age of instability
3. The age of self-focus
4. The age of feeling in-between
5. The age of possibilities

Essentially, students face multiple life possibilities while trying to figure out their adult personalities (Arnett, 2005). When these possibilities present themselves, an inability to understand self and others can lead to conflict (Hardy et al., 2013). If students can be taught proper conflict management techniques during this time, it becomes possible for them to better manage their emotions and make smarter decisions that avoid destructive behavior (Brinkert, 2016).

Hardy et al. (2013) theorize that it is possible to determine destructive behaviors that college students are going to engage in based on their identity development. Identity maturity and moral identity were both found to be substitutional indicators of whether college students will make destructive decisions. Based on these findings, it is theorized that it is in the best interest of both college campuses and students for students to participate in some identity commitment-forming process (Hardy et al., 2013). This is the very type of identity-forming process that I am calling for with the creation of the new conflict management curriculum. I theorize that this process can be successfully completed through teaching students proper conflict management skills, and these skills can be acquired through teaching students to be reflective

thinkers. However, how do students become better reflective thinkers? As previously discussed, through the development of their social and emotional intelligence skills.

Given the importance of social and emotional intelligence skills in dealing with conflict, it makes sense to include social and emotional development as part of traditional college curriculums. Teng et al. (2019) argue that a lack of curriculum focused on social and emotional skills development is a serious gap in current collegiate education systems not only in the United States, but on a global level. They assert that not including programs that are designed to develop social and emotional intelligence skills among college students only sets them up for failure upon entering the job market. In fact, their research revealed that a large contributing factor to the unemployment rate among young people was related to students simply not understanding the elements of communication associated with social and emotional intelligence.

Similarly, Cheng et al. (2019) suggest that, in an exceedingly competitive job market, employers have pivoted away from seeking employees with basic knowledge of their field and are now looking for individuals who have a natural inclination for social and emotional intelligence. Anthony and Garner (2016) also found that development in social and emotional intelligence made college students more desirable in the job market and made it easier for them to interact with their peers. Above all, they felt that heightened social and emotional intelligence skills helped students to be better communicators. Based on these studies, it is clear that not giving college students the means by which to develop and hone these highly sought-after communication skills leads to a large disadvantage in their college and adult lives.

Due to their nature, one of the most effective ways to teach social and emotional intelligence skills is using a hands-on approach. For instance, Dogara et al. (2020) explore the positive effects of teaching social and emotional intelligence utilizing Project-Based Learning

(PjBL). PjBL is a process in which a teacher introduces a challenge into the learning environment and the students then work together to solve the simulated challenge. This approach allows students to develop their social and emotional skills in real time, as the only way to solve the challenge is to engage in activities that build the skills. This process allows students to analyze the process as they learn it, leading to a higher chance of skills retention (developing reflective thinking). Dogara et al. argue that PjBL is an excellent alternative to teaching social and emotional intelligence in comparison to a more traditional way such as rotary memorization. Social and emotional intelligence cannot simply be learned by reading about them in a textbook. They have to be experienced and learned in real time. When examining how to best teach social and emotional intelligence, Anthony and Garner (2016) also found that students preferred hands-on, group activities that had a high degree of real-life applicability. These studies underscore the value of my proposed solution of utilizing theatre performance techniques to teach social and emotional intelligence skills development. These theatre techniques are hands-on and focus heavily on group involvement. They simulate situations that students might see in their everyday lives, so the connection to real-life applicability is clear.

Students learn more about themselves and their peers by developing better social and emotional intelligence skills (Tulgan, 2015). In completing this sort of training, students become more secure in their identities, and this better understanding of self leads to better conflict management in the real world. What follows is an examination of how students might use the new curriculum in real-world settings and some of the perspectives that will inform the curriculum. These perspectives were chosen as they help to promote reflective thinking and encourage collaboration and the sharing of lived experiences (Ospina et al., 2020). They also

utilize a “hands on learning approach” as is advocated for when developing student social and emotional intelligence (Dogara et al., 2020; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

Part of this better conflict management comes from allowing students to understand better the relationships in their lives (Putnam, 2010). Regarding the curriculum being built, I intend to draw upon the tenets of relational leadership. These tenets mix well with the better understanding of self and others that has been illustrated to be so important for youth development (Hardy et al., 2013; Ospina et al., 2020). The entity-based perspective of relational leadership examines the relationships between leaders and followers. This perspective distances itself from the traditional mindset of there being a set leader with followers beneath them. Instead, it views relationships as ever-growing and evolving relationships where responsibilities shift depending on the situation. Ospina et al. (2020) discuss various ways to look at relational and collective leadership (Ospina et al., 2020).

For the purposes of this research, relational leadership will be used as a type of leadership to be explored, rather than a lens for examination. This adaption will allow for students to explore building relationships with their peers when participating in the workshop. There will be no set student “leader”, but rather a mixture of students on the same level of playing field. In utilizing this sort of relational leadership approach, students will have to work through the mixing of shared identities as they participate in the workshop. There can be a wide range of relationships between individuals and collectives. Roles are determined and positions change based upon the situations that individuals find themselves in. All members of a group have to understand their own identities and be respectful toward the identities of others in their group (Ospina et al., 2020). Because situations are always changing, and because multiple identities are

being accounted for in the groups, the space in which the students are working can be compared to another leadership perspective: Complex Adaptive Systems (Preiser et al, 2018).

Complex adaptive systems are complex in the sense that they are composed of multiple varying systems and their outcomes cannot be predicted (Preiser et al., 2018). Complex adaptive systems as applied to leadership are composed of three primary tenets. The first is administrative leadership which helps to balance the goals of an organization and keep the bureaucratic functions of the organization stable. Then there is adaptive leadership. This tenet is concerned with the complex elements (relationships, changing goals, creativity generation) of an organization. Last is enabling leadership which works as a channel between the other two forms of leadership. It connects the goals of the organization with all of the complex elements at play (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Complexity as a whole examines the emergence of new forms of leadership due to change. Complex systems are highly adaptive and help to make sense of instances where adaption has to occur quickly.

Complex adaptive systems do have defined perimeters, but constant change is taking place as the multiple systems they are composed of adapt. In the case of this study, specifically the theory of leadership for organizational adaptability will be examined. This theory is different from traditional forms of leadership as it seeks to create a space where new ideas can mix and interact (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Think of things in terms of a college campus. The college as a whole is a system, but then there are various departments within the college, and within these departments are various social groups, etc. All of the systems are interconnected and constantly moving. These systems are adaptive in the way that they must self-organize whenever a change is made. With organizational adaptability, different people from the groups can come together and propose ideas. Conflict may occur, but ultimately through living in the space and discussing

with each other, everyone comes to a solution. The idea is to work together to find the best, new system possible. The overall college remains, but it had to adapt and create a new set of systems in order to survive (Holladay & Tytel, 2011). Using this approach, students learn to interact with peers that are different from them. The idea of coexisting can be explored with students learning about lived experiences different from their own.

The last tenet to be explored will be that of leadership as practice (referred to as LAP from here forward). LAP deals with and looks at leadership as a practice that involves a group of people rather than the traditional lens of examining the traits of one leader that encompasses a group. It seeks to understand how leadership emerges over time in everyday situations (Raelin, 2011). This approach is a switch from more traditional forms of leadership studies that heavily rely on determining characteristics associated with “leaders” rather than leadership. LAP seeks to do the opposite and understand how leadership emerges without a designated leader.

In essence, human constructs become the focus. A group is faced with a task and the process (or creation of process) that occurs is what LAP seeks to define. There are loose rules and defined agents in a scenario that needs leadership, but the rest of the elements of the situation are left unwritten. Working together, a method of leadership is created, and the group goes about completing their task (Crevani et al., 2010). Like complex adaptive systems before it, LAP is based on natural interactions among participants and requires a strong sense of adaptability.

The perspective of LAP aligns well with the developmental stage that college students find themselves in. They are constantly encountering new situations, developing new social circles, etc. (Arnett, 2000). If the period of emerging adulthood is thought of as a sort of LAP scenario, then the practices of flexibility and open mindedness become a natural part of the developmental process. Students learn to view a conflict situation as it is, rather than as they

perceive it to be based on previous experiences. They consider the relationships being formed (relational leadership), are aware of and open to the fact their situation is fluid (complex adaptive systems) and are willing to live in that fluid state to solve the conflict (LAP). This allows them to account for the identities of those they are encountering, while expanding their own identities; all important parts of the youth development and the conflict management process (Arnett, 2005; Putnam, 2010). While the leadership perspectives being explored are useful in terms of navigating youth development, they need to be channeled through a more focused lens to create real impact in the lives of students. This can be done by using them in tandem with various processes in the conflict management field and theatre performance techniques described above.

In summary, through the literature reviewed, a common theme emerges time and time again: common ground is found through elements of storytelling. Conflicting parties can better understand their objectives and the objectives of others by analyzing the story at play in the conflict. With storytelling being such a pivotal part of conflict management, it makes sense that incorporating a lens such as theatre would increase the approach's effectiveness. By using CAD as a theoretical framework, then examining key tenets of youth development, conflict resolution, and theatre performance, it has been shown that a viable path for a new and improved conflict management curriculum can be found through the combination of select conflict management and theatre performance techniques.

The next chapter will include a detailed explanation of the methodology behind this research. Specifically, the theoretical framework of interpretivism, the importance of CAD, explanation of chosen participants, examination and justification of the chosen data gathering procedures, and a personal reflexivity statement will be explored. Finally, the following chapter will also include a workshop timeline and a series of lesson plans that describe the intended

activities to be used in the workshop. The following methodological choices were made as they were seen as best fit to answer the research questions discussed in Chapter 1.

Figure 2.1



Source: Thomas-Kilmann Instrument

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This study looked at how to help traditional college-aged students better manage conflict in their lives. In doing this, the current state of the conflict management field was examined. Based upon the formative studies outlined in Chapter 2 of this document, it was discovered that current conflict management methods lack the necessary social and emotional intelligence skills development and explicit instruction on real-life implementation required for actual impact in the lives of college-aged students. With conflict being interwoven into many aspects of life, it is essential to correct these curriculum oversights. Sending college students into the real world, having only received education from a flawed curriculum, will likely result in negative experiences in both their work and personal lives (King, 1994, Bazezwe & Neka, 2017).

The theoretical framework of interpretivism was chosen for this research. Interpretivism seeks to understand the subjective experiences of individuals in set contexts from a qualitative research lens (Bhattacharya, 2017). Since this research aims to understand how students process and deal with conflict, employing interpretivism as a theoretical framework makes sense. Interpretivism also allows for the stories of individuals to be analyzed. An essential part of conflict management is the sharing and mutual acknowledgment of stories by partners in conflict (Opacin, 2022). The importance of storytelling and interpretivism's ability to analyze participants' lived experiences justifies its use as a framework for this study.

Based on the above discussions, I concluded that the best way to address these inadequacies was to create a new conflict management curriculum. The communication-as-design (CAD) framework was utilized to create this new curriculum. CAD was used because it is a framework that focuses on solving communication-based puzzles. Problems with current communication models are analyzed, and then CAD works to provide solutions. Because CAD is

a framework used to examine many different communication styles, it is also inclusive and aids in accommodating various lived experiences of diverse students (Aakhus & Bzdak, 2015). In viewing current conflict management methods through a CAD lens, combining current conflict practices with that select theatre performance techniques emerged as a solution to the stated problems.

Specifically, the conflict management techniques of conflict coaching and conflict management styles were chosen to be paired with improvisational acting and Stanislavski's action verbs. These specific conflict management styles were chosen as they both seek to help participants understand themselves and others (Brinkert, 2016; Thomas & Kilmann, 2012). The theatre performance techniques were chosen as their tenets deal with helping to understand elements of social and emotional intelligence to connect with fellow actors. They also focus on real-life applicability during time-sensitive rehearsals (McGraw et al., 2012; Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). The highlighted issues can be addressed by combining these approaches, and creating a new, more applicable conflict management curriculum. Combining the chosen conflict management techniques and theatre performance techniques works well because both disciplines are based on storytelling and understanding lived experiences from multiple viewpoints (Brinkert, 2016; McGraw et al., 2012; Putnam, 2010).

To evaluate the effectiveness of the new curriculum, a workshop process will take place to explore the following research questions:

1. What are participants perceived experiences with conflict in their everyday lives prior to the workshop?
2. What are students' perceptions about conflict situations after completing the workshop?

2A. How do theatre performance techniques impact students' perception of their social and emotional intelligence skills?

Study Preview

I propose conducting a multi-stage research process to address the two research questions. First, I will organize, design, and facilitate a workshop series, which will take place during the Fall 2023 semester on the Midwest State University campus. The workshop will be composed of three meetings with the students. The first two meetings will be as a group and will focus on exploring the new curriculum. During these sessions, questions will be asked that will help to gauge students' experiences during the workshop process. Table 1 contains a proposed timetable for the completion of the workshop process.

Table 3.1

Projected Theatre Techniques for Better Conflict Management Workshop Timetable

<i>Month</i>	<i>Action</i>
August 2023	Work with Midwest State University Housing and Dining Services and the Midwest State School of Media staff to gather 7-20 participants for the workshop process.
Early October 2023	Begin the workshop process. Introductions will occur and two entry level theatre exercises will be explored.
Late October 202	The second session of the workshop process will occur. Two more theatre exercises will be completed. These exercises will be more complex and will encourage real life application of the skills being learned.

Late October/ Early November 2023	The final workshop meeting will occur. Students will attend individually interview sessions where they will be asked a series of questions designed to help answer the research questions.
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Second, after completing the first two workshop sessions, the third session will act as a debriefing session. I will conduct semi-structured interviews to explore students' perceptions of the curriculum and students' experiences and attitudes related to conflict.

Chapter Overview

The rest of the chapter reads as follows. First, I detail the sampling strategy used in the study, and then describe the data-gathering procedures. I explain how semi-structured interviews, research journal entries, and videotaped workshop sessions were used for data collection. Next, I outline my analysis strategy and procedures utilizing a case study approach (Bhattacharya, 2007; Yin, 2003). Given the qualitative nature of this study, I offer a personal reflexivity statement detailing why this research is important to me as a researcher and how my own experiences impact my understanding of research process (from design to analysis). Finally, I conclude with an in-depth overview of the curriculum and detailed lesson plans for conducting the workshops.

Data Collection

Sampling Strategy

Given that the purposes of this research were specific (to evaluate a new conflict management curriculum to improve the lives of college aged students) "criterion sampling" was conducted (Suri, 2011). The participants had to be within the emerging adulthood range (18 to 25) (Arnett, 2000). Participants for the study had to meet the criteria of being workers currently employed by Midwest State University, or Midwest State students currently living in the dorms.

Participants for this study included undergraduate housing and dining employees employed through Midwest State University Housing and Dining Services and undergraduate students taking classes through the Midwest State School of Media. The identities of these students were kept anonymous. 7 students were chosen for this workshop. This number was chosen so that individual attention could be given to each participant. This allowed for every participant's story to be fully heard by myself as the researcher. Given that any students of any age can live in the dorms, the participant pool consisted of students ranging in age from freshman to senior (University, 2023).

Undergraduate housing workers were chosen for this study as they traditionally deal with conflict while in their position. They also can create large-scale, positive changes as they perform their roles (Taub et al., 2013). Undergraduate housing workers are a unique population for this study as they both are representatives of the demographic needing better conflict management skills while simultaneously being tasked with creating positive and productive residential communities. Students living in the dorms were chosen as they are the community that the undergraduate housing workers interact with the most.

Specifically, undergraduate housing workers and students living in the dorms deal with all the traditional stresses of college. Undergraduate housing workers are required to hold a position that requires them to connect with and act as leaders for other students they live with. In this research, I engaged with the K-State community by partnering with both Housing and Dining and the A.Q. Miller School of Media. Working with students living/working in the dorms was an intentional choice as these students are part of their own set communities, i.e. the communities created from living within the dorms. In partnering with the university to work with these specific students, the hope was that they would learn better conflict management skills and

then share these skills with other students they encounter. Having good conflict management skills helps these workers to find success in their positions. When both knowledge and skills are given to undergraduate housing workers, and the other students participating in the study (as my curriculum works to do), a wide-ranging impact can be seen that improves the lives of the selected students and the overall campus community. This is due to the trickle-down effect of sound conflict management.

The workers and students can better mitigate conflict, which leads to increased satisfaction among the students they oversee and their peers. These students are then able to find more success while on campus. It is also possible that students not participating in the study will see the strong conflict management skills of the workers and others and begin to mirror their actions. This can lead to a decrease in campus-wide conflict, ultimately leading to a much more productive and happier university (Taub et al., 2013; Brinkert, 2011). On a grander level, if these students can find more success while in college, post-graduation they can continue to share their conflict management skills with whatever community they choose to engage with during their adult lives.

I contacted K-State housing through a dorm manager. I also contacted the A.Q. Miller School of Media through my GTA assistantship. I asked both departments to propose the workshop to their students. The goal was to get a mix of 7 to 20 RAs and students living in the dorms to sign up for the workshop. Compensation in the form of dinner after the workshops was offered to participants. Once participants were selected, the workshop process outlined in Chapter 1 began.

