

Gracing the Stage:
Re-conceptualizing Theatre in Drama Education Through Principles from
Cultural Psychology

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Dedication

To Mary and Marc.

Abstract

This thesis explores the meaning and use of theatre in drama education. The inquiry is grounded in a narrative of conversational interviews between myself and two other participants sharing a background in drama education and theatre production. Narratives generated from these interviews serve as the basis for interpretation and analysis as well as a resource to illuminate my own ideas. I have drawn from the principles of cultural psychology, particularly Etienne Wenger's ideas of communities of practice to re-conceptualize theatre as a culturally relevant site of practice in drama education.

Principles of cultural psychology are based on the premise that culture and psyche are co-constituting and that cognition is cultural and situated in practice; culture is the medium of thought and therefore it is the medium through which we learn. By building on the dual foundations of the narratives and the theories and principles of cultural psychology I attempt to create a hermeneutic dialogue that illuminates both particular and general concerns in drama education.

A critical look at relevant literature along with the discussions with the co-participants shows that drama education primarily presents drama as a means for personal development or as a pedagogical tool to be used across the curriculum. Within both these traditions drama and theatre have become dichotomized with much of theatre craft relegated to the sidelines of the drama classroom. However, viewed through the lens of cultural psychology, theatre, with its richness and variety of cultural practices becomes an important component of the drama classroom. It succeeds at this by providing a powerful framework for learners through its artefacts and dual processes of participation and

reification. This framework is built upon an understanding of theatre as a learned craft that engages our intentionality and is malleable enough to foster creativity by permitting the student to negotiate meaning within practice.

The research findings point to the crucial need to reinstate art practices in drama education. In conclusion, dramatic art that allows for deep understanding of the dual nature of theatre and drama education is called for.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

That school play we all remember

I was never in the ‘school play’ in high school, but I have taken drama in school since grade ten. I thought the kids who did theatre were a kind of clique, a nice clique but one that I wasn’t a part of – they practiced theatre, they took on roles. They not only played the fictitious characters one associates with the stage but they also took on the roles of theatre practice – director, designer, stage hand... while I hung around outside perfecting teenage angst.

Until my last year of high school I had no idea what theatre practice was about and even then, the kind of theatre I was involved in was educational, rather than aesthetically minded. Of course I could be enthusiastic enough in the classroom drama exercises, but their point was never really clear to me. When I went off to university and showed up for one of the requisite lecture style theatre courses, the professor’s first words to the class were, “theatre is a dying art”. I suppose at the time I was not terribly upset by this comment. After all, I was taking drama in education, which to many has little to do with the actual practice of theatre.

But now, years later, having worked as a theatre professional and drama teacher, I have to question the divide that has been imposed between theatre and drama in the classroom. Today when I teach workshops in Halifax schools, the teachers and/or administration sometimes ask for an introduction to drama,

nothing too long or involving and certainly nothing that involves theatrical process and presentation. It is always seen as something that can fit snugly between gym and recess, a minor reprieve from school desks. On one occasion I found myself in an enlarged hallway with 60 students and a half hour to work. This state of affairs results from the tremendous effort of drama educators and theorists to make their subject compliant with the established ways of doing things within schools. Drama now takes place across the curriculum, at all age levels and often with little training for those teaching. The theories of drama education I read during my degree in drama in education made theatre seem to be only about performance, and more pointedly, about the risk of stunting development through performance. Drama education was not grounded in an exploration of dramatic art practices but in theories of development in cognitive psychology. Students in the context of a drama class are measured on their individual cognitive development and their ability to discuss social issues, similar to the rest of the school curriculum.

There is an important distinction being made in this paper between ‘drama in education’ and drama education. Drama in education is what my first degree was called but it also refers to the use of drama as a tool for education that is quite different than having a drama education in which a body of knowledge from drama and theatre is the basis for the content of curriculum. However, the use of these terms is context-sensitive and may at times appear interchangeable. The terms ‘drama’ and ‘dramatic art education’ may also appear blurred in their boundaries as well.

It may have been uncanny providence that during a course working towards my Masters of Arts in Educational Psychology I was introduced to the body of work on cultural psychology. When taking her course on values reasoning Dr. Anne MacCleave gave me a paper written by her colleague at Queen's University, Dr. Arlene Stairs, whom Anne had met during her sabbatical. This article, co-written with Karne Kozolanka, was my introduction to cultural psychology and along with Anne's support led me to undertake an independent study with her that culminated in a conference presentation. We described cultural psychology as a relatively new, emerging discipline with a view of culture as dynamic and evolving that had implications for the teaching and learning process (James & MacCleave, 2000). Subsequently, Anne and I met Arlene in person at her family home in Grand Manan NB where we brainstormed a paper that explored how cultural psychology addresses sociocultural diversity. This co-authored paper was published in 2002.

My interest in culture had an earlier history. This brings me back to the two years I had spent in my undergraduate program of Anthropology before moving to Drama Education. During my audition for the Concordia Theatre Department, a sly professor who knew that I was coming from anthropology asked me if I thought there was any connection between drama and culture. I said 'yes'. And now, all these years later, I would like to explore that connection as best I can. Perhaps these won't be the same connections that professor thought I might make but this inquiry will be an attempt to synthesize my thoughts on theatre, drama, education, and cultural psychology.

Culture in us, us in culture

The implication of Bruner's thesis suggests that creating dramatic text is neither exclusively personal nor entirely culturally determined; it is an interactive process which is open to change and renewal (Nicholson, 1998, p. 75).

Cultural psychology values culture not as a variable in the life of the mind but as an intricately connected and co-constituting function of our psyches. Culture affects us as we in turn affect culture. It is a dynamic and evolving relationship where our life's work actually becomes a rapport and re-creation between the psyche and culture. This places our practices, from work to art to hobbies to home – wherever our lives are situated, as the prime areas for learning and making culture. Our practices are as integral in forming our identities as our identities are in helping us to shape our practices and our culture. Learning, in this view, becomes embedded in our relationship with the historical and social contexts that surround us – and bind us. Cognition is cultural and is situated in practice.

Purpose of the Inquiry

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the interconnectedness among theatre, drama education and culture. Principles of cultural psychology were used to frame this exploration with a particular emphasis on Etienne Wenger's notions of communities of practice.

This qualitative exploration is grounded in a narrative of conversational interviews between myself and two other participants. All the participants share a background in drama education and theatre production. Narrative generated from

these interviews serves as the basis for interpretation and analysis as well as a resource to illuminate my own ideas.

Questions to Guide the Inquiry

Given my background is formed by the dual practices of teaching drama and of doing theatre, the purpose of my inquiry is to uncover how these two worlds intersect and effect one another from the perspective of cultural psychology. I am influenced in this inquiry by questions such as these.

1. What concepts and principles from cultural psychology are the most revealing of drama education and theatre and conversely, what practices in theatre illustrate the concepts and principles of cultural psychology?
2. How does the dual nature of: the participants' communities of practice (drama education and theatre), culture and mind, creativity and skill, reification and participation, inform their pedagogical and artistic practices?
3. How does viewing drama education as an art education affect how we teach it as subject?
4. What is the importance of artefacts of the theatre such as a performance or a play script in drama education?
5. How does the interplay between the local and global cultural knowledge inform theatre practice and drama education?
6. How do practices of theatrical art effect student engagement?

7. Is there a space for the concepts and principles of cultural psychology such as communities of practice and apprenticeship models of learning in the education system?

Even in Mary E. Styslinger's (2000) rather cutting take on traditional theatre she still refers to 'that school play we all remember' (p. 188). Why do we remember it? Is it because it is in our collective consciousness as a time of heightened awareness? Or perhaps as a time of collectively accomplished hard work? As I look at theatre and drama through the lens of cultural psychology, I hope to discover at least parts of the answers to these questions.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this review of literature I attempted to understand the connections between drama education and theatre through the lens of cultural psychology. I will first look at selected principles and concepts that make up cultural psychology. I will then narrow the focus more specifically on Etienne Wenger's ideas around communities of practice. I will use theatre practice in this section as an illustration of Wenger's theories.

The second part of this literature review is concerned with the different conceptions of drama education and how it has been distanced from art practice in general, but particularly the practice of theatre.

The third and final section is an investigation of what constitutes creativity and its relationship to craft and skill in the theatrical context.

Cultural Psychology

Framing the Theatre through Cultural Psychology

"Like fish in water, we fail to 'see' culture because it is the medium within which we exist" (Cole, 1996, p. 8)

My wish to re-conceptualize theatre as a culturally relevant site of practice in drama education stems from my understanding of theories in cultural psychology as applied in education. Cultural psychology is "the study of culture's role in the mental life of human beings" (Cole, 1996) where culture is interpreted "as the medium in which psychological processes are enacted" and consequently, "cultural differences entail differences in psychological functioning" (Greenwood,

1999, p. 503). Here Carl Ratner (1996) gives an example of how cultural meaning and concepts inform our psychological functioning:

We become angry because we interpret someone's action as deliberately intending harm. The interpretive concept "deliberate intention to harm" is a social construct. It is popularly accepted in Western society as a way to understand behavior. However, some societies lack this social concept. They interpret a harmful action as reflecting fate or god's will. In these societies harmful action is not regarded as the perpetrator's fault and it does not generate anger. (¶ 3)

This illustrates that understanding culture is central to understanding psychological processes; that culture is not a fixed variable in a universal model of psychological functioning. Through this lens we see that "psychological phenomena are cultural in their essence" (Ratner, 1999, ¶ 57) and that it is an individual's participation in life around them that truly informs their psychological development.

Culture becomes the medium of thought and therefore it is the medium through which people learn. In this excerpt from her essay "Stages of the World" (1998), Sita Brahmachari describes the different levels of understanding that high school students took away from a Nigerian theatrical performance they had attended.

Interviewed after the performance, a sharp distinction emerged between the responses of the students. Tony, a London-born English boy, described the difficulty he was having commenting about the production

because he saw himself as having no way of evaluating the work or drawing parallels to anything else he knew or experienced. While he thought his drama education had been ‘multicultural’, in that it explored the racism experienced by people in the class and he had learned about the Civil Rights Movement, he still found it difficult to engage with the performance. In contrast, Efua, a student of Nigerian parentage, was extremely excited by the play, in particular the portrayal of one character, Mebude, who, she said resembled her own mother. Efua was upset by the responses of some of her friends who dismissed the performance as ‘false’. ‘They thought she [Mebude] wasn’t acting well but I wanted to tell them that that’s exactly what a proud Nigerian woman acts like.’ Efua felt very defensive about the production which she believed was undervalued by some of her peers simply because they were unable to engage with its conventions. (p. 22)

There are several issues at play but the aspect that is particularly interesting from a cultural psychology perspective is that what is understood as ‘pride’ in one student’s mind is seen as poor acting in another’s. This demonstrates that there is no universal cultural model for ‘pride’ nor is there a clear way to decide what constitutes ‘good’ acting across cultural landscapes and their different theatrical traditions. In other words, one has to give credence to indigenous understanding and/or immersion within a culture to recognize intended meaning. In cultural psychology indigenous research approaches are applied because “the complexity of culture [can] only be understood within the context in which it occurs” (James

& MacCleave, 2000). The indigenous approach to research understands local knowledge as an important element to understanding any investigation of cultural practice.

Richard Schweder (1990) explains that the aim of cultural psychology is “to imaginatively conceive of subject dependent objects (intentional worlds) and object-dependent subjects (intentional persons) interpreting each other’s identities” (p.26). In other words, our psyche and culture are interdependent and mutually constituting (James & MacCleave, 2000). Beyond this intermingling of cultural concepts in our mental landscapes, there is also a very concrete way in which culture is asserted in our psychology and that is through social activity (Ratner, 1996) or communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Vygotsky was an early proponent of the importance of social activity in the study of human psychology. In a critique of Piaget’s explanation of cognitive development he writes, “What is missing, then, in Piaget’s perspective is reality and the child’s relationship to that reality. What is missing is the child’s practical activity. This is fundamental. Even the socialization of the child’s thinking is analyzed by Piaget outside the context of practice. It is isolated from reality and treated as pure interaction or communication of minds” (Vygotsky in Ratner, 1999, ¶ 16.). The practical activity discussed by Vygotsky is often concerned with the production of artefacts.

Artefacts

In his book, “Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline” (1996), Michael Cole defines the elementary units of culture as artefacts. As he describes here, artefacts are not necessarily material ‘things’.

According to the view presented here, which bears a close affinity to the ideas of John Dewey and also traces its genealogy back to Hegel and Marx, an artefact is an aspect of the material world that has been modified over the history of its incorporation into goal-directed human action. By virtue of the changes wrought in the process of their creation and use, artefacts are simultaneously ideal (conceptual) and material. They are ideal in that their material form has been shaped by their participation in the interactions of which they were previously a part and which they mediate at the present. (p.117)

Artefacts include “languages, written documents, social practices, performances, procedures, technologies, regalia, furnishings, utensils and artwork” (MacCleave, & James, 2002) and are “created through activity using cultural tools and consequently, their creation influences subsequent activity” (MacCleave et al, 2002, p13). Cole suggests that there are three levels of artefacts; primary artefacts are directly used in production. Examples of these include computers, pens, and scissors. The second level of artefacts are representations of the primary ones and Cole’s examples include “recipes, traditional beliefs and constitutions” (p. 117). The third level are tertiary artefacts that “color the way we see the ‘actual world’, providing a tool for changing current praxis” and include “works of art and

processes of perception” (Cole, 1997, p.121-122). The difference between secondary and tertiary artefacts lies in degree to which they are interpreted. Artworks constitute tertiary artefacts because of their interpretive nature. They have a “dual conceptual-material nature” (Greenwood, 1999, p. 507) and are “the product of prior human goal-directed activities operating on material objects” (Cole in Greenwood, 1999, p. 507). In this sense the meaning we make of artefacts is dependent on our relating them to our specific cultural histories.

In our interaction with artefacts, theatre becomes a space where artists are able to explore, interpret and create their work. It is in this sense that cultural practice becomes elemental in education as it accounts for the situated nature of cognition.

Learning Culture

“Learning to be a scientist is not the same as “learning science”: it is learning culture, with all the attendant ‘non-rational’ meaning making that goes with it” (Bruner, 1996, p. 132)

Through the lens of cultural psychology, the creation of culture becomes “the object of schooling”(Bruner in Stairs & Kozolanka, 1997 p.11). School becomes not only a space for participation in learning and personal growth but also a site for the transfer and remaking of culture. Students are placed in various communities of practice as opposed to indistinct sites that concentrate on cognitive imperatives. At the moment, the historical connection between the cultural community of theatre and the teaching of drama has been weakened in teaching practices.

Communities of Practice

*“Learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of that learning”
(Wenger, 1998, p. 96)*

From here we can assume that “social activity profoundly structures psychological phenomena” and therefore “research which does describe the concrete social organization of activity elucidates the cultural character of psychological phenomena”(Ratner, 1996, ¶ 36). In the following sections, I will explore how the practice of theatre in education strongly influences students’ engagement in the drama classroom.

Etienne Wenger’s (1998) definition of a community of practice clarifies this observation further:

Being alive as human beings means that we are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds, from ensuring our physical survival to seeking the most lofty pleasures. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn.

Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities, *communities of practice*.

(p.45)

The first part of this definition I would like to address is the aspect of learning within a community of practice. We usually see learning as happening outside of most of our activities. Our evaluation of that learning “must be demonstrated out of context” (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). It is generally seen as “an individual process, that has a beginning, middle and end” and “hence we arrange classrooms where students- free from distractions of their participation in the outside world – can pay attention to the teacher or focus on the exercises” (p. 3).

Communities of practice are everywhere and we are at any time are involved in multiple communities of practice. My list would include the university at which I study, the Midwifery Coalition of Nova Scotia, a book club, the stable where I ride, the Children’s Aid Society of Halifax, the schools in which I direct shows, the productions themselves, and at the heart of it, my family. In some of these communities I am a peripheral member such as in the schools where I direct shows and the Children’s Aid Society where I am contracted out as alternative social worker. In other communities of practice I am very much a core participant; I am chair of the Midwifery Coalition of Nova Scotia and within the theatre productions I direct I am an integral part of their practice. My past communities of practice include the theatre company in Toronto wherein I had many roles – director, actor, and producer, to name a few. Most of these communities of practice save the university are outside of the spaces where learning is assumed to take place, yet much of what I have learned as an adult has come through my involvement in these communities. Within all communities of practice, it is our social relations that establish our enterprises

even if they are solitary endeavours. An ornithologist out alone in the night watching the movements of owls is still connected to a larger community of practice whether it is a university or a wildlife organization, or a government forestry program. The ornithologist's practices are inextricably linked to a wider community.

In this view most of our learning happens through social interactions that are culturally embedded. A social theory of learning is in fact, from the perspective of cultural psychology, a cultural theory of learning. Wenger's social theory of learning includes four categories that all play significant roles within one another: community, practice, meaning, and identity. Aspects of theatrical practices can be associated with each of these categories.

The overlapping and interdependent nature of these four categories is clear from Figure 1. Practice implies community and community generally involves some sort of practice. Identity is formed by community membership and meaning is negotiated through identity, practice and community. Being involved in theatre entails the practice of rehearsal and rehearsal itself gives meaning to the performance. Practice and meaning overlap, as performance is also 'doing', but in a more reified form. This leads to the making of an artefact and connections with a larger community, while meaning in rehearsal is centred on the smaller, intimate relations within the community of practice.

