

**Clowning Around: An Exploration of Life Behind the Nose**

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## Abstract

### Clowning Around: An Exploration of Life Behind the Nose

Michelle M. Baer

This pilot project demonstrates how Henderson's (2005) method of mask and clown can be effectively adapted to the practice of drama therapy through a practical application with 10 adolescent high school students in a brief drama therapy series. Research was conducted in a phenomenological framework to reveal the authentic meaning of the experience of the participants in their own narrative and arts-based documentation. Narrative data was collected from participant-observer notes, participants' journals, responses to a questionnaire, and video transcription. Arts-based data was collected from photographs and film footage of the mask-making and mask character exploration, clown discovery, and the participants' public clown performance. Qualitative coding of the data, analysis of the outcome, implications for clinical practice, and suggestions for further research, are presented.

## Acknowledgements and Dedication

This project is dedicated to the 10 amazing students who dedicated their time, hearts and souls to this project. Thank you, for everything.

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## Introduction

### *Overview*

Post-secondary acting programs utilize training in mask and clown to develop more authentic reactions, characterization, improvisation, and a neutral emotional state (Henderson, 2005). Throughout history, the practice has overlapped into many disciplines other than theatre. Presently, clown doctors are recognized as part of the program for the health and healing of patients within healthcare facilities worldwide (Schwebke & Gryski, 2003). Core elements of mask and clown training are dramatic improvisation, development of spontaneity and creativity, exploration of masks and characters, incorporating a variety of creative arts, and engaging in witnessed performances. These elements also form some of the basic intervention tools used in drama therapy (Jones, 1996; Emunah, 1994). Despite this, drama therapy has not formally employed Henderson's (2005) process of mask and clown in practice. In this pilot-project study, as both researcher and drama therapist, I applied Henderson's method of mask and clown with 10 adolescents in a brief drama therapy group. The following literature review will provide the theoretical background of this project.

### *Historical Context of Clown*

The figure of the clown is present in all cultures around the world, in all times throughout history (Towsen, 1976). The clown can take many different forms depending on the function it is serving: celebratory, ritual, healing, entertainment, or social commentary. Historically, the figure of the clown, fool, and trickster serve one unifying purpose: to recreate any activity of life according to their own logic, reflecting society and the individual's existence within this society (Towsen). The fool is the most closely

linked to the concept of clown in this study. Henderson's technique fosters embracing the contradictions and paradoxes of human existence, within the self and in a universal sense. The fool is both innocent and wise, profound and profane, animal and human, resulting in an existence that navigates its way between all of the contradictions, sometimes in the extreme, to exaggerate the foolishness and the truth of existing on both sides of the spectrum at the same time (Carp, 1998; Henderson, 2005; Hill, 2005). The trickster is an archetypal figure appearing in myths and stories as healer, destroyer, and builder (Dokter, 2005, 2006; Radin, 1956). The trickster differs from the fool in that it causes mischief and fools people by subverting the established order of society by engaging in amoral behaviours (Carp; Carr, 1998; Hill). The clown is a powerful figure because in its presence we witness, experience, and intuitively grasp the paradoxical nature of our own human folly (Henderson; Hill; Towsen).

Similarly, Henderson (2005) sees the clown as an all-encompassing metaphor for the human condition. Possessing childlike or animal qualities, living blissfully outside logical laws and motivated by instinctual drives, the clown responds spontaneously in the moment reflecting qualities of the fool (Henderson; Taylor, 2005; Towsen, 1976). The clown breaks every rule but her own and acts in ways completely contrary, inverted and irreverent to socially acceptable behaviours reflecting some of the trickster qualities (Henderson). The unique qualities of the clown are that she lives in the moment, only feels what she really feels, is unbound from social and self-critical comment, and is constantly exploring, discovering, and expressing in creative ways (Henderson; Towsen).

Carp (1998) defines the clown as possessing a lack of understanding and respect for social norms and thus, operating under idiosyncratic ideas. Carp's therapeutic

intervention of creating clown characters involves increasing trust, spontaneity, and playfulness through using the body as an expressive instrument. Clients develop an increased ability to tolerate paradox. Carp uses exercises developed by Emunah (1994) and Spolin (1999) to facilitate this process of accessing unconscious content. The clown nose is seen as both liberating and protective as it grants the wearer a disguise at the same time as unleashing the more raw, vulnerable and hidden aspects of the self. Permission for expression is granted through wearing a mask with the meaning that the clown nose holds. Reflection on each session encourages grounding the experience in awareness and the possibility of integration of the clown character into the role repertoire of the self (Carp).

#### *Theories of Spontaneity and Creativity*

The notion of present moment awareness in clowning is grounded in Moreno's (1983) theories of spontaneity and creativity. Creativity is the act of creating, whereas spontaneity is the state of being open to new possibilities with a readiness to create. In a state of spontaneity, people are primed for change and able to cope creatively with the unexpected (Blatner, 2000; Moreno). The process of clown implements exercises that foster spontaneity and nurture an aspect of the self that lives "in the here and now" (Henderson, 2005), creating a space in which the potential for therapeutic change exists. The necessary conditions for spontaneous behavior are described by Blatner (1996), as "a) a sense of trust and safety; b) a receptivity to intuitions, images, feelings, and other non-rational mental processes; c) a bit of playfulness; [and] d) a movement toward risk taking and exploration into novelty" (p.43). When these conditions are fulfilled, clients are able to make appropriate reactions to new situations, or new responses to old



situations (Blatner, 1996; Leveton, 2001). The method facilitated in this project fulfills each of these prerequisites to spontaneity.

### *Historical Context of Mask*

Masks have been used for more than 30,000 years in rituals, theatre, healing and art (Sivin, 1986). The mask can protect, disguise or identify the wearer (Foreman, 1999). Mask can be a powerful means of concealing and revealing at the same time (Foreman; Pitruzzella, 2006/07). The clown nose is one of the smallest masks capable of this dual role. In drama therapy practice, mask can be a powerful tool for externalizing internal conflicts, gaining necessary distance and exploring unexpressed feelings (Emunah, 1994; Jones, 1996; Landy, 1993). The sense that it is the mask or the character and not the client permits objective commentary on the actions or emotions of the mask. Through mask, a safe container is created in which to view ones self from different perspectives (Jennings & Minde, 1995).

In this project, the use of mask is situated in Henderson's (2005) adaptation of the late clown master, Richard Pochinko's combination of traditional Native American medicine wheel teachings, theatre training, and European clowning technique. Medicine wheels are tools for helping people understand their place in the universe and explore their connection to all things. The basis of clown through mask involves exercises to face ones self in the seven directions corresponding with directional, emotional and psychological essences of the medicine wheel. A mask is made for exploration in each direction, culminating in the seventh mask: the clown nose. By combining the essences of the medicine wheel with personal symbolic imagery, an individual is able to gain insight into different aspects of the self.

### *Theories of Play*

Playing is one of the nine core processes in drama therapy (Jones, 1996). The special space in which drama therapy takes place is referred to as the playspace as it allows clients to have a playful, malleable relationship with reality. As a result, clients develop the ability to be more playful, flexible, creative and spontaneous in relationship with themselves and their life experiences outside of the playspace (Jones). The freedom of exploration, creation and experimentation are fundamentals of play (McMahon, 1992).