A note, there were three students in the study who had limited previous exposure to conflict management training and theatre performance. Participant Ashley was familiar with

conflict coaching, and participants Jimmy and Steve had some entry level theatre training. The previous experiences of these participants did not have an impact on the overall research as the point of using CAD was to meet students where they were in terms of training. Having previous exposure did not make the workshop activities easier, it just meant these participants could engage more deeply with the material. In figure 3.1 below, a breakdown of the selected participants is available.

Table 3.2
Participant Breakdown

Participant Pseudonyms	Age	Demographic
Ashley	18 Years of Age	College Freshman- Major: Biology
David	18 Years of Age	College Freshman- Major: Mathematics
Jimmy	18 Years of Age	College Freshman- Major: Theatre
Kerry	18 Years of Age	College Freshman- Major: Education
Nancy	18 Years of Age	College Freshman- Major: Social Work
Steve	18 Years of Age	College Freshman- Major: Undecided
Randy	19 Years of Age	College Freshman- Major: Animal Science

As this study was conducted at a predominantly white institute, the results of the study will be contextual rather than universal. However, through using CAD as a design framework, the hope is that this curriculum can be adapted to meet the needs of any students at any type of

institute. Yes, the results collected will be influenced by the lived experiences that this set group of students brought to the research table, but as CAD acts as a metaphorical “mixing bowl” of sorts, the curriculum can be modified to meet the needs of whatever students are participating (Aakhus, 2007).

In this study, there are three primary ways of data gathering: interviews with participants, research journal entries, and video recordings of the workshop sessions. These data collection methods were chosen from a desire to complete good qualitative research. Good qualitative research starts small and grows into a bigger picture (Gonzalez, 2000). In completing my own qualitative research, an emphasis was placed on crystallization. Crystallization seeks to analyze and understand certain phenomenon not easily explained by traditional analysis methods. It is often the case that in its analysis, crystallization will utilize the combination of multiple disciplines (Ellingson, 2017).

Crystallization was proposed as a postmodern approach that rejected the positivist approach of triangulation. Triangulation was seen as too rigid in its approach toward qualitative analysis. The shape of a crystal was proposed rather than a triangle as crystals are multifaceted and can grow to contain multiple branches. This analogy and the point being made signify that qualitative research is multifaceted and requires non-traditional means of analysis that often require the mixing of various data collection branches (Richardson, 2000).

Ultimately, I wanted the end result of the research to be a series of stories to share. Each of the students involved will have a story they bring to the research, and then a story they will create during the research. Stories, similar to crystals and qualitative research, have multiple branches. Because of this, it was necessary to use a combination of data analysis procedures for this research. The very research itself deals with the melding of two disciplines (theatre

performance and conflict management), so it makes sense to use crystallization during the research process. Specifically integrated crystallization was utilized as this approach weaves multiple genres together, interchanging between them, to paint a clear picture of a new research approach (Ellingson, 2017). It is the comparing of these two stories (before and after workshop) that will serve as the basis of this research.

The first data gathering approach was that of semi-structured interviews with the students. Interviews were conducted once students had completed the workshop process. Interviews were also recorded via tape recorder and later transcribed into transcripts for further analysis. These interviews gave participants a chance to discuss the material that they learned in the workshop and process their thoughts concerning the new curriculum (Suri, 2011). The answers to these interviews were used to answer the research questions proposed in both Chapter 1 and restated at the start of this chapter. A list of questions used to guide these semi-structured interviews can be found in the Chapter 3 Appendix section of this chapter.

In choosing to record the findings of the case study through interviews, I thought about what I wanted to accomplish with the research on a large-scale level. True qualitative research is also judged on thick description, multivocality and partiality (Tracy, 2010). Thick description helps to provide context for the qualitative data being collected. Multivocality makes sure that multiple voices are heard in the research, and partiality seeks to avoid any sort of research biases (Tracey, 2010). Often answers to qualitative research questions are abstract. In order to establish validity, researchers must focus on showing the impact of their findings as it relates to their research (Geertz, 1973, Gonzalez, 2000).

Interviews give insight into the lives of the students (thick description). The point of this research is to understand how these new approaches help students deal with conflict, and

interviews allow an up-close look at the process. Also important is the fact that multiple students from varying backgrounds were interviewed allowing for multivocality. Finally, through making the recording of the students' shared stories the highlight of the research, researcher bias was removed. I was there to listen and to observe, the main focusing was on what the students chose to share.

Specifically, the interview process will consist of asking the students a series of varying grand tour questions, or questions that seek to have the participant discuss their everyday lives (Bhattacharya, 2017). Good conflict management often comes from a place similar to storytelling (Opacin, 2022), and good theatre comes from a concrete and defined story (Rees & Staniunas, 2002). With this in mind, it makes sense to use interviews to collect data over a conflict management curriculum. The research is being shown in action versus being described. This variance of stories also takes into the account that all of the student participants, as well as me as the interviewer, come from different backgrounds and will therefore have different stories.

The second form of data collection came from the reflexivity journal entries I kept as the researcher. I used these journal entries to write down my thoughts on the workshop process as it was happening. Positive and negative elements and questions that arose as I conducted the workshop were recorded and later analyzed. Keeping a journal can help a researcher to organize their thoughts, question ideas and practices, and keep track of the overall data being collected. It can also help to eliminate research biases as the point of the reflexivity journal is to record honest analysis as it occurs (Patton, 2015). Through journaling, I captured my thoughts as the research was occurring. I could then review these notes and make sense of my feelings, the reactions of the participants, and the overall research process (Humble & Sharp, 2015). This is an important part of the research process. As has been established, qualitative research is a mixture

of the feelings and stories of the researcher and the research participants. A method to organize all of these elements was vital so that proper analysis could occur.

These research journal entries allowed me to keep a running record of the process the students and myself were going through as it was happening in live time. The questions asked in this research dealt with how students view both themselves and others. Research journal entries allowed me to observe both how the students felt about the introduced theatre techniques, and their perceptions of conflict situations as they were changing. Going back to the tenets of good qualitative research, I was able to observe the students interact with the new hybrid curriculum (crystallization and thick description), I could observe and record multiple students (multivocality), and the journal process forced me to keep honest notes as I was only recording what was happening in front of me and my honest feelings on the process (partiality).

My research sought to examine a change that occurs in the test students' lives. Essentially, I was collecting their stories concerning conflict in their everyday lives. Examining stories, that are created through the lived experiences of a variety of students, certainly qualifies as good qualitative research. Seeing as I am collecting the stories of others, if done correctly, the research will come from a truthful place as participants are being asked to share authentic thoughts and experiences. There is also authenticity on my end seeing as this research is relevant to my own life story. There has to be honesty in how a qualitative researcher approaches and records their research. The lived experiences of the researcher openly play a part in the research (Tracy, 2010). The question becomes: What is the most honest way to record this research process?

While the journal entries help capture my thoughts during the research process, I also wanted a way to capture the workshop process in real-time. This would allow me to see the new

theories I am testing come to life and allow for immediate, in the moment, honest analysis. In seeking to accomplish this, the decision for the third data collection process was made, video recordings of the actual workshop sessions. The use of video recordings for qualitative research are underutilized. They can provide insight into how participants (and researcher) make meaning of the research situation as it is happening. They also allow for new views of established approaches, which can lead to new means of theory building (Wilhoit, 2017).

As the very point of this research is to document students' means making abilities in regard to a new curriculum, and then use that analysis to update existing theories, using video recordings as a method of analysis makes logical sense. The highs and lows of the research process were recorded and shared in earnest through these recorded tapes. With participant consent, all of the workshop meetings were filmed. I then watched these tapes back and used the footage to make notes about the curriculum.

Qualitative research should be rich in its complexity versus quantitative research that is used for its precision (Winter, 2000). Qualitative research should only be used as a method when the material being examined calls for a collection method that is as dense and complex as it is itself (Weick, 2007). Video recordings meet this level of complexity. The use of video recording gives a full view of the curriculum-building process (crystallization/thick description), captures the perspective of every voice in the session (multivocality), and shows the entire research process unedited (partiality).

Now that the data collection methods have been outline let us examine how the data will be analyzed in relation to the three collection methods.

Data Analysis

Interviews

Once the interviews were completed, the created transcripts were reviewed. It was from these transcripts that I began looking for themes that emerged across participants. A coding system was created that allowed for common themes to be analyzed. Specifically, this analyzation was that of inductive analysis, meaning that I drew meaning from the students' interview answers in a personalized way (Bhattacharya, 2017). As previously stated, as the researcher, I was a part of the research.

I viewed the interview answers through the lens of my lived experiences and began to see a series of patterns that emerged. These patterns were composed of thoughts, observations, and feelings that occurred repeatedly across participants. Using these reoccurring themes in tandem with my personal views, I gathered answers to my research questions. However, since one of the goals of the research is to record the feelings of the students as authentically as possible, a means by which to filter my lived experiences is necessary. Mitigating these variances in stories is where the reflexivity journaling comes into play.

Journal Entries

Once the workshop sessions were completed, I set down with my reflexivity journal entries and compared them to the themes I saw emerge in the interview transcripts. These journal entries allowed me to record my thoughts honestly as they were occurring in the moment. Due to the personal nature of qualitative research, it is important to find a method that allows for neutral analyzation. It was also important that I found a way to organize both my thoughts, and the reactions and interactions of the participants. The reflexivity journal entries allowed for both goals to be accomplished (Patton, 2015). By comparing the themes I saw emerge in the interview

transcripts to the notes I took in my research journal, I was able to paint an honest picture of the research results. I was also able to begin getting a clear picture of the validity of my new curriculum. The video recordings of the workshop sessions helped to give an even clearer indicator of the curriculum's validity.

Video recordings

Having the video recordings of the sessions allowed me to watch the students and myself making sense of the new conflict management curriculum in real time. The video recordings in tandem with the reflexivity journaling also helped to keep the research honest. Basically, I was able to watch back these tapes and see the new theories I proposed come to life in the moment. The results of the research could be watched back and decisions concerning its effective could be made based on the reactions of the participants. Having the video recordings allowed me as a researcher to put a moving picture to the observations that I had made in the previous data analysis methods.

Having video evidence to review also helped me to make even greater sense of the new theories being developed and helped to guarantee that now nuanced elements of the research were not missed (Wilhoit, 2017) While watching the tapes, I completed a coding system similar to the one used when reviewing the interviews. I kept track of emerging themes and occurrences seen on the tapes. I then took the observations made through watching the videos, compared them with the themes found in the interviews and journal entries, and used them to answer my research questions.

Positionality Statement

This work is important to me because I have seen first-hand how frustrating and disruptive conflict can be in students' lives. I taught for four years in a high school classroom

setting and currently have been teaching college freshmen for four years. In these various positions, I have watched students try and fail to deal with conflict regularly. Students need to learn to deal with conflict, because an inability to do so leads to diminished feelings of self-worth. An inability to deal with conflict can also make it difficult for students to fully develop their identities (Kellet & Matyok, 2016).

While I have been given some advice and training on how to help students better deal with conflict, none of the materials I have been given ever seemed applicable to real-life situations. This was due to a lack of focus on developing social and emotional intelligence skills. They were also difficult to understand regarding vocabulary and overall makeup (Maier et al., 2017). If I could not understand the conflict management approaches, how could I expect my students to understand them? Even now teaching at the collegiate level, I still feel that better training could be given to students to help them manage conflict.

Thankfully, I have been lucky enough to receive further education in conflict management during my time in the K-State Communication Studies MA program and Leadership Communication PhD program. Because of this training, I now better understand conflict management techniques. I am also in a unique position where I majored in theatre performance for my undergraduate degree. Because of the extensive theatre training I received during my undergraduate degree, I understand how to use social and emotional intelligence skills in communication in my everyday life. I use this combination method of theatre performance and traditional conflict management training I propose in my own struggles with conflict. I am confident in its effectiveness and feel that those who understand and utilize this approach are better equipped to handle conflict when it arises.

Because of these experiences I feel prepared and excited to engage in this research with the students. As this is qualitative research, I will have a voice in the results just as the students will (Bhattacharya, 2017). As is explained in the workshop lesson plans, the facilitator (myself in this workshop) completes the activities with the participants. I will be completing some of the improv scenes with the students, adding my own lived experiences to the collective learning experience. In utilizing this hands-on approach, the students get to see the new curriculum up close, I get to engage with the research in real time and gain a better understanding of the students' experiences, and the entire project gains a depth that would not be afforded through other research methods. Knowing first-hand how frustrating conflict can be for college students makes me want to share this approach so they can learn how to manage conflict better and ultimately have happier and more productive lives.

Chapter 4 - Results

Chapter 1 stated that this research aimed to develop a new form of conflict management curriculum that could be used to teach college aged students how to better deal with conflict through the use of theatre performance techniques. Chapter 3 discussed how interpretivism and CAD were chosen as the theoretical frameworks for this study. This choice was made because interpretivism and CAD allow for the participants' stories to be the study's focus (Aakhus & Bzdak, 2015, Bhattacharya, 2017). After considering the data collected, it was clear that this choice was well founded. Participants had much to say through both discussions over conflict management practices, and stories shared about their personal experiences with conflict. Chapter 4 will examine the validity of this newly created curriculum through analyzing the various data collection methods (semi-structured interviews, reflexivity journal entries, and workshop recordings) utilized throughout the study. A coding system was created to help better organize narrative similarities of the individual student interviews, and, from this system, common themes that connected the narratives were discovered.

This chapter is organized primarily in response to research questions 1 and 2. These research questions are listed below for review:

1. What are participants perceived experiences with conflict in their everyday lives prior to the workshop?
2. What are students' perceptions about conflict situations after completing the workshop?
 - 2A. How do theatre performance techniques impact students' perception of their social and emotional intelligence skills?

In the first section, I focus on participants perceptions of everyday conflict (RQ1) and introduce two primary themes that emerged through the data analysis. Both themes are rooted in

negative emotional experiences of dealing with conflict—namely, fear and frustration. The first theme highlights the apprehensive nature of conflict. In this theme, students’ expressed regret, feelings of being silenced, and unease at their perceived lack of readiness to address conflict situations. The second theme showcased their ongoing feelings of frustration about conflict. That is, students shared experiences wherein they expressed moments of failure and pain points regarding their previous experiences with both everyday conflicts *and* their participation (or lack thereof) with conflict management educational opportunities.

Although RQ1 deals with how students have experienced conflict in the past, RQ2 examined students’ perceptions of their experiences during the workshop. Responding to RQ2, the findings demonstrated how students hope to experience conflict management in the future. In response to RQ2, I illuminate two themes rooted in aspirations for the future. The first theme, everyday conflict in the future, sheds light on the participants’ sense of preparation to respond to daily instances and environments wherein conflict surfaces. The second theme, reframing conflict, detailed students’ newfound sense of hope for positive conflict management in their futures after completing the workshop.

Understanding where these feelings of discomfort concerning conflict stem from, and in turn creating a system by which students can deal with them, is pivotal to ensure that students are no longer hindered by conflict. As shown, the age range of the typical college student (ages 18 to 25) are when essential moments of cognitive abilities begin to develop (Patton et al., 2016; Putnam, 2010). If these developmental moments are disrupted by conflict, students have a high likelihood of turning to self-destructive behavior (Hardy et al., 2013). Correction can be seen in the form of melding conflict management techniques with theatre performance techniques. This approach is easily understood by students and highlights the idea of social and emotional

intelligence skills (Brinkert, 2016; Saha, 2019; Tulgan, 2015). However, this approach is only successful if it can be correctly taught to students. If left unchecked, unregulated conflict can lead students to feel an increasing sense of fear and frustration.

Fear and Frustrations with Conflict

As stated, RQ1 focused on how the participants viewed and felt conflict in their lives prior to the workshop process. Connecting to this theme of personal experiences, preference will be given to the individual student interviews regarding data analysis. Transcripts from the group workshop sessions and my individual research journal entries will be used intermittently to supplement the participants' findings. Analysis of these data sources found that there were 2 common themes that emerged among all participants relating to RQ1: Feelings of Regret/Feeling Silenced and Confusion/Frustration Surrounding Conflict Management Abilities. These results lead to the conclusion that students feel unprepared, confused, and frustrated with their experiences concerning conflict management prior to the workshop. The source of these upsetting feelings largely stemmed from students feeling as if they had no voice (being silenced) when faced with conflict, and it was from this silencing that feelings of regret concerning past conflicts grew. The remainder of this section will explore these two themes in depth starting with Feelings of Regret/Silence.