Figure 1 – Framing Theatre as a Community of Practice

	Community	Practice/process oriented	Meaning/artefactual	Identity
Learning as...	Belonging	Doing	Experience	Becoming
What it does	Frames our practices	Gives coherence to community	Is negotiated through practice and community	Formed by our experience within communities of practice
Examples of Theatre and Educational Contexts	A theatre company formed within or outside a school system. Demands community building.	A rehearsal process and all its attendant tasks	Performance – a culmination of rehearsal; an artefact imbued with meaning	Flirting with constructed future goals (Valsiner in Stairs & Kozolanka, 1997) – an actor, a scenographer, a lighting technician.

(Extrapolated from Wenger, 1998).

I would now like to explore how meaning, community and identity are grounded in practice. Meaning and culture are negotiated through practice and community; our experiences within the world. Wenger regards meaning as something that is negotiated through participation and reification (1998). Wenger describes practice as “a way of talking about our shared historical and social

resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action” (1998, p. 5).

Participation includes living in the world, memberships, acting in the world, interaction and mutuality while reification is “the process of giving form to our experiences by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’” (Wenger, 1998, p. 60). Participation can be both process and product (Wenger, 1998). A performance is reification but the steps in the rehearsal process from auditions, to rehearsal, to dress rehearsal are also reifications. Meaning is negotiated with the dual influences of participation and reification. In drama education there have been times when either reification or participation have perhaps been thought of as the sole bearers of meaning. This situation has created at once theatre that is rigid (where reification takes precedence over participation) or a drama classroom that is without clear objectives and culturally significant tools and artefacts (participation without reification). However, theatre and drama when practiced as art may be less rigid in their reified elements if they concentrate on interpretation and renewal while still creating culturally significant performances.

Communities of practice result from mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). “The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). These artefacts and practices are intentionally generated as opposed

to randomly generated. Like many art forms, the theatrical tradition has accumulated a significant shared repertoire that is flexible enough to allow for reinterpretation and further investigation. Tradition and flexibility are crucial for any art form to survive. A case in point would be a modern interpretation of a Greek tragedy.

Our membership in a community of practice is defined by mutual engagement within that practice (Wenger, 1998 p. 73). It is not enough to state one is a member of a community; one must also act within it. Joint enterprise is the result of a collective process of negotiation and our negotiated response, “It is not just the stated goal, but creates among the participants relations of mutual accountability that become an integral part of practice” (Wenger 1998, p. 78). This mutual accountability is one of the cornerstones of the theatre world without which whole productions would not exist. Perhaps it can be summarized in the oft-repeated sayings “The show must go on!” and “The play’s the thing”.

Wenger states, “Inevitably, our practices deal with the profound issue of how to be a human being. In this sense, the formation of a community of practice is also the negotiation of identities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). We can all probably think of people in our lives that take great pride in defining themselves through their work or through their family or their hobbies. Most of these entail membership in a community of practice and are inseparable from our identities. This is not to say that identity is about self-image: it is more encompassing than that. Our identities are formed through our conciliation between culture and self. Identity is also defined by Wenger as a learning trajectory where we “define who

we are by where we have been and where we are going”(1998, p. 149). In this view a certain amount of transparency of practice for both learner and teacher is an important aspect to sustained engagement. “At least some psychologists are in fact redefining intelligence as ‘a process in which a person interacts with the environment with a future goal orientation...: in order to act, the person has to ‘flirt’ with a constructed future goal” (Valsiner & Lueng, 1994 in Stairs and Kozolanka, 1995, p. 14). Persons and culture are always becoming, creating and re-creating themselves (Stairs & Kozolanka, 1995).

Figure 2 – Dual Processes and Artefacts of the Theatre shows the fluidity of artefacts and their use along with Wenger’s processes of reification and participation.

Figure 2 – Dual Processes and Artefacts in the Theatre

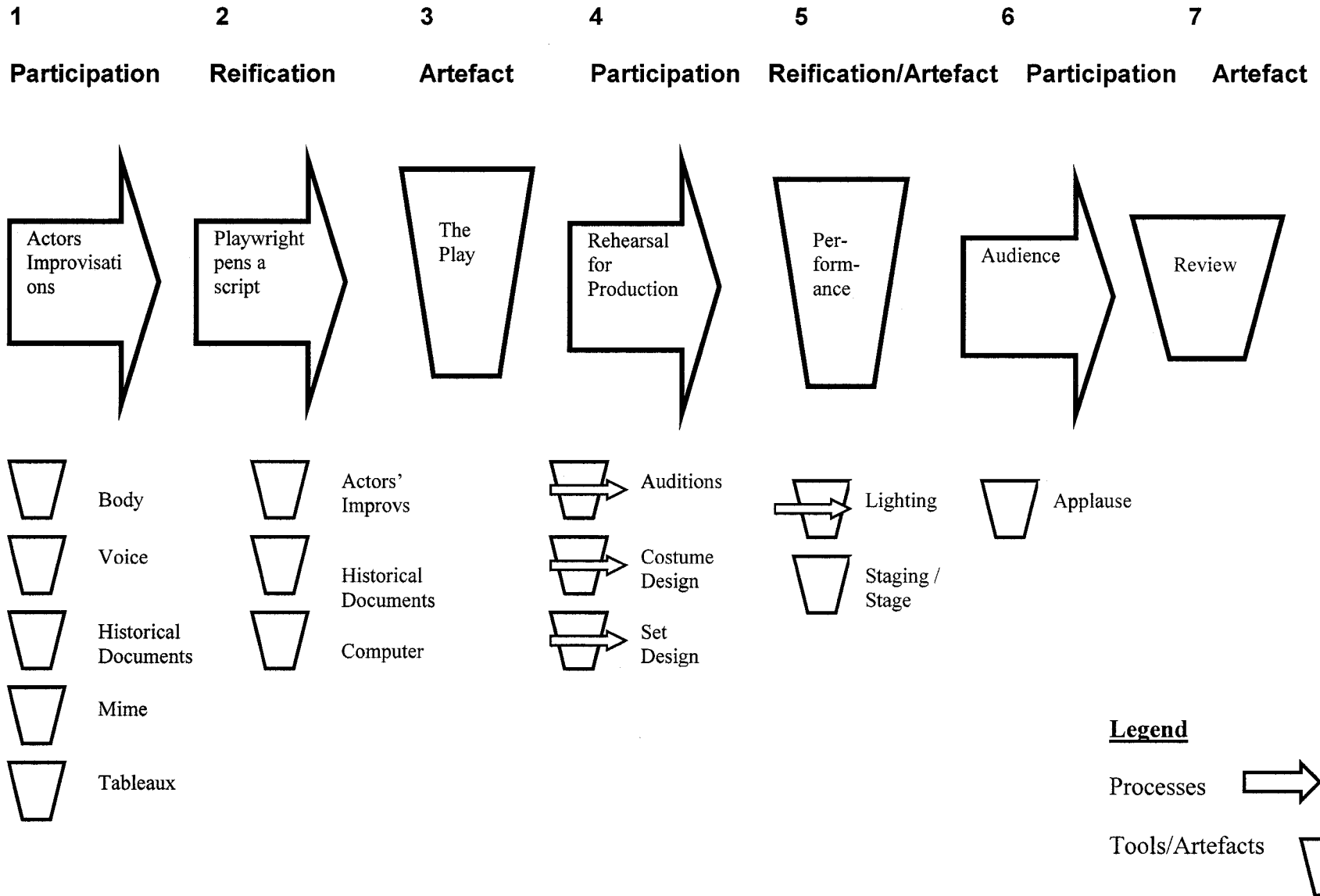


Figure 2 – Dual Processes and Artefacts of the Theatre

(And an accompanying story)

This illustration is not a definitive design that explains all the processes and the artefacts that work within theatre. It is an example or perhaps one layer of the processes and artefacts of theatre and their relation to one another. The illustration is a straight line but it could also be drawn as a spiral, a square, or an interweave of circles. It is a slice of the practices in theatre and should be viewed as suggestive rather than prescriptive. Within each process there are more processes happening. In fact, some of the artefacts themselves include processes such as costume design, lighting design, auditions and set design. Participation and reification include other processes such as interpretation and creation. Participation and reification are co-constituting, reified artefacts may become tools and are acted upon as well as created by our participation.

When I decided to draw an illustration explaining the connections between participation, reification and artefacts I thought it would be best served in this paper by bringing in the theatre event as the subject. I also decided to begin, not with the actors doing the first read-through of a play but with a playwright workshopping her ideas with some actors and a director – one of the ways of developing a script. This is actually an experience I had while at Concordia where I was hired by a playwright to work as an actor on her play that explored the life of a woman with anorexia nervosa and the hunger strikes of the Suffragettes in the 19th century.

If we look at the first column of the illustration, under participation we see are the actors' improvisations. Below this are a few of the tools they might use to come up with the improvisations. The actors' tools include their voice and body, historical documents (in my case ones that related to the Suffragette movement), performance traditions such as mime and tableaux as well as the playwright's own writing. The next column is the reification of the workshops where the playwright pens a script. Her tools would have been those same historical documents, the actors' portrayals in the workshop, along with more banal tools such as a computer. The resulting artefact is a play script that is again quickly put to use for the production. The rehearsal period is filled with many different webs of participation and reification in the cyclic creation of artefacts. To give an example of the layered processes; the set designer will read the play, will meet with the director and attempt to incorporate their visions of the play into drawing and perhaps a maquette. From there the set builders will interpret the maquette and begin construction. Finally, the actors' use of the set and how it relates to the audience will be another process and yet another artefact. It is much more of a web than a straight line but at least the line attempts to convey that the processes and artefacts help to create one another.

The performance is an artefact but it leads to more participation, reification. The audience, of which there has been much consideration of by the actors, director, playwright etc, throughout the process, now participates. They too, have tools by which to enable their participation; one of them, simple yet powerful, is the clapping of hands in applause. The audience's participation is

reified perhaps by a reviewer from a local paper who attends and the last artefact of this incomplete illustration is a review, good or bad...

Theories in Drama Education

In this section of my review I will attempt to summarize the theories that have given form to drama education over the past fifty years and how they have affected dramatic art in general.

A 'Rehearsal for Life' or 'A Life in the Theatre'

Drama education has been characterized by two divergent theories of how drama should exist as a classroom subject. The first relies on human development models of learning and it is often known as developmental drama. The second theory espouses drama as a 'way of knowing'; that is, one uses drama to further understand oneself and society. Both theories propose to "foster personal growth" in students (Woodson, 1999, ¶ 10). Although the name changes from country to country (in the United States it is known as 'creative drama' and here in Canada as 'drama in education') all are similarly conceived. The Children's Theatre Association of America defines creative drama as, "an improvisational, nonexhibitional, process-centered form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon the human experience"(Woodson, 1999, ¶ 7). One notices in this definition that there is no mention of drama as an art that has a knowledge and skill base. In Britain, drama as an art has a long history in the schools. "The famous Boys' Companies of the late 1500s were a great public success, and at the height of their popularity these [companies] could command the talents of playwrights like John Lyly, George Chapman and Ben Jonson" (Hornbrook, 1999, p. 9). It wasn't until after the Second World War that drama, not school plays, became a part of the curriculum

in both Canada and Britain. This was the beginning of the drama classroom, as we know it today.

Developmental Drama

The first theorist in drama education was Peter Slade whose “radical thinking opposed conventional learning theory by privileging experience and the self” (Henry, 2000, ¶ 14.) This is the beginning of the divide between theatre and drama education:

For Slade, Child Drama was ‘a high Art Form in its own right’. A true progressive, he stressed the importance of non-interference in what he saw as the natural creative process, suggesting that the teacher ‘guide and nurture’, perhaps drawing a group’s attention ‘to some little piece of beauty that they might have missed’. (Hornbrook, 1989, p. 9-10)

Here we have the start of the relationship between drama and developmental psychology. Drama’s perceived similarity to the play-acting of children cements this relationship. A report on the state of education in schools in the 1960’s is written, “By playing out psychologically significant situations, children can work out their own personal problems” (Hornbrook, 1989, p. 11). Relationships began to be built between the philosophy of drama for development and the idea of drama as therapy: “Play theory portrays learning as a ludic experiment, a mode of pretending that has practical consequences. Adults play in dramas to enact their imagined scenarios, either pathologically or to heal themselves (Bollas, 1987; Hillman, 1883; Moreno, 1973). “This healing process is a learning process for

living” and of course, “From this perspective learning through drama is a learning how to Be, a learning for the sake of Being” (Henry, 2000, ¶ 17).

Perhaps if we look at a critique of this line of thought we can decipher how drama came to be so separated from the art of theatre. Issues arise in the philosophies of drama education as articulated here by Stephen Cockett (1999) when:

Beneath these generalized notions of learning in drama, and indeed all the arts, lies a philosophical confusion deriving from the ‘subjectivist Myth’ of the human mind as consisting of two distinct realms—the Cognitive/Rational realm and the Affective/Creative realm—and the largely unquestioned convictions that creation and the appreciation of the arts is a matter of subjective feeling, ‘untainted’ by cognition. This confusion has confined much of the discourse on learning and assessment in drama to the realm of metaphysical speculation. (p. 64)

The first text I was given in my degree in Drama in Education was Brian Way’s “Development Through Drama” (1967), the copy I have is its fourteenth printing in Canada, which demonstrates its centrality to drama in education and its impact on generations of teachers and students. Way states in his introduction that “So far as humanly possible, this book is concerned with the development of people, not with the development of drama” and “ Education is concerned with individuals; drama is concerned with the individuality of individuals, with the uniqueness of each human essence. Indeed this is one of the reasons for its intangibility and its immeasurability” (Way, 1967, pp. 2 – 3). These statements

present us with several problems. The first is that the concern of drama education has not been particularly in-step with developments in drama and theatre and I will discuss this idea more thoroughly in a moment. The focus has remained on ways to 'develop' students. The second part of the Way citation concerns the 'mystery' that is dramatic learning. This understanding of drama's "intangibility and immeasurability" has caused significant troubles for those attempting to assess and evaluate not only their students' learning but also the efficacy of their own skills as teachers. As Cockett writes there is "an increasing recognition of the view that without objective criteria, the notion of individual development in drama, or indeed any subject, is meaningless"(Cockett, 1999, p. 64).

Drama as a Way of Knowing

The second established practice in drama education is to use drama as a way of 'knowing'. In this style, students are guided to a deepened understanding of the human condition and the experiences of others in the world. Here Stephen Cockett (1999) looks at how the two major contributors to this approach, Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote, envisioned drama education.

Bolton (1979, p. 11) places the highest educational value on the type of drama he calls 'drama for understanding', meaning drama which brings about 'a constant enlarging or shifting of perspective so that participants have to reassess their current understanding' (1979, p.134). Heathcote (1980, p. 37) describes the process of drama as a way of drawing children to an awareness of 'universals', that is, essential truths and structures that reveal the world as it is (pp.63-64)

In this formulation drama itself becomes a learning tool, “Rather than being the subject of pedagogy, drama-in-education became a sophisticated form of pedagogy itself” (Hornbrook, 1998, p. 13). Thus the drama classroom might become ‘about’ anything that the teacher sees fit for the students to learn. It has been employed particularly as a form of moral education. The drama classroom becomes about what the teacher perceives as important moral lessons to learn. I have myself used drama in classes that involve history where the students are sent on journeys such as the expulsion of the Acadians where students role-play as Acadian families. They are forced off their land, separated and sent on boats to new places to live and then they possibly return. Through enacting these scenes the students may acquire some idea of what it might have been like for the Acadians. In these cases it is not dramatic art that I am hoping to teach, although dramatic art may be a by-product of the lesson. This type of drama education establishes the notion of drama as a pedagogical tool *across* the curriculum. But even in this function it has limitations inherent in its conceptualization as Sharon Bailin (1993) writes here.

This problematic view of the nature of understanding allows Bolton (1984) to propose that dramatic experience could provide common understanding “over and above the conventional thinking required of a particular Form of Knowledge” (p. 151). He fails to realize the degree to which the kinds of understanding he views as common actually depend upon culture and forms of understanding, and, further the degree to which they are contested. What he offers up as common understanding is

actually his own view of the world, and any proffered view of the world must be acknowledged as such and examined critically. (p. 95)

Like developmental drama, “drama as way of knowing” is not explicit about what the students are learning and in fact the drama teacher is encouraged to not tell them (Bailin, 1993).

The use of drama in learning in schools has been confined basically to the ‘imaginative’ realms of drama to help effect ‘real life’. The drama theorists’ views on theatre range from seeing it as sidebar to drama education, to feeling that it is at times harmful in a pedagogical context to believing it is useful if it is for therapeutic reasons. Brian Way (1967) writes here about theatre “There is little or no problem in developing good drama- indeed, as is demonstratable, human beings who are little more than puppets in the hands of highly skilled exponent will quickly master good drama” (p.2). Richard Courtney (1989) sees theatre as “the tip of the iceberg where the whole is the human dramatic process”(p.141). Theatre is solely viewed as a particular dramatic ‘form’, its major functions are its ability to communicate to an audience and “crystallize social issues” (Courtney, 1989). In perhaps a truly dichotomizing take on the place of theatre in drama education comes from Mallika Henry (1999):

But if drama envelops and transforms, perhaps that is why performance, particularly self-scripted performance, seems empowering as a way of telling one’s own story in one’s own dramatic way. It is a means of replicating an overwhelming experience with one’s own script. To understand the medium of drama as ‘enveloping and transforming’, as

entailing receptive and perhaps feminine qualities, provides a different emphasis from focussing on the actor and the role. In the former case, the medium provides the fullness of a world that encourages creative and original action, whereas, the latter definition of drama as role emphasises determinism, initiative and individualism in the more traditional and masculine mode of Western culture. If creating drama is seen as creating or evoking a world, there is an implication of creating an emotional environment through intuition and feeling... To consider the theatre as creating a world, like the mother in early life, as 'enveloping and transforming', allows important feminine aspects of the drama experience to emerge. (§ 31)

This is a questionable assertion that creates a false dichotomy. Cannot assuming a role in drama be equally enveloping and transforming? Is assuming a role necessarily individual or deterministic or can a role not also be intersubjective in nature?

