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My Personal Context in Theatre
I used to be very shy child, and acting was never my forte. But as I entered my teenage years and gained more exposure to Drama, I learnt that it was not all just about realistic acting – there were other styles and technical aspects to it, which I have grown to love. Because of this, I now take IB Theatre; during which, I have been exposed to many theatrical experiences (detailed below), from Frantic Assembly workshops to learning about the different forms of theatre. The way in which I saw Theatre begun to change, and as time passed, my interest in theatre developed. As a performer, I am passionate about physical theatre, as well as using music as a means for devising, because it allows me to truly express myself.

My Skills and Approaches
Past Approach: Tableau
Before learning about this sonic approach to devising, my approach to creating an original piece of theatre had always been through the use of tableau, accompanied by monologues or storytelling. It was only afterwards that characters would start to form. The process would often look like this: a tableau created based on a stimulus (picture, music, event, etc.), followed by everyone in the group taking turns to deliver an inner monologue in character, which would help with their characterisation.

It was an unconventional process – it did not begin with a written script with a set plot, followed by actors memorising their lines and letting this information influence their actions. Actors did not decide on their characterisation first, then let that determine how their characters move. Instead, my approach to creation had allowed the production of a wider range of ideas, because the same tableau could be interpreted in multiple ways. A plot is then created based on the multiple ways actors perceive the tableau. I find this helpful for devised work, as I like to have many ideas to explore and choose from.

I first learnt about this tableau technique during IGCSE Drama. During which, I was first introduced to Epic Theatre (Bertolt Brecht), which emphasised the use of techniques such as alienation and tableau. The reason for this being that Brecht “believed that theatre should appeal not to the spectator’s feelings but to his reason” (“Epic theatre of Brecht”, 1995). He did not want audience members to experience catharsis; he argued that in doing so, the audience would sympathise with the characters onstage, and this prevents them from being critical to the events occurring onstage. Consequently, Brecht invented techniques (i.e. alienation and tableau) to emotionally distance the audience from the action onstage. My class spent many hours exploring Brecht and devising original work based on his techniques. However, out of all his techniques, I was most drawn to tableau, because I like how a single tableau can be interpreted in so many different ways; this also allows for some sort of personal interpretation, and so audiences would be more likely to ruminante on the show.

Workshop: Frantic Assembly
During the workshop, my class learnt about devising with physicality and music. We did a devising exercise, whereby we each had to develop a series of movements with a prop, using music as a source of inspiration. The objective of the activity was to explore all the movement possibilities that were associated to a prop. Prior to this, I have never used music in any of my devising processes. It had vastly intrigued me, and I found it fascinating how music was capable of inspiring us and dictating our movements.

Workshop: Megan Campisi’s Object Theatre
I once took part in Megan Campisi’s object theatre workshop, so I am familiar with the use of daily objects to represent something spectacular. A particular moment that I remember clearly from the workshop was when we had to create a scene of a rocket flying off to the moon, using only a tennis ball, a tissue, and sound effects (created by us). It was an interesting take on the scene, and as I had never seen something like this prior to the workshop, I was captivated. This skill in object theatre was then further developed in a class assignment I had later on in the year, whereby we used a ball to represent the atomic bomb in the Hiroshima disaster (this was our stimulus then). Hence, should my group’s devised piece require any abstract storytelling, I can offer imaginative ideas, owing to the fact that I am so fascinated by how simple objects can be transformed into something else that is completely different. Through both Frantic Assembly and Megan Campisi’s workshops, I learnt that props in theatre could be used in many ways (representational and non-representational), and this is only limited by our imaginations.

Past Experience: Designing
I have also had experience as an assistant lighting designer in school productions. The reason for my interest in lighting design can be attributed to the fact that I used to be shy child. Hence, when I had the choice, I would always sign up for the role of a lighting designer, as opposed to acting roles. Consequently, I have seen the development of scenic elements in many school productions, and I found it intriguing how lights can enhance the whole visual and sensational experience of a performance. For example, in a past school production, The Mikado, there was a particular scene where gobos and colourful lights were used. It produced an entrancing effect on the audience, and the mood was greatly contrasted with the previous scene – all because of a change in lighting. This really inspired me, and as a result, I started to volunteer myself as the lighting designer whenever there were group performances in Drama class. I liked the idea of being able to create a certain mood just through the simple notion of varying the colour, intensity and angle of the lights.

My Interests
For the collaborative project, I want to devise an abstract piece of theatre that focuses more on the visceral experience of the audience, rather than the intellectual side. This is because I am keen on doing a piece about human nature, which
relates more to the emotional side. An abstract style of theatre allows me to communicate directly to the audience’s emotions, and make them truly experience the play, rather than just think about it. Personally, I feel that a theatrical performance is only genuinely expressive if the audience feels it internally. As an audience member, I really like that feeling of catharsis; it is something I want to experience if I were to watch a play, and I know many others who feel the same way too. This is very contrary to Brechtian plays, which appeal to the audience’s reason more than emotion. Although it may sound quite ironic to use one of Brecht’s emotionally distancing techniques to devise a cathartic piece, the way I incorporate the use of tableau in my approach to creation (relying on actors’ interpretations) actually allows me to create a piece that is open to various audience interpretations. This means that it will likely have a personal impact upon the audience, resulting in a more reflective and cathartic experience.

In terms of potential stimuli for the collaborative project, I find health issues quite interesting. Being born into a health-conscious family, orthorexia and bulimia really grab my attention. I have read books about them, both fact and fiction, and I realised that these are issues that are more serious than most people think. In fact, many people are unaware of the inner states of these victims of eating disorder, thus the collaborative project can serve to raise awareness of this. Possible target audiences for a show like that include teenagers, especially girls, because these disorders tend to be more common with girls from this age group – this is often when they start to care more about their appearances and go on diets in order to achieve the “ideal” body image.

Another potential stimulus I could use is something related to loneliness. It pertains to my enthusiasm towards creating a piece about human nature, and I believe that it has great potential to be developed into a show. Loneliness is a very common emotion and most people have experienced it at some point of their lives. It exists in many forms, such as culturally, interpersonally and socially (“Learn Different Types of Loneliness and How to Cope with It”, n.d.), thus could be quite intriguing to explore too. Personally, I experienced cultural loneliness the first year my family moved from Singapore to Shanghai, as I was unable to connect with the Chinese culture – I had lived in Singapore for my whole life prior to the move; this is also probably the reason why the theme of loneliness interests me.

My Research into a Professional Theatre Company

After looking into various devising companies, I settled on Gecko, a physical theatre company which aims to “inspire, move and entertain” (Anderson & Lahav, n.d.). It places emphasis on the visceral experience of the audience – exactly why I was drawn to this company. Additionally, their works are completely open to and dependent on audience interpretation, just like what I would like to aim for in my own piece because I believe that this would then impact the audience on a more personal level, resulting in catharsis.

Gecko’s Choreography Process

"With any Gecko show ... as soon as you have hold a seed, there is a kind of explosive thing that happens where all manner of ideas explode from that point. And then, over time it’s sort of like bouncing down the sides of a funnel where you get more and more focused into a singular point of intensity, a singular point of exploration and focus.”

– Amit Lahav (2012), Artistic Director and founder of Gecko. This was his response to questions regarding the creation process of Missing, one of Gecko’s shows.