Play therapy purports that through exploring aspects of real life and one's experience of the world through imagined worlds in the playspace, clients can make sense of the created world thus coming to terms with their own reality (Cattanach, 2003). The method utilized and developed in this project is highly dependent on enhancing and fostering participants' ability to play, to regain a sense of innocence and to find playful ways of living in, connecting with, and seeing the world. The developmental model for assessment, intervention and evaluation involved in Playtherapy is known as EPR: Embodiment, Projection and Role (Jennings, 1995). These phases are a means of understanding human development and therapeutic change. The phases are not necessarily linear, but rather overlap with each other and are progressively more complex. The first phase, Embodiment play, is non-verbal and involves the body and senses. Projection play is imitative and interactive in nature. Role involves role-play. In adolescence, the three phases are revisited (Jennings). The emergence of a sense of self, and self-identity, is a result of the complex interplay between embodiment, projection, and role (Jennings). The figure of the clown and the methods employed in this study involve an integration of all three phases of EPR.

Projective play and dramatic play serve the purpose of the child discovering its own individuality (Slade, 1968). A stream of memories is set off in the mind and body by allowing oneself to rediscover the spontaneous play of childhood (Slade). In adolescence, the emotions and experiences of early childhood emerge again, along with the early patterns of coping in relation to the struggles of early childhood, with the added demand of establishing a sense of identity (McMahon, 1992). Blatner and Blatner (1997) purport that play is necessary for mental health, however, play after childhood is not socially validated. Reclaiming play and spontaneity involves actively expressing roles in the psyche through character exploration, resulting in the expansion of the role repertoire (Landy, 1994; Blatner & Blatner). The use of roles through character exploration and the exercises described in Blatner and Blatner's method is similar to the methods employed in this pilot-project.

#### *Theories of Role and Development*

By identifying self-states and reciprocal roles within the self, by way of projective techniques such as masks and dramatic enactment, one can reflect upon roles with a necessary distance (Landy, 1984). The healthy individual has a broad role-repertoire, in both quantity and quality (Landy, 1993). The concept of role, counter-role and guide are theoretical grounding for the process of mask making, character exploration and the culmination of character masks into the clown. The creation of masks in this project is a three-phase process likened to that of Landy's role, counter-role and guide. The final character mask is an integration of two prior mask molds. The guide role facilitates optimal balance between two opposing, or contradictory, roles within the self (Landy, 2000). Similarly, the clown is the guide between the role of the playful innocent clown

type (Auguste) and the counter-role of the wise, beautiful, and bold clown type (Joey) (Henderson, 2007; Landy; Towsen, 1976). The role of the fool is essential to human development as the role that possesses the traits of connecting people to their senses, to their emotions, and gives permission to spontaneity (Jennings, 2005/06). Experimentation with roles is the primary means and expression of play for an adolescent that results in a healthy taxonomy of roles, sense of role integration and self (Emunah, 1995; Jennings, 1995; Landy, 1993; Steinberg, 2005). A method that utilizes experimentation with roles and roles that invoke spontaneity would seem to be beneficial for adolescents.

#### *Henderson's Theory and Model of Mask and Clown Training*

Henderson's (2005) teaching of clown focuses on the students' ability to give oneself permission to have absolute complete self-acceptance, to live in the here and now, to tolerate ambivalence, to trust in the self and allow spontaneity to lead the way without self-criticism and judgment. The workshop begins with improvisation exercises. Journaling allows students to document and process the workshop. Neutral mask engages students in a state of being where they can receive and respond in the here and now to anything in their environment. The neutral state of being is the groundwork for developing personal clown as it facilitates the actors' ability to focus and attain a state of release, openness, and connection with the body, internal impulses, and emotions. It is the neutral stable core that allows the clown to exist in a heightened state of awareness. The next phase, creation and exploration of three character masks through art, movement, sound, play, costumes, and performed monologues, is facilitated by letting go and trusting in the unknown by first embodying the neutral mask and coming into a neutral state. Henderson's adaptation of Pochinko's mask work is to combine the directions into

three masks and a clown nose, accounting for all seven directions. Each direction is explored through neutral mask and followed by improvisational exercises using movement and sound. The final stage of the workshop is exploring the personal clown. The clown nose is the mask that unmasks all other masks of the self (Henderson). The clown is not an inner child, nor the child that we were, because that is not the truth, but rather the child that we already are and have always been, that society prevents us from expressing (Henderson; Towsen, 1976). Clown graduation is the final day of the workshop when the students share their clown through an improvised performance with invited audience members. Through a combined phenomenological, narrative and arts-based methodology, this Research Report will lead to a deeper understanding of how this method can actually be adapted for use in drama therapy practice.

### *Research Questions*

What is the essential lived experience of adolescent clients participating in a mask and clown intensive drama therapeutic workshop? How do participants represent their experience and make meaning of this experience through the arts-based medium involved within the process of mask and clown? How can this expression of personal experience be integrated into the application of mask and clown in future drama therapy practice?

### *Methodology*

#### *Participants*

The research participants were a group of 10 adolescents, 7 females and 3 males, ages 17-18 years old whose identities will remain confidential. They attended a high school in the borough of LaSalle on the lower west side of the island of Montreal. The school is situated in a low socio-economic neighborhood and serves a community within

a context of high levels of poverty, crime and violence, gang involvement, addiction and substance abuse, and mental health issues. The school was selected for community program involvement based upon the demographics targeting the students as “at-risk.”

### *Study Design*

The design for this project-based inquiry is a combined phenomenological, narrative and arts-based methodology. An assumption in phenomenological methodology is that “there is an essence or essences to shared experience, these essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced, and the experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p.106). Narrative methodology assumes that people are storytellers by nature, and people’s construction of reality is through narrating their stories (Patton). A narrative account of personal experience validates and gives voice to the experience of participants in a format that can be qualitatively coded (Clandinin, 2007; Creswell, 1998). An arts-based methodology is based in the philosophical view that the creation of art, the process of art and its products are representative of the people who were involved in the process, creation and production of the art (McNiff, 1998).

### *Data Collection*

The qualitatively coded data consisted of narrative data collected from participant-observer notes, participants’ journals and responses to a questionnaire, and video transcription. I also collected arts-based data from photographs and video (See Appendix D) of the mask-making and mask exploration, clown discovery, and the clown performance. The arts-based methodology provided a primary source of reflective

documentation of the process of mask and clown, and supports narrative description of participants' experience (McNiff, 1998). These were qualitatively coded alongside the narrative data to investigate lived experience.

The clients understood they were to keep journals to be collected at three points during the project; however, not a single client kept a journal, citing reasons such as lack of time, being stressed, and simply forgetting. Time did not allow for journaling in session, therefore the data was collected primarily from responses to the questionnaire (See Appendix A) given in the closing session following the performance. Further data collected were from one-page reflections written in session 10 and client progress notes.

#### *Data Analysis*

I applied a qualitative coding strategy of open coding, axial coding and selective coding to the data. I identified the key themes in the narrative inquiry and from this determined the underlying universal structures. The analysis of data in this manner provided a clear picture of the participants' experience (Creswell, 1998). By keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process, my own personal experience of training with Henderson in a mask and clown intensive was bracketed, thus increasing the validity of the study. I acknowledged my biases and rigorously applied a non-directional facilitation of the methods so as not to taint the data or the clients' experience with my own previous experience. I insisted on triangulating sources, methods, and analysts in order to maintain a reflective stance and ensure accuracy of the participants' voice of their experience.