In my analysis of the interviews I will try to map out a place for theatre in drama education that connects drama to educational possibilities beyond development or as a 'way of knowing' or as a therapeutic initiative. I will attempt to find a place for theatre in drama education as an art form that is a culturally situated site of practice.

Blurring the Lines – Creativity, Craft and Skill

For the past fifty years drama education in schools has been underwritten by a particular philosophical perspective concerning persons, culture and education, a form of Romantic naturalism which views the person in his or her natural state as essentially good and culture as potentially damaging to this goodness. From this perspective, education becomes a liberation and development of what is within us rather than an acquisition and assimilation of what is without. (Bailin, 1998, p. 36)

I would like to now direct my attention to a number of facets of theatre practice that play an important role in how it is constituted in an educational context. The diversity of theatre forms and practices have been relegated to the sidelines of the drama classroom because they are viewed as having limited educational value. Part of the reason for this state of affairs has been a dependence on a restrictive vision of the nature of creativity, and how we as learners, access it. This vision of creativity is concerned with demonstrating how far beyond the norms of practice we can go and with the idea that creativity is demonstrated through generative, spontaneous production. Here Sharon Bailin (1998) critiques the pitfalls of associating creativity with spontaneity and free expression in drama education:

Finally, because the creative process is considered to be, of necessity, free and uninhibited, involving the breaking of rules and established patterns, the conventions, skills and knowledge of particular traditions are regarded as constraining, locking one into the prevailing conceptual framework and inhibiting innovation. This drive towards decontextualization has been very evident in drama education, where a curious dichotomy has been erected between ‘drama’ and ‘theatre’, with the former associated with

spontaneous experience and expression and the latter with the techniques necessary to communicate with an audience. (pp.38-39)

This dichotomy of which she speaks is perhaps one of the best reasons to re-evaluate drama and theatre in the context of education. Drama and theatre are intricately connected and not as easily divided as one might assume. Even though many theories of drama education have attempted a separation, there are times when drama's roots in theatre are clearly present. In exercises that involve some sort of presentation, even if it is improvised, the constructs of theatre remain. We become audience and the participants become 'actors' and some sort of 'directing' will take place. Even if we are trying to embody moral issues by using improvisation we will still use theatrical techniques, no matter how rudimentary, to navigate the performance. If our performances are weak, that will have an impact on how we view the successfulness of the presentation and the process. This is actually perhaps the crux of the matter. Without the acknowledging and passing on theatre craft we will actually create less winning drama and therefore our content, whether it is a love story or a piece on the problems of drug use in teenagers, will not resonate with the learners themselves.

This brings me to Sharon Bailin's (1998) convincing theories on what constitutes creativity in theatre and drama education. Here she describes the process that a director must go through to put a show up,

In drama, a director developing a new interpretation of a play requires considerable judgement at every step of the interpretive process, from recognizing the script's interesting possibilities, to judging the aptness of

possible interpretations, to predicting the likely effect on an audience, to judging the feasibility of execution, to deciding on the particular form in which the interpretation will be manifested, to developing the interpretation in production. Thus, Ian McKellan's innovative 1992 interpretation of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, with its setting in a fictional, post-war, fascist England, could not have been a case of random novelty involving unconstrained generation. Rather, it must have arisen from his thorough understanding of the play's text and themes and incisive judgement regarding the evocative power with which those themes could be presented for contemporary audiences in the chosen setting. (p. 41)

The interplay between process and product is clear in this description and parallels Wenger's thoughts on the need for balance between participation and reification. Bailin believes that "Crucially, what is special about creativity lies in what is achieved rather than how it is achieved" (1998, p. 42). While I am in agreement that the object of creativity is what is produced, I would argue that akin to Bailin's description of a director interpreting a play for the stage, there are steps along the way that will speak volumes about an individual's creativity and therefore the process remains an integral element. The fact that there must be a product provides the impetus for process. However, in the educational context and in the discourse of drama in education – the process remains the prime exemplar of creativity.

What resonates in Bailin's writing is how we have in the past evaluated creativity and the disparate way in which creativity is measured in school and out

in the world. Many tests that are meant to measure creativity do so on several key levels, “The subject is rated on the number of uses generated (a measure of fluency) and the novelty of the uses” (Bailin, 1998, p. 40). This reminds me of many exercises in drama where the purpose is said to limber up our creative muscles. In these exercises the instructor often tells you not to take the time to think ‘just do it’. One exercise involves passing a pencil around the circle and making it into different objects, in this exercise there is always someone who just makes writing motions with it and this of course is ‘wrong’ and not creative. In Collision Theatre our intentional creation of different scenes was directly linked to our interpretations of the poetry itself, they were not the random, higgledy-piggledy generation that Bailin (1998) describes here:

The ability to generate large numbers of novel uses is irrelevant to many creative activities and would seem to have very little to do with the type of activity in which Shakespeare or Einstein engaged; we have no reason to expect that either would have scored highly on such tests. Shakespeare’s creativity lay not in generating a large number of unusual words, but rather in coming up with appropriate words in specific contexts and juxtaposing and combining words to create desired effects. His creativity was connected more with making aesthetic judgements and choices than with randomly generating novel responses. (p. 40)

What is missing in these tests is some measure of quality and an understanding that creative thinking is not unlike ordinary thinking (Bailin, 1998). It is through aesthetic choice, judgement and skill in our craft that creativity manifests itself.

This brings me to another aspect of the debate around drama and theatre education – that of the importance of the acquisition of skills in these areas.

David Hornbrook (1998) writes about the continual dichotomizing of product and process, “an essentialism of form in the arts – that is, a belief that certain artworks have intrinsic worth – is replaced by an essentialism of process, and, in a highly influential inversion, education in the arts becomes education through the arts” (p. 10).

To de-bunk this particular essentialism of process, one first has to be able to understand that drama and theatre have within their province, an array of skills to be learned and secondly that these skills help one to enter into a meaningful relationship within the craft and art of theatre.

The Oxford dictionary definition of ‘craft’ is, “skill; cunning, deceit; art, trade” (1982, p. 203). As you can see, it refers both to skill and art in its definition (as it does to ‘cunning’ but that is perhaps not within the scope of this paper). David Hornbrook definition of craft distinguishes it from art by that idea that in craft we have knowledge of the end product while in art we often don’t (1998). This is perhaps a slightly narrow view that comes from our distinctly modernist art perspective. One must think of painters of old whose religious paintings were definitely the product of having known what was in the end at the beginning. But as we are living in the (post) modern age perhaps this definition will suffice. The blurring of this distinction between art and craft is significant because it allows us to think of regaining some of the ‘craft’ aspects of the arts in our schools.

To many, skill implies habits (Bailin, 1998) and with this view practice becomes a kind of robotic repetitive movement of the body. David Hornbrook (1998) describes skill as an element of craft and that it is “the successful exercise of a skill requires that I must first have absorbed certain, specialized ways of doing things to such an extent that I am not perpetually conscious of them and then that I possess the dexterity and ingenuity to apply those ways of doing things in different contexts or to different objects” (p. 57). In this definition is not only the learning of certain ways of doing things but how we transfer and manipulate them later. We also need skills to help to successfully navigate our membership, activities and social relations within a community of practice, skills that relate directly to that practice. However, it is craft not skill that “implies a sense of belonging, of membership, apprenticeship, community and continuity” and in this sense, craft includes skill, artistic sensibility and membership (Hornbrook, 1998, p. 57). To understand theatre practice as a possibility within the framework of education one has to understand that theatre has skills that are integral to its function as craft and as an art.

The divisions raised between drama and theatre mirrors those raised between creativity and skill. It would seem that a certain amount of blurring of these lines might represent a positive step towards understanding theatre’s place in the drama classroom.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

This research takes the form of a qualitative study in which I analyze the principles and theories of cultural psychology and then interpret their significance using hermeneutic interpretation of conversational interviews. The exploration of this narrative combines interpretation and analysis and seeks to be illustrative and illuminating. The interviews are, on occasion, fodder for my interpretation and analysis, at others they are touchstones and sometimes they are inspirations for this writer's further musings on drama education, theatre and culture.

Common Ground

While considering how I would proceed with this project it became clear to me that I wanted to mine my own experiences to help illuminate my investigations into theatre's place in education. I felt that to make sense with this type of research work, I needed to delve into how I had come to my present thoughts on the importance of theatre in the world of pedagogy. To do so, I first had to ask myself where my love for theatre originated. Clearly for me, it began with a sixth grade teacher who put on a play every year with his class. He fostered a love for the theatre in many of his students to the extent that, in my year, we actually took on the task of doing a second production by ourselves.

In high school I was first exposed to the socio-political theatre of Augusto Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed. In Theatre of the Oppressed's *Forum Theatre*, the actors present a scenario in which there is an obvious oppressor and a clear victim of oppression. In that first scene the balance of power is dramatically

unequal and the intent of that scene is to raise emotions and ‘action’ from the audience. The actors then present the scene again but a member of the audience (called a ‘spect-actor’) steps into the role of the oppressed or victim (this is called an intervention) and attempts to wrest control back from the oppressor. Here Augusto Boal (1992) gives clear instructions of what this scenario looks like:

The audience is informed that the first step is to take the protagonist’s place whenever he or she is making a mistake, in order to try to bring about a better solution. All they have to do is approach the playing area and shout ‘Stop!’ Then, immediately, the actors must stop where they are without changing position. With the minimum delay, the spect-actor must say where he or she wants the scene taken from, indicating the relevant phrase, comment, or movement (whichever is easiest). The actors then start the scene again from the prescribed point, with the spect-actor as protagonist. (p. 20)

From there, multiple solutions may be tried with the intent that when a suitable solution is found, some sort of action will be taken (Boal, 1992).

Boal’s “Theatre of the Oppressed” has had a profound effect on my thinking about theatre and its connection to education, although my views of its success have changed over the years. Much of what led me into taking up Drama in Education in university came out of my desire to perform socially active theatre.

Another aspect I needed to consider when beginning this thesis was how I was going to explore these past experiences that in many cases had been joint

enterprises with other individuals. I decided that to reflect on my communities of practice I would need members of that community to assist in conjuring memories and reconstructing our collective histories that have helped to frame my beliefs about theatre and education. This is important because collective memories become attached to artefacts and tools that are symbolic characters (Anne MacCleave, personal communication).

Between 1996 and 1998 I was part of a theatre company where all the founding members had attended theatre at Concordia University. Three of the members, Evalyn, Katarina and myself had been enrolled in a specialized program in Drama in Education (DINE). I decided that because of this shared positionality of dual communities that they would be the best people to talk with. As I reflect on our shared history as both colleagues and friends, I realize that it was not just our shared aesthetic preferences that brought us together, but also our commitment to education in the theatre and our eagerness to see ‘drama’ and ‘theatre’ not as separate domains. A memory of the three of us starting a petition to change the way a course was taught comes to mind. We were separately and collectively energetic learners fully engaged in our education. We wanted to live what we learned and not merely accumulate credits for a credential.

Within the Drama in Education program at Concordia there were some unnamed streams. There were those who took this course of study on the way to becoming a drama teacher within the public school system. There were also folks who wanted to go on and be drama therapists. The third group included people who had been involved in or hoped to become involved in theatre for social

justice and working with special populations – this work is often done outside of the school systems in places of poverty and disenfranchisement (prisons, group homes etc). I think that at the outset we perhaps fit best into the second and third group although since then both Katarina and I have worked a fair bit within the school system. From the onset we displayed a tendency to integrate these streams.

An important part of the curriculum in the Drama in Education program is being part of productions at the university. The program attempted to give us a taste of all aspects of theatre including prop building, set design, directing and acting. However, our focus was on the theory and practice of drama for development. In fact, since I have graduated from the program, its name has in fact changed to Theatre and Development.

Another common thread between all the participants and me is that we were all involved in working with a playwright who was also an instructor in the drama in education program. Her work, along with the French theatre genres that place in the actors' physical movements in the foreground, helped to shape the productions in our theatre company.

After university we all moved to Toronto at different times. It is there that we began to work as a theatre company. When Katarina and I first moved back to Toronto we were lucky enough to be offered a studio space in Toronto's Beaches neighbourhood for free! We used this space to start a small theatre school for preschoolers. During that time we talked a lot about what we would like our future work in theatre and education to look like. We decided that creating

theatre would be our priority and that we wanted our pedagogy to be directly linked to our work as a company. It was at this point that Evalyn became involved and we started the process of creating our show, “The Former Republic of Poetry”.

“The Former Republic of Poetry” was a theatrical piece that used poetry as its main text. In the beginning we met in coffee shops, our homes or empty rooms on the University of Toronto campus (we had connections in their Space Management department). We knew we wanted to create a show that was not from a pre-existing script, but instead wished to explore non-theatrical text such as poetry and short stories. Our first task was to find pieces that we felt would work well on the stage and were inspiring in and of themselves. We brought together anything and everything that we had ever felt excited by and began an exhaustive cull of material. We would try things out and if they didn’t work we would scrap them. In the end, our first production of the show had vastly different material in it than our last production some two years later. And if the text had not changed, then how we enacted it had.

One of the biggest challenges in this endeavour was to move written text off the page and onto the stage. Now, with Katarina and Evalyn’s permission, I have set a new task: taking our combined theatrical and educational experience and attempting to create them anew on the page. Shifting a text from one medium to another requires not only technical skill in understanding each form, but also understanding the multiple ways in which one can interpret the text.

Methodological Underpinnings

Hermeneutic as a mode of inquiry is very apropos as a way to explore the narratives that emerge from conversational interviews. Hultgren (1993) writes that “hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting it”(p.30). I equate this with our task in “The Former Republic of Poetry”, of not allowing ourselves to be literal in our interpretation of the poetry we were using and our constant need to make sense of what we were creating in a way that communicated understanding (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

A Hermeneutic Inquiry

The echoes of history are always inadvertently and deliberately inviting us into both past and new ways of being in the present. We live in a world that recedes into the past and extends into the future, rather than pitting ourselves against history, and therefore we need to remember, recollect and recall it (Moules, 2002, ¶ 1.)

Hermeneutics is a theory and practice of interpretation. The focus of hermeneutic inquiry is on texts. Originally these texts were written and Biblical but a contemporary notion of texts also includes conversation, artworks and performances. In fact, hermeneutics has been described as the art of conversation (Smith, 2003). Interpreting humanity in a hermeneutic view requires that our understanding be ‘participative, conversational and, and dialogic (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195).

In examining what might be suitable criteria of quality for hermeneutic work, Nancy Moules (2002) suggests that consistency across methodology and the grounding philosophy of the work is an important reflection of rigor. The structuring of this inquiry around cultural psychology, narrative and hermeneutic

interpretation shows a consistency of values in research. These values include: a) an understanding of the importance of our historical and cultural contexts, b) the significance of exploring the particular, the local, c) affording a place for natural bias in the researcher.

Interpretation in the hermeneutic sense “is profoundly creative” (Smith, 2003, ¶ 4) and is bound by our place in history and culture. “We understand historically because we are historical and belong to history” (Moules, 2002, ¶ 38.). In hermeneutics this historical and cultural situatedness is referred to as tradition and we are always concerned in hermeneutic inquiry with being aware of our traditions. Traditions “shape what we are and how we understand the world, the attempt to step outside of the process of tradition would be like trying to step outside our own skin” (Gallagher, 1992 in Schwandt, 2000, p. 195).

Behind the artistic process and the process of writing this paper there is a belief in the need for hermeneutic interpretation that does not attempt to place the subject outside of their world (Hultgren, 1993; Kinchloe & McLaren, 2000), but asks us to examine our inter-subjectivity as it is “historically situated, ever changing [and] ever evolving in the cultural and ideological climate”(Hinchey, 1998; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Hinchey, 1999 in Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

The hermeneutic approach to interpretation concerns itself with a “spiralling dialectic between the parts and the whole” (Smith, 2003, ¶ 10). The particular is afforded a prominent place in hermeneutics because it is through the particular that we begin to understand larger structures. This is not a one-way

relationship, the global also is understood more clearly when we are attuned to the local as described here.

This movement of whole to parts is combined with an analytic flow between abstract and concrete. Such dynamics often tie interpretation to the interplay of larger social forces (the general) to the everyday lives of the individuals (the particular). Focus on the parts is the dynamic that brings the particular into focus, sharpening our understanding of the individual in light of the social and psychological forces that shape him or her. The parts and the unique places they occupy ground hermeneutical ways of seeing by providing the contextualization of the particular – a perspective often erased in traditional inquiry’s search for abstract generalizations. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 286-287)

I have attempted in the inquiry to oscillate between the part and the whole. The travelling back and forth between the narrative excerpts and the principles of cultural psychology, theories of drama in education and theories of art practice create what I hope is a hermeneutic conversation between the particular and the general.