Gecko’s “creative process involves a lot of rapid fire devising” (Evans & Finkel, n.d.). It starts off with a central idea, and performers come up with sets of movements around that. Based on the emotion behind the movements, performers then engage their breaths, and let it guide their explorations (Evans, n.d.). Breathing can express emotions in a very raw and genuine way. This is significant because Gecko stresses the importance of performers being truthful to their emotions, in order to communicate honestly to the audience – this is Gecko’s trademark style of performance (Lahav & Gecko, 2016). Gecko performers will then keep on exploring, until their instincts tell them that they have the “right” action; when that happens, they will repeat the same action over and over again, with more precision or confidence each time (Evans, n.d.). This small, repeated action then forms the “singular point of exploration” (Lahav, 2012), and a show eventually builds up, stemming from this.

Gecko performers focus on what they are involved in, and only introduce technical elements along the way if they feel that it is necessary. However, music is integral to their work. Not only does it function as a script to Lahav (Lahav & Gecko, 2016), it also inspires performers and enhances performances. Music can draw out the mood of the play and create an emotional impact on the audience. It can also be used to highlight the complex and abstract themes present in Gecko’s shows. This is relevant because Gecko aims to have shows that “highlight the complexity of human nature” (Lahav & Gecko, 2016).

Besides that, there are several of us in the class who are greatly inspired by music, myself included. This is likely due to the fact that I have been playing the piano since I was a kid, and my interest in music had stemmed from there. Hence, if we end up being in the same ensemble for this collaborative project, we could begin our explorations into the starting point by using music as a source of inspiration for movement, just like Gecko (and even Frantic Assembly, as detailed on page 1). However, in order to create truth within a piece, it is important to keep all our movements instinctive because “when it comes to expressing feelings[,] 55% of the communication consists of body language” (Marwijk & Leendert, n.d.), showing that physicality is actually more important than spoken dialogue to communicate meaning.
Putting a Show Together

This is an outline of the whole creative process Gecko shows undergo:

1. Initial choreography process (detailed above). Design elements develop simultaneously with this.
2. New ideas/starting points are investigated and used to create a “world” for the show (the setting).
3. Storyboard draft created.
4. Ideas are tested out; design elements are recorded. Sorting out of ideas that work and ideas that do not. Ideas that do not work will still be kept, but only tested out again at a later stage
5. Piece is edited and a new storyboard is drafted.
6. The design, concept, “world”, and feel of the piece are now completely different to the initial one.
7. Rehearsals continue. At this stage, full lighting is utilised.
9. Piece is adapted. Another storyboard is drawn.
10. Technical elements may change drastically. However, underlying themes, design and concept will merely be an “adaptation”.
11. Edits and developments are constantly made to the show. Lahav believes that a show is never finished; after each performance, modifications will be made, though the rate of change eventually slows down.

(Lahav & Gecko, 2016)

Gecko’s work involves a lot of storyboarding and modifications throughout the process. This is an approach that we could potentially use for our collaborative project – we could storyboard our ideas each time, then modify it as we go along. If it does not work, however, we need to be willing to let go of our initial ideas because like Gecko, they often end up with a show that has a completely different feel to what they started off with. I believe that this is noteworthy because sometimes we may get too attached with our ideas and are unwilling to change them, even if they do not fit the “world” of the show.

Lastly, Gecko’s works depend hugely on audience interpretation, to the extent that each audience member might leave the same theatre feeling something completely different to one another. This made me think about my collaborative piece – maybe it would be worthwhile to host a “work-in-progress” performance to a small audience, just like Gecko, so that we can get insight into the audience’s experience. It would be a good way to gauge if the piece has impacted the audience on a personal level, since a performer’s experience is likely to be different from an audience member’s. We could also get some of the “work-in-progress” audience members to watch the final performance, so that we could ask them to compare both performances and their experiences.

The Formation of My Group

In light of coming together, our teacher gave us several opportunities to work with different people in the class and to find out more about one another’s working styles. The day we started the process of exploring grouping possibilities, our teacher gave us two post-it notes each. We wrote down our preferred performance style (e.g. stylised, realistic) on one of them, and the theatrical roles we wanted to contribute to our ensembles on the other (e.g. set, lighting). Our teacher then helped us to rewrite our answers so that it was all anonymous and we could not identify one another based on the handwriting. It was important to keep it anonymous because we found that friends just wanted to group with friends, even if their theatrical styles and roles were incompatible.

The next day, we grouped people based on their theatrical roles, such that each group had a variety: a lighting designer, set designer, choreographer, etc. There were 7 people in the class; so naturally we tried to divide the class into a group of 3 and 4.

Journal entry on 8 Nov 2016: “Ms Jodi ... played us a guitar music track stimulus, and we had 20 minutes to devise a piece. I was grouped with Bryce, Joleen and Kai. We created an abstract piece based on the struggle to live... making use of set, costume and Frantic Assembly’s influences (there was this activity we had done in the workshop which involved creating movement based on different points of contact; we used it for this piece). It was quite amazing because we all had similar interpretations/images in our minds when we first heard the music (desert, struggles), though our ideas started to differ as we began to develop the piece. Nonetheless, we were quite agreeable with one another, and having worked with all 3 of them before, I think it’s likely that getting along is not a big problem. Also, I had felt quite comfortable just throwing ideas out at them.” (glt067, 2016a)

The following day, we rearranged our groupings once again, according to our preferred performance styles. I got to experience working with Bryce and Megan this time, on another stimulus. I liked that they were quite open to ideas and willing to try out all suggestions; “[but] I don’t think I can go in the same group as Megan, because she wanted to do sound and lights... and so do I. [Additionally], I find that Megan can get too political [at times]; I would not like to create a theatre based on politics, [so] I do not want to work with her.” (glt067, 2016a)

Alongside with the process of forming groups, we had all also been leading workshops for the class based on our chosen theatre companies. Most of our workshops consisted of devising exercises that required us to work in groups. We then seized this opportunity to try out other possible groupings; for example, with people we have never worked with before, with people we think we might work well with, etc., all the while keeping in mind whom we worked well with, in terms of style, theatrical roles and creative ideas.

Journal entry on 29 Nov 2016: “It’s been great having the opportunity to gain insight into how various theatre companies work and create their original pieces. Some of them were more physical, some more reflective, whilst others, more playful (i.e. experimenting with ideas). Nevertheless, some of the approaches will definitely be useful when we start devising. I
particularly liked the workshop Bryce led, based on Massive Theatre Company, as their shows aim for the audience to be able to reflect on their own personal experiences and feel like the performance is about them. It affects them on a personal level, just like Gecko’s work.” (glt067, 2016a)

Nevertheless, when it was time to decide, we agreed as a class that we should focus more on the theatrical roles for the groupings, in the sense that it was more important that each group comprised of individuals with different skills, as opposed to other factors, such as our relationships with one another. We were generally quite flexible about the performance style (abstract/realistic) because we were in consensus that that would highly depend on the target audience and artistic intentions of the piece. We decided to make our decisions based on theatrical roles because we felt that the mise-en-scène elements were vital to a performance. We did not want to have a group with absolutely no one interested in doing design, or a group with no performers at all, as that would not work out either.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLES</th>
<th>Kai</th>
<th>Megan</th>
<th>Marg</th>
<th>Bryce</th>
<th>Isaac</th>
<th>Joleen</th>
<th>Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Want</td>
<td>Anything</td>
<td>LX, SFX</td>
<td>Costume</td>
<td>Choreo</td>
<td>Set, script</td>
<td>Set, costume</td>
<td>LX, SFX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Choreo</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Costume</td>
<td>SFX, choreo</td>
<td>Choreo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY: SFX = sound; LX = lights; Choreography = choreo; Design = costume, SFX, LX and set

All of us were completely fine with being performers, so what we truly had to focus on when splitting into groups was ensuring that each group had a designer for each design aspect.