#### *Recruitment and Intervention Plan*

The group was selected after a process of meeting with Level 5 students referred by the high school Drama and English teacher. I interviewed a list of 19 referred students in small groups. In the interview, I explained the project and informed them that they had been referred by their teacher as someone who might enjoy and benefit from being a part of this group with no obligation to participate. They were asked at the end of this preliminary interview their level of interest from 1-10 on a Likert scale, 10 being very interested and 1 being not interested. Following the interviews, 12 students were selected based on expressing interest in the 8-10 level range as well as my assessment of their suitability to the group (Yalom, 2005). Students who had expressed their interest as lower than 5 were met with no further. The students who expressed their level of interest between 5-7 were consulted with and put on a waiting list. 10 of the 12 selected students followed the group to the end. One student chose not to participate before the group began due to concerns regarding absences. Another student was unable to participate in the group due to discontinuing her attendance at the school. Two students on the waiting list were consulted, but with further information decided that the group was not for them.

The first session with this group of 10 clients was delayed three weeks due to the necessity of working out a new protocol for research participants under the age of 18 regarding parental consent and assent given by participants (See Appendix B). The procedures described below were based on and adapted directly from Henderson's (2005) method of clown through mask process. The pilot-project process involved meeting once per week for two hours over 14 weeks, which were divided into three major sections each with its own specific goals.



The first section was focused on group dynamics, cohesion, and creating the space to play safely as we moved forward in the work (Blatner, 1997; Emunah, 1994; Yalom, 2005). This consisted of foundational mask and clown exercises designed by Henderson, adapted by myself for this project and blended with exercises for the beginning phases of a drama therapy group (Cossa, 2007; Yalom). The second section involved the mask making and exploration process which included creating a mask mold in clay with one's eyes closed, covering the final mold in papier-mâché, painting the mask, and, through movement and guided exploration, embodying the mask character. The third and final section of the series was dedicated to discovering one's own personal clown mainly by developing communication of internal emotional states through physicalization and responding authentically in the moment to external stimuli. The culmination of the third section was a performance of each client's individual clown character for an invite-only audience. Following the performance, we held a closure session to process the experience, thus bringing the third and final section of the drama therapy series to a close.

The major therapeutic goal for each member of the group was to get to know themselves and others better. The major aim of the study was to engage in a practical application of the process of mask and clown in a drama therapy series, in order to ascertain what participants involved in the process experienced as described by them in their own arts-based and narrative documentation.

### *The Process in Practice*

The most serious difficulty with this group in practice was time limitations. Reflecting on the process of the group following its completion, I learned that I needed to create a strict group norm regarding attendance and punctuality. Despite various

interventions, there was little improvement. Some school staff reportedly told clients to “get their priorities straight” regarding their absences for the group. The lack of support from staff only exacerbated the time limitations and the clients’ commitment to the group. Sometimes, group members entered late and did not partake in the opening ritual. Other times, group members left before session was over and thus missed out on closing rituals. Attempts were made to include clients if they arrived late or left early, however, most times, this interrupted the flow of the session in progress.

Unforeseen circumstances, such as 4 of the 10 group members attending the three-week school trip to Europe, also affected the intervention plan. The overall experience of the group was affected, not only for those members who missed a number of sessions, but also for those who were left behind. The time frame of the Europe trip fell during the last section of the original plan for the drama therapy series in which we were going to be further exploring mask characters, especially in relation to Jones (1996) nine core processes, Landy’s (1993) role theory, and beginning to explore clown. Therefore, I chose to begin the mask work two weeks earlier than planned. This decision resulted in a loss of some aspects of the process, such as grounding the work in the seven directions and a full session working in neutral mask. However, it enabled all group members to engage in the process of creating their mask.

In our first group, we began with some basic drama therapy icebreaker exercises based on the work of Emunah (1994), Cossa (2006) and White (2002). The exercises employed were geared towards creating a group contract, establishing a sense of safety and trust, and instilling the group norm of confidentiality. A major goal in this first group was allowing the group to begin to get to know one another as well as for myself to get to

know the individuals and the group as a whole. We began with the question “I wanted to be a part of this group because...” (Cossa). The most common response to this question was “I want to get to know myself better and get to know other people” (Baer, 2008). Through sociometric exercises such as categorical groupings (Emanah) and the spectogram (White), group members gained experience with action techniques. They began to situate themselves in relation to others within the group, discovering a sense of connectedness. The therapeutic factor of universality was evident in the beginning stages of this group (Cossa; Yalom, 2005).

In the second session, we focused on spontaneity, play and group building exercises. Emanah’s (1994) “circle-mirror-transformation,” Henderson’s (2005) “yes, let’s,” “flocking,” and Cossa’s (2007) “tell me about the time when...” were utilized in this session. Group members demonstrated some resistance and apprehension to engaging in embodied play. The next portion of the drama therapy series was guided by assessment of clients’ ability to play in each level of the EPR paradigm. A focus on areas of strength in the EPR paradigm enabled healthy risk-taking during the mask and clown process and expanding less developed levels of play as the group progressed (Jennings, 1995).

The third session focused on more direct personal exploration. To work towards the goal of the session, I adapted an exercise called “Treasure Stories” as facilitated by Henderson (2005). The exercise involves sharing a story with the group about something that one considers to be a treasure in their life. The experience of sharing a personal story permits a more vulnerable place of sharing and connecting with other group members. The most important adaptation I made to this exercise was introducing active witnessing, by developing a technique I named “reflection response sculpts.” A reflection response

sculpt is an embodied response facilitated by each group member attuning to their own internal impulse and emotions, and then translating that into a sound, movement, word or phrase to give back to the person to whom they are responding. This method of feedback provided a therapeutic avenue for the giver and receiver, as well as the entire group, which was actively engaged in the witnessing process. The techniques utilized in the reflection responses draw on the work of Emunah (1994), Jones (2008; 1996), Silverman (2004) and the double technique based in psychodrama (Blatner, 1996; Leveton, 2001). The reflection response sculpts provided a sense of validation for clients. The treasure story exercise served as a warm up for future processes in the group where this similar pattern of sharing, witnessing and reflecting was utilized. Throughout this session, group members arrived late and left early. Four clients were absent. Time did not allow for the absent group members to share their own stories, nor to hear the others' stories.

In the fourth session, I introduced the idea of a neutral state of being. We explored exercises to attain this state in which clients strived to release and relax their minds and bodies. When a full neutral state is achieved one lives with no judgement and no inhibition, embracing and releasing emotions, moments, and impulses in a fluid manner. This state will hereafter be referred to simply as neutral. We began with a warm-up in which clients became more aware of an inner observer. The simplified version did not use neutral masks, but still retained the mind-body centering techniques allowing clients to clear out and become more open. We then explored colours in the body through movement while listening to music. This session was highly disrupted by exam review periods. Two group members were absent. Six group members arrived late, then proceeded to inform me that they needed to be in class and could not come to group. I

decided to hold a truncated session during the next class period. When the group was called out of class at that time, only some of the group members returned, and were also late, leaving a short 40 minutes for the session. The clients' capacity to become deeply involved in the neutral work and the colour exploration was severely limited by the time constraint and interruptions.

By session five, approximately a third of the way into the drama therapy series, the mask making commenced. This marks the second section of the project. Fortunately, and surprisingly, the entire group arrived to session, thus all group members were together once again which had not been the case since the second session. After a check-in to focus into the session, I facilitated the mask making. Each client had a lump of clay to be shaped into an oval. I then led a neutral clearing out ritual. Once each group member had closed their eyes and focused on their breath in a semi-meditative state, I gave them a word to drop into their body as the trigger for facilitating the mask making. Continuing through the entire process with their eyes closed, clients then placed their hands on the clay to discover what was there, and allow the rhythm of the word to be channeled into the clay. This process was led with the words "one," then "two" and finally "one/two." This three-phase process results in the necessity to release and to trust in the changes, shifts and transformations of the clay from one phase to the next and within each creation. It also allows for intuitively creating a balance between the two sides in one mask form. The ambivalence and open nature of numbers permits anything to be artistically expressed through the clay. The process is based on the assumption that through artistic and dramatic projection, the resulting mask is a representation of the client's internal world (Jones, 1996). The use of numbers is derived from Henderson's

(2005) adaptation of Pochinko's method using the seven directions in clown through mask. The emotions that surfaced during the process of creating the mask were encouraged to be incorporated into the mask characters turning process into content as it is all grist for the mill (Jones, 2008; Yalom, 2005).