Bias; pre-judgement; prejudice; or a “fore-structure of understanding” (Gadamer in Smith, 2003; Schwandt, 2000;) is another integral part of how we conduct and are a part of research. In many research traditions the idea of bias is a wholly negative one. However in hermeneutics bias gives the researcher a base from where to begin as Smith (2003) explains here.

To any encounter I have with another person, or with a poem or painting, I inevitably bring a prejudice or pre-judgement or “fore-structure of understanding” which constitutes the necessary starting condition for my interpretation. Without such prejudice, I have no basis of encounter, nothing for the new person or thing to register upon, from which I can begin the process of understanding, or better, from which together we can come to a shared understanding. (§ 18)

In this inquiry I view drama education from a clearly biased standpoint. Because of my work as a theatre practitioner, I see drama education as being to certain extent about teaching the craft of theatre. Schwandt (2000) writes that, “reaching an understanding is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing, or tracking one’s own standpoint, prejudgements, biases or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires an *engagement* of one’s own biases” (p. 195). I come to the research with this bias and it becomes an integral part of how I view the narratives and the principles and theories that inform my work.

Narratives

Narratives are embedded throughout the inquiry from the opening page to the last. The inquiry is built on the dual foundations narratives and the theories and principles of cultural psychology. The narratives carry within them the particular, the localized knowledge. These stories are often co-created. They are told during the conversational interviews and then again in the inquiry with another level of meaning attached to them. In this way, the narratives from the interviews are elevated from the mundane.

Good hermeneutic work “comes down to our capacity to recognize ourselves in the finished account, in the ‘story’ of human existence which is encountered there” (Caputo in Moules, 2002). When posed with ‘big’ questions we often relate them to our experience. Our experience is transmitted through stories and hermeneutics “is aware of the ‘storied nature of human experience...’”(Smith in Moules, 2002, ¶ 60).

By taking our experience from the mundane to the theoretical I hope to invite the reader into this hermeneutic interpretive process. I would hope that as a reader of this paper, you will be able to join in this hermeneutic dialogue and find ways it might apply to your lives and experiences.

The Participants

Katarina

Kat began her theatre studies while attending Arts York a fine arts based program within Unionville High School in Toronto. After finishing high school she went to the University of Toronto for Theatre Program. Disillusioned with U of T she auditioned both for RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) in England and also for the Drama in Education program at Concordia University. While she was accepted into both programs, she chose Concordia because unlike UofT, the program had an educational dimension, rather than an exclusively performance based program.

After completing her studies at Concordia, Kat moved to Toronto and she and I started a small theatre school for elementary aged students. Soon after this our theatre company was formed. At the same time Kat was also doing

a B.Ed in drama so that she could teach within the public school system.

Ironically, today she is a teacher at Arts York where she began her interest in the Theatre. As she says, “I know where to find the milk”.

Evalyn

Evalyn’s interest in theatre began in high school or perhaps before. I remember attending a play at our high school (yes we went to the same high school) and being bowled over by Evalyn’s portrayal of Abigail in *The Crucible*. Evalyn went to Concordia University first to study Performance but after a year changed into Drama in Education. After graduating from Concordia she also moved to Toronto and began performing both as an actor and as a musician. In addition, she wrote political pieces for CBC radio Toronto and was a producer on “Out Front”, a program that produces listeners stories for broadcast. She continued as an educator teaching at the “Young People’s Theatre” (YPT) in Toronto. She continues to write, act, perform music and work at “YPT”. Her theatre company “Independent Auntie Productions” is doing very well and has been signed on to a main stage season at Toronto’s “Theatre Passe Muraille” for 2005.

Octavia

It was in high school that I became interested in theatre, particularly theatre used as a political arena. However, I did not pursue theatre at first in university but instead was enrolled in Anthropology for two years at Concordia. I, too, became disenchanted with my program of study and after taking a year away from school, auditioned and was accepted to the Drama in Education

program at Concordia. It was here that I met Kat and re-met Evalyn. After graduating from university and moving back to Toronto, I became involved both with the theatre school with Kat also, I worked with the Toronto Board of Education as a guest artist collaborating with dancers and visual artists to create workshops for elementary school students. While still continuing my work with “Collision Theatre” I moved to Halifax. In Halifax I again worked as a guest artist in the schools working with both elementary and high school students. As I did more and more workshops in schools I began to realize that the positive impact I had as a guest artist was significantly greater if I was able to do theatre performances with the students as opposed to drama workshops. This was particularly clear when working at the elementary level in inner city schools. Here, the level of investment the students had in the program increased tenfold when it was theatre and their encounter with theatre and drama became a significant aspect of their schooling.

Methods

Conversational Interviews

All the participants in this study have oscillated between the role of drama educator and the role of theatre practitioner. We are all culturally situated within both fields and have spent much of our time collectively attempting to integrate these roles. When we met to discuss and dream of the scope of our theatre company we often found ourselves dreaming of a company that moved effortlessly between performance and education. In fact, we did do a couple of

workshops with high school students that focused on using poetry as text for theatrical performance.

Throughout our years together we have been part of not just one, but two different communities of practice, drama in education and our theatre company, Collision. Our discussions are therefore based on our experiences within both fields of practice. We share similar opinions in many cases and therefore it is not always my intention to pull out opposing or ‘more objective’ answers from the participants but to tease out further insights beyond my own about our experiences in relation to my current work.

My decision to carry out conversational interviews originates from the way in which we collaborated as members of a theatre company. Conversational interviews are not about exacting the truth from interviewees but about sharing and illuminating ideas (Vaines, 1990). The interviews are about “accessing various stories or narrative through which people describe their world” (Silverman, 2000 p.823). As a theatre company with big dreams, much of our time was spent sharing ideas and histories while critiquing our space in the cultural worlds of theatre and education. I wanted the interviews to reflect as closely as possible the discussions we would have had in rehearsal, or in the coffee shop – conversational interviews allowed “meanings to emerge through shared experience and language” (Vaines 1990). Conversation has been an important aspect of our work together and this is mirrored in the larger world where, “an overwhelming proportion of the world’s business is conducted through the medium of spoken interaction” (Heritage, 1984 in Silverman, 2000 p.821). As

our relationship stems from drama education and theatre, our conversations naturally tend to be about them. I do admit that the conversational interview process is still a more rigid and rigorous process than plain old chat, this was apparent to me immediately during our first session. At that time, some of the ideas that I floated around were somewhat foreign to the other participants and although both were well versed in both theatre and education, cultural psychology was something that I had independently become involved in. It is with this in mind that I concur with Silverman (2000) that this is the alternative approach to how interviews are analyzed, “This narrative approach claims that, by abandoning the attempt to treat respondents accounts as potentially “true” pictures of “reality”, we open up for analysis the culturally rich methods through which interviewers and interviewees alike, in concert, generate plausible accounts of the world”(p.823). The ice was broken soon enough and the interviews moved in a much more fluid style.

Regardless of the content of these interviews there is an emotional aspect to this collaboration that should be addressed. At the time of these interviews our theatre company was no more. While I do not believe that any of us had expectations of closure from engaging in this forum. It seems necessary to mention that these discussions took place at the end of our formal collaboration as opposed to the beginning or the middle.

The three of us met for these interviews on two separate occasions. The first interview took place at my family home in Toronto and the second at Kat’s home also in Toronto. The interviews took place three months apart, because I

had to fly to Toronto and also because I wanted to have read and reflected on the first interview before beginning the second one. Both interviews were between one and a half and two hours in length. Although this amount of data may seem rather small, it has been suggested that limiting data can prove positive in a qualitative study because the textual analysis requires that we have time to look at details (Silverman, 2000). However, the reason for having more than one interview was to allow for reflection on the parts of collaborators and it also had an ice breaking effect as the second interview flows more smoothly.

Ethical Considerations

I selected participants with whom I have worked and studied with over a seven-year period. Our shared history is an important aspect of this research as it allows us to move into exploring the meaning of our collective work in three separate communities of practice: a) as students training to be drama educators, b) as theatre practitioners and c) as drama teachers. There is a significant level of shared trust and respect between the participants.

How the Research was Conducted

The list below gives an outline for how the research was conducted in this inquiry:

1. I contacted the two other participants with whom I have been working with over a period of seven years
2. I informed my co-participants of my research proposal. I made available to them some of the literature that I have reviewed which should help clarify my research questions. In a letter of informed consent and participant consent form (see Appendix A and B). I informed them of their rights as participants

in this project which includes: anonymity, release of transcribed conversations to them, and the ability to opt out of the study at anytime.

3. Two scheduled conversations were tape-recorded. These transcripts were offered to each participant in case they felt clarification was needed. These transcripts were also used by participants to reflect on discussion.
4. Following the completion of the conversations with co-participants, I analyzed and interpreted the narratives to help explore our shared histories in drama education and theatre. I also used the interviews to find resonance between selected principles of cultural psychology and dramatic art practice.
5. The interpretation/analysis of the narrative was shared with co-participants for their review and comments before publication.
6. Participants were given the choice of whether or not they wanted the audiotapes to be destroyed. No one requested destruction of the tapes.

Ethical Information

There was minimal risk to participants of this study. They were given choices in regards to what was done with the transcriptions of their conversations and were allowed to choose a pseudonym if they preferred. However, no one chose this option.

The potential benefits for participants included being able to:

1. Reflect on and explore their multiple relationships to theatre and to drama education,
2. Articulate and share the cultural tools they have developed over the years of practice.

3. Generate new ideas about ways of working between existing boundaries of theatre and drama education.

Criteria of Quality

This research that I have undertaken falls under the rubric of qualitative research. In keeping with the nature of the inquiry I have chosen to use research tools that complement the method of writing. The use of traditional tools of validity and reliability do not match the character of the study that is as much about illuminating ideas as it is about finding ‘truths’. There is no way in which this inquiry could be replicated and in fact, if I were to go back and have conversations with the participants again, I would probably have a different, but no less true narrative to work with. MacCleave (2003,2004, 2005) strongly urged researchers from different traditions to educate each other about how to appropriately judge the quality of each other’s studies.

I have chosen to use criteria of quality that allows for a “situated, partial, positioned, explicit tentativeness” (Lather, 1994, p. 52) within the inquiry:

1. Is there consistency across the chosen methodology and the grounding philosophy of the work?
2. Does the inquiry help the reader to understand the history of drama education?
3. Does the inquiry help the reader understand selected principles of cultural psychology and Wenger’s notion of communities of practice? Is the nature of theatre as a community of practice made clear?

4. Do the conversations help to explore the cultural tools of practice in the theatre?
5. Does the research help to illuminate the duality of the communities of practice that the participants occupy and how these communities constitute each other?
6. Do the conversations give a glimpse of the camaraderie and closeness between the participants?
7. Do the narratives that are not a part of the dialogue i.e. excerpts from poetry, film and prose give an added layer of meaning to the text?
8. Does the research reveal the possibilities of using cultural psychology as a lens to understand the place of theatre in drama education?

The answers to these questions may be partial, they may lead to yet other questions and they may have multiple answers within different contexts. That is the nature of a narrative and hermeneutic inquiry.

Chapter Four

NARRATIVE EXCERPT A

Contexts for Drama and Theatre

In this excerpt Kat, Evalyn and I talk about what drama and developmental drama and theatre mean to us. We also give some examples of different drama classes and theatre rehearsals we have either witnessed or taught.

Questions that arise

1. What separates developmental drama from plain drama?
2. How does the dual nature of our communities of practice affect our pedagogy?
3. What aspects of theatre lend themselves to the teaching of drama education?
4. How does theatre practice support intentionality?

Furthermore, in society in general the role of art is nebulous...But in theatre there is no such separation: at every instant the practical question is an artistic one; the most incoherent, uncouth player is as much involved in matters of pitch and pace, intonation and rhythm, position, distance, colour and shape as the most sophisticated. In rehearsal, the height of the chair, the texture of the costume, the brightness of the light, the quality of emotion, matter all the time: the aesthetics are practical.

-From "The Empty Space" by Peter Brook (1968).

Does this mean that drama is yet another subject that has to be fitted into an already overcrowded curriculum? No. Drama is not another subject; theatre might be, with its groundwork in history and its study of playwrights and their works, but not drama. Drama is as intangible as personality itself, and is concerned with the development of people. Indeed it is as necessary to discard educational conventions as to disregard theatre conventions (Way, 1967, p.7)

What is of crucial interest about how Way sees drama is that it is not, in his mind, intended as a subject for school. Yet it definitely became one and his theories about drama and development helped to shape drama curriculum. However, one of his predictions did come true, there has definitely been a 'disregard' for the conventions of the theatre. In the excerpt that follows we talk about how we see drama and theatre in the context of education and share experiences we have had in both observing and teaching drama.

Excerpt

Kat: I think that drama in education allowed us to create our own roles. I'm thinking 'developmental drama' and 'drama' and 'theatre' for me are three different things in a way. My dra...

Tav- ah okay.

Kat: My drama definition is games and activities and 'core' activities and exercises and dabbling with text but not a deep analysis of text and I always felt that that's what I get from theatre when I'm practicing. I wish that drama was related in that sense because it could really benefit. Like if you did insert that meat from theatre into it then you could really learn a lot more! When you think of the educational value of dealing with language and analyzing language and text. Text kind of comes out improvisationally in drama... and we do pick up pages but there always glued pages, you know 'pages 7,8, &9' you know what I mean. You never really look at the first page of anything. You're always somewhere starting in the middle. I don't mind starting in the middle but I do like having a full well-rounded picture of all the elements that were meant to be in that piece of work. I feel that drama a lot of times is trying to create that context in the room and I don't think it's successful in doing that. Whereas I think developmental drama was because they always reminded us to interpret ourselves and in that sense we took on the extra task of

analyzing text and involving ourselves more. Because we were asked to do it off the bat to be involved on that level.

Tav: So developmental drama to you means what exactly.

Kat: A school of practice that began in the late sixties? (*laughs*).

Tav: I mean in comparison with drama.

Kat: The use of drama as a tool for development in the students and it's loosely attached to stages of development and growth and it deals with the senses and it really does deal with the individual and the human being on a level that an actor might go through if they wanted to 'method' or take a certain approach to acting but won't necessarily go through in performance. It's always coming back to the self, there's a psychology that's attached to it that won't allow itself to..I don't know. It's difficult to not look at them as three different umbrella terms in a way.

Defining Terms – A Negotiation

Kat defines 'drama' differently from how she defines 'developmental drama'. To her drama is just about games while developmental drama engages you in a more critical way particularly when you are looking inwards. Theatre in Kat's mind brings a sense of purpose and wholeness to drama that is missing otherwise. She uses the example of textual analysis and how in drama you would often use just a couple of pages from a text whereas in the theatre would need to delve into the whole of the work. Kat sees the lack of depth in drama as a problem especially when it comes to learning.

I put Kat on the spot a little here by asking her to tell me what developmental drama is in her mind. She answers perhaps with a bit of trepidation but generally her description is a match to what theorists in drama education have written, particularly Brian Way (1967) and as David Hornbrook (1989) states here Way's version had a profound effect on drama education:

In the 'whole person', the unique 'human essence' for whom Way's drama lessons were to be a gradual nurturing process, we can clearly see the ghost of Rousseau's noble savage, that decent, law-abiding liberal humanist, sensitive, tolerant, imaginative, reflective, fitting well into the social environment, who yet manages to be creative and original – within acceptable limits. Through the mid-1960s and early 1970s, book after book professed to demonstrate how drama-in-education developed 'self-confidence', or encouraged 'personal awareness' and an awareness of others, or taught students how to co-operate in groups, or fostered qualities of 'tolerance and understanding', or helped children to become more 'self-disciplined'. Just about the only thing classroom drama made no claims to do, and by this time many teachers would have been puzzled to have it suggested, was to equip young people with an understanding of actors, theatres and plays. (p.12)

Hornbrook's disenchantment with the aims of developmental drama are clearly expressed here but I think what is at the heart of his attack is the understanding that drama teachers everywhere became unprepared to work on anything besides personal development. But as Kat explains, this personal development can sometimes mirror the work of an actor and perhaps give the student some personal tools that though perhaps too idealized; they are nevertheless worth striving towards. The excerpt continues below with an experience I had teaching drama in Dartmouth Nova Scotia.

Excerpt

Tav: It's interesting when you're saying it comes back to the 'self'. I went to a school to do a drama workshop, it wasn't a developmental drama workshop but it was exercises voice and body work. I stayed afterwards and I watched a rehearsal for a play. The kids in the drama class during the exercises they were there but they weren't all there. Then I watched them during this practice and they had a psychotic director, who was I think a French teacher or something. And he was just wild! A real prima donna! But these kids were responding to it. I was wondering how is it that they are responding? I was baffled. Because here I am, I'm nice, I'm talking to them about growth in some way, individual growth and then there with this wacky guy whose ordering them around saying "If you don't memorize your lines I'm leaving!" I was wondering, what makes this glue together?

Ev: Well maybe it has something to do with the roles.

Tav: Yeah, it certainly has something to do with the roles, I'm sure it does. And accepting those roles.

Ev: Yeah, yeah. And in fact, liking them or in fact really attaching a lot of worth to them.

Tav: Even when we were in drama in education or anybody in the theatre department. If you had a production you were doing everything else seemed to come after it. That was the thing, you had to do that. Papers could be late, blah, blah, blah. But the performance..