This is a brief rundown of the discussions we had:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Bryce, Isaac, Kai</td>
<td>- Worked in these groups before and it turned out well. Creative ideas matched.</td>
<td>- Conflicting theatrical roles in Group 2. Megan and I want to do SFX and LX; Marg and Joleen want costume. So, we decided to split Group 2 up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Me, Marg, Megan, Joleen</td>
<td>- Group 2 is likely to produce a performance more focused on design than acting. If Group 2 is creating an abstract piece (i.e. more emphasis on design), this might be beneficial.</td>
<td>- Megan is adamant on being in a larger group, so we moved Marg over, as she is the most flexible in terms of roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Megan, Kai, Joleen</td>
<td>- Generally quite satisfied with grouping.</td>
<td>- Kai’s creative ideas are more compatible with Bryce’s and Isaac’s, compared to his current group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Marg, Me, Bryce, Isaac</td>
<td>- Theatrical roles were quite well split. Each group had a costume, lighting, set designer and choreographer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Marg, Megan, Kai, Joleen</td>
<td>- Generally quite satisfied with grouping.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Me, Isaac, Bryce</td>
<td>- Theatrical roles quite well split. Each group had costume, lighting, set designer and choreographer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third grouping was supposedly finalised. However, we soon realised that it was very unfair to Kai if he was the only one compromising – his creative ideas worked best with the boys, yet he was grouped with all the girls. Marg suggested swapping Isaac and Joleen; the reason for this being that they both expressed interest in set design, and we wanted to have one set designer per group.

Journal entry on 19 Dec 2016:

**Opinions Regarding the Switch**

- Isaac: Neutral. Will do what satisfies most people.
- Kai: Neutral. But moving Isaac over means a guy in his group. ✓
- Joleen: Neutral. Doesn’t want to do politics. (Megan does) ✓
- Marg: Supports the switch greatly. ✓
- Me: Neutral. Work well with Joleen. ✓
- Bryce: Against the switch. Works better with Isaac than Joleen. X
  (glt067, 2016a)

Initially, I was reluctant to go with the switch, as I was eager to work with someone I have not worked with before (Isaac). But seeing that it would benefit more people, I agreed. However, Bryce had been against the switch, because he works better with Isaac than Joleen, in terms of creative ideas. At this stage, as the groupings were supposedly already finalised, it was vital that everyone agreed with the swap or it would not happen.

Nonetheless, it was clear that moving Isaac to the other group had greater benefits. This led to his suggestion, which eventually became our finalised groupings: a group of 2, and a group of 5. I thought that it would be interesting to see what we could make out of this. Also, there was no conflict in theatrical roles within the groups, although that meant members in the group of 2 who each have to take on more roles. Regardless, everyone seemed to be happy with this grouping.
Therefore, my group now consists of:

**Me**: Will focus mainly on the lighting design, but will help to source music/ create soundtracks as well.

**Joleen**: Fine with anything design-related (except sound). Will do set and costume as I am already doing lights and sound.

We agreed to work on the script, directing and choreography together, as our strengths and interests lay more within the technical design elements. Although this was not my first choice of grouping, it was better for everyone as a whole. Just like the collaborative process, there are times when we will have to compromise. Nevertheless, I still feel that this grouping could work. For one, I work better in smaller groups, as I feel more comfortable sharing my ideas. Secondly, Joleen and I get on well, so although our creative ideas may occasionally conflict, we should be able to come to a solution amicably. In terms of interpersonal skills, Joleen is good at organising rehearsal schedules and ensuring everyone turns up. There are only 2 of us in the group, so that would not be a problem. However, when we need light technicians (likely to be a student outside our group), this could prove to be useful. As for me, I am often known as a “scribe”, a person who writes a lot. I can contribute to the group by taking down notes for the group to look at later.

With regards to the style of our performance, Joleen wants something predominantly realistic, though she prefers the starting point to be something of abstract quality. On the other hand, I would like to do something abstract, so we agreed to do a piece that had a mixture of realistic and abstract scenes. This means that the audience may not fully experience the show viscerally (because only part of it is abstract). I negotiated with Joleen and said that I would be fine with that, on condition that we still produce a piece that evokes introspection, that makes the audience feel something on a deeper, more personal level. Regardless, Joleen’s interest in realism will mean that she can direct those scenes and I can direct the abstract ones, instead of having to fight over which scenes we want to direct. Therefore, I think this grouping might actually work.

The nature of this task relies heavily on collaboration. There are a few upsides to this:
- There will be a variety of ideas. Though there are only two of us, it is still possible to bounce ideas off each other, allowing for the generation of more ideas. The more people there are in the group, the wider the range of ideas that is produced. But it can also be beneficial to not have too many choices as this could result in a final piece where actors try to incorporate all ideas, but do so ineffectively.
- Everyone can contribute and bring in new skills to the group. Joleen can lead a workshop on Zen Zen Zo (her chosen theatre company), whereas I am able to teach her about object theatre.
- Criticism can occur anytime throughout the developing process. Bad ideas are analysed and improved upon, or ignored; good ideas are accepted and developed upon.
- We can help one another. For example, I can help Joleen build her set.

But like any other group work, collaboration has its downsides too:
- Disagreements are bound to happen, especially if the group is made up of people who have different ideas. I do not think this will be too much of a problem as Joleen and I are more likely to listen and discuss rather than disagree, as briefly mentioned above; but we can both still be stubborn at times.
- There could be miscommunication; sometimes people might misinterpret parts of the piece, or be confused with the progress/ structure of the performance. Again, as there are only the two of us in the group, this is unlikely to happen, unless one of us does all the work and creates the whole plot by herself – but this is then no longer a collaborative piece.
- Not everyone is free on the same day, which makes it hard to schedule rehearsals. I am free on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but Joleen is not. While she is free on Fridays, I am not. Therefore, it comes to a point where we each have to give up our after-school activities for rehearsals.

**Our Exploration of the Starting Point**

In deciding our starting point, Joleen and I agreed that we would each bring in one stimulus, then decide on one. As stated earlier, I am interested in using music to create a piece, since it allows for more abstract and instinctive interpretations, as compared to other stimuli like newspaper articles. Recently, I came across the music, “Cold”, by Jorge Méndez: upon listening to it, I experienced feelings of sadness and loneliness. I presented this as my stimulus to Joleen, because I felt that it had potential to develop into a visceral piece.

Joleen’s stimulus was the theme of separation, which I also thought evoked a multitude of ideas (death, divorce, etc.). Because of the nature of our stimuli, we agreed that music would produce a more abstract piece, whereas the theme would be less so. Because Joleen was keen on doing something less abstract, and we had already compromised to do a mixture of styles, we agreed to use the **theme of separation** as the starting point.

We began by individually recording our initial responses (*Figure 1 on next page*) to the starting point and conducting research into it. We then discussed our ideas. From my research, I stumbled across the idea of Siamese twins. I find the idea of Siamese twins interesting because they are not very common. I suggested that we could do a piece about Siamese twins who were not separated at birth, but something happens that eventually leads to their physical separation towards the end. Joleen then suggested that our play’s intention could revolve around the inevitability of separation. She also suggested that the separation could be between friends, friends with personal problems who would cheer each other up. But one day, there might be a situation that leads to their inevitable separation.
It was important to note that at this stage, these were all provisional ideas. We decided to practically explore the potential for each idea before settling on a rough draft of the plot and setting our target audiences and intentions; though, we were leaning towards teenagers as our target audience, since we are teenagers ourselves, and we wanted a performance that would resonate with people like us.