Table 4.1

Research Question 1 Themes

Themes	Description	Codes	Student Interview Example
Feelings of Regret/Feeling Silenced	Participants had a common narrative of regretting how they handled a previous conflict.	Family issues Friendship breakdowns	"I feel like a lot of the time I would just go with what the

	This regret largely came from feeling as if they did not speak their peace in moments of conflict. Essentially, for a number of reasons, they felt silenced when in conflict.	Regrets over past social interactions Anxiety Uncertainty Power dynamics Self-doubt	other person wanted to do to be able to solve the argument.” - Ashley “It was a conflict that had been going on, but I just pushed it to the side because he would just kind of brush it off.” - Jimmy
Confusion/Frustration Surrounding Conflict Management Abilities	A shared consensus among participants was that they had little to no previous conflict management training. This led to them feeling confused/frustrated when faced with conflict. Participants had ideas they wanted to express but were unsure how to express them.	Lack of training Confusion over material Underprepared Unanswered questions Frustration over lack of knowledge Longing for better understanding	“None. I mean, I've kind of discussed it with my therapist, but that's pretty much it. There's been no training.” - Nancy “I've failed. I've done that so many times. I used to get really nitpicky on myself for failing, because I was like, "Failing is a sign of weakness.” - Randy

Feelings of Regret/Feeling Silenced

A common theme that emerged in all the individual interviews were that the students had feelings of regret pertaining to conflict in their lives. More specifically they had regret over the thoughts and feelings that they did not share when in conflict. Participants could feel that there was a space for them to share their feelings, but they did not have the skills to react in the moment. As a result, a feeling of dissonance remains with the students. They wish they had spoken up in the moment, but only realize they had a chance to speak after the moment has passed. Participant Randy, a 19-year-old college freshman majoring in animal science, was asked to describe a conflict that had occurred in their life:

It would be with my father my freshman year. Him and I got in a conflict over feeding an animal, and then it went south real bad. I don't like talking about it much just because it's still kind of a sensitive topic. It kind of depends on the day. I pretty much fed the animals too much food, like our cats and dogs, and he decided he was going to fight me on it, even though I'm the only kid who can properly feed them. That's all I'm going to say because if I say more, I will probably need a therapist again, so we're not going to do that.

Their response connects to the themes of having regrets concerning how to deal with conflict. This feeling of regret connects to RQ 1, showing that students currently have a negative perception of conflict in their lives. For instance, in the above excerpt, Randy remorsefully expressed that they wished they had said more when in conflict with their father. However, they lacked the ability to communicate what they felt. This in turn contributed to ongoing feelings of regret once the conflict episode ended.

In addition to feelings of regret, many participants described a silencing effect that surfaced during earlier conflicts. They feel silenced when in conflict situations where they lacked the skills, ability, or socio-emotional safety to speak up. At times, participants engaged in self-silencing. For example, at the end of the above excerpt, Randy states, “That’s all I’m going to say because if I say more, I will probably need a therapist again...” This quote shows that Randy recognized negative emotions coming up when discussing past conflict situations, but it also signals that they are not fully aware of how to process these feelings. Rather than discuss and unpack the conflict in a healthy way, they choose to again remain silent. Randy’s experience both highlights their perceived inability to handle conflict, and a lack of meaningful engagement with conflict management training. Absent these conditions, many of the participants (who did not use their voice due to a lack of conflict management skills) noted that they “did not find [their] voice.” It is this inability to speak due to a lack of knowledge that causes the silence and ensuing regret.

Similarly, Jimmy, an 18-year-old college freshman majoring in theatre, recalled an argument that they had among their family that they wish had a different outcome:

...There was a time, not really recently, a couple of months ago maybe, but it was an argument with my dad because my brother and I both got in trouble for doing something and me and my brother both didn't really understand why we were getting in trouble. We didn't agree with it. We thought that he was punishing us a little too extreme. So we had a whole argument and there was a particular day that my brother brought that up. My brother's four years younger than me. And at the time, it had probably been a couple of weeks since it had happened, and we were both talking to my dad, and he started to bring it up. And then I just sat there, and I didn't say anything because I was like, "Oh, we're

talking about this now." And I wanted to say stuff, but I was like, "I don't want to turn this into a big thing." So I didn't say anything basically and avoided the whole conflict going on and just watched it like an observer.

Much like Randy, Jimmy also talks about a feeling of regret regarding their conflict. Had they known more, perhaps they would have spoken up and not have been silenced by their inability to manage conflict. A sense of frustration and confusion in regard to their conflict management abilities at the times of these stories is evident.

The compounding emotional experiences of confusion, frustration, fear, or reluctance to deal with conflict can create mental impasses for some students. That is, given the ongoing impact of these negative emotional experiences, students recalled feeling stuck, which further contributes to the silencing affect. For example, another participant Steve, an 18-year-old college freshman with an undecided major, described a conflict they recently had with their mother:

Gosh, this is kind of hard actually. Recently, I guess, I haven't been going to class as often. It's because I've been sick, and my mom is low-key a little crazy about that, even when it doesn't matter all that much. So I have to tell her, "Hey, I'm not going to go to class." And then she gets a little angry at me and such. I'm like, "Yeah, I should probably go to class, but I also want to focus on me still while I'm up here." And yeah. There's something like that. I could maybe think of something else, but there's too much to dig up.

The mention of their being "something else, but there is too much to dig up." gives the sense that Steve is reluctant to share about their previous dealings with conflict because there may be numerous experiences where conflict has taken place. As a result, Steve implies that conflict is

both difficult to talk about (“this is kind of hard actually”) and ever-present (“there’s too much to dig up”).

Given this example, Steve’s reluctance to discuss conflict adds further complexity to the silencing effect of previous conflict. If Steve cannot talk about their previous dealings with conflict, how can they learn from them? If conflict is such a taboo topic that participants fully avoid discussing any dealings they have had with it, how can healing and personal growth occur? As shown in Chapter 2, one of the best ways to heal and learn new approaches to conflict management is through the art of storytelling (Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Rademaker et al., 2020). In order to both heal from past conflicts, and to learn how to better mitigate future ones, discussion of conflict has to occur. Silencing must stop so that new methods of conflict management can be taught that reduce the chances of fallout and regret.

Participant Nancy, an 18-year-old college freshman majoring in social work, was asked the same question as the above participants and discussed fights they have had with friends. They share how they feel as if they struggle to set boundaries concerning their own personal well-being. The feelings of regret and silencing that Nancy describes below show a much deeper issue concerning identity development. If students cannot find their voices and learn to healthily interact with their environments, as shown in previous chapters they are much more likely to engage in self destructive behaviors as they progress throughout college (Hardy et al., 2013). As Nancy recalled the result of their fight with friends, they stated:

After some of the fights we didn't speak anymore. I wish I had been more open about my feelings. I feel like a lot of the time I would just go with what the other person wanted to do to be able to solve the argument. But looking back, I should have just been like, "No, these are my boundaries. Thanks though." And I feel like it would've gone differently.

We might not have still ended up speaking anymore, but I know I would've felt better about it. I don't know, just the way that I was raised, I guess. It was more of a make other people comfortable before you make yourself comfortable. Now I obviously know differently, and my parents were like, "We're sorry for trying to teach you that", but yeah.

Furthermore, the situation that Nancy describes hints at a type of generational silencing going back to their parents (and potentially further from a generational viewpoint). This is compounded by Nancy's hesitation to discuss conflict. For example, at the beginning of the interview, Nancy asked, "How much do I have to share?". Their question about depth of response implied the presence of potential feelings of disdain concerning conflict for this individual student. If intervention is not created, entirely new generations of college students will contain to struggle with conflict management, and on a greater level, their identities. These identity struggles can lead to feelings of confusion and frustration, as will be explored in the next section.

Confusion/Frustration Surrounding Conflict Management Abilities

In further response to RQ1, a second theme emerged that highlights confusions and frustrations surrounding conflict (and conflict management abilities). The feelings of confusion and frustration concerning how students viewed conflict prior to the workshop was apparent in interviews, video recordings of the training sessions, and my own observational notes. For instance, during the workshop, students described feeling let down by current conflict management training materials.

Throughout interviews and workshops, students intimated a deep sense of resentment related to their confusion over how to manage conflict. While participant Randy discussed their feelings of regret surrounding the conflict with their dad, they also attributed some of the

dissonance they felt toward frustration over not understanding how to better manage conflict.

Randy shared that they felt as if they failed at managing this conflict with their dad because they chose to avoid the conflict and leave their relationship:

The one thing that I felt like I failed was I left his house. I got a court order stating that I could live with my mom instead of my dad. I kind of (long pause) ...Now, looking back at it, I feel like I should have just stayed and tried to work on it, because I understand no one's perfect. No one's going to be perfect. No one can be 100%. You can strive to be 100%, but you can't. You need others to help you.

What Randy is talking about is an inability to have chosen the correct conflict management style for the moment of conflict they faced. They chose to be conflict avoidant, and then found a sense of regret concerning the conflict outcome as a result. On one hand, their frustration surfaced from the outcome of the conflict. On the other hand, it can be tied to the confusion that they felt trying to pick a conflict management style. Randy's instinct to be conflict avoidant, and then wishing that they would have had better knowledge to pick a different style, speaks to the need for a better conflict management curriculum. As discussed in the previous chapters, current conflict management training practices being given to students have not been updated to reflect a changing world, and they are not composed of relatable language (Maier, et al., 2017).

The theme of frustration/confusion was brought up by multiple other participants. In order to better understand where these feelings are coming from, participants were asked to describe their previous experiences with conflict management training. Participants David, an 18-year-old college freshman majoring in mathematics, Kerry an 18-year-old college freshman majoring in education, and Steve all shared about the limited amount of conflict management training they had experienced and about conflicts that had encountered. For example, David

noted that “the only type of conflict management [they’ve] ever been taught was by my coaches because I’m in fighting sports and stuff like that.” David went on to describe the solitary nature of his sport:

You have a team, but they’re not really your team. You’re all by yourself, and so you could easily go at each other, whatever. They have to teach us...you got to be able to control yourself. You got to not do stupid things, whatever. Bad things happen when you’re stupid, you know what I mean? That was the only conflict management I’ve ever had other than the workshop. Most of the time it was usually just calm down, keep yourself calm, stay quiet. If things don’t need to escalate, don’t escalate them. That was about it.

Similarly, Kerry described a four-year, college preparation class called Avid that they enrolled in to help learn about emotional intelligence and stress. In the class, Kerry recalled talking about conflict management “a little bit...but...not too much.” Kerry also noted that the class did not set them up to be successful in their college career:

I’m an education major, so I work a lot with kids. And this past summer, my job, I really enjoyed the older kids, but I didn’t discipline them the same as I did the younger kids so eventually it caught up to me. They loved me, but they don’t respect me. I know I could have handled that differently by setting my boundaries where they needed to be so they could hang out with me and respect me at the same time. But I put the bar so low, so they just thought I was their friend instead.

Here, Kerry’s example of their past summer job is connected to confusion in that Kerry was unable to determine which, if any, of the things learned in their class could be transferrable

and applicable. Others, like Steve, noted that learned about conflict management through their relationships, noting that their relationships inspired new learning. Steve shared:

This is a new experience, I guess, for me, honestly. (Discussing a conflict in their life)

This could be like relationships because I would have an argument with an ex of mine and that would eventually lead to, I don't know, just a little (long pause) ...because I wouldn't manage it well, I would more defend for me. I'm kind of stubborn like that, to be honest. But even though if I am in the wrong at times, I'm just more caught up in the heat in the moment, unfortunately. And it does affect the relationship a little bit.

All of these participants referred to areas of their lives where they encountered frustration concerning a lack of knowledge related to conflict management. David discusses how when they played sports it was encouraged to keep emotions low and to “not do anything stupid”. Kerry (an education major) discussed how their lack of conflict management training made it hard for them to have a healthy relationship with their students, resulting in the students not respecting them. Steve talked about how all their conflict management training happened on the fly in real moments of conflict that negatively impacted their relationships. Being told to “not do stupid things”, being unable as a teacher to healthily connect with your students, and having to try and understand difficult conflict management processes randomly in moments of conflict, would be frustrating for any individual. The fact that these college students are in the peak of their adult development phase trying to deal with these issues creates an entirely new level of frustration (Gottlieb et al., 2007; Maier et al., 2017). Them being placed in these situations with limited conflict training shows a lack of accountability for the current school system regarding conflict education. These students are justified in their feelings of confusion and frustration.

Speaking of confusion and frustration happening in real time, this sense of confusion and frustration was evident in the first meeting of the actual workshop process. In what follows, I refer to my research journal notes to provide additional support for the students' voices and experiences. As students were entering the room for the session, I briefly recalled their sense of confusion. I write the following short note to myself:

First Workshop Day- First Journal Entry: *It feels as the students are a bit nervous as they enter the room. They are not unfriendly as we start the workshop and everyone starts to meet each other, but there is a sense of tension. We began the session by discussing what conflict is and how there are many different ways to manage it. None of the students said much. I felt as if they were a bit confused over the material I was introducing. It appeared that some of them had never heard of "conflict management" before. Perhaps this sense of tension in the room is a good thing as it simulates the anxiety that is sometimes felt during conflict.*

I had anticipated the potential for anxiety among the students at the start of this process and chose to open the workshop with an activity that would help alleviate some of this tension: No Doubles- 1-20 (A full description of this activity can be found in the Appendix). After completing the first activity, I wrote down my thoughts on how the session seemed to be going:

First Workshop Day- Second Journal Entry: *The students seemed to respond well to the No Doubles- 1-20 activity. They were hesitant at first and became frustrated whenever they lost a round and had to start over. There also seemed to be confusion over how to establish a winning counting system without being able to explicitly discuss a plan. I encouraged the students to clear their minds, remember to breathe regularly, and to try and focus on the nonverbals of their peers/the energy in the room. Once they*

utilized these techniques, the group rhythm became much stronger. Confusion/frustration once felt by failing at the game was replaced by a sense of positive excitement at counting higher and higher.

My thoughts on the tension easing once the first activity started were proven to be **correct**. While the students started the game hesitant, by the end they were successfully counting as high as 25 with full outside interference. I attribute this shift in energy to the students establishing a sense of communal energy as they began using their social and emotional intelligence in order to win the game. The following exchange is an excerpt from the Activity 1 debrief session that occurred on the first day of the workshop. This excerpt is from the video recordings of the workshop session. In the exchange, students were asked what they thought of the activity and to describe their mindset as they completed the game. The students started the activity feeling confused about the objective and frustrated whenever they failed. This led to a number of students choosing to remain silent when playing the first rounds. Once time passed and the students began to use entry level conflict management skills, these negative emotions subsided:

Randy: I thought it wasn't that bad. I mean, it is fun when you actually can successfully do it. But in the moment, you're so nervous. You're like, "Do I say the number? Do I not? Is someone going to say it? Is someone going to say it at the same time?" You're worrying about everyone else, instead of yourself.

Steve: I was stressed during that, I was (long pause) ...Especially when you started clapping, I was like, "Whoa." That was crazy.

Nancy: Oh yeah. I think it's a confidence thing, like knowing, "Oh okay, I'm going to do this first." So, with the anxiety, but it's just your own confidence, and co-agreeing and stuff.

Both Randy and Steve mentioned feeling nervous and stressed, connecting to the theme of frustration and confusion. However, Nancy shared that she felt that part of being able to

succeed in the game required confidence. Whereas Randy described the importance to being able to understand the emotions of yourself before you can begin to think about the emotions of others, Steve hinted at the anxiety that can come with managing conflict. What the above dialogue shows is that while the students still experienced feelings of confusion and frustration, they are beginning to learn how to manage conflict, helping to resolve those feelings. The idea of being able to practice conflict in a safe environment (i.e. conflict coaching) can help to reduce some of the negative feelings often associated with conflict (Brinkert, 2016). This is shown in more detail with the following additional excerpt from the Activity 1 debrief:

Randy: Well, I was just trying to figure out if someone else was going to say the same number as me. The same time, because a couple of times it happened, not many. But it's more of you're nervous, you're on the spot. So you're like, instead of in general when you're talking, not like this game. You listen for people, they stop talking, then you speak instead of talking at the same time, that's disrespectful. So in the game, it's throwing those mechanisms off because you're not used to it

Steve: Oh, the clapping. I mean, eventually I got used to the clapping, but when you started, I was like, "Whoa, this is different." So I started laughing but I was like, "I don't want to say a number, because I don't want to get it wrong." But then I overcame that and started saying numbers and then, that was the round we won. So, I'll take credit.

Randy talks about breaking down the views and ideals that have led to their silencing and confusion/frustration when dealing with conflict. They are beginning to understand that confusion does not have to be the default setting when faced with conflict. In tandem, Steve shares that they reached a place where the want to win the game became more powerful than their confusion and fear in the situation. This is a prime example of thinking of conflict as

something that can be successfully solved, instead of as something that will only cause chaos. Although the themes of regret and anger are important ways to perceive conflict, the above exchanges between participants provide a glimpse into the hope that these feelings are a thing of the past.

The overall narrative themes of feeling regret, feeling silenced, and feeling confused/frustrated toward conflict pre-workshop can all be seen in the above points of data analysis. These feelings are all a byproduct of not knowing how to correctly manage conflict. The negative feelings that students express having toward conflict in response to RQ 1 are all potentially detrimental to their development. As discussed in the literature reviewed, conflict is a pivotal and important part of early adulthood development. Conflict does not have to be a negative thing, in fact it can become quite positive when treated as a learning tool (Bazezew & Neka, 2017). This change in perception and how students started to view conflict as a positive experience versus a negative one will be examined more fully in the next section responding to RQ2.