Kat: ..comes first. You know what it kind of reminds me of in a loose loose way is with parenting. When you adopt a role and you drop your personality and you become your mother (?)__ or your father's voice. And the parent that is speaking with the child is still holding on to their personality and inviting the child's personality as well and engaging them on a level. I remember once when I was teaching in Newmarket. We wrote a quiz on Romeo and Juliet and they said what's really weird is that we didn't feel like —she meant it as a compliment but it felt like one of those double edged things—fourteen years olds and she says to me, "It didn't feel like we were learning when we were with Kat" Like it didn't feel like we were going to be prepared for this quiz as the other class who were being taught by the woman down the hall. Different quiz, but same stage of Romeo and Juliet. She was worried that they wouldn't know enough to pass this quiz. It was as if we were enjoying ourselves too much or maybe I was talking to them in a way that they weren't used to and so the learning definitely wasn't happening if you're not thinking of it on that level—'dictator' or at least authority. I guess I came across as

very young and I didn't sit at the front of the room; I had them with me on the same level at all times. But it was a compliment in a big way. Because I felt that's how you want—well you didn't want it to be as if “wow, I didn't know I was learning at all” You do want that sense because if they don't think they are learning then they just aren't going to be involved. But it happens silently so, it might look like a total lack of respect. “The allowed classroom is a bad classroom”. An energized room is good unless there's someone throwing their desk across the room.’ If no one leaves I feel as though the class has worked. It's an awful way to think, but at the high school level you kind of feel that way. And everybody's here the next day and it's not because they can't skip or they need the credit. It must be something we are doing here.

Tav: There's a certain seriousness attached to doing certain work in drama and theatre.

Kat: Well, I think it can work either way. I don't like walking into a room where I'm having a workshop being taught to me by someone who's like, “(deep breath) I want you all to...”

Tav: Oh no! Run!

Kat: I don't like someone who says “and how do you feel about the rain today?” And you're just like, you know what, I don't want to talk about the rain today. There's kind of loosey goosey, there's a spectrum of. Well, I guess it has a lot to do with the methods they learned and their personality as well.

Tav: I'm just going to interject something here. When I saw this high school, these students completely engaged in this crazy director's style and I was seeing these obvious roles coming out. I don't know if you guys ever did a co-op program in high school?

Kat & Ev: No.

Tav: Okay. Well, it's kind of a difference between learning science and being a scientist.

Kat: I love that.

Tav: The thing that struck me was that these kids were being. They were part of a work environment as it were. As opposed to a learning, or an experimental environment. Even when I think of us working together I still think we were part of a working environment in Collision. There was experiment involved and I don't mean to say that these roles, these hard and fast roles in traditional theatre are the way to go but I'm just saying

that theatre of all sorts creates a sense to me of actually being involved in a work world environment. So you are just not playing at something but you are being something.

Kat: Could that be as a result of the fact that there is a product at the end? That's the first thing that I think of is that they are working because there's some sense of deadline that there are working towards.

Tav: Yeah, I think that's a part of it. But it comes to mind that there are all these culturally established situations that you have to go through, these rituals. Thinking traditionally, you go to an audition right? Then you get the role, you go over the lines, and the director is speaking to the set designer and there are elements that are already set up, they are culturally validated as it were. It's different from being in an environment that is solely about educating or growth. When I think back to why I was involved in a theatrical production or even in drama in education in the courses doing something where we had some sort of role and it was connected to theatre then there would be this kind of seriousness that would come because it's a practice that's culturally rich. You can think of it in any kind of field – medicine, teaching itself. As a drama teacher you always feel a little bit on the edge of that. On the margins of that world (*laughs*). That's always been something that has struck me and why do we engage in those things more—I'm not sure if it's freely or...

Ev: I extend that to my teaching practice but I really see the benefit, I mean I watch class after class. "YPT" is not really, well in some senses it features developmental drama. It is a teaching environment that compared to some other schools that I hear other people teaching for where they have to put on a play that is a written play, that has a certain number of lines.

Tav: Oh boy.

Ev: That's a nightmare. But "YPT" is focused on theatre

Tav: Well they are a theatre company

Ev: There is a performance and that part is really recognized. Especially in the summer when they get to perform on the main stage. It's really a key moment, it's a big deal for those kids and it is a very useful thing to work toward.

A Spectrum of Practice

This discussion reveals not only the various places in which we all work, but also the complexity of how drama works in education. I think in this excerpt

we reach a consensus of sorts as to what we hope ‘to do’ and ‘to be’ as drama teachers. It sits somewhere in the spectrum of practice laid out in the quotes I have used here from Brian Way and David Hornbrook. In my experience watching the high school play rehearsal I was amazed at the engagement of the students although a tyrant was directing them. Through discussion we conclude that they are engaged because their work is intentional and they see themselves in particular ‘roles’ within it. It is apparent that participation within a community of practice does not equal ‘collaboration’ and is not necessarily ‘harmonious’ (Wenger, 1998).

In this excerpt we also talk about seriousness and engagement on the part of the teacher. Kat’s example of how she worried about her presentation to her students but yet saw that her engagement and knowledge of the material had a positive effect. Bringing a sense of seriousness does not mean that one has to be dictator, but rather instead that one has a genuine knowledge and commitment to the subject and an ability to contextualize the material. We talk about student seriousness in drama as relating to having a product at the end and also, as Evalyn says, that theatre is helpful because it becomes about a practice that is out there in the world – like being a scientist or a carpenter. Our own experience doing theatre at Concordia helps us to understand what kind of commitment is necessary as we discuss how other important elements of our studies had to be set aside if we were working on a production.

Somewhere between the “loosey goosey” style of some of our teachers and the prima donna attitude displayed by the Dartmouth director, lies a

comfortable and practical space for teaching drama education. As it stands, the elusive aims of drama in education cause difficulty for learners and teachers alike. It is a pedagogy that does not rely on reified and culturally validated artefacts gained through artistic practice and has little similarity to the larger global practice of theatre. The ‘meat’ of theatre is that it’s a cultural art form where students can situate themselves within its practices.

In summary, this excerpt attempts to define the differences between theatre, drama and developmental drama. While developmental drama acts more critically than a drama just concerned with games, theatre asks us to place ourselves in roles that help us to ‘flirt’ with future pictures in the creation of our identity. It is theatre’s ‘meat’, its history and practices, that helps it become an educational space where its members perceive real purpose. This fits with the view in cultural psychology that participating in culturally valued activities (our intentionality) is one of the primary ways in which we act and learn in the world.

NARRATIVE EXCERPT B

The Second Teachable Subject or “Would you like a bird with that course?”

In this excerpt questions come up as to what should be prioritized when learning to become a drama teacher, particularly when drama teachers have no knowledge or skill base in theatre arts.

Questions that arise

1. Why is theatre craft valuable in the drama classroom?
2. What is the role of the drama teacher?

Unlike colleagues in science or history, the drama teacher has been divested of any affirming body of 'important' knowledge to justify his or her presence in the timetable, and reference to the subject's expansive pedagogic claims can sound pompous and hollow amid the hubbub of the drama class. In the face of the apparently intractable antipathy, some secondary drama classes became general discussion sessions...in others, teachers fell back upon old but popular menus of games and exercises in order to keep 'difficult' classes occupied until the life-saving bell. Unfortunately, both strategies simply served to reinforce students' suspicions about drama's legitimacy as a subject, setting up expectations of its practices as indistinguishable, on the one hand, from subjects such as religious or personal or social education, on the other, from play.

- From "Education and Dramatic Art" by David Hornbrook (1989)

Kat, Evalyn and I were all in the Drama in Education specialization within the Concordia Theatre Department. This sometimes made for some discordance between what we were reading about in DINE and what we practiced as members of the theatre department. While digesting theories that proposed that theatre was not a core part of any drama curriculum, we were ourselves involved in numerous theatrical productions. The formation of Collision Theatre and all that we hoped to do with our degrees was in some part related to how we had practiced both theatre and drama at university. At the opening of this passage I begin by remarking on a couple of the theorists in Drama in Education.

Excerpt

Tav: What I'm going from in this sense. I've been perusing all the theories of Brian Way and Richard Courtney and he writes that theatre is just the tip of the iceberg of drama. I sometimes wonder if it is the other way around?

Kat: I guess that he's got a different way of looking at it than I do.

Tav: Yeah but in terms of what we learned say in the first DINE course.

Ev: I hated that class

Tav: *(laughter from Ev and Tav)* And this is what I'm getting down to! This is the nitty gritty of this situation! *(laughter all around)* and what I'm writing about.

Kat: I can't remember what class that was.

Tav: that was like the very first class we took.

Ev: It was DINE 200.

Tav: That is what the theory says. That is what people are being taught. We're lucky in the sense that that theatre department at Concordia made sure that we were a part of (or maybe it was DINE), that we were a part of other aspects. That we had to take set design, that we had to do props or costume or whatever. That we could be involved in productions. But if

you were going to teach from a drama in education text, you would have very little connection with theatre and that's what disturbs me and that what I find when I go into a school is that there's this real lack of connected to theatre but theatre is seen as this kind of outside force.

Ev: And maybe also a dying art. Not a form that people are even very familiar with.

Tav: But what is drama if it's not connected to that?

Kat: I know. Thank you because when I was at teacher's college at UofT. Some people had some drama or some theatre background and some people took one course of it in undergrad. Which was a theory course, which is just reading some plays. It always irks me obviously because I feel like how come you need so much more for other things. In order for it to be a teachable subject you only needed one or two undergrad courses. A lot of those people were coming to it as if we were introducing drama to them for the first time in a sense, in a classroom. And I thought 'wow' it's just not enough time because you are going to be an educator any second! Your other teachable subject is definitely your forte and your going to treat this as some other thing that you do that only requires one or two undergrad courses for it so- and there's a lot of games and you walked away with a lot of stencils and sheets and idea that are just that, they are just ideas. They are attached to nothing, there is no context for them in your world.

Tav: Except for as a teachable subject!

Kat: Yeah and if your going to put it on that level I always felt like, well don't have it as a teachable subject at all. I now come to the point in my life where I'm wondering, well, I'm interested I guess if I'm going to be honest, with theatre and education in a way not drama in education. I sort of feel like if I was going to be fulfilled as an instructor it would have to be outside of the school system. Because I keep coming across people, or did at that time in my life that themselves aren't – and I'm not saying they have to be type of person I am to do it, I'm just saying that they are going to be in that classroom, they're going to be the leader and they don't have the resources to back it up. No wonder we are getting a lot of people saying (five minutes in the staff room beforehand) "hey, do you have a quick activity I can do with them just to get them to basically warm-up their voices a little bit, you know, just something I can do with them fast". And I think couldn't you just do that as easily with mask? I mean there is no 'little' and maybe it's because we did so many lesson plans and..

Tav: Do you remember doing those lesson plans?

Kat: Yeah! And really thinking about them so much, maybe too much. Maybe after years of experience it comes a lot more easily?

Ev: I still lesson plan!

Kat: Me too! And you know what Ev; I need to know that there is some through line.

Tav: It's not even the plan itself I don't think, but the content of the plan

Ev: Yeah

Tav: If you are going through the five senses every friggin day. (Sensory awareness, listening etc). A problem I had was that I was noticing if I put these kids in a place where there is just feeling themselves around there isn't really the contact happening. But as soon as I place them – I do this exercise where I put them on stage – and all of a sudden 'bang!' there was this attachment to what they were doing. It's frustrating to me that drama gets so removed from theatre.

Kat: But what I'm saying, or just adding to that is that some of the instructors themselves weren't introduced to those. And its sad because the person who was leading 'this class' well I just think you have to know most of the stuff I know or I don't know how you are leading it. Maybe there's a different goal altogether. Maybe to you it's not that serious or closely related to theatre. Or you think your definition is close enough, who cares. But you are letting them walk away from it! Each time I would try to bring stuff in or in my own perspective but you know what, it got frustrating. Because it is like you are trying to explain a whole other perspective or context or concept or something. And you start to sound like someone who is sad because they are not in theatre. I didn't want to come across as someone who wanted to be on stage instead of behind the scenes or teaching because I don't look at them as divorced from each other or separate. I can see them together but I think a lot of people couldn't. As soon as you mention theatre for some reason, people were like "it's a drama class for high school". Yeah but they could create theatre or drama whatever you call it as soon as there is an audience involved, I don't care what you call it and use the tools of both because I like to use the tools of both. You can cross-fertilize and back and forth not a problem I think they work nicely together.

Tav: A girl I was tutoring this year and she was in grade 10 drama and she had one teacher who went off on maternity leave or something and then another teacher who came in. And I ask her, just to make conversation what she was doing and (*laughs*) they were having pajama parties and it just seemed to me like, okay you've created a bird course! It's so different

if you get to cross-fertilize those things as opposed to being in just the one. She also did a play with Irondale Theatre that is a company out here who do things with kids in care. They do plays. And that she was totally excited about. In terms of the pajama party she was like ‘I’ve got to bring my pajamas to school!’”

Kat: I’ve heard it just a little too often even in the short amount of time I did in the schools. “I’ve gotta do something with these kids, I’ve got to think of something to do. Give me an improv,” And I think why are you doing it then? And you’ve thought about it and you couldn’t really think of anything. So now you’re asking a couple of seconds a head of time? It’s a little scary.

A Leaky Foundation

Our experiences of how drama is used in the classroom is a very much a reality in schools today. While discussing the state of drama in the schools with a high school music teacher here in Halifax, I was frustrated to hear that the drama teacher is never involved with the school play and in the classroom does not attempt to use theatre at all. Another drama teacher I know, who is a drama teacher by default (her specialization is in visual art education), said that she just does drama games with her students as that is what is available to her. Kat’s experience in the public school system mirrors this and speaks to one of the roots of the problem: unlike music or visual art, the foundation you need to teach drama is clearly lacking in any discernable theatre practice and sometimes no practice at all. In the end, it makes for poor pedagogy all round if you have no familiarity with the skill set needed to help the students learn.

Writing on the dilemmas in the drama curriculum, Michael O’Hara (2001) proposes that as it is envisioned, drama is perhaps not a subject but a learning process. Here he attempts to draw together what makes it a learning process as opposed to a subject,

Drama is the only school subject “that begins and ends with people...and lives outside the textbook” (Wilks, 1973); it does not envelop a body of techniques which children must acquire (Witkin, 1974), nor, as McGregor (1976) writes, is there any central core of knowledge that must be assimilated. Drawing as it does on experience, which is then related to the resolution of situations through dramatic form, drama in education is best seen as an experience rather than a subject (Davies, 1975), or in Heathcote’s (1971) terms, a “system”.

Drama in education is, then, seen as way of teaching and learning, rather than a conventional school subject with definite knowledge to be acquired or skills to be learned. (p. 318)

O’Hara’s perceived idea of drama does not include technique or skill or familiarity with it as an art practice. But even as a way of learning or as a tool for development, one has to have some familiarity with the art of drama. Asking students who have never improvised before to do so is asking them to do something that will need to be learned. A good example is the idea that we don’t say ‘no’ in improv. It’s not because “no” is so negative sounding or anything like that. But imagine you are improvising a scene and you say, “Would you like to go and catch that last train, we can make it if we run?” and the other participant says “no” and then you say, “Do you want some of this candy that makes you fly like a bat?” and the other participant says ‘no’. What is happening is that one of you is working on establishing a framework for the scene while the other is just stopping the scene before it has even begun. Unless your intent is to play a

supremely belligerent, apathetic character, there isn't much use for 'no' in improvisation. That is a skill that you need to learn, no matter how small. It is part of a huge collection of skills and knowledge that is available in the drama classroom if we believe that theatre should actually be in the drama classroom.

The disconnection in teacher training between theatre and drama has profound effects on how students are able to engage in the dramatic process because the meaning of the lessons has been decontextualized. In a later excerpt Evalyn notes that she is told at her job at "YPT" that she must always show how any exercise is connected to the theatre. Kat's experience at teacher's college and with colleagues choosing exercises without consideration of context is similar to the experience of meaning loss described here,

To illustrate "meaning loss" Stairs (1996) related an attempt to make curriculum culturally relevant to Inuit youth of Nunavik where there was a discrepancy between intentions and outcomes. Projects, oral traditions, and ideas from Inuit history and traditions were introduced into the school curriculum with the intention of promoting respect for cultural traditions and a sense of relatedness/connectedness among past, present and future. Unfortunately, Inuit youth were just as alienated from these "floating lessons" (Annahatak, personal communication) as they were from "culturally relevant" curricular content of Southern Canada. Not only were these lessons unrelated to student's current lifestyles and choices but also they were unrelated to traditional contexts, values, skills, and spirituality (e.g. care, correctness, and right relationship to the human, animal, and

material world”) (Stairs, 1996,p. 224). Thus, students were distanced from both Inuit and Euro-American bases of identity. One project required students to construct tools that were used in the traditional Inuit culture but “these tools remained merely toys for the students” (Stairs, 1996, p. 224) (MacCleave et al. 2002 ¶ 22.)

Doing drama games without connecting them to a valued endeavor effectively makes tools into toys. Kat’s experience at teachers college points to a significant issue with having drama and theatre not viewed as art practices. Many of her classmates did not have a background in theatre and came to drama teaching without a base of knowledge in an art practice. For subjects such as music one would assume that there is a necessity of having a background in the field – at least perhaps the ability to read or play music. It would be a rather odd field if it did not engage with the very tools of its trade. Yet drama is not viewed in the same way and this view is perpetuated by conclusions like Michael O’Hara’s that it does not require any art and skill base. This amounts to a denial of access to the skills and the craft needed to effectively teach drama as a subject in its own right.