We first explored the idea of the Siamese twins. Since neither of us knew what it felt like to be joined to another human being, we decided to experiment physically, as a pair of Siamese twins. I suggested that we try out my Brechtian approach to creation (see page 1 – Past Approach: Tableau), and we experimented joining at different body parts (our backs, our arms, our legs). We created different tableaux showing the daily lives of Siamese twins, but we realised that our actions were extremely limited, and all our tableaux had resulted in similar interpretations by the both of us. It did not spark any new ideas. Additionally, it would be quite impractical to be a pair of joined twins, as there were only two of us in the group – how are we going to interact with other characters? Therefore, we agreed to set this idea aside.

Nonetheless, we realised that our ideas were very specific and it might be worthwhile to look at the bigger picture, before further explorations. We concurred that we should come up with a rough plot, before exploring these specific ideas in detail, despite our original thought to explore ideas before settling on a plot. Thus, I adapted and conducted the “Pair Story-making” activity, taken from the Drama Resource website (Farmer, n.d.).

We did this activity at Joleen’s place; there had been a photo of her with a young kid on the table. This sparked a conversation of pedophilia halfway through this activity. We were both really drawn by that idea; people (us included) often joke about pedophilia, and so we thought that it would be interesting to explore the idea of how pedophilia leads to the separation. This formed the basis of our storyline (for our first work-in-progress).

However, upon discussion with our teacher, we realised that we might have tried to pack too many themes into our show – there was pedophilia, separation, family over friendship and unconditional love. We touched on all these themes, but none of them were actually explored in a profound manner. We thought that the message (inevitability of separation) would not be as clear if there were so many themes present in our show. Therefore, we decided to ask a few of our friends to be our first “work-in-progress” audience, just like how Gecko uses them, to get insight into their interpretation of the show.

Most of these audience members commented on the lack of an evident message in our piece:

- When asked what they thought the main message of our piece was, we received varying responses. There was “separation”, “friendship before relationships”, “family over friendship” (Work-in-progress Audience #1, 2017).
- In our performance, one of the lines Joleen had was, “I only have space for one ‘Lee’ in my life.” This was supposed to be a significant line that conveys the theme of family over friendship. However, several audience members said that they “didn’t really get the point of that line. Why was it said?” (Work-in-progress Audience #1, 2017).

Hence, Joleen and I decided to pick just one theme from our show, and develop our artistic intentions based on that, so that our piece would have a more focused message delivered to the audience. We also wanted to create a piece that we could relate to, so that there could be more emotional truth in our performance. Being teenagers ourselves, we felt that whatever was emotional truth to us would be best understood by a teenage audience, which was why Joleen and I decided to pick a theme that specifically relates to people in that age group. The theme was family over friendship, as opposed to the inevitability of separation.

We chose this theme because Joleen is a “family over friendship” kind of person, whereas I, on the other hand, think friends are more important than family. However, because of the Asian culture I was brought up with, I have this view that it is only morally right to choose your family over your friends, regardless of who I prioritise. We thought that this might be a meaningful theme to explore in our piece, as different individuals are likely to have different opinions about the importance of family and friendship.

Figure 1. Initial responses mind map. (glt067, 2016b)
Target Audience: Teenagers

Joleen and I agreed that the teenage years are a time when adolescents start to rebel against their parents. At this age, teenagers often experience peer pressure too, and may sometimes be influenced into thinking that spending time with their family is uncool – often, they may even feel pressured to make fun of their own families. This is also the age when people start to have more freedom and spend more time with their friends, compared to their family. As our show aims to deal with these issues, we feel that it would be much more relatable to older teens (16-18 years old), because they are likely to have more freedom and already have been through the family/friends conflict a few times. Our show would likely be more impactful on them, as it enables them to reflect upon their past. In order to make the characters more relatable to teens, we have also decided to make them around 16-18 years old. Nevertheless, we thought that it was still important to invite audiences from the younger teenage years, so that we can have an insight to their perspectives - younger teens may not reflect on their past choices as much as older teens as they have less life experience, but it is still possible that our show can influence the way they view family/friend situations in future.

Artistic Intention

We wanted to convey to the audience that family is more important than friendship. Adults often remind teenagers how important familial relationships are in life, sometimes even more so than friendship. For many people, even as they age, move out of the house, see their friends more than their family, they are still willing to go out of their way to help their family members when they need it. Unlike friends that come and go, family is permanent. Hence, for our piece, we intend to make the audience truly think about their priorities. We want them to be emotionally involved in our show, so that they reflect on their past actions – were there times when they have chosen friendship over family, in situations when it was clearly immoral to do so? Did they regret any of these decisions? We also wanted to convey to them that sometimes, it is all right to leave your friends, to separate from your friends, if it means being there for your family, who has been there for you since birth.

New Plot

Joleen and I agreed that we managed to create a very emotional scene of separation in what we originally had (first work-in-progress show). We wanted to keep that (though we needed to edit lines and actions), because we liked the idea of the two best friends who were separated due to family. But because the idea of pedophilia was removed from our original show, we now had to come up with other causes that led to their separation.

We discussed this, and eventually came up with two possibilities:
- Michelle (Bailey’s best friend) treats Will (Bailey’s brother) inappropriately
- Michelle is a bad influence on Will

Characters

In order to convey our message to the audience in a captivating manner, we decided to dramatise the characters as such:
- **Bailey** (Joleen): Family over friendship. Over-protective of her “baby” brother Will.
- **Willy/ Will** (Me): Neutral stance towards prioritising family or friendship.
- **Michelle** (Me): Friendship (including romantic relationships) over family.

Since teenagers are often faced with peer pressure, we wanted the cause of separation to be something related to that; therefore, we used the second possibility stated above. I suggested that the bad influence be that Michelle encourages underage Will (16 years old) to drink. Joleen liked that idea and further developed upon that, suggesting that maybe Michelle (18 years old) has just graduated and went to celebrate at a house party. She brings Will there, and he gets drunk. Bailey is furious when she finds out, which, in turn, leads her to convince Will to break up with Michelle. Additionally, she loses trust in Michelle and stops being her friend, leading to their separation in the last scene.

Due to our main message to the audience being “family is more important than friendship”, we decided to make it such that Michelle loses everything at the end of the play – her friend and boyfriend. We wanted to convey to the audience that choosing friendship over family is wrong. Whereas Bailey, who chooses family over friendship, is not as affected as Michelle, because she still has her family (which is permanent) on her side. Through our characterisations, we hope to convey our intentions effectively to the audience.

The Collaborative Development of Our Piece

Joleen and I agreed that since this piece revolves around two best friends and one of their brothers, we should start Scene 1 by establishing the relationships between the characters. Joleen had the idea that we begin the scene by introducing ourselves in a monologue, in a classroom. However, as we had not really established what each of our characters was like (their personalities), we were not sure how to begin. Hence, I suggested that we characterise ourselves before proceeding. I asked some questions to kick-start our process:

- What are your character’s interests?
- How does she behave in social situations?
- What is she fearful of?
- What does she know that other characters do not?
- What is your relationship to other characters?

**Snapshot of Michelle’s Character**
- Confident
- Occasionally embarrassed by Bailey
- Loves Willy & Bailey
- Fear of being judged
- Relationships over family
I answered the questions for Michelle’s characterisation; Joleen did the same for Bailey’s characterisation. I then used this information to write Michelle’s introduction monologue:

_Hey everyone, my name is Michelle. I am 16 years old this year. I’m an only child, and my parents are hardly home. My best friend is Bailey, who isn’t here yet, but well, she’s always late. Anyway, I met her 9 years ago, when we were 7, and we’ve been best friends ever since._

The development of this scene went by smoothly, up till the point when we had to introduce Will. This was a problem, because Joleen and I were onstage together, which meant that neither of us could act as Will here. I suggested then that maybe we should not include an introduction for Will at the start, but Joleen argued that doing so would help to establish our inter-character relationships clearly from the start, because it informs the audience of who Will was. This was important because Will was the cause of conflict between the girls.