Everyday interactions with conflict in the future and reframing conflict

While RQ1 dealt with how students have viewed conflict in the past, RQ2 explored how participants perceive conflict in their lives after completing the workshop. In response to RQ2, two themes were identified: (1) everyday conflict in the future and (2) reframing conflict. The first theme, everyday conflict in the future, described participants' aspirations for productive relationships. In other words, this theme highlighted how students hope to engage with both the people and environments in which they interact with daily. This theme is important because it demonstrates the ability of effective conflict management workshops by empowering students to

use their social and emotional intelligence skills—particularly within the context of a workshop designed using theatre techniques (RQ2a).

The second theme, hope for future conflict, refers to skills that students learned during the workshop that have given them hope for managing future conflict situations. This theme is important in the context of conflict because it shows how the workshop helped the students to find a shift in mindset that allows them to view conflict in a more positive light. Again, participants' voices are central to answering RQ2, and my own journal entries and observations from the workshop sessions act as supplements. However, in discussing RQ2's findings, I move between participants' voices and experiences, and the use of first-person insights to detail both design and facilitation choices to better contextualize the effectiveness of the conflict management workshops.

Table 4.2

Research Question 2 Themes

Themes	Description	Codes	Students Interview Example
Everyday Conflict in the Future	Participants discussed a want and the importance of being able to better understand and relate to their environment. This included wanting to better connect with individuals in their lives. Connections were made between social and emotional intelligence in	New info Relation to theatre performance Real life uses Want to understand Want to belong	"...Emotional awareness I'd say has been one of my struggle points with understanding people. I've been able to learn a little more about that."- Steve

	relation to this want.		
Reframing Conflict	Participants shared their feelings on conflict after completing the workshop and shared where they saw it fitting into their futures. They discussed how they have hope for removing some of the barriers that currently exist in their lives concerning conflict management.	Future interactions Understanding of conflict Better prepared for conflict Hope for the future Clearer path to applicability	“If I'm able to diffuse a situation easily or even just understand the situation, be able to see what's going on is going to be a lot easier for me to decide what I'm going to do next.” - David

Everyday conflict in the future

As the workshop progressed, the students began to exhibit and discuss a shift in their perceptions toward conflict. I chose to design the workshop sessions with a looser structure that would encourage the students to make their own discoveries and share as they saw fit. Guidance was given in order to provide context (i.e. explaining what conflict coaching is and how it is used), but then students were given free rein to play and discover during the workshop activities. This sort of loose structure was intentional as it required the students to engage in the type of reflective driven thinking that is so pivotal to learning and retaining conflict management skills (Kings, 1994, Maier et al., 2017, Bazezew & Neka, 2017). Instructions and explanations of key concepts were given as needed in order to ensure that students were engaging properly with the material. As discussed in Chapter 1, when reflective thinking is combined with social and emotional intelligence skills, true conflict management can begin.

The above approach worked as the area of social and emotional intelligence skills stood out to students in the workshop process. Being able to both recognize the needs of their partners in conflict, and then being able to react appropriately thanks to increased social and emotional intelligence skills came up in the interviews. Specifically, students talked about how they thought that their increased social and emotional intelligence skills would help them to more positively interact with the environments in which they lived. Being able to better understand peers, taking time to consider the needs of others, recognizing conflict styles of partners, and being more aware of their own emotional states were all discussed. Steve described their change in perception concerning social and emotional intelligence skills:

Social awareness has been something I've always been good at, so I wouldn't say that, but maybe emotional awareness I'd say has been one of my struggle points with understanding people. I've been able to learn a little more about that. And I'm still learning, obviously, on how to deal with that. I might try to look some stuff up. I actually was looking. I don't know if it was after one of the research things or the next day. I think it was the next day after. I was curious, so I started looking that stuff up. And I'm trying to get better at that emotional stuff because that is something I still struggle with, because I feel like, like I said before, I was stubborn. I'm pretty stubborn so I always am more focused about me.

Through participating in the workshop, Steve realized that they have an underlying issue in which they let their stubbornness get in the way of understanding the needs of their partners in conflict. The very fact that Steve discusses a newfound interest in the topic of social and emotional intelligence, an interest so great that they decided to do outside research during their free time to better understand the concept, signals that there has been a shift in how they view

their environment. Steve now believes that conflict is something that can be successfully managed. They feel that through increased social and emotional intelligence skills, they can find a healthier way to interact with the relationships in their lives. If these healthier relational interactions can occur, then Steve will find much more success in their daily environment.

Similarly, participant Jimmy talks about the importance of using social and emotional intelligence skills to understand the needs of others when in a conflict situation:

I think it's made me think more about it because I don't think it's something (long pause) ...I think most people don't really think about other people as much because I think we are very... Humankind really is just very focused on themselves a lot of the time. So I think after doing the workshop, it made me want to think more about, okay, what is this person doing? And just be more interested in observing how other people act too. I feel like I have learned more about figuring out what someone wants to do based on their body language. Like with the second workshop, the actions, because I feel like that's something that I didn't really think about before. So figuring out like, oh, this person wants this out of this other person, and you can tell because they're doing this and this and they're saying that. That kind of thing.

Jimmy is talking about two elements of the new conflict management curriculum: First, they discuss how having a better understanding of social and emotional intelligence skills have helped them to recognize the needs of others (i.e. how they view and interact with their environment). This shift in thinking shows growth in being able to more positively interact with their environment. Jimmy mentions paying more attention to the body language of their partners in conflict. They also mention an overall want to better understand and acknowledge the needs of others in their social circles. This change in mindset signals more positive interactions in their

relationships moving forward. Because they learned to better recognize the needs of others, they are now better positioned to live in an environment that will not be as impacted by conflict.

Second, they are discussing how Stanislavski's action verbs helped them to understand the objectives of their partner in conflict and respond accordingly. This participant's reactions relate directly to RQ2 and RQ2a. Jimmy's perception of their social and emotional intelligence skills increased positively, and they now feel like they are better equipped to handle conflict. This shift occurred through the use of Stanislavski's action verbs. Jimmy feels like they can now better understand where a partner is coming from when in conflict. Gone is a focus on only self needs during a conflict situation. Jimmy now understands that in order to positively mitigate a conflict in their environment, the needs of all involved in the conflict have to be considered. In summary, through utilizing this theatre performance technique, Jimmy was able to increase their social and emotional intelligence abilities. This shows that theatre techniques can indeed be used for real life application rather than just stage performance.

Participant Nancy had similar learning experiences during the workshop and gave an example of real-life application during her interview. They described a time in their life where they encountered conflict with a loved one:

The other day I argued with my friend Liv about how fraternities worked. It was a really dumb argument, but I actually used what we did. She needed time, but I wanted to talk about it. And so what I did was I wrote her a little note and I was like, "Hey, still love you. This was a stupid fight, but I understand why your feelings were hurt and whenever you want to talk to me, we can talk." Because she's very avoidant. So I was like, "Let's just talk about it." And then we did, and it was okay. It was a really dumb argument.

What Nancy is describing are the more nuanced elements of conflict management that require social and emotional intelligence skills for successful mitigation. Nancy wanted to continue to discuss the conflict, but through use of social and emotional intelligence skills, they were able to determine that their partner in conflict needed a break. In taking this break, they pair was able to take space and then come back together later and reach a positive conflict resolution. Nancy being exposed to the skills necessary to make this recognition (social and emotional intelligence skills/Conflict management styles) during the workshop, and then applying them later in their environment, is a prime example of conflict coaching at work. Through exposure in a controlled environment, Nancy gained the skills needed to manage conflict when it came up in their life (Brinkert, 2016).

Part of this successful instance of conflict management came from Nancy being able to discover and then honor her partner in conflict's conflict management style. This related back to RQ 2A as it deals with Nancy's use of social and emotional intelligence skills. Steve, Jimmy, and Nancy all shared that they felt their abilities to manage conflict in relation to the use of social and emotional intelligence skills were positively increased through the use of theatre performance techniques as a training method. The idea of objective driven thinking and understanding the objectives of others were brought up by all three participants. The positive outcomes that these students found using Stanislavski's action verbs show that there is validity in this new curriculum.

These positive changes can further be seen by looking at the end of the first workshop session. In the following journal entry, I reflected on the success of the workshop session:

First Workshop Day- Third Journal Entry: *The students seem to have responded well to the first activity. In particular, they made some great connections relating back to*

social and emotional intelligence skills. Concerning RQ2, it seems like there has been a shift in perception. The students are responding well to the material, and it feels like we are all coming together to create a shared narrative. I notice that they seem more comfortable with each other. They are responding and reacting more positively to the environment that was been created within the workshop sessions. Even in a short amount of time, it seems like the social and emotional intelligence skills they have learned are helping them to build stronger connections with others. It is my hope that these feelings will carry over into the next activity (Improv Freeze).

Improv Freeze required the students to use their newly discovered social and emotional intelligence skills, as well as higher level conflict management abilities. The students were paired together, and then given characters and situations to act out. As the performing pair was acting out the scene, other students could call out “Freeze” and enter/change the scene as they saw fit. This served to create a sense of uncertainty and anxiety in a controlled space. The students had to work together and trust each other in order to create entertaining scenes. In doing this, the tenets of conflict coaching were employed, meaning that the students were able to deal with simulated conflict in an effort to help them be more prepared for real world conflict (Brinkert, 2016). The students were given hypothetical conflict situations (these are the scenarios they are describing) and told to practice their conflict management abilities. After completing the activity, Randy shared the following:

I felt like when we knew the topic, it gave us more of a confidence boost and we could more relate to it. For the example, the last thing we just did about the child having that fender bender. That felt like we've kind of been through it, I don't know, but also it felt very relatable so we could put ourselves in there and not feel so anxious. We could just

go in, and then the more intense everyone got, you could tell that everyone wanted to go. I did. I really wanted to be in there.

Others, like Ashley, an 18-year-old college freshman majoring in biology, described that the simulated conflict “was interesting to see, depending on what your energy was, if you were super argumentative, you were out for blood. If you were super loud and raising the argument, then the other person was matching your energy.” Ashley is describing how various conflict management styles bring different levels of energy (Nicotera, 1993). The energy of a conflict can shift with little notice, so being able to recognize this shift, adapt appropriately, and then respond reasonable is a pivotal part of conflict management. Ashley recognizing this change in energy signifies that they will be able to recognize it when faced with conflict in real life.

Participants reactions to the simulated conflict exercise referenced the way that the activity had a physical impact on them. The following exchange between David and Jimmy demonstrated this:

David: For me there was such a big difference. I noticed that things were going super slow and nice, and then I jumped in with that stupid character, the old person that was angry, and that brought the level up. And then when she jumped in, I was like, "Oh shit." Literally, my heart rate increased, I was stressed. I was like, "Holy, now I have to react some way in order to keep this continued like that." And I was like, "Wow, this is happening right now."

Jimmy: Oh yeah!!! I think improv games like that one can help simulate...stuff that can happen in the future to where you're more like in conflict, that's not something that you ever really want to deal with or want to cause. But by doing stuff like this and getting used to working with people to figure out conflicts and to interact and see how people react to different things, it can help you whenever you get into real situations where

you're actually in conflict with someone and you're like, "Okay, how do I handle this?"

And feeling more comfortable handling it than you would've been before, I think.

The biggest contribution from Improv Freeze in relation to RQ 2 is that the students feel more comfortable with conflict now that they have experienced it in a simulated environment. All of the participants talk about how they feel like being able to be exposed to the anxiety that often accompanies conflict situations in a controlled setting like an improv game is a positive experience. It allows them to experience this anxiety in a safe space. The participants share that since they have felt this anxiety in a smaller dose, they feel like they will be better able to deal with anxiety when it enters their environments during a real conflict. The participants also mention a sense of excitement that they felt playing Improv Freeze. While they started out timid in the workshop, by the end of day 1, they are not only participating, but vying for a chance to be more involved. This change in participation signals that students are no longer thinking of conflict as a fully negative experience. There is growth and positive elements that can accompany conflict (Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013).

While it was not introduced fully until the second day of the workshop, the students are already recognizing that people approach conflict differently and that there are different conflict management styles that can be used. Being able to recognize these styles is a great example of social and emotional intelligence skills at play. Recognizing these styles show that the students are connecting the tenets of improvisational theatre with conflict management. This connection also draws parallels to LAP. The students are all together in this simulated conflict situation. There are no ground rules or set leaders, so a system of leadership has to emerge through their collaboration (Raelin, 2011). Students had to live in the moment and try to respond authentically to what their partners were giving them while completing this exercise. This is not unlike the

social interactions that students will encounter in their daily environments. There is no set “script” for building relationships, so the adaptability skills that the students are developing are pivotal to positive social interactions in their environments. This connection being made, combined with the positive experience the students described, shows that a positive shift in terms of conflict perception is occurring (RQ2).

Unpacking this positive shift a bit further, participants Steve and David discussed how they think the theatre performance conflict management techniques they learned in the workshop will be beneficial in daily relationships. They cite both improv and conflict management styles as being particularly noteworthy:

Steve: Performance techniques? So like the improv stuff, right? Yeah, so like I said, the improv. Like I mentioned, the improv. I think that will help a lot because I'm always pretty bad with coming up on stuff on the spot. Improv has never been my thing when I used to do theater, but I'm getting better at it over time. And doing that is also just helping more. And you've got to think of what to say on the spot. And even when you can't, you have to say something for the arguments, I feel like. So that's going to help a lot.

David: It was like the five points. That's what I thought about. I was like, okay, well... Then I pretty much kind of chose one (the conflict management styles) and was like, let's just go with this, see what happens. I think it's going to be really beneficial to not get yelled at, especially by my girlfriend. If I'm able to diffuse a situation easily or even just understand the situation, be able to see what's going on is going to be a lot easier for me to decide what I'm going to do next. I mean, obviously sometimes I'm just going to have to be right about something if I feel that what's happening is wrong. I feel like using them

already proved to work and I just continued using the skills that you showed, then it would be a lot easier to diffuse a lot of situations in the future and have a better bond overall.

Steve's answer shows that they now feel more positively about future conflicts that they might encounter, while David feels as if their relationship with their girlfriend has been strengthened as a result of participating in the workshop. The participants are also touching on elements of relational leadership and complex adaptive systems. The situation (improv theatre game) is always changing. This is not unlike a complex adaptive system. The various rounds of the game are constantly changing, and new situations are emerging (complexity) (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

The participants survive these changes and find stability through working together and using their social and emotional intelligence skills. Being able to understand the changing system, and then being able to keep the ball rolling (using improv and conflict management styles in this case) is pivotal for a sustainable environment. Steve and David both share that they feel better equipped to deal with conflict in their daily relationships. They have gained knowledge, skills, and a positive view of conflict that may emerge in their environments. They have found hope for future conflicts. This newfound hope will be explored in the proceeding section.

Reframing conflict

It was during the second day of the workshop that the students began to express true feelings of hope for future conflict management. In other words, they expressed a desire and willingness to reframe conflict as a productive and less scary experience. As the workshop sessions continued and new material was discovered, the idea of conflict being a necessary and

productive part of life seemed to grow among the participants. In fact, the decrease in perceived anxiety itself among participants from the first session to the second signaled that the new curriculum was helping with overall student views toward conflict. The students came in talking with each other and they seemed more at ease with the process. Again, a hands-off approach that allowed the students to interact with each other freely was utilized. I made a quick journal entry as everyone was preparing to start:

Second Workshop Day- First Entry: *The students seem much calmer. They are talking more freely and making jokes with each other. I am glad that this is the case as I had hoped the activities from last week would not only teach conflict management, but also increase social and emotional intelligence skills allowing for better group cohesion and a sense of community. This sense of community will be important as today's session will require participants to be more vulnerable and open with each other.*

As it seemed like the students were very drawn to the idea of conflict management styles during the first session, the second session started with an in-depth explanation of this conflict management tool. The various styles were defined, and a discussion was had where the students shared where they felt they fell in terms of the style they most often used. I communicated to the students that the goal of conflict management styles is to get to a place where you know your default style but can switch to any of the other styles depending on the style best needed to resolve a set conflict. Part of being able to accomplish this is also being able to identify the actions of those you are in conflict with. The concept of objective-driven thinking using Stanislavski's Action Verbs was introduced as a means of accomplishing this task. The following is an excerpt of the students discussing their conflict management styles and where they might use them in their everyday lives:

Ashley: I'm probably avoiding or competing. It's weird because if I know I'm wrong, then I just avoid it. But if I know I'm right, I kind of just compete for it.

David: Kind of depends on different people. In a group setting, I'm probably accommodating. With my girlfriend I would be avoiding, because if I'm right and she's wrong, she's still right. It doesn't matter what I say, I've just got to give up. I know you're wrong...but I can't say that, so I'll move on.

Jimmy: I feel like I'm either collaborating or accommodating. I think it depends on the situation, I guess. If I'm having a conflict with someone and they're...I don't know, more competing, then I'll probably end up being more accommodating. But then if it's a less competitive conflict, then I'll probably be more collaborative.

Nancy: I'm definitely competing just because I don't bring up conflict unless it is something that has very much so affected me or someone else. And so then it's like, well, I know that this has either affected me or it's affected someone else personally, so I know that this needs to stop.