In this section I have attempted to convey the problems of having theatre and drama depicted as disconnected entities. Drama becomes in part, “floating lessons”(Annahatak in MacCleave et al, 2002) that do not inspire seriousness on the part of the students nor on the part of the teacher. For drama to be taken seriously as a subject that is it would seem useful to connect it with theatre and present it as an art practice, similar to visual art or music.

NARRATIVE EXCERPT C

Serving the Text

In this selection we discuss a paper that I gave both the participants to read that was about the liberatory nature of free expression in drama. We discuss the creative possibilities with working with texts and how we see our role as actors or directors using a script.

Questions that arise

1. How do we define creativity in the drama classroom?
2. Is any one practice in the theatre necessarily more 'freeing' creatively than others?

During the rehearsals he had little to do. He was both thrilled and disturbed by the idea that only half the work was his, the other half belonged to the director, the actors and even the scene makers. Overseeing the work was an element of time that was new to him. Over the proscenium arch there was an immense, invisible clock to whose ticking the playwright must attend, its hands moving inexorably on from eight-thirty, as precise as the audience's patience. In that busy period of two hours, if the intervals were taken into account, he must present and solve the problem he had set himself, or be doomed. – The character of Henry James on the eve of the production of his first play.

-From "The Master" by Colm Toibin (2004)

Liberation and Literature

Before our first session of interviews I had asked the participants to take a look at an article by Mary E. Styslinger (2000) that a member of my committee had given to me. It was about using drama as a tool to explore literature and how drama could be a 'liberatory practice'. My interests in the article stemmed from the fact that what she had done in the classroom was to use a piece of literature as a jumping off point for dramatic scenes created by the students. Basically, what she wanted the students to explore was 'what happened after the last scene of the book?' She felt that to "dramatize from the center of the text" stifled the liberatory nature of drama and that "educators who dramatize at the center of the text are enacting power strategies in their classrooms" (pp. 188-189).

Styslinger discusses drama in terms of liberation from the text and its constraints. She also believes that this allows the students their full creative and expressive freedom whereas to use the text would oppress them by shutting down their creative selves. As she states here, "Drama when enacted without constraint provides a means to liberate the self from the self" (p.189). In this excerpt I make no bones about my criticisms of her "Romantic, decontextualized view of creativity"(Bailin, 1998, p. 43). In my mind, it is an apt place to begin a discussion of how we use texts in drama and theatre.

Excerpt

Tav: So, I mean, I'm going to give you my opinions. I won't sit back and not tell you how I feel about something. So, I was reading this article called "Relations of Power in Drama in Education" This author talks about drama in education through the whole thing with hardly ever mentioning theatre.

Ev: wow.

Kat: But at the same time not surprising, go ahead.

Tav: What's amazing is that she's talking about all the power situations where you put 'text' at the 'centre' of the drama, which means that you are creating this dominant and oppressive environment.

Ev: wow

Tav: Because the kids aren't being liberated. This is how the author looks at drama as a 'liberatory practice'. The kids have to stick to the lines. To me it just seemed like 'whoa' you're not even thinking theatre as a practice and that's where this comes from and it's not just about power relations. Although we have often thought about it like that, I think.

Kat and Ev: yeah.

Tav: I'm just going to give you this quote from the article.
"Educators who dramatize at the centre of the text are enacting power strategies in their classrooms. They are exercising governance in ways that inhibit the freedom of their students. The freedom they need to exercise critical intelligence. The supposed advantages of drama, improved literacy, multiple interpretations and increased collaboration, and problem solving become minimized as teachers enact constraints."

Ev: What does that mean, "teacher's enacting constraints"?

Tav: The author gives the example of a teacher doing a play of "Lord of the Flies" where the kids are taking on the characters directly from the book. The example the author gives as the way to do it to make it good for the kids. As opposed to doing it verbatim is to say, "why don't we divide yourselves up in groups and pretend it's the future. What happened to the boys on the island? Which I would consider an exercise in creating a deeper connection between the student and the character. Like it's not a separate thing where one is good and one is bad.

Ev: Yeah! It connects.

Tav: So anyways, I was reading that and.. throwing up. *(All laugh)*.

[Perhaps a little background to the above statement is needed. The idea of theatre as a liberatory practice had been much discussed in my experience at university, to the point, where perhaps I had become a little less likely to respond with enthusiasm to such a statement.]

Kat: You know what it sounds like to me in a way, is a 'follow up' activities. When you finish a work or when you're trying to look for closure and you look into the distance and you're trying to involve some level of interpretation, but not on a very deep level because I think you can get that depth from the actual text.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: It's different if you place it somewhere and that was the crux of it but if it's something where they have done the actual text it just sounds like a follow-up, kind of 'say goodbye'. It's not really asking you to invest too much.

Tav: And the idea that the text is what is limiting, well can't our own minds be limiting? To put ourselves into the text, into the character is a way of expanding..

Kat: Expanding?

Tav: Well, expanding our minds. Expanding our ideas of what is possible. It's not like we can say 'alright we can't go by the text because we have to find out what is possible' Even to go into the text you find out what is possible. I think about looking at a text deeply and I go whoa you find out a lot if you look at it deeply.

But that kind of thinking has been bothering me in terms of my teaching. That for drama to be good it has to be this 'liberatory' practice that's not connected at all with theatre.

Ev: Do you find that that's the dominant opinion that you're coming up against?

Tav: To a certain extent. Also that you can do drama, that you can come in and teach for an hour in that kind of situation. Okay what are you going to do in an hour? But also that people don't look at drama as connected to theatre.

Ev: Like classroom teachers?

Tav: Classroom teachers, who ever is calling you in. Being sort of divorced from the practise of theatre

Generating, not judging.

Often it is assumed that the only way for students to have creative input into theatre is to create the play themselves without any prior script. Student playwrighting is often done by choosing a subject, researching that subject and then using improvisation, tableaux and freeze-frames to flush out a script. The process hinges on generating many scenes and then choosing which scenes will fit. What often occurs in this process is that a disproportionate amount of time is given over to the ‘generating’ process while little time is left for making sound aesthetic choices. The upshot of this is that many student productions are less than aesthetically pleasing because they have not been sufficiently honed and judged.

I continue to muse over the words ‘service’ and ‘serving’ in this excerpt to follow long after I have re-read the second interview on the same subject. Also the word ‘liberation’. Often the words are diametrically opposed in our culture – to serve or to be liberated. There isn’t a lot of discussion around liberation through service.

Excerpt

Tav: Yeah. That’s funny, eh? So what do you think about, in drama and education when – or even when you read that article, there’s a list of things that drama is useful for teaching kids. You know, whether it’s literacy or – well I think basically it was literacy and liberation that that article was talking about. However you define liberation?

So what do you think about like in terms of the theatre, besides literacy because you wrote – you said something in here, (Kat), about, that it’s possible to find things – you know, we were talking about this article. Just hold on a second here. You were talking about how using text. Using text is an important part of learning theatre as opposed to – and not just pulling out one page.

Kat: Yes.

Tav: You know to what I'm referring?

Kat: Yeah, exactly. I'm the type of person that wants to see the whole...

Tav: The whole thing, yeah.

Kat: ...kit and caboodle. Even if I know that I'm not going to be doing the whole thing. I think it's important for context and it's very difficult to just take an excerpt and to understand Brecht or Moliere or any playwright. But I think it's really difficult in any story to even remove a passage and to understand the whole point of the story. You know what I mean?

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: So I sort of felt that with theatre, that when you're dealing with text that you're sort of – and I hate to say it because it sounds like such a theatre student thing to say, but you should serve the text. Like you should serve – all their works would serve text. The director should go back and...

Tav: Right.

Kat: Making sure that your interpretation is showing the text. You're paying service to the playwright. If you're an actor, your part should be serving a text. When you're analyzing language and I mean when you actually delve into it and don't just look at it as sentences and words, I think that you're exploring language beyond just the words. And you're learning – it's probably more obvious in a different language. Like when we say we watch French theatre and we enjoy it. I think you're learning a lot of French there...

Literate Bodies

During our time at university in Montreal, Katarina and I attended productions in French. People might assume that it is tantamount to watching a foreign language film without the subtitles. However, the type of theatre we were most interested in viewing was a 'physical' theatre in which the movement of the body is of equal importance to the dialogue. Years later, when on holiday to Germany and the Czech Republic we again attended several performances in the

language of the country we were in. Katarina's description of 'exploring language beyond the words' applies quite neatly to our own exploration of theatre in other cultures and our eventual work with poetry as the main text for our show.

Excerpt

Kat: ...even when you're not walking away speaking French. So when you speak of it as a cultural... In terms of cultural practice in drama...and drama being like theatre, being a culture – drama being – using theatre so that it could be a culture within school, I think that the text is a major player in that.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: I think that...

Tav: And it's not just – yeah. Can I just say something? You said, you know, that you should serve the text. But my question is, is the text also serving you, like in that educational situation?

Kat: That's choice. Like that's – yeah.

Tav: You think that's choice?

Kat: No. I think that's you choosing the and why you are choosing the text because I don't think that you should just grab anything and say, "Well it's a classic. It'll do."

Tav: Yeah, yeah.

Kat: "Let's go through it." I think that when you put a play on in Toronto in the year 2001, it should be serving the year. I think that you should – especially if it's something way back in the repertoire of theatre that you're pulling on again.

Tav: I'm thinking from a student's point of view.

Kat: But that's interpretation and I think that that's inevitable. Like I don't...

Tav: Yeah. No, that's what I'm saying is that...

Kat: I don't mean serve the text like ((crosstalk)).

Tav: No, no. Oh I know, I know. I was just trying to say that in serving the text in the same time it's going to serve you.

Kat: Oh, big time.

Ev: Well what do you mean about it's from the students point of view? What...

Tav: Well if you're going to be – if you or I are just teaching a class in which we were doing a whole text, okay, and, thinking about what drama is useful for or whatever – is it useful for individual growth and development? Right? And the thing about that is that, when you're using the text, people might often think that, you know, it's not for the kids' growth and development, it's for the product.

Ev: Right.

Tav: But what I'm saying is that often I find that if you're using text and you're like – you know, and if you are serving it then it is serving you as well. It's a reciprocal...

Kat: You're investing in it.

A Hidden Tyranny of Mode

Improvisation and types of theatre that are associated with it (Boal's "Forum Theatre", theatre sports, and "Second City") tend to dominate in the drama classroom. Improvisation is a single theatrical skill unto itself yet is a primary measure of success in the drama classroom. It far outweighs other important skills such as the use of textual analysis, line interpretation and voice work. It dominates the curriculum because of its association with the notion of "free expression" as Andy Kempe (1998) explains here:

The traditional emphasis on improvisation in drama education has persuaded many teachers of literature also to use improvisation as way into play scripts in English lessons. Underlying such a practice may be a belief that confronting the script directly will somehow stifle the students'

creative responses to it. And of course, if interpreting scripts involved simply following the playwright's instructions, then theatre production would be no more inspiring than assembling kitchen units from a series of pictograms and theatre artists little more than technical jobbers. (p. 92)

There is no doubt that improv has its place in the theatrical cannon but its supremacy has been far too overreaching. In my own practice and in my own teaching I use it mostly to help students to loosen their grip a bit. When you are asked to improvise, especially when the goal is generating many ideas quickly, I was often told, "don't think, just do". Judgement is always quick and light in improv. Pure improvisation, that is, not thinking too much or having no prior knowledge of the character, theme and setting of what you are about to act out can be as much a constraint as being bound by a script. If one does either activity enough a certain amount of proficiency of skill is gained. In my own experience, the most creatively engaging work comes out of becoming proficient at both these tasks laying groundwork for a greater understanding of the text itself and how one could manipulate it.

Finding a suitable way of performing a line involves considerable imaginative engagement. Add to this the other elements that make up performance, such as lighting, costume, make-up and scenography, and one sees how tremendously creative the act of staging a play is. But these skills are learned by harnessing creativity not by giving it free rein, and as drama teachers, it may be that we have been too reluctant to constrain

students' spontaneity while they learn to master a medium. (Kempe, 1998, p. 93)

Clearly "Free expression" has its own constraints and while some may see it as devoid of cultural reference, it is in fact, a very culturally specific practice. Sita Brahmachari (1998) writes in her article "Stages of the World", "while it has provided a powerful means of countering racial prejudices and casual stereotyping, school drama has shied away from investigating the particularities of peoples, histories and artistic practices" (p.19). Naturalistic improv is *the* method of exploration. One could argue that Western drama education has problems enough acknowledging its own historical practices let alone exploring other forms of theatrical expression. Improvisation is a mode of expression among many. Any pedagogy that privileges one mode of expression above all else – without holding a respected place for other modes – may in fact be guilty of enacting power strategies.

Culture Free vs. Culturally Situated

Styslinger's (2000) position demonstrates a view of culture as an inhibiting source in our creative endeavours,

Just as dramatizing from the center of the text is an easier practice for teachers, it is also an easier one for students. No one has to think for himself or herself. Lines need only be read. Actions need only be followed. All easily adapt to this structure of dominations. (p.190)

Here Sharon Bailin (1998) posits another view that accepts that we are never actually free of culture,

Creativity is not an entity existing within individual psyches which needs to be liberated and protected from stultifying influences of culture, but rather has to do with the quality production taking place within cultural forms and traditions. (p. 49)

As with the view of improv as a mode that somehow is more freeing than other forms of dramatic enactment, Styslinger's culture-free notion of creativity is itself a product of cultural thought.

Using text 'from the centre', the edge, or not using text at all does not in itself enact power relations. What is important is the skill with which we use it in helping deepen students' understanding of the crafts of theatre and drama.

Approaches that allow for an array of sources, styles and processes are more likely to develop students' artistic sensibilities. These ideas of liberation and service can be used in conjunction and are sometimes one and the same.

This section is a critique of a particular way in which creativity and the use of text in theatre is viewed. In this view working with pre-existing text is seen reducing the possibilities of creative endeavour in the theatre. A critique guided by the principles of cultural psychology demonstrates that this freedom is misrepresented and in fact freedoms can be seen as a constraint in itself.

NARRATIVE EXCERPT D

The Scottish Play

In this section we talk about the importance of initiating students into theatrical practice. Evalyn gives an example where a superstition specific to the theatre was shared with the students and then changed to inspire student participation.

Questions that arise

1. Can we manipulate reified aspects of theatre?
2. What is the importance of membership in a community of practice like theatre?
3. How are communities of practice maintained over time?

Theatrical Logic

*In is down, down is front
Out is up, up is back
Off is out, on is in
And of course-
Left is right and right is left
A drop shouldn't and a
Block and fall does neither
A prop doesn't and
A cove has no water
Tripping is OK
A running crew rarely gets anywhere
A purchase line buys you nothing
A trap will not catch anything
A gridiron has nothing to do with football
Strike is work (In fact a lot of work)
And a green room, thank god, usually isn't
Now that you're fully versed in Theatrical terms,
Break a leg.
But not really.*

-Anon

Shibboleth – a metaphor for a text to see if someone belongs.

This excerpt from our second meeting concerns a ‘teachable moment’ that Evalyn experienced during one of her classes at Toronto’s ‘Young People’s Theatre’ (‘YPT’). This ‘moment’ comes about because of a well-known superstition in the theatre world. This superstition could have just been discussed as a warning of its use, but as you will see, Evalyn takes it much farther than that.

Excerpt

Tav: It was about, when we were talking about rituals of the theatre.

Ev: Sorry did you say rituals of the theatre?

Tav: Yeah. You were talking about how you when you were thinking of doing a performance with kids at ‘YPT’ and it turned out to be the ‘Scottish play’..

Ev: Oh yeah right, okay

Tav: I am really interested at looking at the fact that we talk about theatre in regards to the roles we have in it etc, but there is just so much in there with regards to its educational use. So I really wanted to look at what makes it viable in education but part of that is...

Ev: And part of that seems like its passing on cultural history too. If we use that example of the ‘Macbeth’ thing its about a theatre history in a sense or a theatre culture. But that’s also kind of about history period when you think how much Shakespeare has influenced our culture dramatically, no pun intended. (*Laughter from all three*). If that superstition has permeated our culture and that play has had such an influence and teaching kids about it –

(*To Kat*) this is what Tav and I were talking about yesterday.

I had a group of kids at ‘YPT’ and I was teaching them inside a theatre space in fact we were on stage having our class and we were talking about superstitions which was the topic of our class and the play we were creating together and somebody said ‘Macbeth’ and I freaked out at them, “You can’t say that word!”

Tav: (*laughing*) Was it natural for you to do that?

- Ev: No not really, I think back on it and...
- Tav: For an educational effect?
- Ev: Yeah, I mean I love teaching them – one of my favourite things working with the young kids in the ‘YPT’ classes is ‘break a leg’ You say it the first time and a kid looks at you like “huh?” (*Laughter*) and you get to explain this thing that’s this neat language. So I think about when I was a kid learning these things and it makes you feel important and it instilled a feeling that you were a part of a select club..
- Kat: And it’s a shared language and I’m going to initiate you too.
- Ev: And I think about that incident with the ‘Macbeth’ thing and I bet that’s something they remember. The kid who said it will for sure remember it because I made him do something. I said, “Well if you say it you have to do something to counteract it.” So they had a really fun time thinking up things to make each other do and then everybody started saying it in hopes of being punished as well. (*Serious laughter*).
- Tav: It’s funny because you’re doing it in an educational context but it’s not like..
- Ev: Yeah it’s not like now we’re going to learn a skill but in some ways it’s about understanding and learning a culture, which is educational, I guess.
- Tav: If you were a stage manager of a big show and you said ‘Macbeth’ it wouldn’t go over so well would it?
- Ev: No. Its interesting the head of ‘YPT’ says that whenever you are teaching something in class you always have refer it back to theatre and how it applies especially on parent day. Really showing how this goofy game that you are all doing applies to theatre.