Joleen claimed that it was vital to include Will’s introduction, because Michelle and Will are never seen together in a scene, due to the fact that there were only 2 of us in the group (Joleen was always acting as Bailey, while I was both Will and Michelle). Hence, we needed to establish what Will’s relationship to Michelle was in the introduction. Joleen suggested doing a voice-over, but I disagreed, because I thought that it would be strange to have us both onstage and delivering our monologues in person, but having a third character doing theirs through a voice-over. In fact, since we had already decided that Will would eventually appear in a scene together with Bailey, I thought that using a voice-over to represent him at the start would be confusing, because he would be physically represented in later scenes. So I proposed that we introduce Will by leaving a written note on Michelle’s chair. Michelle could read out this note (supposedly written by Will), which would reveal to the audience about his character – his personality, interests, etc. The note would essentially have the same structure as Michelle’s and Bailey’s monologues, but it will also explain that Will left it there because he was going to be late. But when we ran through this scene, we realised that it was quite lengthy, so Joleen suggested to just let the note be short and sweet instead, “Will you go out on a date with me? XOXO Willy”. After all, Will’s introduction was not as important as Michelle’s or Bailey’s, as he was not a main character.

One of the main benefits of working with Joleen, in my opinion, is that even though we may disagree initially, we still build on each other’s ideas. This often leads to new ideas, which has more potential, and which we usually also agree on, such as the idea of the having a note to introduce Will.

We wanted to show the girls in their respective rooms in the next scene, hence we agreed to create a split scene. We thought of setting up the girls’ rooms in similar ways, to show that they came from similar backgrounds; however, we wanted to have subtle differences that show what each girl prioritises, hence we decided to use cross-cutting. For example, while Michelle has a photograph of her and Bailey on her table, Bailey has a photograph of her family.

Originally, I thought of using lighting to create this split setting, and Joleen suggested using a physical flat (wall panel), but there were implications to this: firstly, there were only the two of us in the group so we would want to have minimal set changes between scenes. With the addition of the central flat, it gave us more set pieces to move. Secondly, our teacher had once showed us a performance recording, whereby a flat was used to split the stage. The camera had been placed in the middle, so both sides of the stages could be seen clearly. However, she told us that during the performance, audience members who sat at the far ends were actually unable to see what was happening on the opposite side of the stage – it would then defeat the whole purpose of cross-cutting, which was why I thought that the walls were unnecessary, but Joleen thought that the split looked better with the flat there. I agreed that this was true, but it was more important that the audience could see the action onstage, than making the split clear to the audience. But seeing that Joleen was adamant on this decision, and her being the main set designer of the group, I gave in. Fortunately, we found a thinner flat in the blackbox, and so I suggested that we use that and place it slightly more upstage, so that it would not block the audience’s sight. Both of us were happy with this choice.

After that, we had to create a party scene. We decided that the most practical way to do this was via lighting and sound effects. We did not want to involve too many set changes, because it was quite impractical to do so, with only two of us in the group – this is a major downside to having such a small ensemble; it limits our artistic choices. Then again, with limited choices, it ensures that we do not go overboard in our design aspects.

At the party, Michelle pressures Will to drink and they become drunk. Bailey calls Will when he fails to return home by 10pm. Michelle then drops Will back home, and this is when I am supposed to change characters and act as drunken Will. He will be characterised by my drunken stupor and clumsiness as I stumble into the room. Joleen helped to direct my blocking as Will (Figure 2) because she has more experience interacting with drunken siblings. I had trouble with his slurred speech, so Joleen guided me in the delivery of my lines – again, this is an advantage of collaboration: we were able to help one another based on our knowledge in different areas. We then continued to develop our last scene (the emotional separation scene aforementioned on page 7 – we re-choreographed it when our plot changed).

_Journal entry on 9 Jan 2017: “Joleen led a devising exercise from Zen Zen Zo Theatre Company, whereby we each [had to come] up with 4 actions. She would then do one of hers, freeze; I do mine, freeze; she does hers, and so on, alternating till we get through all our actions. Essentially, an action of one person causes a reaction in the other. Joleen mentioned how the pauses are supposed to be abrupt and all, and she suggested doing this exercise because she_
thought that it could show the beginning of the separation, [when our actions became less smooth and more hesitant]."

(glt067, 2017a)

This was recorded and afterwards, we watched the recordings and further refined our actions. I thought that our actions conveyed our emotions really well, however, I also felt that if we continued with this Zen Zen Zo choreography for the whole scene (which was 2 minutes long), it would eventually lose its emotional content and just appear as though Joleen and I were simply alternating our words and actions. Therefore, we decided that I should lead a choreography exercise for the second half of the scene – and it should be relatively different to Zen Zen Zo’s style.

To further deepen the emotional content of the scene (so that we can make the audience more reflective), I suggested that we incorporate moments of stillness and silence, moments whereby Bailey and Michelle just make eye contact. Upon watching videos of our rehearsals, I realised that the use of eye contact can really draw out the tension between the two best friends (Figure 3). However, when Joleen and I stare at each other, one of us will almost definitely start laughing, and it then kills the whole sad mood of the scene. This is the bad thing about working with Joleen – the fact that we were great friends, and we found it very hard to take each other seriously. Had I worked with someone else, I do not think this would happen as frequently; though this was something I had not thought about at all when we were forming our ensembles.

Nonetheless, when we were experimenting with eye contact, it reminded me of an exercise that Isaac (my classmate) had conducted back in IB Year 1. It involved playing around with eye contact and focal areas. Everyone had to walk around and maintain eye contact with the person they walk pass for an instantaneous moment. It then increased to 5s, 10s and eventually, 30s. I remember that the feeling of discomfort and urge to laugh had increased as the length of time to maintain eye contact for increased. Therefore, it struck me that Joleen and I could do this exercise in our rehearsals, so that we would eventually be able to maintain eye contact without breaking out into laughter.

Structure of the Script

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene 1</th>
<th>Scene 2</th>
<th>Scene 3</th>
<th>Scene 4</th>
<th>Scene 5</th>
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This was our script at a glance. We thought that this version of the script was much more focused on the “family over friendship” theme, rather than having a lot of themes (e.g. pedophilia, unconditional love). However, just to be sure, we decided to host a second informal “work-in-progress” performance, just as Gecko does. This would be useful because it allows us to get insight into the audience’s experience upon watching the piece. It would also allow us to know if there were any bits of the story that were unclear, or if the message was clearly conveyed to the audience. Additionally, their responses may also act as a basis for us to gauge the impact that our performance has had on the audience, when we perform our final piece.

We asked the work-in-progress audience what they thought the message of our show was, and also if it had made them reflect on anything in their lives. These are some of their responses and feedback:

- Most people understood the message that family is more important than friends.
- Thought about his own relationship with parents. Realises that he sometimes spends more time with his friends than parents… The piece also made him think about the way he behaves around his parents.
- Too much narrative in story. Limits audience interpretation because everything is already prescribed. Plot is also linear which limits their imagination.
- Last scene was the most abstract out of all scenes. Audience liked it and thought it impacted them the most.
- Have a consistent play-world – decide if Will is to be a character played by me, an invisible character, or an offstage character represented by voice-over. Will’s existence is quite inconsistent, and feedback was that it gets confusing.