The language and awareness that the students are using when discussing the various conflict styles and which they use most often signifies tremendous growth. During the first workshop session, they were not aware what these styles were. However, after completing just part of the new curriculum, they are able to recognize all styles, place themselves on the conflict styles scale, and recognize that these styles are fluid and have to be interchanged based on different conflict partners and situations (Nicotera, 1993). This increase in understanding signifies hope that the students will be better equipped to handle conflict in the future.

After the introduction of conflict management styles and Stanislavski's Action Verbs, the first activity of the day was started (Analyze a Scene). Students were shown three scenes from

popular movies and television shows. They were then asked to identify the conflict management styles the characters used, the action verbs they were playing, and what the overall objectives of the characters were. I created the following journal entry after finishing the activity:

Second Workshop Day- Second Entry: *This activity (Analyze a Scene) went very well.*

The student seemed to be making clear connections between the various conflict management styles and the idea of objective-driven thinking using Stanislavski's action verbs. Regarding RQ 2A, the students talked about a change in their perception of social and emotional intelligence regarding using said skills to help determine a conflict partner's conflict style. Then once this is accomplished, they discussed how the action verbs could be used to find a conflict solution. The connection they are making between the theatre technique and the conflict management approach shows new potential for their being able to successfully manage conflict in the future. This relates back to RQ 2. The students have changed their perception on conflict to think of it as something that can be potentially resolved if clear, objective-driven thinking is utilized.

My thoughts on the students' perceived changes in understanding of social and emotional intelligence skills, and on conflict in general, were shown to be correct through the following conversations (For context, this transcript is from the Analyze a Scene activity and the scene being analyzed was from *Good Will Hunting*):

Jimmy: I think at first, he's (Will) very avoidant and then he kind of shifts to being competing. So he starts out very avoidant, he does not want to talk about it, and then when he brings up brick laying, he starts to get more competitive.

David: I mean, yeah, but towards the end he's back to avoiding...the whole shepherd thing or whatever. He was just trolling at that point. He was trying to avoid the whole conversation itself.

Steve: He (Sean) is just trying to push him to make a decision and maybe a potential decision that he knows might be best for him...I'd say more competing, just so he's trying to get the decision out of him.

Jimmy, David, and Steve are able to identify the conflict management styles that both of the characters in the scene are using. They are also able to track and catalogue the various conflict styles that the characters switch to as the conflict progresses. Being able to track these changes not only shows that the students are understanding conflict management styles, but also the objectives and actions at play within the scene. Being able to comprehend these underlying Stanislavski's action verbs shows that the students are grasping and implementing the reflective thinking that is so pivotal to correct conflict management. Prior to the workshop, they were unaware of what the various conflict management styles even were.

Part of them being able to track the action verbs at play come from using their social and emotional intelligence skills. They are paying attention to the nuanced elements of communication that give insight into the thoughts going through the characters' heads. The scene does not spell out the objectives the actors are playing, rather the students have increased their social and emotional intelligence skills enough that they are now able to read the subtext that is so often present in conflict situations. This higher-level thinking in terms of character objectives and conflict management styles was not an isolated incident, as the students were able to have conversations about the other scenes watched as well.

A similar conversation took place later in the workshop after showing the third and final scene (A clip from *F9: The Fast Saga*). The students were again asked to identify the characters' various conflict management styles:

Steve: He is very, I guess like Michael Scott (reference to clip 2), but competitive. He wants him to tell him at least a hint on where his brother could potentially be and I'm pretty sure he stayed like that the majority of the time. And then maybe in the end he became a little collaborative, but I'm not exactly sure.

Jimmy: I think he was pretty much just competing. It was just a much more calm type in the clip. It was more like, it's not like you're my enemy, but I'm still wanting to be right and wanting what I want kind of thing.

Nancy: Yeah. I think he was only competing in the sense of his assertiveness, because it wasn't like, "Oh, I'm going to be so upset if you don't give me what I want." He was just like, "Come on, dude, this is what I need from you." And then I feel like throughout it he had...I think that he turned into collaborative because he's just like, instead let's talk about it and then I'll get what I want, type of thing...But it's still competing because the other guy didn't really get what he wanted.

Cale: What action verbs are they using?

Jimmy: To persuade him.

Nancy: To reconnect.

Again, the participants can recognize various conflict styles, and they are also able to pick action verbs to match their perceived notions of what objectives the characters are playing. This shows a positive change in perception, and from this positive change, new hope for future conflict management is found. It is important to note that the students are also picking up on

essential elements of storytelling and peacemaking through analysis of these scenes. They can recognize and understand the struggles of the characters, and from this recognition, they can better understand why the characters act the way they do. This process is an example of contact theory at work (Rademaker et al., 2020). In future instances of conflict, rather than viewing those they are in conflict with as adversaries, the students can now think of them as individuals with their own objectives and goals. They have a better understanding of the fact that all people bring a previous story with them to a conflict. A person's actions are a response to their lived experiences (Rademaker et al., 2020). Knowing this, combined with the new conflict management and theatre performance techniques they have learned, will help students to better understand and accept those they are in conflict with.

After finishing the conversation over the Analyze a Scene activity, a short break was taken. After coming back together from the break, we began the final activity of the workshop, Create a Scene. Create a Scene was the culmination of the entire workshop process. The students were given a short scene made up of non-descriptive dialogue (Ex: "Hi, how are you?" "Good thanks for asking.>"). They were told to create a scene by choosing various conflict styles to act out while delivering the dialogue. They were also told to consider the action verbs they were playing to encourage objective-driven thinking. The point was to give them practice with these skills, but also to put them in a place of simulated conflict so that they could practice their conflict management abilities. I took the following journal entry before starting the activity:

Second Workshop Day- Third Entry: *The students made great connections toward objective-driven thinking (Stanislavski's Action Verbs), and they did a great job identifying various conflict management styles in the Analyze a Scene activity. In particular, I noticed how quickly they identified the styles. This speaks to a positive shift*

in their social and emotional intelligence skills. They were able to analyze the various unspoken elements of the scene and make a conclusion about the characters' behavior (RQ 2A). There was a noticeable excitement in the atmosphere of the room. It felt as if the students were excited to learn these skills as they could clearly see how they connected to their everyday lives. I am excited to try out the final activity- Create a Scene.

The students responded positively to Create a Scene. They were able to take all that they had learned during the workshop session and create scenes that were engaging from a theatre performance viewpoint, but more importantly that showed their new conflict management skills. Specifically, the students were able to ground themselves when faced with the anxiety of performing, use their social and emotional intelligence skills to listen and interact successfully with their partners, and utilize their new knowledge of conflict management to create scenes that correctly showed how to handle a conflict situation. After the activity, the following conversations took place. Students were asked how an activity like this could help them in their everyday lives:

Nancy: If someone you're talking to has a competitive style, kind of just learn how to diffuse it and make it into one that would end up being a win-win instead of anyone losing. Because then it would be beneficial for both sides and not just be like, "Oh, maybe you're both competitive and then it doesn't get anywhere." Or one person's competitive and you might be avoidant. Just figure out how to do it for yourself and also how to diffuse another person.

Cale: What about the objective-driven thinking?

Nancy: Not as useful just because I feel like very clear when we do these types of things, just from the styles, you kind of already know what they're trying to get from it. With me, it was very clear being competitive that I was not going to be honest with Steve and tell him I was eating their lunch even though I was doing it right in front of them. And with that, I just feel like, yeah, it could be different for other types of people, but it's not as useful I think, as knowing the styles and different people.

Jimmy: I think the objectives can be helpful when you're trying to justify why you're in a conflict. It might be an argument and you are like, "Okay, why am I talking to this person? Am I in the right, what am I trying to do?". And if you don't have an answer to that, it's probably like, "Okay, I should just back out because I don't know what I'm doing," kind of a thing. Sometimes people can argue and it's over nothing because neither one of them are thinking about why they're arguing in the first place.

David: Yeah. I don't think it would be useful. I mean it would be useful if you want to explain what was going on, not during it. If we're talking about during it, you're not thinking about that. If you think about it, if Steve's just absolutely snacking down on my lunch, I'm not thinking, "This person's probably like, I want this person to not believe that I'm eating their lunch. I'm going to think this guy's an idiot. He's eating my lunch in front of me."

Ashley: I mean, yeah, I think that if you were able to change the way that you think of things and do it very objectively with little emotion, then yeah, I think that that would be extremely useful. And a lot of conflicts would not get as out of hand as they often do. But yeah, it's just a matter of... it would take a lot more practice to do that and really focusing yourself on that. But I do think that it would be very helpful for a counselor if two kids

came to the counselor because they got into a fight, then the counselor can have them walk through the conflict using these and have them use them, "Okay, what actions did you do? Why did you get into this conflict?" And that would be a very good way for them to see objectively, "Oh, this was a stupid fight. Why did we do this?"

Examining this exchange, multiple points of analysis merge. It is clear the students have learned how to decide their own conflict management styles based on their situations. It also appears that they can recognize the conflict style of their partners. With this recognition, there comes more confidence and renewed hope for managing conflict in their daily lives. However, it appears that the students were hesitant about the real-life applicability concerning the objective-driven thinking and use of Stanislavski's action verbs in this exercise.

There does seem to be a consensus that objective-driven thinking is useful when managing conflict. However, the students do not feel that understanding and considering the objectives of their partners in conflict is meaningful when in an actual conflict situation. Specifically, some students felt that in the heat of an actual conflict, the idea of objective-driven thinking would not be realistic. The observation was made that perhaps it makes more sense to consider Stanislavski's action verbs in a sort of post-conflict debrief where the conflict is studied to help those in the conflict better deal with future conflict situations.

Still other students felt as if the objective-driven thinking and use of Stanislavski's action verbs were useful, but more practice would be needed to master how to use them during an actual conflict. They saw the need for understanding a partner in conflict's mindset and goals, but did not feel like these were components that could be easily considered when conflict was occurring. An individual would focus on their own needs and finding their grounding in the situation first, causing the analysis of a partner to fall to the wayside. It is important to note that

all students found objective-driven thinking to be useful, and they all agreed that they felt an overall increase in hope for future instances of conflict management, they were just split on the best use of Stanislavski's action verbs once they had to try them out in real time. This discrepancy among students and future implications for the use of Stanislavski's action verbs will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Overall, through increasing students social and emotional intelligence skills, and exposing them in tandem to both select theatre performance techniques and conflict management techniques, the students found a new hope for managing future conflicts. They expressed that they felt better equipped to handle future conflicts, and that they felt as if they understood the conflict management practices much better post workshop. While there was some participant discrepancy concerning Stanislavski's action verbs and objective-driven thinking in terms of real-life applicability, the student response to the workshop process showed that students did indeed find a newfound sense of hope when managing conflict thanks to the new theatre infused curriculum.

Results Conclusion

In summary, by examining the personal interviews conducted with the students, researcher journal entries, and footage from the workshop sessions, it can be determined that a need for a better conflict management curriculum is evident. Participants had little to no conflict management training before the workshop, resulting in feelings of regret and unfair silencing of their voices when in conflict. Students also felt a sense of frustration and confusion toward conflict management prior to the workshop and introduction to the new curriculum. They felt as if they had failed relationships in their lives. These failed relationships were in part tied to a

silencing of student voices that resulted as a lack of knowledge caused by the poor conflict management curriculum discussed in previous chapters.

After participating in the workshop, students reported feeling better about interacting with their daily environments. They also reported hope for future instances of conflict management. Specifically, students reported their perceptions of social and emotional intelligence skills increasing positively. They felt as if they had a better understanding of what social and emotional intelligence skills were, as well as how to successfully use them to mitigate conflict in their day-to-day lives. Students generally reported a positive change in perception concerning conflict. They no longer felt that conflict was an entirely negative thing, citing the workshop as helping them to understand that conflict is part of a personal growth process that can be positive. The final chapter will explore this change further by reviewing the implications of these results on the methodology and theories utilized in creating the new conflict management curriculum. The future direction of the study will also be examined.

Chapter 5 - Discussion of Findings and Implications

Introduction

This qualitative case study examined how current conflict management curricula given to college-aged students needs to be revised. These curricula need to be improved regarding real-life applicability and language use when communicating with a layperson audience (Maier et al., 2017). This intervention was sought by fusing select theatre performance techniques with existing conflict management practices. It is from this melding of disciplines that a new form of conflict management curriculum was created. This curriculum emphasized everyday language use and real-life applicability by teaching social and emotional intelligence skills. This new curriculum was then evaluated through a multiple-stage workshop consisting of various students working for or living in a facility operated by Midwest State University Housing and Dining.

By examining the data collected throughout the workshop process under a qualitative lens, four themes emerged in response to the study's research questions:

1. What are participants' perceived experiences with conflict in their everyday lives prior to the workshop?
2. What are students' perceptions about conflict situations after completing the workshop?
 - 2A. How do theatre performance techniques impact students' perception of their social and emotional intelligence skills?

This case study utilized an interpretivism methodology and a communication-as-design theoretical framework. Interpretivism was chosen as methodology as it allows for individuals' subjective experiences to be examined from a qualitative viewpoint within contained contexts (Bhattacharya, 2017). CAD was chosen as a framework because it allows for the mixing of various theories to solve complex communication puzzles. CAD also considers various voices

and viewpoints across disciplines, meaning that this framework allows for the diverse voices of the K-State student body population to be heard (Aakhus & Bzdak, 2015). Using a narrative inquiry-based approach, I identified four main themes from interviews, observations, and my research journals. These themes were divided into subcategories, with the first two (Feelings of Regret/Feeling Silenced and Confusion/Frustration Surrounding Conflict Management Abilities) relating to RQ1 and the remaining two relating to RQ2 (Everyday Conflict in the Future and Reframing Conflict).

RQ1 themes looked at how participants felt about conflict prior to the workshop. The themes of Feelings of Regret/Feeling Silenced and Confusion/Frustration Surrounding Conflict Management Abilities were discovered. These themes emerged as students shared that they felt a lack of proper conflict management training had negatively impacted their personal growth. Students shared that they often felt silenced when in conflict due to a lack of conflict management knowledge. This lack of knowledge resulted in them choosing to be conflict-avoidant when a different conflict management style was required for their conflict situations. This choice to be avoidant and not speak about their feelings resulted in feelings of regret. It also hurt the students' relationships. These negative experiences and regrets hindered students' personal development, with some students saying they had to seek outside help from a mental health professional to reconcile the conflicts they faced.

RQ2 themes looked at how participants felt about conflict after completing the workshop. The themes of Everyday Conflict in the Future and Reframing Conflict were discovered. Participants felt as if they gained valuable insight into conflict management. In particular, they felt that they were much better suited for handling future conflicts by learning about the various conflict management styles and developing their social and emotional intelligence skills. They

attribute this easing of tension to the conflict management/theatre performance hybrid curriculum used in the workshop sessions. Students cited that the new curriculum was easy to understand in instruction and that the theatre techniques helped them to develop their social and emotional intelligence skills. Students cited hesitations about the theatre techniques that encourage objective-driven thinking when in conflict. They felt they were helpful but that participants would need more practice time or for this approach. They also shared that perhaps the approach would be better used in a different context (such as post-conflict coaching). Overall, however, after completing the workshop, students felt better about handling conflict and had found new hope for the future conflicts they might face.

As such, these findings have scholarly and practical significance. As stated, I adopted a CAD-based approach to explore the design of conflict management processes. The theories combined under the framework of CAD consisted of Conflict and Peace Education, Conflict Coaching, Improvisational Theatre, Conflict Management Styles, Stanislavski's Action Verbs, and College Student Development. Upon completing the research, several significant contributions (both theoretical and practical) were made to these various fields' bodies of scholarship. To best explore these contributions, this chapter will be organized as follows: Theoretical Implications, Practical Implications, Limitations and Future Research, and a Conclusion.

Theoretical Implications

Several important discoveries were made concerning the disciplines that defined the theoretical makeup for the curriculum. It was found that conflict management and peacebuilding have a great propensity toward reconciliation through storytelling. However, a better conflict management curriculum is required for this quality to emerge. The incorporation of theatre

performance as a solution will be discussed, as well as conflict management and peacebuilding's relationship with CAD. In terms of youth development, it was found that teaching students to think reflectively is highly important. In order for this to occur, students have to practice this thought process. How theatre can help to encourage use of reflective thinking will be explored. The theoretical implications for Conflict/Peacebuilding and Youth Development will be discussed within this section.

Theoretical Implications for Conflict/Peacebuilding

Conflict management and peacebuilding focus on helping individuals better deal with conflict and connect more productively (Putnam, 2010). With this goal in mind, it is strange that there are conflict management processes that take more work for everyday individuals to understand. The high-level vocabulary required to unpack some conflict management literature, combined with unclear roadmaps for real-life application, leaves a theoretical hole that only those studying conflict management can understand (Brinkert, 2016; Saha, 2019; Tulgan, 2015). If this gap in literature persists, it will be difficult for students to be contributing members of their communities. They will spend their time and resources dealing with unnecessary conflict. Their everyday lives will be filled with difficulty and an inability to connect with others all due to poor conflict management training. In order for students to become functioning members of their chosen groups, they have to be given the tools to manage conflict (Maier et al., 2017; Morrison, 2020). Current conflict management practices need to be redesigned to account for the issues of difficult language and a lack of real-life applicability. My research addresses this issue by introducing the use of theatre performance techniques to account for the problems of real-life applicability and higher-level language use. The introduction of theatre performance is possible

thanks to CAD, a theoretical framework that allows for a design process that makes conflict management techniques more meaningful and applicable for students.