Incommensurability

Evalyn asks me, “Sorry did you say rituals of the theatre?” This is the first sign that while we all share similar backgrounds in theatre and drama education that I have chosen to study an area that is somewhat unfamiliar to the other participants in the conversation. I use a term, ‘rituals of theatre’ and perhaps the term does not ring a bell for Evalyn in regards to the ‘teachable moment’, or perhaps she just didn’t hear what I said. As in any qualitative research process, there is a distinct measure of interpretation that is necessary so that I must reiterate here, that these interviews are not here to help me find ‘universal truths’ but to assist me in illuminating my own thoughts on theatre’s place in education. This possible breakdown in communication between Evalyn and myself just indicates that in reality our communities of practice are crammed with language, tools and so on that are specific to that practice. Each time we step out of our regular sites of practice we must be able to not only be open to others diverse understandings of the world but to remember to share ours in a mindful way. In an example of this issue of incommensurability in research, Anne MacCleave (2004) writes:

Researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds may assume falsely that comparable concepts or terms exist across research traditions. They may be unaware that differences go beyond substituting one term for another. This tendency should be expected rather than faulted. Persons encountering a foreign language typically initiate the learning process by focussing on words or short phrases. (p. 10)

It is not only that we might think that concepts are the same across diverse communities of practice, but also that the same term might have different meaning in a different practice as MacCleave (2004) suggests here in a continuation of a description of differing research sites.

Also, researchers may be unaware that same words or terms have different meaning across research cultural boundaries. Alternatively, they may be aware that words or terms embody different meanings but choose to ignore the “alien” discourse and cling to the already familiar. As one example, consider the word “knowledge”. When a researcher schooled in quantitative scientific/clinical traditions speaks of “knowledge”, she/he means something entirely different from the cultural psychologist who speaks of “knowledge” or the phenomenologist who speaks of “knowledge”. (p. 10 -11)

In the interviews there were moments of incommensurability because although we do share communities of practice as drama teachers and theatre practitioners, the sites of these practices were not always the same. Beyond that, my research, although inspired by my practices in these communities, is yet another community of practice with a rich history that includes specialized language and perceptions of education.

When Evalyn recounts the moment where a student utters the dreaded word ‘Macbeth’ there is a blurring of meaning between the terms ‘theatre’ ‘culture’ and ‘history’. In fact in the first two sentences Ev refers to ‘cultural history’, ‘theatre history’ and to ‘theatre culture’. The way she is discussing each

term, they could all be used interchangeably. In this paper itself the terms ‘drama’, ‘drama in education’ and ‘drama education’ are not always distinct from one another. Perhaps this speaks to the nature of the suppleness of meaning in these practices.

The Stage – Educational Spaces

In her introduction to the ‘Macbeth’ moment Evalyn tells us, “I was teaching them inside a theatre space, in fact, we were on the stage having our class”. As the superstition goes, you are not supposed to say ‘Macbeth’ inside the theatre. Being inside the space that houses and sustains this superstition is a significant part of how this moment and others like it occur. Places and their history, just as tools and their history are a significant part of any community of practice, perhaps one that has been ignored in our present educational system.

Initiation and Belonging

“The activities of many communities are unfathomable, unless they are viewed from within the culture” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 33).

In this except a link is established between initiation and belonging. Our job as educators is more than passing on knowledge; it is passing on a feeling of belonging that is accomplished partly through initiation. The exchange between Evalyn and Kat is clearly about this aspect of teaching. Evalyn describes her own experience as a student that learning the language of the theatre meant that she felt “important”, “a part of a select club”. Kat explains that from a teacher’s point of view it is very much about “initiating you” and sharing our language with the students. This language includes the physical language of theatre, written texts and idioms of the theatre. It can be epitomized in learning classical forms of the

theatre such as Shakespearean acting or the physical language of clowning or masque. This is a markedly different way of looking at theatre education than current models which subscribe to none of these notions of ‘belonging and initiation’ as educational goals. Growth and development may include ‘group work’ as an area to be evaluated or a feeling of ‘safeness’ for the students. However, feeling safe is not necessarily belonging and all the exercises used in developmental drama to create a sense of safety and group cohesion are not in the slightest focussed on the historicocultural aspects of the theatre that we discussed in this excerpt.

This ‘teachable moment’ can be described as creative exploration of culture within theatre. Evalyn not only imparts the traditional cultural knowledge (don’t say ‘Macbeth’ in the theatre”), but also uses it to explore other aspects of dramatic play.

Reification or Remaking?

In this instance Evalyn succeeds in performing two tasks important to maintaining any community of practice. She engages in ‘reification’ the process by which we ‘give form to our experience’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 59) in a community of practice. Reification helps to congeal ideas and set apart customs in any community of practice:

Reification occupies much of our collective energy: from entries in a journal to historical records, from poems to encyclopaedias, from names to classification systems, from dolmens to space probes, from the Constitution to a signature on a credit card slip, from gourmet recipes to

medical procedures, from flashy advertisements to census data, from single concepts to entire theories, from the evening news to the national archives, from lesson plans to the compilation of textbooks, from private address lists to sophisticated credit reporting databases, from torturous political speeches to the yellow pages. (1998 p. 59)

At the same time as she passes down a cultural practice within the theatre, Evalyn also alters its power for the group, demonstrating that our participation in any community of practice will always have an effect on that practice itself. By practicing theatre we are also remaking it.

Negotiated Meaning

Clearly in this ‘teachable moment’ Evalyn aims to help the students negotiate the meaning of this superstition. Wenger’s (1998) definition of ‘negotiability’ helps to describe how meaning is changed through our relations with practice.

Negotiability refers to the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration. Negotiability allows us to make meanings applicable to new circumstances, to enlist the collaboration of others, to make sense of events, or to assert our membership. (p. 197)

Meaning is evolving and this is especially so in art where elucidation, interpretation and exploration of ourselves in relation to the world is a foundation of practice. Theatre can be seen to encompass a multiplicity of genres and traditions; mime, musicals, commedia del’arte, buffoon, clown, agit prop,

puppetry, forum theatre, a plethora of texts; from ancient Greek tragedies, to Shakespeare, to the Vagina Monologues, configurations of roles; collectives, self directed one woman/man shows, as well as wide-ranging spaces and traditions; community theatre, Broadway, Off Broadway, fringe, repertory, travelling, young people's theatre, street theatre and theatre in parks, theatre in the round. I could throw any number of these different genres together and it would be plausible; (a community theatre company presenting Chekhov, commedia del'arte in the park, a collective creation in the Fringe festival, a rock opera on Broadway, puppetry in the street). Some of these aspects of the theatre are hundreds of years old, some are fifteen years old. That they exist at all in the world today is a testament to their malleability. Stephanie Woodson (1999) asserts that:

When a new artistic theory emerges, it does not, like in the sciences, replace older theories, but rather exists side by side in dynamic, often painful, tension. The process of 'expanding' theatre can be characterized as an operation discarding old definitions concerned with conventions, and distilling those essential elements that belong to and bind 'theatre' (¶ 15.).

I agree in part with the author in that the old and new exist at the same time. Sometimes they are along side one another, but at others they are used in concert or as comments on each other. Whether the relationship is 'painful' or not depends on the process in which they are made. Furthermore I would wholeheartedly disagree with the author on her belief that we discard convention to necessarily find what is 'essential'. This makes us believe that theatre is about finding universal truths when in fact it seems to me just by the sheer number of

different forms and practices that theatre is about discovering a whole host of ways of seeing and representing the world. Theatrical production is not locked, as some would say, in some simple battle between old versus new. A production of “Macbeth” that I witnessed in Montreal comes to mind where French and English were both spoken on stage.

Evalyn’s teachable moment demonstrates how a reified practice can be manipulated through our own actions – thus meaning itself is negotiated through participation. This small, local moment helps us to see how this concept of negotiability might work on a larger scale. An example would be the work of Bertolt Brecht who manipulated the ‘fourth wall’ and the relationship between performer and audience in ways that had not been done before. Now his methods have become reified practices that again may be manipulated and interpreted to create new forms.

Through negotiating meaning of reified practices in the theatre Evalyn is able to initiate her students into theatre practice. She is both sharing a repertoire and helping the students to negotiate its meaning. This is an inclusive process that helps to maintain a community of practice.

NARRATIVE EXCERPT E

Aladdin's Lamp Shines in Performance

This part of the narrative concerns a particular course within the Drama in Education (DINE) program that we all found to be very effective because of its use of performance. This leads me to consider a later experience I had doing a larger show with a group of intellectually handicapped adults. In this piece I examine how archetypes of the theatre and its unique sense of 'mutual accountability' help to sustain engagement in the practice.

Questions that arise

1. How do reified practices in theatre such help to sustain participation?
2. How is the transparent nature of roles and processes in the theatre useful for student engagement?

It is always hard for anyone to have one single aim in life. In the theatre, however, the goal is clear. From the first rehearsal, the aim is always visible, not too far away, and it involves everyone. We can see many model social patterns at work: the pressures of the first night, with its unmistakable demands, produce that working together, that dedication, that energy and that consideration of each other's needs that governments despair ever evoking outside wars.

-From "The Empty Space" by Peter Brook (1968).

In this excerpt I bring up the lack of performance oriented work we did in Drama in Education (DINE) at Concordia. What we did do a lot of were lesson plans that followed a fairly regulated structure. First, there were warm-up exercises, these might be followed by exercises devoted to establishing trust, and then we would have a ‘main’ exercise or two such as a series of role-plays, followed in the end by exercises designed for closure. In this arc there would also need to be some sense that the exercises were linked to ‘development’. This could be done by focussing on several of the senses (touch, sound, vision etc) or by focussing on developing dramatic skills: specifically improvisation, drama games and storytelling. Many of these exercises were in the end some sort of drama game. Planning for several classes consisted of each of us leading the group through exercises for a day. On a couple of occasions, we were asked to do a complete set of plans for an entire, say, ten-week period but that was not always the norm.

Excerpt

Tav: Okay? So that we did all those lesson plans...

((Crosstalk))

Tav: And, you know, and we did all these lesson plans that had like, you know, the different exercises. But mostly those lesson plans never led up to actually doing a performance, if you see what I’m saying.

Kat: Although I recall some did. Like I’m thinking of Stephen Snow’s Special Populations class. You guys had Special Pops class?

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: And those – do you remember like the groups that we worked with had to present something?

Ev: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah

Kat: And that was a neat thing. Like that was again, I mean proving a point of performance being good kind of pressure.

Kat: Like they had to rise to it.

Ev: And that *we* had to rise to.

Kat: Yeah. Teachers to work with...a group with all these different needs that – to fit that into performance.

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: So – but...

Ev: I mean maybe I'm...

Kat: I think you're right in general we didn't do very much. But it wasn't like, never.

Tav: Yeah. No, I'm not saying never. You know; if I travel to extremes, bring me back.

A Good Kind of Pressure

The Special Populations class in our program was a class in which we learned to work with the intellectually handicapped in drama. Our professor brought in about 30 adults with intellectual handicaps from the community to about 10 of our classes. It was, in a sense, their drama class in which they received a certificate of recognition when they finished. Our job was to run an entire class by ourselves, in groups of two. It was a wonderful hands-on experience.

This same professor also did an all out productions with the same group of adults in the summer months. Theatre students could take this as an independent study course. Our professor's wife wrote the music and there were full-scale sets

and costumes and a three-day run with one day having both a matinee and an evening performance. The cast was entirely intellectually handicapped and the play was about one and a half hours in length with musical and dance numbers. It was a huge undertaking. The strength and ability those actors needed to draw on to perform was the same as in any other theatre company with populations without special needs. The summer I participated the production was of “Aladdin”.

I would like to contrast my experience in this case with the statement made here, “Drama occurs in a fictional world where new ideas, attitudes, and perspectives can be explored without the social consequences of everyday life; students are not pressured to talk or move in public and should not feel judges or “put on the spot” (Edmiston & Wilhelm, 1998, p. 113).” What struck me during the production of “Aladdin” was the desire and determination of the actors to be seen as competent in a public forum. They were very willing to take the risk of ‘going on stage’ so that they could be received publicly. Ormrod (2005) states that competence is a basic human need. In our courses in DINE there was a distinct category of exercises for creating trust within a group and a viewpoint that the safety of any group was important. This stems from drama’s connection to both developmental psychology and art therapies. These principles are important to keep in mind as a teacher but at the same time safety can sometimes become a kind of protectionism that limits learners. In fact there is new research that posits that the minimizing of risk in our society actually has the opposite of the desired effect (Saunders, 2005). In a way, these actors suffered not from too much

exposure but from too little and perhaps their communities of practice were more limited than most. Although their natural fears about being on stage were absolutely present in this context so were displays of elation at their triumphs and disappointment at their failures.

Upon reflection I realize that this is the only show I ever worked on that had understudies. It is not a common practice outside of commercial mainstream theatre. In the end, I don't think any of the understudies were used during the run of the performance. This brings me to the point that Kat makes about performance being a 'good kind of pressure'. What constitutes a good kind of pressure in a learning environment? Well perhaps the answer is twofold. First, that we can envision the trajectory of our identity within a community of practice and can see the path of that practice even as a beginner; and, secondly, that the mutual accountability in this practice is apparent by the nature of the practice itself. Because there is a wide cultural knowledge of what 'the stage' is about – the actors were able to envision their place within the practice. The strongly reified artefacts and practices of theatre created a degree of transparency that facilitated participation.

On mutual accountability Wenger (1998) writes:

Negotiating a joint enterprise give rise to relations of mutual accountability among those involved. These relations of accountability include what matters and what does not, what is important and why it is important, what to do and not to do, what to pay attention to and what to ignore, what to talk about and what to leave unsaid, what to justify and

what to take for granted, what to display and what to withhold, when actions and artefacts are good enough and when they need improvement.

(p. 81)

A lot of these 'relations of accountability' are learned over time with our involvement in practice. There are a few key aspects that can account for both the sense of pressure associated with performance and the high degree of mutual accountability. Anyone's basic knowledge of performance would help them toward a high degree of accountability as it is so interwoven into our cultural awareness of theatre. "The actor's nightmare" is to be on stage without knowing his or her lines. The obvious conundrum that you leave the rest of the cast in if you do not perform (either as actor, set builder, stage hand) is another factor in our ability to uphold accountability. Even if we dislike the director's interpretation of the script or are not entirely pleased our own performance, our obligation to the other members is often a powerful basis for remaining involved. This pressure helps to sustain our engagement and although I've just used the word 'nightmare' it is not always such and is in fact 'a good thing' when it is coupled with a growing competence. As we rehearse, we become more skilled in our craft as we head towards our performance so that the rise in pressure to perform is matched by an awareness of our ability and a resulting confidence. Staging this production with special populations made me realize that prevailing ideas about theatre being a merely a game of mimicry were unfounded.

In a moment that I shall never forget, I was asked in rehearsal to play the part I was understudying because the actor was out sick. I was wretchedly lame

in the part because I had not really been focussing on being an actor – the actor who I understudied inhabited the character because of his absolute engagement in the production. In absolute honesty, I was a little upset that I could not portray the character as well as he. This was one course in which theatre practice played a major role in our learning and the strength of its reified practices facilitated as sustained engagement on the part of the actors.

In our Special Populations course both university students and the intellectually handicapped actors had to rise to the challenge of performance. It became positive pressure for all of us a– even with the ever-present butterflies that come with performance. The sustained engagement of all the participants was enhanced by sense of mutual accountability. The heavily reified archetypes of the theatre created a degree of transparency in the roles and tasks that helped to sustain engagement. In this course it was clear that theatre served a very special role as a community of practice for those who may be denied access to activities that are culturally valued.

NARRATIVE EXCERPT F

The Maine Community

This excerpt is about a community theatre show that Evalyn witnessed in Maine. She brings up issues about what theatre art is and what it is meant to do. It is a perfect example of how theatre practices that are heavily reified in the larger world can be interpreted through our participation on a more local level.

Questions that arise

1. To what extent can localized cultural knowledge have a space in theatrical practice?
2. How might this create possibilities for the larger world of theatre practice to be used in the drama classroom?

The theatre should be treated with respect. The theatre is a wonderful place, a house of strange enchantment, a temple of illusion. What it most emphatically is not, and never will be, is a scruffy, ill-lit, fumed-oak drill hall serving as a temporary soapbox for political propaganda.

-Noel Coward

An underlying concept of the hermeneutic circle in that knowledge is constructed through an interaction between the local and the global. To understand the larger picture, the smaller particulars need to be taken into account. It strikes me that the much-maligned practice of community theatre is a rather unselfconscious exploration of the hermeneutic circle.

Excerpt

Kat: ...(unintelligible) it's not. And there's just as much discipline, just – we paralleled it. Doshan and I were talking about music and stuff. And, you know, you do your scales, you do your vocals, you do your warm-up, to warm up your body.

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: You do those things and you have to do it all the time. You have to do it every day.

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: And same with that athlete who's running the track. You can't expect to be in the Olympics and you can't expect to be on the stage unless you do put in that time.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: And if you're fluky and you get there by chance, you're not going to stay there.