(Work-in-progress Audience #2, 2017)

We edited the script again based on the audiences’ responses. We concluded that having less prescribed narrative would impact the audience in a more meaningful way, as it enables them to have personal interpretations. Therefore, we reflected upon how many of our spoken lines were truly needed, and cut out all that was unnecessary, replacing them with actions or music to convey emotions or meaning instead.

In order to address the feedback about the consistent play-world, we got rid of Will’s character. Not only was it difficult for me to play both Will and Michelle, we were also unable to show any interaction between them – this was weird, considering the fact that he was the cause of the girls’ fallout, and that he was also supposedly dating Michelle. Therefore, Joleen and I thought it made most sense to get rid of Will completely and focus the plot on just Bailey and Michelle.
Once again, this meant that we have no cause for the girls’ separation. So, we brainstormed some more ideas:

Bailey always chooses family over friends. During Michelle’s 18th birthday, she is late due to a family dinner. Michelle is there for Bailey’s 18th birthday. Even after receiving an urgent call from her family, Michelle is reluctant to leave. Both made a promise to go to Stanford University, but Bailey breaks it due to familial reasons.

This formed the basis of our new plot, which eventually became our final performance.

In addition to making changes to the storyline, we also played around with the structure – our linear structure made our piece seem dull and normal, and so by changing the structure, we hope to appeal to the audience’s imagination more. We experimented with these structures:

- **The Cycle** – starting and ending is the same, but takes the audience on a journey. We considered repeating the separation scene, but we realised that it would be misleading, since our main theme was family over friendship, as opposed to the separation.

- **The Frame** – when a motif unifies the collection of ideas. We wanted something that could symbolise the girls’ friendship, something that ties all the scenes together. We discussed the use of bracelets to symbolise what each girl prioritises in her life. Since we now had a birthday scene, Joleen suggested that Michelle could give Bailey friendship bracelets for her birthday. During the family dinner, Bailey would also receive a bracelet from her father. In the final scene, when they separate, Bailey would throw Michelle’s bracelet on the ground, whilst she places her father’s gently in the spotlight, communicating to the audience that she has chosen her family over her best friend. However, Michelle will treasure her bracelet. Throughout the whole performance, she only has one bracelet, suggesting that she is the kind of person who will pick her friend over anyone else in a heartbeat; this was how we eventually came to using bracelets as a recurring prop that ties the whole story together. We felt that the potential for symbolism was really strong with this structure, and so it would enable us to implicitly convey our message to the audience – the audience would have to think and reflect upon it; they would have to “work” to understand the message of the piece. Hence, we used “The Frame” as our structure.

**My Contributions (Including Specific Explorations Led by Me)**

**Gecko Workshop**

Very early on in the process, I led a mini workshop with the class based on my research into Gecko’s work. I conducted activities focused on breathing and the “rapid fire devising” (Evans & Finkel, n.d.) process (see page 2 – **Gecko’s Choreography Process**). The workshop started off with a breathing warm-up, “Breath of Fire”, which I got off the Theatrefolk website (Price, 2013). This was important for Gecko performers because they let their breathing guide their movements. For us, it was more of an experiment, as none of us had really thought much about breathing as a means to convey emotion prior to this. We often rely more on physicality and voice, and I was eager to explore the effectiveness of using breathing a means to convey emotion. From this exercise, I realised that breathing patterns do indeed help to draw out raw emotions – I felt it when my classmates were doing the exercise. In fact, the exercise also helped performers to get into the zone, in preparation for rehearsals.

Seeing that breathing can make emotions more genuine, I decided to use it as an aid for Bailey’s and Michelle’s characterisations, to make them more realistic. Therefore, I led Joleen in a breathing exploration, using Price’s (2013) article as a guide.

I first asked Joleen to mimic how her character normally breathes. Are the breaths quick and shallow? Or are they loud and heavy? After hearing her adjust her breaths, I asked her to imagine how her character would breathe in urgent situations... deeply? Or in gasps? I then asked her to think of a moment in the script, whereby her character would breathe in that way. As she gets used to the rhythm of her breaths, I requested for her to deliver a line in that breathing pattern. The fact that her breathing was audible in her lines changed the mood; honestly, I felt that it made her characterisation seem more realistic than it already was.
I remember hearing her breathing as she had delivered her lines to Will (in the work-in-progress versions). The whole atmosphere was filled with tension, created by her breathing pattern. I could feel that Bailey was boiling in anger, even before she delivers her lines. This shows how much our breaths can affect the whole emotional experience of a performance, if actors engage it properly. Ever since then, we have started to pay more attention to our breathing during rehearsals. Through the use of it, I think that we have managed to create deeper emotional content in the piece; this, in turn, impacts the audience more emotionally.

I also felt that doing breathing exercises before rehearsals actually help us stay more focused. By doing breathing exercises, it keeps our muscles relaxed, and I find that it actually helps Joleen and I to control our laughter as well, when we make eye contact.

**Theatre Gargantua's Physical Gesture Work**

In Year 1 of IB Theatre, our teacher had led a workshop on Theatre Gargantua's devising processes. One of them in particular, I thought would be highly suitable for the choreography in the second half of our last scene, due to its abstract nature and us wanting to create a relatively abstract last scene too.

First of all, I told Joleen to come up with 4 gestures, based on the abstract noun “separation”; this may not be the main theme of our performance, but it was what the last scene was about – the separation of two best friends. I did the same too. However, I noticed that we were taking quite a long time – we were running out of ideas; normally this activity would be conducted with more people in an ensemble, such that there would be more modes of expression for the same noun. Anyway, it was fundamental that we do not take too much time to come up with the actions, because we would then start to feel less instinctive, be more conscious about our actions, and think more. But it should be intuitive and genuine, thus, I reduced it to 2 actions each instead.

![Figure 6. Mirroring (Nair, 2017d)](Image)

Afterwards, we taught our actions to each other. We rearranged them into several possible sequences and did them simultaneously (we mirrored each other). We recorded this process, and upon looking at the recordings, I felt that although each sequence conveyed a slightly different story, they all ultimately showed the anger and finality of a friendship. This is likely due to the abrupt and strong gestures that Joleen and I had individually came up with.

Thinking back to an IB Theatre performance that I watched last year, I remember that the students had used mirroring to convey the idea that their characters had similar goals. However, towards the end, they start to become more different, and this is reflected in their physicality when they gradually begin to go out of sync with each other. I thought that this might be something that we could apply to our piece, seeing that Bailey and Michelle were best friends who used to do everything together, until the day Michelle gave up on all hope that Bailey will ever choose her over her family.

Because we wanted to start off the scene showing the relationship Michelle and Bailey used to have, Joleen and I thought that it would be better if we used my choreography (mirroring) for the first half of the last scene instead, then transition into her choreography for the second half (out of sync). We felt that this would be more effective because Zen Zo’s style was more of an action and reaction thing; it shows that the characters were already out of sync and they were merely responding to each other's actions, as opposed to being on the same page, being together.

After watching all the sequences on recording, we picked the sequence that we felt was most related to our lines (based on our instincts, since we wanted this scene to be emotionally truthful). Initially, I directed Joleen to do her gestures and deliver her lines at the same time; however, I felt that it was a bit awkward, hence I asked her to deliver her line, then do the gesture after. We experimented with various ways of incorporating the movement and line. I felt that from an audience's point of view, the scene would create the most emotional impact if the actors first delivered their lines, then do their actions. This enables to audience to fully process the things that are happening onstage – they first listen to the character’s lines, then note the gesture afterwards, instead of having to process both what the actor is saying and doing at the same time (which would be the case if characters delivered their lines and did gestures simultaneously).

With the coloured lighting that comes on in this scene, I felt that the choreography very clearly conveyed the gloominess that comes with the separation of a friendship.