Surprise, shock, horror, and glee emanated from the faces of the participants when first seeing what had transpired with their eyes closed. The only instruction in addition to the numbers was that they were creating a face, but the details of this were purposely undefined. After each stage, we engaged in clearing out and playful spontaneous exercises to gain some distance from the mask making process itself. Clients would return to their clay after the playful interludes, close their eyes and clear out into a neutral state, ready to receive the next word. They would then allow their hands to come to the clay, and without destroying it, discover what was there and allow it to shift and change as necessary for the next word to express itself. An extra session dedicated to papering the layers of papier-mâché onto the clay mask moulds was held during the same week. This was a shorter session that consisted of a more informal drop-in group with a casual atmosphere.

In session six, the most important tasks were de-claying and painting the masks. Two group members were absent from this session. In addition to the major tasks, we worked with group cohesion exercises and engaged in playful exercises such as "space substance," "moving across the room in different landscapes," and "flocking" (Emunah, 1994; Henderson, 2005). These brought an atmosphere of freedom, of permission, and of trusting to intuitively paint the masks. At the end of this session, as a closing, I engaged clients in a reflection on "what is one aspect of myself that I have learned more about

through being involved in this process?" A universal theme of surprise and pride was evident in their responses. For example, more than one client said, "I can just let go and do something I didn't think I'd be able to do," "I never thought I could do something like this," and "I discovered that I'm creative" (Baer, 2008).

In session seven, the focus was exploring the mask characters through movement, sound, improvisation, costuming, performing monologues, and reflection responses. A good portion of the session was spent cutting eyeholes and attaching elastic to the masks to make them wearable. Although the time spent exploring the mask characters was limited, there was a lot of depth in the work for such a brief period of time. Two clients who had missed the previous session spent the time painting while the rest began to explore their masks. The major themes of the session derived from coding the video footage transcription were feelings of uncertainty, awkwardness, and self-doubt specifically regarding the character monologue performances. The exploration of the mask characters was based on Henderson's (2005) method of mask exploration.

The mask exploration began with the clients entering into neutral. Once they had achieved this cleared out, uninhibited state, I led them through a process of internalizing the shapes, colours and textures of their masks with their hands and then with their eyes. When this was completed, clients put their mask on and breathed until the mask became one with their face. Clients were led through basic character creation work using movement, voice, costuming, playing with objects and spontaneously responding to questions regarding the who, what, where, why and when of their character (Spolin, 1999). Exploring mask characters through embodied movement work seemed to be the most challenging element of the process for clients. Gentle encouragement, through

reminders to let go of the harsh inner critic and, instead, allow the mask to lead the exploration, eventually resulted in more physical engagement. An exercise adapted from Henderson (2005), called “wave goodbye.” was facilitated. In this exercise, the mask character discovers that they must wave goodbye to the person they love most in the world as the person leaves on a ship for a year. The exercise results in fleshing out the character by engaging the clients’ belief in the life of this being. It also expanded knowledge about how their character relates to the world. This provided insight into the clients’ way of relating to others (Henderson; Jones, 2008). The character and the client as the character, experience a familiar situation, one that anyone could potentially face or have faced at some time in real life (Henderson). Two group members performed their improvised character mask monologues and were witnessed by the rest of the group with reflection response sculptures.

Only one of five students who were supposed to be present at school came to the eighth session. The other 5 students were excused for the Europe trip and the New York trip, however, the 4 group members who did not come to session were not excused and simply skipped school, therefore also missing session. The plan to continue mask exploration with all other group members was halted. One client came to session even though she was ill and had not attended the rest of her school day. She chose not to present her mask monologue without the other group members present stating, “I really like having them here to give me the feedback...it’s just nice to have their support so I would rather wait,” (Baer, 2008), therefore we did not have a session.

In session nine, we completed the mask monologues. Four group members were still absent on the Europe trip and one was absent though unexcused. Group members



explored or re-explored their masks through the same process as described previously, presented character mask monologues, and responded with reflective response sculptures to the monologues. Four group members did not have the chance to explore or present their mask character monologues, as they were absent for sessions seven through nine.

Sessions 10, 11, and 12 covered the introduction and exploration of clown and marked the third and final section of the series. At this time, the group members on the Europe trip returned, and I chose to wait for this date in order to facilitate clown exploration for all of the group members together. All 10 clients attended session ten. This session consisted of creating clown hearts, a first experience in clown, a discussion of the upcoming performance, and of the last two weeks leading into termination. Group members who were present for mask making shared their experience with group members who had missed this process due to absence. Creating clown hearts took a substantial length of time leaving very little time to begin clown. The introduction to clown involved a neutral preparation, clearing out to internalize the words on their clown hearts -- play, freedom, now, hopes, dreams, fears, belief, magic, mischief, heart -- and then putting on the small, round, red mask, also known as the clown nose. As they had done with their character masks, I led them to internalize the rhythm, colour, shape and texture of the nose. Wearing the nose mask, they breathed with it until they were in a place of absolute, complete self-acceptance. I led exercises to foster a state of innocence combined with the wisdom of experience represented by the words on their hearts. I encouraged them to let emotions come and let them go in a constant flow, with no past to regret and no future to dread, living in the now and in a place of the freedom to just play (Henderson, 2005). We closed by presenting something unique that each clown could do

with an object they had been playing with, and shared one word about their experience of their first day in clown. Each group member shared a similar feeling of being ‘free’ and their experience as, “a little weird, but fun” (Baer, 2008).

It was evident from the lack of physical embodiment and engagement, as well as the expression of feeling awkward during session 10, that a more intense physical, emotional and psychological warm-up was necessary in session 11. Increasing spontaneity and creativity, instilling a sense of play, freedom, and expression was facilitated through exercises derived from Spolin (1999), such as “emotional body parts,” “gibberish scenes,” and Henderson’s (2005) numerous clown warm-up games focusing especially on an improvisation exercise called “action-reaction.” In this exercise a pair stands facing each other. One person begins with a sound and movement. The other person observes and reacts to their partner instinctually with a sound and movement of their own. The exercise continues in this cyclic manner and evolves until it is so fast-paced that it can occur in unison. It is an impulse-based exercise that facilitates spontaneity. An environment of play, permission and living in the moment free from self-criticism prevailed following the intensive warm-up. The group members explored their second day in clown trying on costumes and playing with different objects. Clients engaged in non-verbal communication and allowed themselves to express more authentically and freely. As the clients began expressing their exhaustion in clown, we moved into a cool down, then removed noses and wrote in their journals for the last 10 minutes of the session. Many described feeling open, surprised and having a lot of fun playing in clown (Baer, 2008).