An example of this can be seen through the fusing of conflict coaching and improv. While the students are given loose conflict scenarios, they get to choose the trajectory of the scene based on their own lived experiences. Then through the active listening required to perform improv, they learn more about each other. In doing this they are creating a sense of shared meaning making. This encourages trust and relationship growth. It is from this growth that true understanding of self and other can occur, resulting in sustainable change that transforms the conflict management process. Use of improv in tandem with conflict coaching also allows for a continuous reflective practice as the participants are living within the scene. All of these tenets relate to the elicitive training modules of John Paul Lederach, showing that this approach fits within the world of conflict management/peacebuilding (Lederach, 2005).

This type of mixing of disciplines is precisely what CAD can be used for. CAD is a framework that allows for the mixing of multiple disciplines in order to solve communication issues. This was seen in the Eddington et al. (2020) article that used CAD as a means of working to develop a more inclusive engineering department in a midwestern university. It was found that CAD was indeed a useful tool when it came to designing an intervention that allowed participants to discuss diversity and inclusion. However, while the article showed that CAD was useful in terms of tackling wicked problems, the researchers acknowledged that an increase in the diversity of study participants would have “enriched the designers’ understanding and design solutions” (Eddington et al., 2020).

Lack of diversity itself can be an issue when using CAD as a theoretical framework. CAD on its own cannot create diversity. If the various theories brought to the CAD table do not

include diversity, then diversity will remain out of the process. The same limitation can also be found in conflict management/peacebuilding processes. Everyone involved, from the trainers to the trainees, will have different lived experiences. These different lived experiences could be considered the “stories” of an individual’s life. For true reconciliation to occur, there has to be a means by which to analyze the conflict at play while also paying attention to the individual stories bubbling under the surface. Real conflict management can begin by embracing these stories (Opacin, 2022).

A CAD framework can merge these individual experiences with conflict management techniques (Aakhus, 2007; Eddington et al., 2020), but only if a technique that encourages storytelling is also introduced. This is where the new, theatre-based conflict management curriculum comes into play. This research has shown that mixing theatre techniques (such as objective-driven thinking through Stanislavski’ action verbs) with conflict management techniques helped to bridge this lived experience gap and create a curriculum that was more widely accessible. When the stories of all involved can be listened to, and the conflict management curriculum is easy to understand and dispatched with social and emotional intelligence training in mind, the likelihood for reconciliation becomes substantially higher (Brinkert, 2016; Opacin, 2022; Saha, 2019; Tulgan, 2015).

Theoretical Implications for Youth Development

Throughout this study, it has been shown that an inability to deal with conflict can lead students down a destructive path filled with poor (and potentially deadly) decisions (Hardy et al., 2013). Specifically, college students are at place in their biological development (ages 18 to 25) where they are most open to new schools of thought (Arnett, 2000). If students can be taught good conflict management skills during this time period, they can be set up for greater future

successes. This is because they learned to approach problems reflectively (the ability to adapt and solve problems without clear answers) (Arnett, 2000 & King & Kitchener, 2004). It becomes clear that new methods of teaching students reflective thinking are pivotal for overall student success.

Perhaps more importantly, my research shows that students are actively seeking a solution that will help them to think reflectively. Participant Randy stated the following when referring to ending their relationship with their father, “Now, looking back at it, I feel like I should have just stayed and tried to work on it”. Randy hints at remorse and states that they wish they had known a better path to take when faced with this conflict. In other words, Randy wants to fix their relationship with their father and find inner peace.

One problem that prevents students from finding this peace is that students remain in pre-reflective thinking tiers. This is because current conflict management approaches have yet to teach them to think reflectively (Brinkert, 2016; Patton et al., 2016). Consider, again, the above example with Randy. Why did Randy make this poor decision? Looking back to the reflective judgement thought process tiers, we know that strong decision making occurs in the (upper) reflective thinking tiers. By the time they reach college, students are aware that they are facing complex problems that involve reflective thinking, but they lack the ability to think in this manner (Hardy et al., 2013). If students are not given a process to learn reflective thinking, such as the one proposed in my theatre performance hybrid curriculum, issues such as the one that Randy faced will continue to plague students.

A student who feels as if they cannot manage conflict in their personal life will face a difficult road toward finding success in their chosen communities (Post et al., 2016). Through the implementation of this theatre infused conflict management curriculum students can learn

reflective thinking, thus filling the gap in current youth development theories. At its core, this research is about helping students to find personal fulfillment through correctly managing conflict. Then once this personal fulfillment has been found, the students can take their new conflict management skills out into their chosen communities and share with others what they have learned.

In summary, this research has shown that there is room for improvement in the fields of conflict/peacebuilding and youth development in terms of making the tenets of said fields more widely accessible. There is also room for improvement concerning teaching students how to think reflectively. Partnering these fields with other areas of study has shown promise in terms of fixing these issues. With a stronger theoretical background that pulls from other disciplines established, real work can begin that helps the participants that are influenced by these fields. Practical changes can only occur once the theoretical gaps have been filled.

Practical Implications

Practical Implications for Theatre Performance

Through this research, it has been shown that theatre performance does not have to be limited to the stage. The tenets utilized by professional theatre makers to create engaging stories on stage, can be translated to everyday life and used to help a wide array of individuals. As shown, incorporating conflict management techniques into lesson plans allows theatre performance to translate to the world outside of theatre. The tenets of a good performance are no longer only useful to stage performers. Instead, a mass audience can find the validity and usefulness of this type of work. Previously, theatre performance sharpened social and emotional intelligence skills, but only for stage performance. When partnered with conflict management

techniques however, it becomes possible to channel these attributes into a place of real-world applicability.

Take, for instance, the way that participant Jimmy discusses objective-driven thinking, “I think the objectives can be helpful when you're trying to justify why you're in a conflict.” When viewed from a theatre performance lens, objective-driven thinking creates well-rounded characters that are clear to the audience (Rees & Staniunas, 2002). However, they become much more helpful when partnered with conflict management techniques. Participants are now encouraged to think of their needs, as well as their partner’s needs, when in conflict. This is basic conflict coaching at play. Jimmy entered into a simulated conflict situation, and through working with a mediator, they learned to manage their needs better as well as the needs of their partner when in conflict. The theatre performance techniques gave Jimmy the social and emotional intelligence skills to recognize objectives, the conflict management techniques taught them how to channel this recognition toward positive conflict resolution, and the entire process helped Jimmy to learn to think reflectively (Brinkert, 2016; Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010; Tulgan, 2015). This process leads to more straightforward communication and better organization of thought, increasing the potential for conflict resolution.

Theatre performance techniques have always been helpful to theatre practitioners in terms of performance, but combining them with conflict management techniques opens an entirely new arena of potential. Take, for instance, the idea of using improvisational theatre to teach a layperson audience about leadership as practice. LAP is about learning how to accept change and thrive in fluid situations—an example is working for a company where every new project has a new leader. Employees must adapt quickly and learn to work with a new leader whenever a new project emerges (Raelin, 2011). Through improv, individuals learn about the

tenets of LAP, and through LAP, individuals learn to embrace and thrive in periods of change. Once only used by trained actors, this approach suddenly becomes practical for a range of individuals to use in real-world scenarios. While more research is required to pinpoint effectiveness, my research has proven that incorporating conflict management approaches with theatre performance techniques takes the usefulness of theatre off the stage, through the fourth wall, and into the real world. Once in the real world, actual conflict mitigation can begin.

Practical Implications for Conflict Management

Just as there are practical implications for mixing conflict management with theatre performance, the same is true in reverse. Current conflict management techniques are helpful but could be more practical. Theatre performance can correct this problem. In mixing the two disciplines, something wholly new emerges that can be used by layperson audiences. A higher-level education is no longer required to gain the benefits of conflict management techniques.

Incorporating theatre performance techniques breaks down barriers and allows for a new way of teaching conflict management. Emphasis can be placed on both technique and application. As shown, the best way for college students to learn complex processes is through methods that encourage reflective thinking (King & Kitchener, 2004). Students get hands-on training in solving simulated conflict management problems by incorporating theatre performance techniques. Furthermore, this training prompts social and emotional intelligence growth. These aspects allow students to practice the skills necessary to solve complex problems without clear solutions (i.e., conflicts examined through a reflective thinking model).

This hybrid approach was shown to be effective. Participant David stated that they feel as if they have gained a better understanding of conflict management by viewing the process through a theatre performance lens, “If I’m able to diffuse a situation easily or even just

understand the situation, be able to see what's going on...it's going to be a lot easier for me to decide what I'm going to do next.” What David is describing is the reflective thinking model. The conflicts they face will not have clear solutions. There is no “point A to point B” approach that can be taken, so a deeper dive will be required. While predicting the results of these deeper dives in David’s life is impossible, that is not the point. The point is that David now feels better equipped to handle these murky situations because they can now think reflectively. This, in turn, allows David to be a better functioning and contributing member of society.

Practical Implications for Community Engagement

In Chapter 1, it was stated that the purpose of this research was to help college students develop better conflict management skills during their most influential years of mental development (18 to 25 years of age). The hope was that in doing this, these students would be able to enter the real world after college and become better contributing members of their chosen communities. Afterall, a community filled with conflict is not a community that can thrive. The impact of conflict was highlighted by bringing up the conflict filled dispute over LGBTQIA+ rights faced by the Midwest State University Housing and Dining Services in 2022. In collaborating with the Midwest State Housing and Dining Services, a partnership was made with the university.

This partnership was made with the end goal of creating a campus that was inclusive and welcoming to all. Both of the student groups involved in this conflict mentioned in Chapter 1 (Christian community and LGBTQIA+ community) had concerns and feelings they wanted to share. Through this partnership with the university a conflict management curriculum was created that allowed for important conversations relating to this real-world issue to occur. Now that students have this curriculum to use as a guide, the hope is that they will be better suited to

handle future conflicts in whatever community they become a part of. Looking to future conflicts, K-State Housing and Dining Services now have a conflict management curriculum that can be used in the university's goal of creating a campus that is welcoming to all students. Specifically, through teaching students better conflict management, they can better engage with their communities to avoid runaway conflicts.

In Chapter 2, the idea of pulling from tenets of leadership perspectives for successful youth development was introduced. This dissertation pulled from the tenets of relational leadership (relationships college students form), complex adaptive systems (the fluid situations that students find as they navigate college), and leadership as practice (accepting and finding a way to thrive in fluid situations). These perspectives were chosen because they all encourage the type of reflective thinking that has shown to be so important for youth development (Ospina et al., 2020; Raelin, 2011; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The activities used in the theatre infused curriculum draw from these perspectives as a means of establishing real-world validity. They explain why these theatre and conflict management techniques work as well as they do.

The combined theatre performance and conflict management curriculum encourages students to embrace all of these approaches to community building. Through teaching Stanislavski's action verbs, students learn to recognize their own needs and the needs of partners (relational leadership). Through practicing improvisational acting, students find calm in uncertain situations and allow for change to occur naturally (complex adaptive systems). Through improv they also learn to trust the process and their partners in their environment (LAP).

All these skills relate to community building. These perspectives encourage reflective thinking, enabling students to move past the pre-reflective thinking tiers and into the higher-level

tiers that allow real change-making. Through the new teaching methods explored in this curriculum, students gain the skills necessary to become higher-functioning members of their chosen communities. With the new conflict management skills they have learned, they can then spread these skills to other members of their communities. This sort of trickle-down impact has been seen before, and when it occurs, actual change-making can begin (Brinkert, 2011). While no community is entirely devoid of conflict, providing future generations with the skills required for successful conflict mitigation is a pivotal step toward better community engagement for generations to come.

Limitations and Future Research

While this research showed that participants benefited from combining theatre performance techniques and conflict management practices into a new curriculum, the research was not without limitations. Specifically, students noted that they hesitated about the practical application of Stanislavski's action verbs. This hesitation stemmed from belief that students did not have enough time to embrace Stanislavski's action verbs fully. It was not that the students did not see merit in their use, they simply felt the time boundaries of the limited session workshop format suppressed their understanding. Additionally, the sample size and choice of participants were limited. As the participants were all students at K-State (a predominantly white, midwestern university), the results collected only exist on one end of the college student identity spectrum. Again, the results are contextual rather than universal. Future research is required to better understand the impact of the new curriculum in more diverse populations. These factors could have had an impact in terms of the scope of data collected. Limitations and suggestions for future research will now be explored.

Time Boundaries of Workshops

Concerning the use of Stanislavski's action verbs, all participants agreed that the idea behind them of objective-driven thinking was important when solving conflict. The issue raised was with considering the objectives of others while conflict was occurring. Students felt that this consideration of partners in conflict was either impossible or unnecessary. Conflict management literature has proven that considering partners' objectives in conflict is helpful and necessary. One of the tenets of conflict coaching is trying to understand the viewpoints of those you are in conflict with (Brinkert, 2016). If this idea of considering the objectives of others is proven to be necessary, why did students not gravitate to the use of Stanislavski's action verbs?

A potential answer could be that the students needed more time in the workshops to unpack the process thoroughly. These workshop sessions were intended to be an introduction to conflict management techniques. Participant Ashley goes so far as to say, "I think they would be instrumental...it would take a lot more practice to do that and focusing yourself on that". The concept of Stanislavski's action verbs and objective-driven thinking were also introduced on the second day of the workshop after participants had already spent considerable time unpacking new ideas from the previous session. Objective-driven thinking is a higher component of conflict management, and it is possible that students were still solidifying the other skills discussed. They did not fully grasp the impact of Stanislavski's action verbs due to overstimulation.

Looking to future research, how do we correct this problem? The solution could be as simple as repeated practice. With more workshop sessions, the students will have time to master entry-level conflict management abilities and begin working toward higher-level skills (such as understanding the objectives of others while in conflict). With more sessions, students could participate in more improv-based simulated conflict situations. Completing these exercises helps

to develop reflective thinking in students. As the reflective judgment model advocates, if students can learn to think of problems not as black and white with clear solutions, but as a spectrum with multiple elements and outcomes, they will have an increased ability to consider complex processes. Once students become accustomed to thinking this way, approaches like the one used by Stanislavski's action verbs become not only easier, but beneficial.

Sample Size and Choice Limitations

Another potential limitation of this research was the sample size and choice of participants. Only seven students volunteered for the workshop sessions. Six of these seven students had classes together, meaning there was only one genuinely unknown participant in the participant pool. While the number and mix of students interviewed were substantial enough to produce results on the effectiveness of the new curriculum, a larger and wider variety of students would be needed to test the long-range abilities of the curriculum. For example- The students became comfortable with each other quickly as most of them knew each other, and the small number of participants made it easier for them to connect. While the theatre games played still simulated the anxiety felt during a conflict, this anxiety did not persist as long as it could have with a large participant pool.

More students from varied backgrounds would allow the research to go deeper. Students would get more practice rounds of conflict management that feel truer to real life versus playing theatre games with friends. The different lived experiences brought by a more extensive and diverse participant pool would allow other conflict situations to be explored. This would result in the students gaining further knowledge through objective-driven thinking and viewing the world not just through the lens of their stake in the conflict but from the viewpoint of others. Again, the research done in this study was substantial and thoroughly answered the research questions

posed. However, a prominent participant pool with greater diversity would be needed to test the curriculum further and make more generalizable claims.

This greater diversity can easily be incorporated thanks to the use of CAD as a framework. As previously stated, CAD is a type of framework that builds from whatever other theories are brought to the table. It cannot create diversity on its own, but if the theories combined under its umbrella account for diversity, possibilities for shared meaning making increase significantly (Aakhus, 2007). Because of CAD, this curriculum can be used at a local level (as was shown with this research), but it can also be adapted to meet the needs of institutions on a global . This is because theatre is a universal art form (Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). While changes would need to be made to the curriculum to meet the demographic needs of the participant pool (it was written for K-State students in the emerging adulthood phase), the use of CAD and theatre makes this possible. Storytelling is a universal concept. Every individual has a lived experience that has shaped who they are. Greater understanding and potential connection can be found among communities through sharing of stories as this curriculum advocates.

Future Directions

The limitations mentioned could be solved by offering a extended workshop process to a class. The various workshop sessions could be spread throughout a semester, with periodic interviews taking place to gauge student satisfaction and learning. This solves the issue of overstimulation (Stanislavski's action verbs), where students have to learn multiple conflict management techniques quickly. A classroom-based approach would also allow the students to practice the conflict management techniques more, promoting the reflective thinking required for use of Stanislavski's action verbs. Regarding participant sample size and choice, a traditional

college class would offer a more significant number of participants. With more students, there would be an increase in varied lived experiences. This would lead to a higher chance of a diverse participant pool. By providing this curriculum as part of a college course, a larger, more diverse group of students would gain more time to complete the curriculum. Depending on the choice of class and institute, a global perspective could also be gathered to test the wide-ranging impacts of the curriculum. This would give students a higher likelihood of understanding and implementing the material covered daily.