**Lighting & Sound Design**

Journal entry #1 from 11 Feb 2017: “In our work-in-progress performances, we used “Cold” (my original stimulus) as the background music for our last scene. Joleen and I both thought that it worked really well because it fitted the sad mood of the separation – it was a tragic end to their friendship and the music helped to bring out this loneliness. However, our piece has changed drastically since the last performance – it has now become disappointment and anger that resulted in the girls’ mutual want to end the friendship. It was not exactly a tragic separation, so I felt that we should use another piece of music instead of “Cold”. I thought “Bloodstream” (instrumental version) by Stateless worked extremely well because it had a mysterious feel to it. Additionally, towards the end of the music, there is an eerie high note that is played, followed by silence; this is then repeated again, and it creates an eerie ending to our piece, thus would be great in conveying the tension between the girls. However, this meant that we had to time our dialogues and actions accurately to the soundtrack, such that the scene finishes just as the ending high notes play. The problem with this was that the
instrumental version of “Bloodstream” consisted of the same tune repeating over and over again, and so it was hard to keep track of the timing, even after numerous rehearsals. Fortunately, one day, Joleen came across another piece of music, “Love & Loss” by Mattia Cupelli, which she sent to me. Upon listening to the music, we had both thought of our final scene of separation. Our instincts told us that this was the perfect music for the last scene – it contains hints of sadness, yet not so much that the whole mood becomes depressing; additionally, “Love & Loss” also helps to build tension as its tempo and dynamics progressively increase.” (glt067, 2017b)

Journal entry #2 from 11 Feb 2017: “We wanted to create a sense of longing and nostalgia in Scene 2. Immediately, two songs came to my mind: “Yellow” by Coldplay and “All I Want” by Kodaline. I wanted to get a third person’s opinion on my choice for music, thus I asked Sofia [a friend] to tell me what she felt after listening to the songs. Note that at this stage, Sofia knew nothing about our plot. She told us that she felt a sense of confusion, and reconciliation too, to a certain extent (when listening to “All I Want”. The song also made her imagine that there was a death involved in our play (which there would be, though she does not know). It made her think of The Fault in Our Stars (“All I Want” was actually in this film but Sofia had not realised), The Perks of Being a Wallflower, ‘those kinds of films where you don’t really know if the ending is happy or sad’. Joleen and I felt that this was perfect because these were the exact emotions we wanted our audience to experience watching Scene 2, and also, the fact that it had both a happy and sad tune to it helps us convey to the audience the complexity of Michelle and Bailey’s friendship – none of the girls wanted to separate but they saw the necessity to.” (glt067, 2017b)

In terms of lighting, I have also experimented with different possible designs involving various colours, intensities and angles:

My final choices for lighting are discussed in the next section.

My Artistic Choices (as Seen in the Video)

Because of our small group size, Joleen and I each ended up taking multiple theatrical roles. Despite being in charge of both sound and lights, I felt that my lighting design contributed more to the piece, in terms of conveying the main message to the audience. Thus, I will only focus on justifying the lighting choices I made in this section of my process portfolio.

My chosen moment (last scene/ separation scene) is the most abstract scene in our performance. The mood was mainly created with lighting. Our main intention of the piece was to convey to the audience that family is more important than friendship; we wanted to make them reflect on their priorities, as well as past decisions they have made between family and friends.

I decided to use a concentrated, coloured lighting because it helps to create a more abstract atmosphere. I specifically requested for the coloured lighting to be set up at high intensities, such that it went beyond what was realistic, in order to appeal to the audience’s imaginations and emotions, making them introspect and reflect more on their past.

Originally, I wanted to use blue lights because it conveys the cold atmosphere of the scene, when Bailey and Michelle realised the need for separation. Blue is a cold colour, often associated to isolation and sadness. Even though Bailey prioritises her family, the girls have been best friends for 13 years, and so I felt that it would make sense to use blue light to highlight the loneliness they feel when they sever their ties. It also conveys their mental conflict, how they (especially Bailey) are lost and struggling to stay true to their priorities.

The scene starts off with the characters feeling hurt – Michelle was hurt because Bailey chose her family over her; Bailey was hurt because Michelle made her choose between her family and friend. It was only after Michelle declares that “it’s time we go our separate ways” (1:11 in video) that the girls truly realised the need for their separation. I felt that the separation would be even more emphasised if the light only turned blue at this moment (i.e. if the lights were not blue prior to this).

Upon watching the last scene, one of our set crew had actually suggested using a purple light for the start of the scene, then slowly fading this to blue as the scene progresses. I decided to use his idea because not only does it accentuate the shift into blue light towards the end of the scene, but the loss of a reddish tinge to the light also connotes a loss of love, as the girls became more detached from one another. I had hoped that as the light cross-faded into blue, the audience would start thinking about which character has made the “right” decision.
During our feedback sessions, most audience members said they felt that the lighting was good, but there were several who felt that it would have been more effective if the colour matched the mood more. One of them rated the effectiveness of lighting as 5/10, suggesting that I could have used “flickering lights [to make] it look like there was more mental conflict” (SJII Senior Students, 2017) in the last scene. Because some audience members felt that the colour of the lighting did not match the mood, they were unable to connect with the characters as well, hence were less impacted by the show and were less reflective on the performance than we expected them to have been.

In order to give the whole area a bluish tinge, I had also requested for a white flat to be placed centre stage (originally we were using a brown flat). This was because white absorbs coloured lighting better, and this would help to enhance the atmosphere of the performance. I thought this worked well, just like how Bailey’s costume absorbed the blue lighting well. But this was not the case for me, as I was dressed in full black. In fact, I was barely visible under the intense blue lights. I should have used a lighter tinge of blue light, or maybe added some yellow lights from the fresnels to brighten the stage. It was important to be able to see Michelle because her actions were mirroring Bailey’s – this was significant (will explain more in What Could Have Been Better). If the audience cannot see this, they are less likely to reflect about the family/friendship conflict the characters had been through – after all, the loss of the mirroring effect halfway through the scene (0:33 in video) highlighted the separation even more.

Regardless, quite a few audience members had also commented about how our show would have benefitted from using more subtle lighting:

- One person had rated the effectiveness of lighting as 7/10, giving the comment: “perhaps [use] a lighter tint” (SJII Senior Students, 2017).
- Another person had rated 6/10, suggesting the use of more subtle lighting

This is something that I will keep in mind when designing the lighting of abstract scenes in future shows.

As Bailey throws her friendship bracelet on the floor, the light turns into a deathly white colour (1:41 in video), almost as though symbolising the death of the friendship (as well as the death of Bailey’s father); white is the colour for mourning. It creates an empty, eerie atmosphere. Bailey realises that choosing her family over Michelle all the time is wrong, but knows that her family is her priority, whereas Michelle is angry at the fact that Bailey has never prioritised her. The white lights help to create a harsh, unfriendly environment, as though both characters were finally realising the hard truth that their friendship will not work out. Another reason white lights were used in this moment was because of practicality – the photo frames placed on the floor were symbolic and we wanted the audience to see them; blue lights made them look very dark and barely visible.

As Michelle drops her bracelet, spotlights go on (1:45 in video). This spotlight comes from an upstage lantern, such that it shines on the actors from an angle behind. This casts a shadow on Michelle as she drops her bracelet. It highlights the significance of this moment to the audience, and the fact that there is a shadow conveys to the audience the dreadfulness of the separation, because shadows are often associated with ominousness. Also, it creates a sense of reflection – Bailey was doing the exact same thing, removing her bracelets.