Session 12 was full of nervous energy, both my own and the group members', as the performance was planned for the following day. We discussed logistics and explored their nerves surrounding the performance through role-play and expressive media. The latter part of the session was spent doing a meditative neutral exercise focusing on facing the self in "seven directions" (Henderson, 2005), and moving into clown, focusing on costume and practicing clown solos and duos through improvisational interactive exercises. Three group members were absent for this third day of clown exploration and clients that attended were late to session. The focus of clown exploration in this session was to express and communicate without words. This connected clients to their body, senses and emotions, and detracted from utilizing language as a defense that can block more honest expression.

The last day of the group consisted of a pre-performance warm-up to get into clown, the performance itself, and a closure session pizza party. All but one client attended this final day of session 13/14. A small audience invited by the group members attended the short, mostly improvised, performance (See Appendix D). Following the performance, I fielded a question-answer period between the group and their audience. The clients were given the opportunity to discuss their experience in a public though intimate setting. We then returned to the drama therapy room to change out of costumes, debrief through verbal and creative media, and of course, eat pizza. In the very last closing circle, the clients had a chance to share how each group member had affected them and what they themselves felt they gave to the group. As I attempted to bring the group to a final ending, by having each client do their own "wave goodbye" ritual, some clients expressed that they were unable to stay. The bell for the end of class had rung and

3 clients protested they had a bus to catch, an appointment to get to, and an after school detention to serve. They quickly gave and received their feedback and then scurried out of the room. Soon after, 2 other clients said they had better leave as well, followed by 3 others, and as the dwindling group became smaller yet, only 2 clients remained at the very end. They commented that it was “ironic and sad” (Baer, 2008) that they were the only ones left. It had become an expected phenomenon by this time as the group had demonstrated this type of behaviour throughout the entire process, but these two were always the ones to remain until the very end, and from my perspective, were also the two who really dedicated themselves to the group, took part in each part of the process, and excelled in their sincere desire to work on their therapeutic goals.

## Findings

### *The Experience of Clients*

Five major themes outlining the findings were identified through qualitatively coding the narrative and arts-based data collected from participant-observer notes, participants' journals and responses to the questionnaire, film footage, and photographs. Multiple analysts assisted in this phase of the project thus increasing the validity of the findings extracted from highly subjective data. In providing examples from the data to support the code, I will demonstrate the themes and patterns of the participants' experience, leading to answer the central question guiding this inquiry: “What is the essential lived experience of adolescent clients participating in a mask and clown intensive drama therapeutic workshop?” The final Axial Codes supported by the Selective Coding examples are as follows: **1) Freedom, 2) Insight, 3) Positive Affect, 4) Negative Affect, and 5) New/Exploratory Behaviours.**

**Freedom** was the category under which the most subcategories manifested. This coding category had examples within and between the sets of data most often, and can thus be said to be the single most universal experience described by the research participants. This category involves the axial coding subcategories of liberating, opening up, letting go/release, no judgment, escape, play, and permission to express and to be yourself. Choosing one word to describe the experience of participating in mask and clown most often was a word that fit in this category. One client simply wrote, "FREEDOM [*sic*]." In video transcription analysis, photographic data analysis of arts-based media, participant-observer notes, analysis of narrative subjective personal experience in the journal entry and the questionnaire highlighted this experience commonly referred to in the participants' own words as "freedom." In the final phase of selective coding for **Freedom**, I will provide exemplars from the raw data as follows:

In response to the question, "Has this group or the activities that we have done had any impact on the rest of your life? If yes, in what way?" clients wrote that, "It teaches us to be free and have fun without having any regrets," and "It has, I've learned not to care what I look like, or what I'm doing. Just live in the moment." A pattern of responses related to the freedom of being yourself, was evident in responses like, "The group has aloud [*sic*] me to realize that you can be yourself at anytime," and "I felt like I could be someone else without anyone judging me," and "Just being able to do what you want, at any time felt amazing," suggesting an experience of permission and self-acceptance.

In response to the question, "Would you recommend this type of group to other people your age? Why or why not?" one client wrote, "Yes, it's hard being in high

school. Your [*sic*] always worrying what people are saying/thinking about you. This class Allows [*sic*] you to let loose and be your self. Do whatever you please. We do little activities that normally you wouldn't do. You can let go of all your thoughts and act out on your feelings." In the raw data from journals, clients wrote narratives describing, "My experiences so far in this group, is just letting go. Being able to be yourself. Not caring what anybody thinks about you," and "being able to act like someone you wouldn't normally act like." Highlighting the subcategory of escape, a client wrote, "I feel like theres [*sic*] no judgement when Im [*sic*] doing clown Like [*sic*] everyones [*sic*] neutral. It's like a getaway like someone is taking over me like as if I was high. It's a good relief a good experience," and another client wrote that, "It lets me express myself without thinking about all the other stuff going on in life."

The next category labeled **2) Insight** contained many pieces of raw data describing a feeling of being surprised, of learning something new about oneself and about others, of making connections, and an expression of personal growth and self-knowledge. This encapsulates participants' description of the entire experience as a journey, or an adventure full of growth, change, and transformation. Some clients answered the questionnaire section asking them to create an artistic representation of their journey in the group with a drawing. Coding analysis of these drawings (See Appendix C) found that many belonged in this category as they demonstrate an opening and insight into themselves, into the group and beyond the group experience to their life outside the group. Exemplars of **Insight** in the raw data are as follows:

A client described his journey in the group as, "I went from being a closed door to an open window." In video footage, a client reflects on her experience in the group: "I

find that like this helps us to control our actions, like instead of saying like if you're in a fight or whatever you know...like, you know like once we get to know ourselves better, like if say if we're like in a bad situation we actually know how to control ourselves."

In response to the question, "Has this group or the activities that we have done had any impact on the rest of your life? If yes, in what way?" clients answered, "yes, it did. After our performance, I don't think I will ever be stage fright [*sic*] again." Another stated that, "it was cool to get to know other people. We got to get together with our inside and got to feel our emotions and express them in our mask and our clown," while other clients reflected, "yeah it made me open up a little easier. Getting more comfortable to learn more about your inner self," and "My favorite moment was the hole [*sic*] process of working with you because you got me to know myself better and let my inner self go." These responses support the category of insight, as these were discoveries made into themselves upon reflection on their experience of being a part of this group.

Moments of surprise and shifting of expectations also belong to this category of **Insight**. Plenty of raw data reflected this experience from describing the group in one word as "courage," "changing," and "adventure" to clients writing, "I did things that I would of (*sic*) never done," and "...I didn't think I was going to open up that much," and "it was better then (*sic*) I thought and fun." In response to a favourite moment or part of the process, a client wrote, "the Showe [*sic*] Because I never believed that I would do that," and another wrote, "I found the funnest part of the group was the actual performance. It went so much better than I thought it would be." In regards to expectations, some clients wrote, "I never thought it would help me open up I really enjoy this class," and "I was surprised of how good the performance turned out," and

“When I first heard what the group was all about I deffinatly[sic] wanted to get to know myself better. And I DID! [sic]”

In response to describing the experience of the mask making, a client wrote, “to my surprise I turned nothing into something.” Another client wrote that mask “making is fun and painting also. The first week of my mask I was very exciting [sic] but then my character was change [sic] the other week [sic]. I was surprise when the character of the mask change [sic]. I had difficulties connecting with the mask.” Some clients also compared the experience of making the masks and of being in the group as parallel emotional journeys of transformation and gaining insight where they felt “scared at first but it was ok after.” Another client explained that, “at first I was shy not knowing many people in the group then happy having fun.”