If these changes were made, it would allow for a more thorough examination of the new curriculum. With more time, the question could be answered concerning the practicality of Stanislavski's action verbs. Likewise, bringing in a large and more diverse participant pool would allow for more and varied data collection. This would in turn produce richer participant stories for greater qualitative analysis. If this occurred, a more precise and more concrete narrative could emerge concerning the effectiveness of the new curriculum.

In terms of future iterations of this study, incorporating elements of higher education curriculum design could help to gain deeper insight. Fallows and Stevens (2000) advocate that universities should develop an entirely new, campus wide curriculum that incorporates elements of social and emotional intelligence into all degree programs. They argue that regardless of major, these types of skills are pivotal for career success (Fallows & Stevens, 2000). Fallows and Stevens (2000) draw from higher education curriculum building methods used by the University of Luton. Once Luton began to incorporate elements of social and emotional intelligence into their university's curriculum design, undergraduate employment rates post-graduation noticeably increased. Through the use of curriculum design (categories such as defined skills areas, university wide objectives, etc.), Fallon and Stevens (2000) advocate that a similar employment

increase can be seen at other universities (Fallows & Stevens, 2000). While their ideas are not new (their research was first published in 2000), as shown by my research, a need for this kind of approach very much still exists today. Combining these elements of higher education curriculum building with my existing research could serve to strengthen and enrich the effectiveness of the proposed theatre performance infused conflict management curriculum.

Conclusion

As stated at the start of chapter 1, “The path of young adulthood is filled with trials and tribulations”. Whether it be fighting with a significant other, trying to make friends in a new environment, or working to pay your way through school, the life of a college student is no easy task. When this task is compounded by conflict, the path toward success for college students becomes complex and unclear (Brinkert, 2016; Saha, 2019; Tulgan, 2015). This is unfortunate because it is during the age range of a traditional college student (ages 18 to 25) that social and emotional development determines how these students react to conflict situations for the remainder of their lives (Gottlieb et al., 2007). Even more unfortunate is that while conflict management curriculums do exist to help college students learn healthy conflict management techniques, they are difficult for layperson students to understand and lack training in the social and emotional intelligence skills required for real-life application (Maier et al., 2017).

Fortunately, there is hope for subverting these underdeveloped conflict management curriculums and implementing a new curriculum. This would allow college students to manage conflict and benefit and succeed in other areas of life due to having faced it. Through this research, elements of conflict management and theatre performance techniques were united under a theoretical framework of communication as design, and a wholly new conflict management curriculum emerged. This curriculum was composed of easy-to-understand

language and utilized theatre performance to highlight social and emotional intelligence skills development to increase the likelihood of real-life application. The curriculum was assessed and evaluated through multiple workshop sessions with traditional college-aged students. The student participants agreed that they found the new curriculum, helpful, easy to understand, and something that they saw benefitting their lives.

This result should come as no surprise as both theatre performance and conflict management, at their core, are about storytelling (Opacin, 2022; Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2010). Through storytelling, people can find common ground, share cathartic experiences, and feel that their voices are being heard. They can also find a sense of empathy and understanding for each other that very few other experiences provide. It is from this place of sharing one's story, and actively listening to the stories of others, that more productive and meaningful conflict management can begin.

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Chapter 3 Appendix- Interview Questions for After the Completion of the Workshop

1. Can you tell me about a time in your life that you encountered a conflict?
2. How did you handle the above conflict?
3. What were your experiences regarding conflict management training like before the workshop?
4. Describe a time you felt like you failed at managing conflict?
5. Why do you think you struggled with the above conflict?
6. How important did you think conflict management skills were before the workshop and why?
7. How important do you think conflict management skills are after the workshop and why?
8. What are your thoughts on conflict after completing the workshop?
9. Tell me about your experiences with social and emotional intelligence before the workshop?
10. How important did you think social and emotional intelligence skills were before the workshop?
11. How important do you think social and emotional intelligence skills are after the workshop?
12. What new social and emotional intelligence skills do you feel you have learned after the workshop?
13. Do you think increased social and emotional intelligence skills could have helped with the conflict you mentioned earlier? Yes or no and how so?

14. Do you feel like the instructions for the workshop were clear and composed of easy-to-understand language? Yes or no and how so?

15. How do you think the addition of theatre performance techniques helped you to better understand conflict management? Where the theatre techniques not helpful?

16. Can you describe a part of the workshop that you found to be the most useful for real life application?

17. Was there a part of the workshop that you found to be unhelpful? Yes or no and how so?

18. Do you have any final thoughts you would like to share about the workshop process?

Appendix- Workshop Exemplars

Workshop Introduction

Based on the gaps in current practices highlighted in Chapter 2, it is clear that further work needs to be done to train college students in conflict management. This work primarily revolves around creating training modules that incorporate social and emotional skills development and use language in their instructions that can be easily understood. These areas will be addressed through the implementation of the theatre techniques (Improvisational Theatre and Stanislavski's Action Verbs), combined with the existing conflict management training processes (Conflict Coaching and Conflict Management Styles), to create a new form of conflict management training workshop for college students that can be used by universities to train RAs and the students they work with.

This training workshop will be led by a facilitator and consist of four activities. These activities will be divided between two modules and are designed to build social and emotional skills that will in turn help students better manage conflict. Listed in the order they are to be executed, the four activities are: No Doubles 1-20, Improv Freeze, Analyze a Scene, and Create a Scene. The activities build in complexity with the first activity (No doubles 1-20) serving as an easy, introductory exercises to social and emotional skills development, the second (Improv Freeze) serving to get students on their feet and putting their new social and emotional skills to work, the third (Analyze a Scene) helps students to see the new techniques in action begin to recognize real life applicability, and the last (Create a Scene) requires students to practice actual conflict management through simulated conflict situations. No Doubles 1-20 and Improv Freeze are in Module 1, while Analyze a Scene and Create a Scene is in Module 2.

Theatre-Based Conflict Management Module 1- Improvisational

Acting

Introduction and Basic Rules of Improv

The primary purpose of this module and its included activities is to help college students develop their social and emotional intelligence skills through the playing of basic improv theatre games. Students attending college are in need of social and emotional intelligence training so that they can better understand how to communicate with others. Improved communication abilities through social and emotional skills development will increase a student's likelihood of successful conflict management when faced with a conflictual situation. Upon completing this training students will be better equipped to deal with conflict due to their heightened social and emotional intelligence skills. As the key tenets of this module revolve around improvisational acting, it is important that the facilitator has reviewed the basic rules of improv listed below before actual facilitation.

Basic Rules of Improv

Any successful improv exercise will utilize the improv rules as set forth by Del Close. Del developed these rules during his many years teaching at Second City (Improv Olympics Editors, 2018). Understanding these rules and the definition of improv will be key in teaching this module.

Eleven Rules of Improv

1. You are all supporting actors.
2. Always check your impulses.
3. Never enter a scene unless you are NEEDED.
4. Save your fellow actor, don't worry about the piece.
5. Your prime responsibility is to support.
6. Work at the top of your brains at all times.
7. Never underestimate or condescend to your audience.
8. No jokes (unless it is tipped in front that it is a joke.)
9. Trust... trust your fellow actors to support you; trust them to come through if you lay something heavy on them; trust yourself.
10. Avoid judging what is going down except in terms of whether it needs help (either by entering or cutting), what can best follow, or how you can support it imaginatively if your support is called for.
11. LISTEN

References

Improv Encyclopedia. (2018) Eleven commandments. Improv Encyclopedia. Retrieved from http://improvencyclopedia.org/references/Eleven_Commandments.html

Activity 1- No Doubles 1-20

Purpose of Activity

This activity serves as a warmup/ice breaker for the group. It is a low stake, easy to understand activity that gets all participants engaged. The activity also works as a baseline introduction for social and emotional skills. Students will be able to see the importance and the function of social and emotional skills in real time while participating in the activity. This is essential because students cannot begin to use their social and emotional skills to solve conflict until they are aware of the function that they serve. In the debrief of this activity, the mediator should point out the social and emotional skills that students have used during the activity and tie them to conflict management. This will serve as a segue way into the second activity of this curriculum that deals directly with conflict management. A list of the social and emotional skills gained through this activity are active listening, nonverbal communication skills, and developing a group dynamic.

This activity is based on a variation of an improv game found on Improv Encyclopedia.com. The original source material can be found at the end of this activity.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this activity students will be able to:

1. Understand and appreciate the importance of social and emotional skills;
2. Identify and use social and emotional skills such as active listening and nonverbal communication to develop a group dynamic.

Coordination and Planning Items

- **Module type:** In person
- **Facilitator requirements:** This activity requires only one facilitator. No previous experience in improvisational theatre is required. However, it is important that the facilitator review both the basic rules of improv listed above and the module itself in its entirety to ensure they have a clear understanding of the activity.
- **Total activity time:** 50 minutes
- **Time allocation:**
 - 10 minutes to gather group and explain rules
 - 15 minutes for first round of activity
 - 15 minutes for second round of activity
 - 10 minutes for debrief
- **Maximum number of participants:** In order to allow for active game play and the opportunity for all players to participate, number of participants should be limited to no more than 20. This number will also allow the facilitator the ability to interact with all participants and easily oversee the activity.

- **Room design/set up:** This activity is best played in a large, empty room where participants can stand comfortably together in a large circle. A room with ample acoustics is also helpful as this ensures that all participants can be heard when speaking.
- **Supplies Required:** None

Facilitator Script

The following is a scripted introduction that a facilitator can read in order to welcome the student participants and introduce them to the game:

Hello everyone and welcome to the (insert your university's name) campus! We are so glad that you are all here with us today. The purpose of this workshop is to help us learn how to better deal with the conflict that can arise between us and those that we encounter in our lives. Who here has ever had a conflict with someone? Raise your hand if this applies to you. (Allow students to respond) Great! Thank you to those that shared. The truth of the matter is that conflict is an inevitable part of life. Whether it be with a coworker, a teacher, a best friend, a significant other, or your parents, at some point, we all have had a conflict with someone. You're all probably thinking, "What does conflict management have to do with college?" Well, knowing how to manage conflict is a highly important skills that can not only help you succeed during your time on campus, but in your everyday lives after college as well. Good conflict management skills help us have better relationships, to be competitive in the world of employment opportunities, and they help us to be overall better human beings. Now I know that conflict can be difficult, but it doesn't have to be! Today we are going to do a few activities that can help you all better manage conflict, and a big part of managing conflict comes from having well developed social and emotional skills. Now I'm sure some of you are wondering, "What are social and emotional skills exactly?" Well don't worry, I didn't know what they were at your age either. Basically, social and emotional skills are the nuanced and unspoken elements of communication. Body language, nonverbal cues, reading the atmosphere of a room, these are all examples of social and emotional skills. All of these things are important parts of conflict management. Today we are going to do a few activities to help you all build your social and emotional skills and in turn, learn how to better manage conflict. Let's start with a game called No Doubles 1-20.

Instructions for No Doubles 1-20

1. Have all participants get together in a large circle. Make sure that everyone stands an arms width apart.
2. Explain to the group that the goal of the activity is to discover the importance of social and emotional skills and to see in real time how they can help accomplish tasks. Emphasize the ideas of active listening, nonverbal communication, and group dynamic building as outlined in the "Student Learning Outcomes" section above.
3. Once everyone is in a circle, explain the rules and instruct them of the deceptively simple goal of the game: Working together, the group must find a way to count to 20. The catch is that no two players can talk at the same time and no discussion of strategies can take place. Participants must speak in random order and players

cannot give any direct signal that they are about to speak. If any players speak at the same time (Example: Two players say “5” together) the group must immediately start counting over again from 1.

4. As the facilitator, it is your job to help the students work as an ensemble. Encourage them to remain as calm as possible. Instruct them to attempt and breathe naturally and at a consistent pace throughout the duration of the game. Reiterate that remaining calm is key. This is important because in order for players to utilize their social and emotional skills, as well as to build a group dynamic, all members must find a way to be on the same mental wavelength. Collective breathing and shared sense of calm can help to accomplish this goal.
5. As the game begins the group will struggle to count much higher than the first few digits. After a few failed attempts, pause the game and encourage players to try and use their social and emotional skills. Always refer back to the social and emotional skills discussed in “Student Learning Outcomes.” Remind them to look for the nonverbals of the other players that might cue that they are about to speak. It is also helpful to remind them that developing a group dynamic is key. This can be done through active listening and trying to develop a rhythm to the group’s counting.
6. After a few more rounds with students now using social and emotional skills, the group should find success in counting to 20. Once this happens it is time to make the game a bit more difficult. Instruct all the players to start the game over, but this time with their eyes closed. Taking away sight will require players to fully rely on their social and emotional skills. This is due to the fact that students must now fully rely on the group dynamic that has been created and to actively listen for the rhythm that was created in the first round of play. If time allows, students can try counting higher than 20. Outside interference (such as the facilitator clapping their hands, or the playing of music) can also be brought in to add new difficulty to the game.

Group Debrief

Once the activity is over, bring participants back together and ask them to share about their experiences executing the activity. Work to tie all that is shared back to the importance of social and emotional skills. Again, highlight the elements listed in “Student Learning Outcomes.” Talk about how by using social and emotional skills students were able to develop a group rhythm, and through this rhythm they were able to complete the task of counting to 20 even when the benefit of sight was removed. The point of this activity is that it allows for quick results allowing students to see immediately the importance of social and emotional skills development. Even if students do not successfully count all the way to 20, they should still see improvement from the first few attempts. Regardless of actual number reached at the end, highlight this improvement and connect it with social and emotional skills. To end this first activity, ask students to think about how the social and emotional skills used in this activity could be useful in dealing with conflict. Ask this question at the end so that students will think about how the new skills they have just learned could be applicable to conflicts that may arise in their everyday lives.

References

Improv Encyclopedia. (2018) No doubles 1-10. Improv Encyclopedia. Retrieved from http://improvenyclopedia.org/games//No_Doubles_1-10.html

Activity 2- Improv Freeze

Purpose of Activity

This activity serves to get students up on their feet and actually practicing their social and emotional skills and conflict management abilities. Students will gain skills in the areas of reacting and adapting under pressure of time when faced with conflictual situations. As the game requires partner work, students will also receive training in peer listening and reaction. This is done using the tenets of conflict coaching. In conflict coaching a mediator walks participants through simulated conflict situations and helps them to find possible solutions that can then be applied if/when conflict arises in everyday life. Ultimately, Improv Freeze works as a simulated first step toward actual conflict management. Using the social and emotional skills introduced in Activity 1, combined with the guided mediator process utilized in conflict coaching, students are exposed to hypothetical conflict situations that provide them with a game plan for when faced with actual conflict.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will gain skills in reacting and adapting in conflictual situations;
2. Students will be able to identify engaged peer listening and use appropriate conflict reaction;
3. Students will be able to use entry-level conflict management techniques implemented through social and emotional skills.

Coordination and Planning Items

- **Module type:** In person
- **Facilitator requirements:** This activity requires only one facilitator. No previous experience in improvisational theatre is required. However, it is important that the facilitator review both the basic rules of improv listed above and the module itself in its entirety to ensure they have a clear understanding of the activity. Scenarios for game play provided in the “Activity 2- Appendix” section should also be reviewed thoroughly.
- **Total activity time:** 50 minutes
- **Time Allocation:**
 - 10 minutes to gather group and explain rules
 - 30 minutes of game time where every student participates in at least one scenario
 - 10 minutes for debrief
- **Maximum number of participants:** In order to allow for active game play and the opportunity for all players to participate, number of participants should be limited to no more than 20. This number will also allow the facilitator the ability to interact with all participants and easily oversee the activity.
- **Room design/set up:** This activity is best played in a large, empty room where participants can stand comfortably together in a large circle. A room with ample acoustics is also helpful as this ensures that all participants can be heard when speaking.

- **Supplies Required:** A list of participants' name

Facilitator Script

The following is a scripted introduction that a facilitator can read in order to welcome back the student participants after their break from the Activity 1:

Welcome back everyone! I hope you all are enjoying the workshop so far. Sometimes the best way to learn a new skill is to practice using it in real life situations. Now that we have seen social and emotional skills in action, let's try them out in terms of conflict management. A big part of good conflict management is being able to think quickly on your feet. You need to be able to anticipate where the conflict is going to go and react accordingly to make sure that the situation doesn't elevate. This is done by using your social and emotional skills to correctly interpret what those you may be in conflict with are saying or doing and responding with the most appropriate response possible based on what they have given you. In order to practice this, we are going to play a role-playing game called Improv Freeze! Everyone circle up and I'll explain the rules of the game.

