

***Shakespeare's Mirror:
Using CMM and Drama to Develop Personal Capacities for
Conflict Transformation***

*We are all artists,
and theatre is a language.
We have no better way to work together,
to learn about each other, to heal, and to grow.*

(Michael Rohd, *Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue*)

Description/Rationale. The purpose of this project is to develop a pragmatic, field-tested CMM framework/handbook for educators and social workers to use in teaching and directing Shakespeare's plays with marginalized, at-risk, and incarcerated populations. *Shakespeare's Mirror: A CMM Handbook* will be a user-friendly text that shows how the "communication perspective" can be applied to Shakespeare's plays in ways that can help students to develop their personal capacities for conflict transformation. "Conflict transformation" is the process of reflecting on the communication patterns behind destructive modes of dealing with conflict, and changing those patterns to create positive, constructive outcomes. The CMM approach to conflict transformation will provide means for students to work with Shakespeare's plays in ways that help them to develop greater *resilience* (the ability to face conflict with clarity, strength, and equanimity) *empathy* (the ability to respond with compassion to others' needs), and *practical wisdom* (the ability to use prior knowledge and experience to effectively reflect on and influence the communication process).

This practical research is inspired by a history of Shakespeare study and performance with marginalized groups, including the at-risk, the mentally ill, and the incarcerated (see Cox, 1992; Rogerson, 2006; Shailor, 2010). While a good deal has been written about the practice of performing Shakespeare in prisons (and with other groups), no one has yet articulated a comprehensive approach that is specifically geared toward the development of students' capacities (resilience, empathy, practical wisdom). A handbook that presents a communication perspective, and that shows how to use specific tools from the CMM apparatus, can help ongoing and new practitioners to imagine and develop their work in exciting new ways.

Shakespeare's Mirror: A CMM Handbook will be authored by a communication scholar who is an expert in CMM theory, has studied for years with its originators,

and has published CMM research since the 1980's. The author is also the founder of a Shakespeare prison program, which he has been directing since 2004. The handbook will therefore be informed by a great deal of relevant experience. The author is well-connected to other practitioners who will be intensely interested in the final product, and who are likely to make use of it. I am also regularly contacted by graduate students who want to know more about the ways that I use CMM with my prison theatre program – this book will certainly have currency with that audience.

Methodology. The handbook will be created through an ongoing hermeneutic process that will involve (1) articulating the theoretical framework and the associated tools, and envisioning the final product; (2) testing those ideas in practice, through direct work with prisoners on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (April – August, 2015); and (3) revising and refining the handbook based on the lessons from practice.

Data that will inform the research will include 60 hours of participant observation of prisoner discussions, rehearsals and performances; and written reflections by prisoner participants.

Anticipated outcomes. *Shakespeare's Mirror: A CMM Handbook* will be an attractive, user-friendly text, with a dynamic style and presentation inspired by existing handbooks such as *CMM Solutions* (Sostrin, Pearce, and Pearce, and Pearce, Pearce, and Sostrin, 2012), and the Folger Shakespeare Library's *Shakespeare Set Free* series (Obrien, 2006). Focusing on *Hamlet*, the text will function both as a template for work with other plays, and (possibly) as the first book in a *Shakespeare's Mirror* series. Here is a tentative outline of chapter headings:

PART 1: SHAKESPEARE, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

- (1) How a Communication Perspective on Shakespeare's Works Can Develop Our Capacities for Conflict Transformation
 - (a) The First Capacity: Resilience
 - (b) The Second Capacity: Empathy
 - (c) The Third Capacity: Practical Wisdom

- (2) A Communication Perspective on Shakespeare: An Introduction (with indebtedness to Barnett Pearce's formulation of fundamental questions)
 - (a) *What's going on here?* - Attention to Language and Patterns of Interaction
 - (b) *What are they making?* – How Communication Makes Identities, Relationships, and Other Forms of Social Reality

- (c) *How are they making it?* – Episodes, Stories, Priorities, Motivations, and Choices of Interpretation and Action
- (d) *How does this fit within larger clusters of conversation?* – Personal and Cultural Contexts
- (e) *How can we make this better?* – Choices That Develop Greater Resilience, Empathy, and Practical Wisdom

PART 2: *HAMLET*

- (1) Key Episodes: The Serpentine Model
- (2) Key Stories: The LUUUUTT Model
- (3) Key Conversations: The Daisy Model
- (4) Priorities: The Hierarchy Model
- (5) Motivations: The Logical Force Model
- (6) Loops and Knots: Understanding Reflexivity
- (7) Choices: Bifurcation Points

PART 3: The Evolutionary Potential of Shakespeare in Prison

- (1) Changing the Lives of Individuals
- (2) Changing Communities
- (3) Changing the American Approach to Incarceration

A complete draft of the book will be done in time for the Munich conference. Within three months of the conference, I will submit the book for publication. This book should be of great interest to social workers, prison educators, Shakespeare scholars, and CMM scholars.

Final note. I am happy to receive questions and constructive criticism on this proposal, whether or not I am chosen to participate as a CMM Fellow. My sincere hope is that this proposal will be accepted, and I will have the opportunity to dialogue with CMM theorists/practitioners once again. It has been a long, long time since I have had that luxury. The financial help, and the intimate setting, are the two things that make this opportunity extremely inviting. I just can't do NCA anymore (too big, too crazy, too rushed, and too alienating for me). I am an older scholar who now values listening deeply and responding carefully as much as I enjoy sharing my own work.

Thank you for reading this – Live Long and Prosper!

References

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