The third coding category **3) Positive Affect** was most often identified in relationship with, and even as a result of, the other major themes and patterns present in the essential lived experience of adolescent clients participating in this mask and clown intensive drama therapy group. Positive affect encompasses their expressions of joy, laughter, fun, feeling happy, and “WONDERFUL.” Some examples from the selective coding of the raw data for **Positive Affect** are as follows:

Some descriptions of the emotions experienced through the process of making the masks and of the clown performance were: “it was very kool [sic],” and “It was so fun & very exciting to figure out what [the mask] would look like,” and “happy and free, funny, cool, interesting,” and “it was nerve racking at the beginning now after doing it, it was so much fun,” and “definitely it was such a great experience, it felt great” and “☺ lots...I love it,” and “I felt safe and sure of what was happening,” and “I felt safe the whole time,



no one judged others and everyone enjoyed each others presence,” and “it felt really good, silly” and “loads of fun.” A client responded to a question about expectations stating, “I expected it to be fun, yes it did match my expectations, I had a great time” while another wrote, “this didn’t turn out so much as I’d expected. I didn’t expect it to be as fun as it was,” and, “I was expecting it to be like a drama class with roles. It was nothing like that at all. I enjoyed this experience way more,” demonstrating a large amount of positive affect in their experience.

In response to the question, “Has this group or the activities that we have done had any impact on the rest of your life? If yes, in what way?” clients wrote responses that resounded with positive affect, such as, “I got a lot of stress taken off of my shoulders,” and “play ☺” and “I think that the clown part was the most fun and should deffinatly [*sic*] be focused on a bit more. I will witness my clown more now.” Clients spoke about their experience as members of this group saying, “I felt safe at all times just because all the people around me were safe with it also,” “I hope everyone enjoy it as I did [*sic*],” and, “Thank you for picking me out of all the other peopl [*sic*]. Ps best group ever.”

The fourth category for the coding scheme is **4) Negative Affect**. This label does not necessarily imply negative experience but includes feelings of being anxious, nervous, unsure, uncertain, uncomfortable, awkward, confused, overwhelmed, and doubtful. These emotional experiences sometimes resulted in resistance and accompanied taking risks, however, this often moved the experience into other coding categories such as **Insight** and **New/Exploratory behavior**. The selective coding examples from the raw data are as follows for **Negative Affect**:

During mask exploration, a client holding her mask in her lap blurted out, “Okay this is so stupid, I can’t do this,” as the rest of the group began the mask work. Responses to the question regarding their emotions while creating their masks and presenting mask character monologues included: “awkwardness...weirdish [*sic*],” “a little uncomfortable...nervous,” and “a bit scared not knowing what was going to happen,” and “It was nerve racking at the beginning...at the beginning I was just really uncomfortable,” and “there were some up and some downs.” One participant clearly stated that she “had difficulties connecting with the mask.”

In response to the question regarding personal expectations at the beginning of the group, clients wrote: “I was expecting more acting and more comedy since it was clown my expectations didn’t really meet,” and “I was scared,” “I think the group shouldn’t change but the people in it should know when to come and not be late. We lost a lot of time because of it.” One participant felt, “at first shy not knowing many people in the group...as well as nervous during the performance.” Another participant expressed that “the only thing that doesn’t feel like part of my clown is the heart. I had to do it on my own without the whole process. For me it doesn’t flow well with my clown.” The one group member who was absent during the performance wrote in the session prior to her absence, “Now, I feel like I am not right for this class because I’m too shy and I can’t think of things on the spot...when we were with our noses on it freaked me out, but I liked looking at all the costumes. By doing clown, I discovered that I don’t have any acting skills whatsoever!” In their journal, a client wrote, “I don’t feel like writing no more bah bah” and another wrote, “I didn’t like the action, reaction game all that much I found it hard to come up with an action...I did my heart today. Although im [*sic*] not

really happy with it, I wish I had more time to work on it. I am a bit worried about our show next week. I don't feel confident about my clown and what he should be doing. It's different when we have an audience instead of our group," exemplifying the expression of negative affect as one of the major themes and patterns of universal experience.

The last coding category is **5) New/Exploratory Behaviours**. Large amounts of data illuminate this category with descriptions of engaging in exploratory behaviours, of having a unique experience, and of doing something one normally would not do by being granted permission in the safe container of the group, and by way of the methods employed in this pilot project. This category includes taking risks, experimenting with new roles and behaviours, and stepping outside of one's comfort zone. Exemplars from the raw data for **New/Exploratory Behaviours** follow:

On exploring the mask character and presenting her monologue, a client wrote, "I felt like a whole other person," and another wrote, "I felt like all my feeling went in it and on [the mask]," which was discussed in session by group members as something unique that they had never experienced before. This was echoed in a response from a client who wrote that, "its [*sic*] fun getting to know people and being able to act like someone you wouldn't normally act like," and "getting more comfortable to learn more about your innerself," and "Im [*sic*] having a lot of fun in clown. It lets [*sic*] me express myself without thinking about all the other stuff going on in life. I can just kick back and have an awesome time. This class overall has been such a good experiance [*sic*] and I think this is the only time I would be able to experiance [*sic*] it too. Ive [*sic*] learnt to express myself with bigger actions and exagerating [*sic*] my movements." Another client wrote in the questionnaire, "My expectations were to see if I can act out who I really am and I did let

go.” In participant-observer notes, each client is documented as progressively engaging in new behaviours, experimenting with different roles, and taking risks that expand the role repertoire in quality and quantity (Baer, 2008).

## Discussion

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

A delimitation of this pilot-project is that my intervention method of mask and clown in drama therapy was based solely on Henderson’s (2005) model. It was assumed that aspects of mask and clown were experienced as significant to the lives of participants, and that they were able to articulate this meaning through their own narrative and arts-based documentation. It was my assumption that there is a structure and essence to the shared experience of mask and clown process (Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1988). Limitations of this study are inherent in the methodology itself, where the data collected was subjective personal experience. The techniques outlined in the methodology section describe the thorough efforts made to reduce bias, and to increase validity and reliability. The context of working with a selective population of adolescents, aged 17-18 years, who live with the label of “at-risk” in a high school situated within a low socio-economic neighbourhood, further delimits the population and boundaries of this study. The results, therefore, may not be generalized to other populations or contexts as the following discussion pertains to the specific group of clients and their experience within this pilot-project. The information acquired can, however, be used to make hypotheses for further development of this method and new lines of inquiry following this preliminary study.

### *Assessment of Project*

Supported by the patterns and themes extracted in the qualitative coding, one of the strengths of this project lay in its results for the participants, whose experience most strongly reflected the freedom and permission they gained through their involvement in the project. The most significant shortcoming of this project was the factor of time limitations. In a brief therapy group, the scope of this research project was overwhelming. Due to the lack of time, group cohesion was limited and I was not able to spend enough time exposing and working with the group dynamics. Another shortcoming that resulted from this core issue of time was moving forward in the process and stages of mask and clown despite where the group might have been in terms of their therapeutic journey. This is not to say that I did not tailor the interventions to the group and their needs. I let them guide me where they needed to go and was in a constant state of attaining their feedback, input and suggestions; however, not enough time was available to follow the natural ebbs and flows of each section of the process and to also complete the project's goals. Compromises were made, but to the best of my ability, when weighing decisions, I retained my primary ethical duty as the drama therapist to my clients while maintaining my role as a researcher conducting this project-based inquiry.