The items in the spotlight were significant, because they symbolised what each character prioritises in their lives. Bailey prioritises her family; we showed this by placing the picture of her father and the bracelet (from her father) under the spotlight. On the other hand, Michelle, who prioritises Bailey, drops her friendship bracelet into the light, where there is a photograph of Bailey and her. By using the spotlights, not only did I clearly convey to the audience who each character prioritises, but it also makes them reflect – are they like Bailey, who prioritises family, or are they like Michelle?

**My Evaluation of the Final Piece, Considering the Impact on the Audience**

Despite some mistakes during our performance, we managed to work around most of them, and I think our piece has had a considerable impact on the audience. But before addressing the impact our piece has had on them in my process portfolio, I will first evaluate the presentation of our final piece, which has changed drastically since our work-in-progress performance. There was much lesser narrative prescribed, and I felt that our main message is now much more explicit.

**What Could Have Been Better**

During the process of developing and adapting our work-in-progress piece, the choreography in the last scene is now almost completely different to what we originally had. What can be seen in my selected moment are just the remnants of the choreography created by Theatre Gargantua’s physical gesture and Zen Zen Zo’s action/ reaction exercises. Nonetheless, my idea of mirroring is still noticeable. I thought it was quite effective because it would encourage the audience to really think about which character they are they like Bailey, who prioritises family, or are they like Michelle?

One of the recurring pieces of audience feedback we received was that the props were not clearly visible. In Scene 2, Michelle finds a torn picture (of her and Bailey) and she tapes it back together on the floor. Only the front row audience
could see what I had been taping, which meant that the others would not catch the significance of the photograph (which is a recurring prop). This affects the extent to which the audience can then connect with the characters, and the extent to which they can empathise with the remorse the characters experience. As a result, they are less likely to be as impacted by the girls’ separation and thus would not be as reflective as we had intended for them to be. In hindsight, I should have raised the picture up after taping it, so that the audience could see it.

Something that I also realised from watching the video recording of our performance was that, our scene-to-scene transitions took very long. According to our teacher, “there was a lot of dead air – where nothing was happening” (Sprung-Boyd, 2017). Not only did this kill the tempo of our show, it also meant that any emotional impact the previous scene has had on the audience was lost during the transitions. The tension in the next scene would then be unable to build on the tension from the previous scene as effectively; the impact and meaning our show has had on the audience is therefore reduced.

There were also a couple of times when Michelle and Bailey did not do things inside the light. We were unaware of that, because it had seemed bright onstage. For most of Scene 6, both of us were in the light, though the focus was slightly off. The reason for this was because prior to our performance, we had made a last minute decision to shift the whole set forward, completely forgetting about the fact that our lighting had already been focused to particular spots. As a result, this affected the lighting of the scene, but it was not as bad as in Scene 2, where the audience could barely see what Michelle was doing because I had been so absorbed in my actions that I was not paying attention to the boundaries of the lit area.

Lastly, I felt that even though we tried to use breathing to bring out emotional truth in the play, it was not as audible as I had hoped for it to be. It could hardly be heard in the last scene, but that was all right, because I felt that the use of lighting, music and physicality made up for that, in terms of creating the mood.

### What Went Well

Regardless, there were still upsides to our performance, such as the music – most audience members gave a rating of above 8/10, in terms of how effective it was in bringing out the mood of scenes. For example, in the second scene, we used the song “All I Want” by Kodaline, to convey a sense of reconciliation and longing, and we were told that it really brought out the underlying emotions of the scene (SJII Senior Students, 2017), due its slow rhythm.

Also, I thought that the timing of sound effects was quite good. The music and sound effects were all played from my laptop, and we could only play one track at a time. However, for the second scene, we wanted voice-overs and the sound of a phone ding (Bailey’s message tone) to play while “All I Want” was playing. Therefore, I used Garageband to piece the sound effect and song together, such that the ding and the voice-overs would sound on separate occasions at specific times. Because the timing was fixed, this meant that our actions needed to be choreographed to the song. Watching our performance recording, I realised that our actions were quite well timed. We met all the timed cues and because of the lack of mistakes in the scene, the audience could remain emotionally involved with the events happening onstage, which was good as it then impacts them more.

Our set was also quite realistic (except the last scene, as seen in the video). It was very clear to the audience whether the action was taking place in Bailey’s/ Michelle’s rooms, or at the airport (this was made obvious through the use of airport sound effects too, downloaded from sounddogs.com). In my opinion, the realism made the characters very relatable to the audience and thus they would be more reflective on the situations the girls have gone through, helping us achieve our intentions.

### Impact of Our Piece on the Audience

In order to find out the extent that our piece has successfully conveyed its intentions, we asked audiences to tell us what they thought the main message was. Most people understood that it was trying to convey family was more important than friendship, but there were a handful who also thought it was “family and friends are conflicting priorities” (SJII Senior Students, 2017). After watching the recording, I realised that the reason for this could be the fact that Bailey’s father was on his deathbed – Bailey only chose to leave Michelle because her father was dying. In hindsight, I realised that even if I were a person who strongly prioritised friends, if my father were in a life-or-death situation, I would probably pick my father over keeping a promise with my friend. So this made me think that our decision regarding the cause of separation between Bailey and Michelle was maybe not the best. Many audience members also criticised Michelle for not being understanding enough. The fact that both characters made a choice about whom to prioritise in the last scene communicates to the audience that our show was about choosing your priorities, so it would not be surprising if audiences had thought the message was about the conflicting priorities, which was somewhat the case, although this was not our main message.

We also asked the audience if our show had influenced their views about the importance of family/ friendship in any way, and if it had also made them reflect on anything. Most of the audience responses were positive, in the sense that they felt that our piece had made them reflect about their own priorities, and how although both family and friendship were important, choices have to be made at times. Some also mentioned that it had made them reflect upon the way they treat their family members. Therefore, I think that our piece has actually been quite successful in achieving our intentions – to
make the audience reflect about family/friendship; however, I felt that our message (family is more important than friendship) could have been more clearly conveyed, because there were several people who thought the play was about the conflicting priorities.

Joleen and I were quite surprised though, when we found out that most people actually said that they found family more important than friends, even before watching our show. Based on what I observe in my daily life, I get the impression that friends matter more to teenagers than family. Photos on social media often feature them with friends more than they do parents, and they often talk about personal issues more with their friends. Yet, most people still claimed that family was more important; consequently, the show had not influenced their views much, since they were already pro-family to begin with, but it did make most of them reflect.

There were actually 3 audience members who felt that friends were more important than family. One of them in particular, had felt that our performance actually supported his views, because he had understood our main message as “friendships are lost at the expense of family relationships”. Contrary to most people, he had thought Michelle was the one at right, “because so many times Bailey missed out on events with Michelle, and even the university promise” (SJII Senior Students, 2017). This suggests that maybe we did not convey our message clear enough. Regardless, most people still understood our piece the way we wanted; hence I would say that our piece has mostly fulfilled its intentions.

Then again, from Gecko’s point of view, it is alright that audiences may leave the “same theatre feeling something completely different to one another” (aforementioned in page 3), because it would then mean that there was a lot of personal interpretation involved, meaning that the show has had quite an impact on the audience members – it made them think, made them reflect. I also think that it can be quite valuable to see what different people can get out from the same show based on their own opinions and experiences.

All in all, the collaborative project has allowed me to experience devising short pieces in a group. It has also allowed me to broaden my theatrical experiences in the areas of design, specifically lighting and sound, as well as performing. From this task, I have learnt the importance of not over-prescribing the narratives in performances, as well as the importance of focusing only on one main theme. I have also learnt a lot about the nature of collaboration: its disadvantages, such as disagreements and the need to compromise ideas, as well as its advantages, such as being able to build on and develop one another’s ideas.