Instructions for Improv Freeze

The point of this game is for students to gain practice dealing with conflict through exposure to hypothetical conflict situations commonly found in everyday life. This is done by having two players (both students attending the workshop) work through possible issues of conflict based on one of the randomly selected conflict scenarios. Review the "Activity 2- Appendix" section for these scenarios. The facilitator will pick two students at the start of the activity and will assign them characters and a scenario (e.g., Scenario: Buying a car, Student 1 Character: Buyer, Student 2 Character: Seller). Once characters and a scenario are assigned, the goal is to work through the conflict. The primary goal is not so much creating an entertaining scene, but rather exposing students to conflict situations and giving them an opportunity to react. Even if they react incorrectly, this will still create valuable experience and provide an example of how to not act in future situations of conflict. Students will have no idea as to the specifics of the scenarios prior to gameplay. This uncertainty serves to simulate the unpredictable nature that comes with conflict. Once the game has started, the facilitator must work to help students keep the game alive and to ensure that all students participate. While the initial players work to create the scene, the facilitator watches and looks for an opportunity to yell "FREEZE!" and bring in new players with a new conflict scenario. The facilitator can replace just one player, or both players. Giving the facilitator the power to freeze and change the game at any given moment helps to further the uncertainty factor. The rationale is that if students are exposed to uncertainty, they will be required to use their social and emotional skills to manage conflict. It is the job of the facilitator to make sure that when a new scene begins, players clearly understand the conflict situation, the characters they will be playing, and that the scene moves toward the idea of conflict resolution.

1. Arrange the group in a circle. Leave enough space in the middle so that two players can create a scene within the circle.

2. Ask for any volunteers to go first. If nobody volunteers, pick two students randomly from your list of names.
3. With your players chosen, move to the middle of the circle, then assign a scenario from your previously created list.
4. The facilitator should live in the scene with the students they are training. Offer suggestions as needed to help keep the scene alive (e.g., feeding the students a line, offering a possible solution to try, encouraging them to embrace their instincts, etc.). This can be done by reminding students of the social and emotional skills discussed in Activity 1 and through highlighting characters and conflict situations as defined in the Activity 2- Appendix below.
5. When the facilitator feels that the scene has progressed enough that the performing student have been able to use social and emotional skills to work toward solving the conflict situation, the facilitator should yell “FREEZE!” They should then tag the initial students out, replacing them with randomly chosen new students, starting a new scene. Scenes should not be longer than a few minutes as they are not supposed to be full conflict coaching sessions. The desired outcome is to expose students to possible conflicts they might see in their lives and help them make the connection between social and emotional skills and managing these conflicts. It is okay to use previous scenarios as long as they are with new players.
6. Let the game progress until every student has had an opportunity to be a part of at least one scene.

Group Debrief

Once the game is completed, gather the students and discuss any discoveries that were made when playing. Talk to students about how they felt in the moment while playing the game. It is highly likely that students will have felt a sense of anxiety while playing the game due to the uncertainty factor involved. This is intentional and serves to simulate anxiety that can arise when faced with conflict. Ask students to walk through their mental process when playing the game. What choices did they make that increased their anxiety? What decisions did they make that decreased their anxiety? Help students to tie anxiety reduction back to the social and emotional skills discussed in Activity 1. For instance, if a student talks about anticipating the actions of a partner by observing their facial expression, point out that this is tied to the social and emotional skills of nonverbal communication. Highlight moments when players showed strong use of social and emotional skills so that students are aware of these positive developments and can continue to improve in this area. It is also beneficial to point out things missed during the activity. Give examples of missed opportunities for social and emotional skills use, highlight scenes where it seemed conflict increased, etc. Students should walk away from the activity with as much useable information pertaining to social and emotional skills as possible. If done correctly, students should leave with a new set of tools to deal with conflict and better awareness of the use of social and emotional skills.

Activity 2- Appendix

Conflict Situations

1. Buying a new car
Characters: Buyer and Seller
2. Arguing with a roommate about a messy dorm
Characters: Upset Roommate and Messy Roommate
3. Asking a teacher to raise a grade
Characters: Student and Teacher
4. Returning an item to the store without a receipt
Characters: Buyer and Store Clerk
5. Telling a server that your food order is wrong
Characters: Customer and Server
6. Arguing with a classmate over a group project
Characters: Student 1 and Student 2
7. Being accused of stealing your roommate's clothes
Characters: Accused and Roommate
8. Being confronted by your boss over missing work
Characters: Worker and Boss
9. Explaining to your teacher why you were late for class
Characters: Student and Teacher
10. Asking for a raise at work
Characters: Worker and Boss
11. Confronting a noisy neighbor
Characters: Upset Neighbor and Noisy Neighbor
12. Getting in a fender bender with an angry driver
Characters: Driver 1 and Angry Driver 2

13. Telling your parent about getting into a fender bender
Characters: Person in Fender Bender and Parent
14. Fighting with a significant other about where to eat for dinner
Characters: Significant Other 1 and Significant Other 2
15. Asking for a discount on rent
Characters: Renter and Landlord

Theatre-Based Conflict Management Module 2- Stanislavski's Action Verbs

Introduction

The primary goal of this module and its activities is to help students recognize different conflict management styles and understand the importance of objective-driven thinking. Working knowledge of the various conflict management styles allow students to have a go-to game plan to draw upon when in conflictual situations. Once these various conflict management styles have been learned, the concept of Stanislavski's Action Verbs is introduced to help students learn to think in an objective-driven mindset when dealing with conflict. "Objective-driven" means to think with ending goals at the front of their mind. Using the action verbs allows students to have clearer actions and objectives when in conflict. Upon completion of this training students will have a better idea of how to deal with conflict due to their new knowledge of conflict management styles, and the training received in objective-based thinking when dealing with conflict thanks to Stanislavski's Action Verbs.

Activity 3- Analyze a Scene

Purpose of Activity

This activity serves as an opportunity for students to see the real-life applicability of the theatre performance and conflict management techniques. The primary purpose of the activity is to help students recognize and understand the use of conflict management styles and objective-driven thinking through Stanislavski's Action Verbs.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to identify conflict management styles in use.
2. Students will see the Stanislavski's Action Verbs technique in use.
3. Students will begin to think of how they can use the new theatre-based conflict management curriculum in their lives.

Coordination and Planning Items

- **Module type:** In person
- **Facilitator requirements:** This activity requires only one facilitator. No previous experience in theatre is required, however it is important that the facilitator review both the concept of Stanislavski's Action Verbs and the module itself in its entirety to ensure they have a clear understanding of the activity. A guided script for game play (provided below) should also be reviewed thoroughly.
- **Total activity time:** 70 minutes
- **Time Allocation:**
 - 10 minutes to gather group and explain rules.
 - 10 minutes to explain the various conflict management styles with the group.
 - 15 minutes to watch the three selected scenes.
 - 30 minutes for discussion and group analysis of the scenes and conflict management techniques.
 - 10 minutes for debrief and closing remarks.
- **Maximum number of participants:** In order to allow for active game play and the opportunity for all players to participate, number of participants should be limited to no more than 20. This number will also allow the facilitator the ability to interact with all participants and easily oversee the activity.
- **Room design/set up:** This activity is best played in a large, room where there is room for a table and chairs for participants to sit at. A room with ample acoustics is also helpful as this ensures that all participants can be heard when speaking. There will also need to be a way to show a series of brief videos to the participants and this should be considered when setting up the room.

- **Supplies Required:** A means to show a series of short videos to participants, clipboards, pencils, and paper copies of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Styles Survey. You can purchase the survey at: <https://kilmanniagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument-tki/>.

Facilitator Script

The following is a scripted introduction that a facilitator can read in order to welcome back the student participants after completion of Module 1:

We have reached our last day together. Did you all know that there are different types of conflict management styles that people use when dealing with conflict? According to conflict research pioneers Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann there are five different types of conflict management styles: Collaborating, Competing, Avoiding, Accommodating, and Compromising. Thomas and Kilmann created a test that people can take to find out which conflict style they have a natural disposition toward. A huge part of being able to successfully deal with conflict is being able to recognize different conflict management styles so that you can use any of them when a situation calls for a style other than your own. Understanding all the styles also helps you to better understand those that you may come into conflict with. To help us start to recognize these skills, our next activity is going to be called Analyze a Scene!

Any questions? (Pause and answer any questions) All right, so the first thing we are all going to do is take the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Styles Survey. We have a copy for everyone on these clipboards as well as pencils to use when filling the survey out. Once you have completed the survey, figure out your conflict style using the attached rubric. Once you are finished, we will review the survey together. (Pass out the surveys and wait for students to complete them.)

Everyone, done? Great, let's discuss the different types of conflict management styles a bit before going on to the activity. It is just as important to understand all of the conflict management styles so that you can pick the right style for a conflict and understand the style being used by the person you are in conflict with. That way, you can respond appropriately to different styles. (Using the definitions provided by the survey, review the five conflict management styles with students. Answer any questions then proceed to activity.)

Now that we have gone over the survey, let's talk a little about the emotions that might come up when dealing with conflict. In theatre, it is a rule that you should never play directly into your emotions. Emotions can be confusing and hard to define since we all feel things differently. While it is impossible to take emotions out of conflict management, try to think of the conflict resolution in terms of your goals and the emotions that will be at play as you work toward those goals. Think of your actions in the scene as playable action verbs. This approach was first thought of by Konstantin Stanislavski, who is widely considered to be the father of modern acting. Because of this, this acting technique is referred to as "Stanislavski's Action Verbs". I'll give you an example: Two people are fighting over a parking spot. Instead of playing "Anger" toward the character you are in opposition with within the scene, play things like "To intimidate," "To flatter," "To bribe," etc. Think of this in terms of solving the conflict in the

clearest way possible using defined actions. Attempting to solve conflict without a plan can lead to confusion and even more conflict between individuals.

If a person can understand the conflict management style being used by their partner in conflict, and have a working knowledge of the other styles that they can use based on the situation, and then learn to act in the forward thinking method used in Stanislavski's Action Verbs, then managing conflict becomes much easier. The purpose of this exercise is to help you all to see this process in action. We are going to watch a series of 3 short video clips that show people in conflict. After each clip, we will stop and discuss the action verbs being used and the conflict management styles being used. Once we finish, you all should have a better idea of how to use this process and will be able to use the approach in your own lives!

Instructions for Analyze a Scene

1. Start by passing out copies of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Styles Survey. These should have been prepared in advance of the workshop by placing a copy of each survey on a clipboard along with a pencil. After the surveys have been distributed to students, give them 10 minutes to complete the survey. After 10 minutes, encourage them to finish up and then review the conflict management styles with them.
2. Once the different styles have been explained, explain the concept of Stanislavski's Action Verbs to the participants.
3. After the action verbs have been explained, start the first video clip. The instructor can pick the clips based on the participants they are working with. Any clip from a movie/television show where characters are in conflict will work. For the sake of simplicity, only have two characters in conflict within the scene. Scenes should be no longer than 5 minutes.
4. After the first scene has been watched, ask participants for their thoughts. Encourage them to try and identify the conflict management styles that the characters used. Encourage them to try and identify what action verbs the characters were using. Participants may need help completing these tasks during the first clip, so do not hesitate to guide the conversation.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 for the other two clips. As the activity goes on, try to let participants run the conversation themselves. The goal is to have the participants recognize the process in action so that they can then create their own conflict management scenes during the last activity of the workshop.

Debrief

Talk to the students about the importance of conflict management styles. Make sure they understand the connection between recognizing their own conflict management styles, the styles of others, and having a knowledge of all the styles. Understanding conflict management styles and understanding how to use the social and emotional skills explored in the previous activities to deescalate conflict should be the key takeaways. Also be sure to highlight the effectiveness of using playable actions in solving conflict. Discuss with students how these playable actions helped guide emotions and lead to better overall communication.

To conclude, asks the students if they have any final questions and then answer them accordingly.

Activity 4- Create a Scene

Purpose of Activity

This activity serves as the culmination of the workshop. The primary purpose of the activity is to help students understand different styles of conflict management (set forth by the Thomas-Kilmann model) and to be able to identify when to use them in real life. Through the implementation of Stanislavski's Action Verbs, students should learn to think in an objective-drive fashion, helping them to better deal with conflict by having end goals in mind when dealing with conflict situations.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to identify one's own conflict management style.
2. Students will learn to use different conflict management styles when called for.
3. Students will learn to recognize the conflict management styles of others and how to respond accordingly.
4. Students will learn to use playable actions to increase effectiveness in dealing with conflict and to better communicate emotions.
5. Students will gain practice in solving conflicts between themselves and their peers using social and emotional skills.

Coordination and Planning Items

- **Module type:** In person
- **Facilitator requirements:** This activity requires only one facilitator. No previous experience in improvisational theatre is required, however it is important that the facilitator review both the basic rules of improv listed above and the module itself in its entirety to ensure they have a clear understanding of the activity. A guided script for game play provided in the "Activity 4- Appendix" section should also be reviewed thoroughly.
- **Total activity time:** 60 minutes
- **Time Allocation:**
 - 10 minutes to gather group and explain rules.
 - 10 minutes to review the various conflict management styles with the group.
 - 30 Minutes for gameplay and presentation of volunteer student scenes.
 - 10 minutes for debrief and closing remarks.
- **Maximum number of participants:** In order to allow for active game play and the opportunity for all players to participate, number of participants should be limited to no more than 20. This number will also allow the facilitator the ability to interact with all participants and easily oversee the activity.
- **Room design/set up:** This activity is best played in a large, empty room where participants can stand comfortably together in a large circle. A room with ample acoustics is also helpful as this ensures that all participants can be heard when speaking.

Facilitator Script

The following is a scripted introduction that a facilitator can read in order to welcome back the student participants after their break from Activity 3:

We have reached our last activity of the day! Now that we all have some experience in terms of using conflict management styles and action verbs to solve conflict, let's get up on our feet and practice doing so in real time! To help us learn these skills, our final activity is going to be called Create a Scene! We have a short, scripted conflict that each of you will act out with a partner. The dialogue will be the same for everyone, but the acting choices and outcome of the scene will vary based on conflict management styles and acting choices made.

Any questions? (Pause and answer any questions) All right, so the first thing we are all going to do is review our individual results from the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Styles Survey. Everyone take a few moments and review the possible conflict management styles, as well as the style that you tested as having a predisposition toward. (Pass out the surveys from the previous activity and wait for students to review them.)

Everyone, done? Great, now that we have gone over the survey, come get a copy of the scene from me, and then find a partner. Remember, in theatre, it is a rule that you should never play directly into your emotions, use Stanislavski's Action Verbs instead. The purpose of this exercise is to think in terms of clear actions that are driven toward a clearly established objective. Working with a partner, create a scene that lets you both try and solve the conflict by making a list of playable actions. Take into account your conflict management style and your partner's style. Once you get through the scene with your preferred conflict management style, try the scene a second time with one of the other styles. The basic rules will be the same, switching styles will just help you to gain practice in using all the styles.

Instructions for Create a Scene

1. Start by passing out copies of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Styles Survey. These should have been prepared in advance of the workshop by placing a copy of each survey on a clipboard along with a pencil. After the surveys have been distributed to students, give them 10 minutes to review the survey. After 10 minutes, encourage them to finish up and review the conflict management styles with them once more if needed.
2. Once the different styles have been explained, instruct students to find a partner. Make sure to walk around the room helping students with questions and stepping in to help finding partners when needed.
3. After everyone has a partner, help the students with the process of developing the scene. Working together, students should decide what type of conflict exists in their scene. The script has been kept simple so that any type of conflict can be imposed over the lines. With the conflict established and conflict management styles explained, students should use Stanislavski's Action Verbs to create clear actions that work toward the ending objective of solving the conflict. Walk around and watch each group work through the process. Offer insight when needed or answer questions as they come up. Find three partner groups that feel comfortable and would like to present their scenes to all participants.

4. After 15 minutes, bring everyone back together and introduce your three groups chosen to perform. After each performance ask the performers to talk about their process and to explain why they chose the actions that they did. Once the performers have shared, open things up to questions from the audience. All three of the performance groups should take 5 minutes each, for a total of 15 minutes of presentation.

Debrief

Talk to the students about the importance of conflict management styles. A list of possible questions to ask during this debrief can be found below. Make sure they understand the connection between recognizing their own conflict management styles, the styles of others, and having a knowledge of all the styles. Understanding conflict management styles and understanding how to use the social and emotional skills explored in the previous activities to deescalate conflict should be the key takeaways. Also be sure to highlight the effectiveness of using playable actions in solving conflict. Discuss with students how these playable actions helped guide emotions and lead to better overall communication. To conclude, ask the students if they have any final questions and then answer them accordingly. Thank them for attending and wish them the best of luck on their collegiate journeys.

Questions

1. How did knowing your conflict management style help you in resolving conflict?
2. How did it feel when you tried out different conflict management styles?
3. How did your conflict management style interact with your partner's style?
4. What playable actions did you come up with that you felt worked well in terms of conflict management?
5. What playable actions did you come up with that you felt did not work well in terms of conflict management?
6. Were you able to clearly define an objective for the scene? Did having this objective help you in terms of managing conflict?

Activity 4- Appendix

Guided Script for Create a Scene

Character 1: Hey, what's up?

Character 2: Not much

Character 1: Cool

Character 2: Did you steal my lunch?

Character 1: What? No way!

Character 2: I'm pretty sure you did.

Character 1: Are you saying I'm lying?

Character 2: Well, somebody took it.

Character 1: I don't know.

Character 2: Neither do I.

Character 1: Well, okay, I guess.

Character 2: Okay then.