In my experience, group therapy implemented within a school can be a very challenging process. There were simply far too many conflicting commitments for student clients to contend with in a school environment. The majority of absences from the group were due to exams, exam review periods, school trips and school projects. Being called out of class repeatedly can be embarrassing and block full engagement in the therapy process. Motivation to be a part of the group to skip class was not as relevant for this group since most of the group members were highly anxious about missing

important classes. A general lack of support from school staff and administration added to the challenges of working in the school system.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

For future facilitation of similar projects, I would recommend a workshop-based environment for a longer period of time to enable deeper exploration of each aspect of the process. I feel the potential of mask and clown is so much greater than what I was able to accomplish in this very short period of time and within the scope of this project. I also recognize my own shortcomings in having a limited amount of training in only one method of mask and clown, and only my past two years as a drama therapy student, as well as this being a pilot-project study.

A pre-requisite for facilitating this work is that one has training in mask and clown technique. Some aspect of teaching is also required by providing more groundwork and imparting information on clown and clown philosophy earlier in the project. Due to the nature of this research project and the research design, I did not want to taint the data by informing the clients about what they should be experiencing by entrenching it too much in theory or my own training background. However, there is a level of maturity that must be engendered and fostered before diving into the mask and clown activities in order to reach a greater depth of the work. More focus on neutral mask could potentially enable clients more focus, maturity, and self-awareness.

I would suggest the incorporation of creative processing using artistic media to expand upon the content and process while still remaining in the metaphor (Jones, 2008; Silverman, 2004). In future clinical practice, I would establish a stronger frame for dramatic projection to reach deeper layers of the unconscious through further work with

masks, mask character exploration, and clown. The ability to project internal material into the external structures of the masks, characters, and the clown allows clients a safe container in which to explore, gain awareness, and integrate new perspectives of the self. With more time, Jones' nine core processes could be more fully realized within the project, especially in relation to life-drama connections, embodiment, dramatic projection, active witnessing, and dramatherapeutic empathy and distancing.

In future research, Landy's role theory (2000) could be applied to the mask creation and exploration, by defining the roles that are represented in the spontaneously created masks described in this project. Another application of role theory is the potential to utilize exercises developed by Landy for role method drama therapy in the exploration of character masks. Furthermore, one could create masks by invoking the roles defined in Landy's role profiles and incorporate this into the method in clinical practice. Pendzik's (2003) six-keys assessment model could be applied to the method looking at a client's ability to enter and exit the dramatic reality, the characters and roles invoked, the themes and conflicts, the quality of the dramatic reality, the response to the dramatic reality and the subtext. In turn, this could be used to better plan interventions and facilitate therapeutic change for clients.

It would be interesting to follow up the experience of clients once they have gained some distance from the process. Investigating the lasting impact and changing perspective about the experience would be an important line of future inquiry. A constant state of feedback would help guide a process that leads to deeper levels of insight. Reflecting more upon the process as it unfolds would deepen concurrent levels of exploration. Journaling should be a priority within each session to facilitate this reflective

processing of material. I would use exercises derived from the narrative perspective to enhance journaling, and to facilitate the exploration of journal material within the sessions through creative techniques.

Further research could be conducted on applying mask and clown in different contexts and with different populations. Another line of inquiry would be investigating the similarities and differences of clients' experience of mask and clown in therapy versus students' experience of mask and clown as theatre training. It would also be interesting to study the impact of utilizing this method working with individual clients versus in a group context. It would be useful to investigate the potential benefits of play, laughter and creativity within the process of clown and how this can be therapeutic. The figure of the clown also holds a place in history as being capable of social commentary, therefore an interesting line of inquiry might be to investigate how this method utilized in drama therapy can carry through from the individual level and function in the larger arena of society.

Overall, this project met the therapeutic goals of the individual clients and of the group as a whole. Facilitating this process in practice enabled me to see a wealth of potentials within the process of mask and clown that have been uncovered for future clinical applications, drama therapy practice, and research.



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## Appendix A: Questionnaire

**Drama Therapy Mask and Clown Questionnaire: What was my experience?**  
(Just a reminder that all responses will be kept confidential \*your identity will be kept secret.) Your honesty and willingness to share your responses is greatly appreciated!

1. What was your favorite moment during our time together? Why?
2. What were your expectations for this group before it began? Did your actual experience match your expectations? Why or why not?
3. Has this group or the activities that we have done had any impact on the rest of your life? If yes, in what way?
4. If I were to run another mask and clown group, in your opinion what would be the most important thing(s) to keep the same and what would be the most important thing(s) to change based on your experience in this group?
5. Would you recommend this type of group to other people your age? Why or why not?
6. How would you explain the process we went through to someone who knows nothing about mask or clown?
7. What were some of the feelings that you experienced through this process?
8. How did you feel when you were...
  - a) Creating your mask?
  - b) Exploring your mask?
  - c) Being witnessed in your mask?
  - d) Witnessing others in their masks?
  - e) Exploring your clown?
9. Did you feel safe in your experience of this group and this process? Was there a time when you did not feel safe? Please describe.
10. Was there a time when you felt completely surprised by how you felt or how you reacted, or how someone else reacted to you? Please describe.
11. Using a section of your response paper, please map out your individual journey of our time together (this may be done in any medium, i.e. Drawing, sketching a map with symbols and words, poetry, images, noting any shifts/obstacles/breakthroughs/discoveries etc).
12. How did it feel to be witnessed by people that were from outside of the group?
13. What is one thing you are going to take with you from this group?
14. Describe your experience in this group in one word.

## Appendix B: Consent and Assent Forms

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN MASK AND CLOWN DRAMA THERAPY WORKSHOP

This is to state that I \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent/Guardian, Print Name) agree to allow my son/daughter \_\_\_\_\_ (Print Name) to participate in research being conducted by Michelle Baer, as part of her Master's studies in the Department of Creative Arts Therapies of Concordia University ph.# (514) 848-2424, e-mail: michelle.baer@gmail.com.

#### A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to investigate the experience of students participating in a drama therapy group utilizing the techniques of mask, character exploration and personal clown discovery.

#### B. PROCEDURES

I understand that my son/daughter will participate in 12 weekly, 1 ½ hr long group drama therapy sessions during school hours. The school staff and administration is supportive of this group. My son/daughter will take part in creative exercises that will lead to exploring his/her own personal clown. This includes writing in a weekly journal, painting, movement, mask making, character exploration, dramatic improvisation and a clown performance. An invite-only audience will attend this performance and art exhibition. I understand that some or all of my son/daughter's artwork, personal journal, clown performance and his/her comments about these materials may be part of the research. All information will be kept in a locked cabinet and only the researcher will have the key.

#### C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

No harm should come to my son/daughter by participating in this study. However, he/she may experience feelings that are uncomfortable because of the personal nature of the exploration. If my son/daughter finds that these feelings are overwhelming, a referral will be made for individual counseling with another support staff member within the High School\*.

Potential benefits are that my son/daughter will have the opportunity to explore personal issues creatively within a supportive group and with a drama therapist. By participating in this research project, my son/daughter will be able to share his/her experience with others within the group, and potentially with important people in his/her life and community through the exhibition and performance.

#### D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my son/daughter's participation at any time without negative consequences.
- I understand that my son/daughter's participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL- The researcher will know, but will not disclose his/her identity.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.
- I understand that copies of the research paper will be bound and kept in the Program's Resource Room and in the Concordia University Library.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO ALLOW MY SON/DAUGHTER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

o In addition, I give permission to Michelle Baer to photograph and/or film my son's/daughter's artwork, masks, dramatic improvisation work, character exploration, and clown exploration under the conditions of confidentiality outlined above.

o I will make my decision about having my son's/daughter's artwork, masks, dramatic improvisation work, character exploration, and clown exploration photographed and/or filmed after he/she has participated in a number of sessions.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you. If you have any questions about this project, please contact the Master's student or her supervisor.

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at [areid@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:areid@alcor.concordia.ca).

\* The name of the High School has been removed to protect confidentiality.

## ASSENT FORM

### CLOWNING AROUND: AN EXPLORATION OF LIFE BEHIND THE NOSE

**Principal Investigator:** Michelle Baer, Drama Therapy Student Intern.

Conducting this research as part of her Master's studies in the Department of Creative Arts Therapies of Concordia University.

#### 1. Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of students participating in a drama therapy group that uses mask making, character exploration and personal clown in the therapeutic process.

#### 2. Procedures:

1) The drama therapy mask and clown group involves **attending 12 weekly group drama therapy sessions. These sessions will be 1 ½ hours (Per.6 and ½ of Per. 7) on Tuesdays.** The sessions involve participating in creative techniques and dramatic tools such as: painting, movement, improvisation, mask making, character exploration, and writing. These sessions may be recorded on film and still photographs.

2) It also involves **discovering and exploring your own personal clown.** What is clown? Just to clear up any fears it is neither a circus clown nor a horror movie clown. In this workshop, clown is the part of you that lives in the moment, and not only accepts but embraces everything that makes you, YOU. Seem a little impossible? Well, the beauty is that your clown is already there inside of you, just waiting to be discovered and invited out by taking part in these creative activities.

3) **Writing in a weekly journal** to keep track of your experience is a part of the research procedures. The Drama Therapist/researcher will collect these journals after 4 sessions, 8 sessions and 12 sessions to help make the drama therapy group as helpful and enjoyable as possible for you and to collect information about your experience for the research. All information collected is confidential. Your identity will be kept secret.

4) After the 10<sup>th</sup> session, a **clown performance and exhibition** of artwork from the process that you choose to share with a by-your-invite-only audience. You will have input regarding the inclusion of your personal material in this event. After this there will be two more sessions to bring the group to a close.

5) Finally, once the Drama Therapist/researcher is writing the research paper, you may be asked to read parts of the paper and **give feedback** to make sure your experience is being written about accurately.

#### 3. Risks and Discomforts:

No harm should come to you for participating in this study. However, you may experience feelings that are uncomfortable because of the personal nature of the



exploration. If you find that these feelings are overwhelming, a referral will be made for individual counseling with another support staff member within the High School\*.

#### **4.Benefits:**

If you agree to participate in this project, you will have the chance to participate in Drama Therapy which may help you creatively express your feelings and experiences, have a chance to get to know yourself a little better and explore personal issues with a supportive group and drama therapist.

#### **5.Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to participate now and end your participation later. Your academics are in no way impacted by your decision of participation or withdrawal from this research project. Your future care from support staff at the High School\* will not be affected in any way. You also have the right to ask questions at any time or refuse to answer any question.

#### **6.Confidentiality:**

Consideration will be made to ensure confidentiality within each group regarding sensitive topics. When performing your personal clown, your face and body will be concealed with make-up and costume of your own creation. Even with these precautions, your identity may not be completely concealed because you will be presenting your clown in front of a by-invite-only-audience. Any information you provide will remain strictly confidential within the limits of the law. All study files will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The information obtained will not be communicated to any person involved in any treatment you receive or classes you attend without your written consent.

If I receive information during the course of this study that makes me concerned about your safety, we are required by law to report this information to Youth Protection Services. The results of this research will be included in the final Masters research paper, but you will not be identified by name in this or any reports or publications.

#### **7.Contact Information or Questions:**

If you have any questions about this project now or later, please contact the Master's student, Michelle Baer on Tuesdays at the High School\*, by email: [michelleb@ccs-montreal.org](mailto:michelleb@ccs-montreal.org) or phone 514-937-5351.

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at [areid@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:areid@alcor.concordia.ca).

**Statement of Assent**  
**Clowning Around: An Exploration of Life Behind the Nose**

The study has been explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the study. I will be asked to participate in drama therapy sessions where my activities will be photographed and/or videotaped.

I will also participate in writing a weekly response journal and present my personal clown performance.

Approximately one month after the drama therapy sessions end, I will be asked if I would like to give my feedback on the written research.

By signing this assent form I do not give up any of my legal rights.  
I will receive a copy of this signed assent form.

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

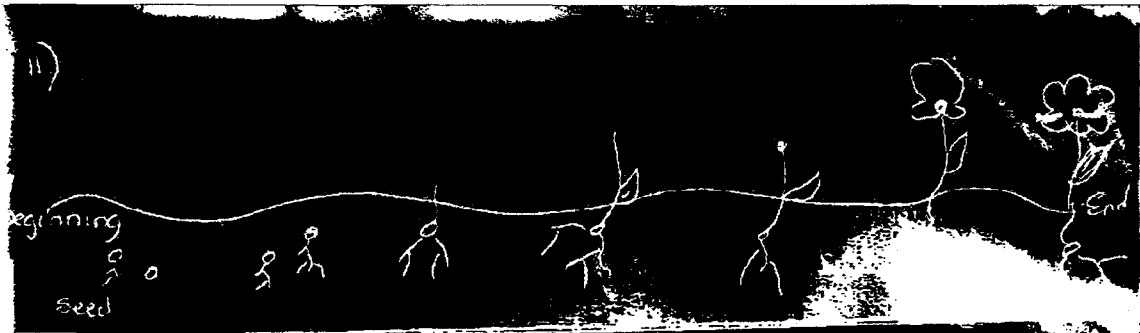
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Who Explained Assent Form: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

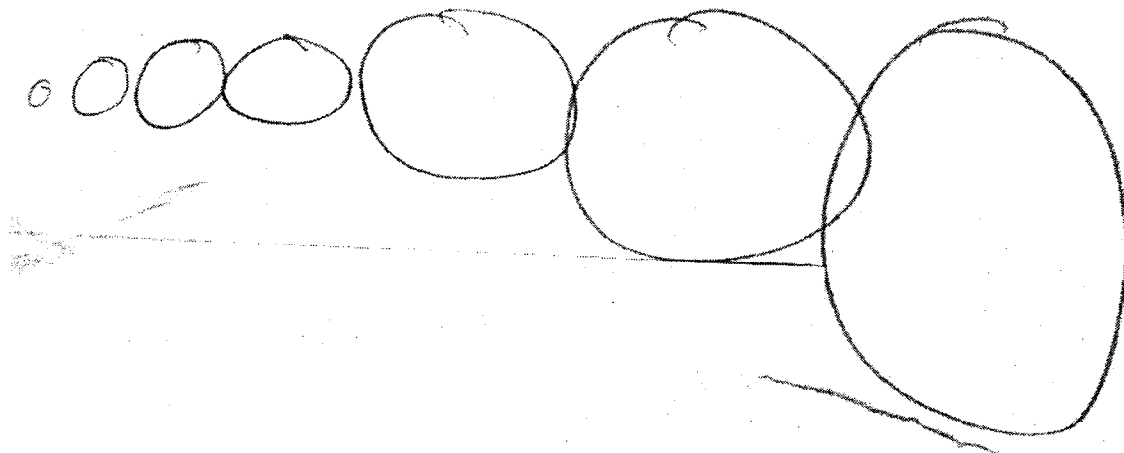
\* The name of the High School has been removed to protect confidentiality.

## Appendix C: Photos of Clients' Drawings



## Drawing 1:

Left side of drawing are the words: "beginning," and "seed," with arrow pointing to the small circle. Right side of drawing is the word "End," roots of flower are blurred in the scanned image.



## Drawing 2:

Circles spread the horizontal length of the paper and are progressively larger in size.