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: Like you'll have your shot and you'll have your flash in the pan and then it will be gone. Like you can't sustain that. So I think that it's – I think that – for kids too, I like to bring in that sports element too. It's something they can relate to very easily. They know that they have to practice. There's baseball practice before there's the baseball.

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: So this is practice, too.

Tav: Yeah. And it's like, you know – and there's also the idea of like there's amateur sports and there's amateur theatrics.

Kat: Yeah.

Tav: You know, and it's not always about the prima donna in that sense...

Ev: No.

Tav: ...because there is the amateur.

Ev: That's a good example. When I was in Maine this summer – I went to Maine for holiday and we saw this community theatre show that a friend of (Keith)'s was – had written, I think. And it was all these local people that live in this tourist town. And I think almost everybody in the show were local, not the tourists that come for the summer or whatever.

Tav: Okay.

Ev: And it was just like a dorky, hilarious, hour-long musical sort of, you know, review.

Tav: Yeah.

Ev: Like a vehicle for using classic songs from the theatre.

Tav: Yeah.

Ev: Musical theatre...

Tav: Broadway musical.

((Crosstalk))

Ev: ...every song from the musical. And it was Cats.

Tav: Right. Right.

Ev: And it was Pirates of Penzance. And it was just everything that you wanted to sing. So they set it in their town.

Tav: Yeah.

Ev: And it was sort of all about tourists. It was making jokes about the tourists and about the – and about real estate, actually. And there was kind of... There was an evil character and it was the real estate agent who was trying to sell off everything and like, destroy the landscape. And it was sort of good against evil and...

Anyway, but what was really actually interesting about the play was sort of the cultural thing. It was like, “Oh wow, that must have been really neat.” Like not only just because it’s a once-a-year community play like that everybody – and we heard the sort of backdrop of it because we were – the playwright was living at the house where we were staying.

So he was sort of telling us like, “Oh yeah, so-and-so is really upset.” We were talking about Waiting for Guffman. But also because it was relevant to their community, not in a political theatre way. ...in any way, shape or form. But it was like telling – it was reflecting this reality that they all share...in this fun, kind of upbeat way. And it was for fun. Like, and they didn’t seem – you know, it didn’t really matter when somebody screwed up their lines. And in fact, it was so – because we saw the dress rehearsal, not the final show. But there were a couple of things where people just sort of stopped and like did the thing of like, “Huh? Am I supposed to go on now?”

Why was I saying that? I don’t even know. But it was just neat.

Tav: Yeah. It was the amateur...

Ev: Yeah, the amateur – what it was giving to that community, right? And how – it’s like it’s this moment for people to get to sing that song they wanted to sing or whatever. And they’re not like – maybe some of them are heading for Broadway, I don’t know. But it didn’t seem...

Like it was very much for a function that was....

It’s not separate from art...because it is – like they’re putting it on to entertain their community, which is ultimately what art is about or theatre definitely, right? And in its most popular form it’s just about telling a story and making people laugh or cry or whatever. Like, so – and it’s also for the community. Like it serves a purpose of bonding people together to – learning a new skill set, getting to sing in front of people, get you to public speak with all these things. Anyway...

Contemplating Community

“Yet almost nothing is known about the learning – cognitive and situative – that actually goes on beyond the classroom hours on sports teams, in community organizations, or through voluntary community service”
(Heath, 2001, p. 10)

The moderately successful film “Waiting for Guffman” is a mockumentary about a community theatre company. The company is composed of every odd ball character you can imagine, from the married dentists in matching K-way suits to the director himself whose questionable ‘big time’ fame in New York city helps to convince a group of people in small town Missouri to put on a play about the founder of their town, Blaine. This mockumentary succeeds because it taps some truths about community theatre. It often brings together a wide range of people with differing levels of talent and ability. Community theatre often reflects local themes, oddities and issues, whether it be the personalities of the actors’ themselves, some historic event or as in the case of the show in Maine, the pressing reality of their land issues. Evalyn’s description of the show and its workings highlight interesting links between how theatre works in a community and features of cultural psychology’s theories of learning.

As Shirley Brice Heath (2000) tells us, the study of learning outside the education system is far more limited than the study of learning within it. It is no different in drama education. Theatre as a site of learning has had little written about it and especially so the community theatre of which Evalyn speaks. I learned a lot in university about ‘theatre for social change’ or as it is termed by many now, “community-based theatre” epitomized by Boal’s “Theatre of the Oppressed”. This was referred to as theatre that was ‘about’ community,

specifically about changing the ‘actions’ of a community. What is written about theatre in drama education focuses on the psychological aspects of enactment (Henry, 2000; Stysliger, 2000; Woodson, 1999) but not on the more broad activities of the theatre such as the interconnectedness of crafts (i.e. set design, directing, lighting design) or the nature of the practice as a whole (i.e. apprenticeship and membership). Theatre’s relation to ritual has also been explored (Turner, 1974, 1982, 1986) in the context of drama education (Henry, 2000). But as David Hornbrook (1998) writes, “For many years there has been a profound antipathy in some quarters to what were disparagingly referred to as “theatre skills” (p. 52). Community theatre as produced in small towns and big cities all over this country has yet to be fully explored as a site of learning.

Evalyn says the show in Maine “was relevant to their community, not in a political theatre way.” Here Richard Schechner (2000) gives a short overview of the difference he sees between community theatre and community-based theatre:

Additionally, there is the enormous “community-based theatre” movement... Community based theatre knits together politics, local action, and healing both personal and collective. Old-fashioned “community theatre” specializes in reruns of proven Broadway hits, operettas and the like. Community-based theatre develops scripts and production styles from scratch, drawing on both local talent and for-hire specialists” (p.6).

There are also differences in the makeup of the groups that would be doing community theatre or ‘community-based’ theatre. Community-based theatre is

often initiated from outside the community by those wishing to help that community in some way. There is also the aspect of ‘helping’ that goes along with community-based theatre that although they might write scripts from scratch the overall prerogative of the piece is to ‘heal’ or call to action. The production that Evalyn witnessed had incorporated ‘proven Broadway hits’ yet within this genre they were able to reflect their own community concerns:

And it was sort of all about tourists. It was making jokes about the tourists and about the – and about real estate, actually. And there was kind of... There was an evil character and it was the real estate agent who was trying to sell off everything and like, destroy the landscape. And it was sort of good against evil and... (Evalyn)

Within a cultural psychology framework, “Activities are culturally situated and can be so familiar that they are taken-for-granted (“the way things are done”) or innovative in response to changing circumstances and needs (MacCleave & James, 2002, ¶ 32) and sometimes they can be both at the very same time. In this case their innovative response was how they managed to situate these tried and true musical numbers. The ability to transform and interpret these songs and lay them in a framework that was about the community happened because the “meaning, understandings and purposes [were] shared” (Rogoff 1990 in MacCleave & James, 2002, ¶ 32) and the activity itself was valued (MacCleave & James, 2002). It is quite clear that Schechner’s feels that an old-fashioned community theatre is merely an imitation of mainstream theatre.

Conversely he feels that theatre on a global level is far from a simple replicating form.

Spoken drama originated in Europe, a function of modernity. Spoken drama went global with colonialism. But during the 20th century, both the Western avantgarde and non-Western theatre artists, intent on recuperating their own classic and traditional forms, created alternatives to spoken drama. The two movements – experimental performance and the reaching for tradition – are intertwined. Spoken drama was exported as part of the colonial package, even as numerous influences from Africa, Asia, and Latin America streamed back to reshape the theatre of the home cultures. From a non-Western perspective, even as spoken drama was imposed and imitated, local, traditional, and classic genres soon enough reasserted themselves, becoming partners in the creation of fertile vital hybrids (Schechner, 2000, p. 5).

I would argue that it is not only the established professionals who are able to reconceive and recreate theatre on a global level. It happens in community theatre as well, as Evalyn witnessed in the ‘dorky’ Maine show. Interpretation and aesthetic judgment are key aspects of how our creativity works (Bailin, 1998) which makes learning in the theatre possible at the very local level of community theatre. As Evalyn observes, “it is not separate from art... they’re putting it on to entertain their community, which is ultimately what art is about or theatre definitely, right? And in its most popular form it’s just about telling a story and making people laugh or cry or whatever. Like, so – and it’s also for the

community". Yes and even within the heavily reified style of the Broadway musical, theatre is able to reflect the community.

In the hermeneutic circle local concerns, the particulars are interpreted through the larger more global scenes and vice versa. To explore the use of theatre in education, we need to look more deeply at how this co-composing of meaning between local and global in community theatre is a site of learning for the participants.

NARRATIVE EXCERPT G

Gerry's Directing Class

An ode to a professor. This is nostalgia. We discuss the importance of performance in the classroom, how it affects the work that you produce. We also talk at length about discipline and critiquing artworks and their respective places in our practice as teachers and as artists. Finally we discuss our hope that there is a space for theatre practice in the education system.

Questions that arise

1. What is the importance of watching and critiquing and being critiqued in the process of 'becoming' artists and teachers?
2. What is the value of performance in educational settings?
3. How can models such as communities of practice and apprenticeship fit into theatre and into the education system?

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit on day. “Does it mean having things inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real. It doesn’t happen all at once. You become.”

- From “The Velveteen Rabbit” by Margery Williams

This conversation is a bit of a riff – there is an excited buzz about it and although it is very long I felt it needed to be here in its entirety. I will intersperse my thoughts and analysis throughout instead of leaving it to the end.

Thematically, what renders this section cohesive is that we come back on several occasions to a specific class we all took together at Concordia. Gerry's directing course made a lasting impression on all of us. As Kat says in this excerpt, it was one of our 'sharpest' educational experiences within the theatre department.

Excerpt

Kat: Also Gerry's class. That wasn't a DINE course

Ev: Yeah. That's not – see I'm...

((Crosstalk))

Ev: It was a lot of like, you know, performance class.

((Tape Paused))

Tav: All right. I'm sure it's still working as it was. [*Referring to the tape recorder*]

Ev: I was just going to say about Gerry's class that I know it was not a DINE class, it was a director class. But in a sense, more so perhaps than a performance class, we were working on being a role. We were learning to be directors. Right? In a sense that's like being a teacher sort of. So – and that was – I mean obviously I think we'd all agree it was one of the best courses we ever took there.

Tav: Oh yeah.

Ev: And part of what it was for me, I know, was the experience of having to be a director in front of a group, like having to take that role, which is something we never – rarely did in DINE when – not that you had to lead the group because you did sometimes have to lead the whole group. But they were warm-ups. That's different than having...

Kat: You know why?

Ev: ...the class watch you in your role as a teacher. And sit and critique how are you doing this role with a small group of people who are watching you in that role. And that was like a really neat teaching tool, I thought.

Tav: Yeah. Yeah.

Kat: How come DINE didn't feel that way? Like even if we had DINE class for a whole day or a whole period...

Ev: We would rarely do that.

Kat: No, but we wouldn't even feel the role – like I mean even if someone was sitting there – if half the group's sitting with pads and paper and pens and the other half were being students and we were teaching, it still wouldn't feel like what it felt like in directing.

Ev: It was so warm and fuzzy.

Kat: You know what I mean?

Ev: Directing wasn't warm and fuzzy. It was scary.

Kat: In DINE when we got up to do acting and people would (give you) notes. They'd be like, "Well I sort of felt that, you know"...

Tav: But we really didn't do that that often.

Ev: We did notes in DINE but it was never...

Kat: More of an activity.

Ev: Yeah. But, you know, you do a warm-up and then sort of say, "Well how was the warm-up?" "Well you could have added this to get us ready for, you know, whatever." And...

Kat: But not you. Not you as teacher. It didn't feel as personal.

Tav: It's an interesting – that's a...

Kat: Whereas if you want to feel personal, go for practicum experience or a high school teacher's...

Ev: Yeah right. Oh right.

- Kat: Watch them teach their class that they've already had for a month. And they don't know you.
- Ev: And they're grading you.
- Kat: Exactly. And they've just met you so you're already trying to show them your personality. Then you're trying to show them your teaching style. Then you're trying to mix with the group. Then you're trying to create a group amongst them with you. That's when you feel like, you know, someone sits down and writes about you, that you feel like you're being written up on as a teacher. I think everyone should go through practicum. And you do for teacher's college but I think that teachers should go through practicum with other teachers in a way. Not to be like, you know, "You did that incorrectly," or what have you. But...
- Ev: But just to have that...
- Kat: Just to share and be in the classroom. And to see what their classroom is like.
- Ev: But it's also that step of awareness, too. Like, it's like when you're – if you're leading the warm-up in DINE or the whole lesson. You're in a very different role with yourself somehow. Or you're in a – like you might be nervous and you might be sort of watching yourself and feeling like... And you're aware that the teacher is probably monitoring you on how you're doing.
- Kat: Yeah.
- Tav: Yeah.
- Ev: So it's like it's not just – you're not – it's not just your class. Like you're not without eyes watching or whatever.
- Kat: But it's different when you're being – or maybe it's not (unintelligible).
- Ev: It is, though.
- Tav: It feels more like a job interview or something. Like the tone – and then I'll say it this way...you know, because that's the way that it's going to work.
- Ev: But it's also when you're being watched for your effectiveness – like I'm thinking of – in directing, I really – like I vividly remember directing (my scenes) in front of the class and feeling like, "Oh, that didn't work." Or it

was – like feeling so anxious about it and stuff. But – and having a heightened awareness about everything that I was doing and every move that I was making because it wasn't just that everybody was experiencing it.

Tav: No.

((Crosstalk))

Ev: ...differences.

Tav: Differences. Yeah.

Ev: If you're leading the warm-up and everybody's doing it...and you're kind of going, "No, wiggle your bum further to the left, everybody," or whatever...

Kat: Well maybe if you really had some true students in front of you and your class of teachers was sitting back and we didn't get to use them as participants...

Ev: Right.

Kat: ...maybe it would feel different.

Ev: Right. Effective. Like...

Kat: Yeah. Exactly.

Tav: Yeah. Can I just say something right now?

((Crosstalk))

Kat: They'll show you.

Tav: Exactly. That's (unintelligible) because that's it.

Ev: What?

Tav: Well...

((Crosstalk))

Ev: ...because that was what the directing thing showed me of like, oh yeah, you can – we can like do a warm-up until the cows come home. But does my exercise that I thought of in this directing thing...work this time? Is it connecting? Is it getting the product I wanted? Is it getting..?

Tav: And then all – and again, I'm just – sorry, (I'm just) saying this but you're talking about performing in a way where you have this audience thing as well, as opposed to just participants.

Ev: Right.

Tav: You know? Like – and that's – that is added pressure.

Kat: Not just spontaneous where anything can happen.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: Like with your actors, they just might not get it and they might not think that way. So you need to be very effective. And as a teacher when you're doing practicum and have other teachers watching you and they're going to watch you too. So it's a double whammy. You know? It's not you sitting on a mat with a piece of paper saying, "And then I'd guide them through this." And of course a whole group of teachers is going to nod their heads and say, "But of course you would." But Directing was a special class. It either did show the results or it didn't.

Ev: Or it didn't.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: It's that test that...

Ev: Which doesn't necessarily measure your worth...

Kat: No, no.

Ev: It's a discourse.

Kat: Doesn't matter if you even get it right. It's really good for conversation. Like that criticism or that conversation after or analyzing something like that, be it that it worked or that it didn't, creates that conversation and creates learning.

On Being Watched

Perhaps some clarification of the design of our directing class and our DINE classes is needed here. In DINE class we would try out our lesson plans on the entire class, including the instructor. In this way everyone participated in the exercises, and no one observed. In directing class we selected a scene from a play, chose actors, analyzed the play as a whole then the scene, made aesthetic judgements and gave it our own interpretation – our vision, and then directed the actors in the scene while the rest of the class, including the professor, watched. As Kat notes, it resembles a teaching practicum where someone watches you for your effectiveness.

A heightened awareness was attained in directing class because as Evalyn says, “Because it wasn’t just everyone experiencing it”. In fact, different people are experiencing your work on different levels, as either actor or audience where “everyone is watching every move you make” (Evalyn). The performative nature of the exercise itself helps create the sense of challenge for the learner. David Hornbrook (1989) writes here on the importance of audience.

The audience, so neglected by drama-in-education, is fundamental to dramatic art. Watching and listening to the dramatic text in performance and *responding* to it are not secondary activities but ones without which there would be little purpose in most of the world’s dramas. In the educational context, it is the role of the audience however informally constituted (it may consist only of the teacher or a handful of students), to

subject a dramatic text in performance to interpretation and analysis. (p. 110)

Whether you ‘got it or not’ always led to a discourse and critique unlike the ‘warm and fuzzy’ DINE classroom. We were aware as directors of the audiences’ participation; its ability to interpret and respond. Likewise in “Collision Theatre” we all directed different pieces we all watched each other direct and discerned our different styles and approaches.

As we continue our conversation we look at the role of critique in our experience both within the university and as theatre practitioners. This also leads us into a discussion of maintaining boundaries and rules in our communities of practice.

Excerpt

Tav: Yeah. And I have a theory that, you know, at the time we were in university, the people were extremely afraid of criticism.

Kat: Teachers you mean?

Tav: Teachers, students.

Kat: Yeah.

Tav: The whole feeling was...a fear of criticism. And a fear...

Kat: Or criticism – bad name on criticism like...

Ev: Criticism is not a good word.

Tav: Yeah, that...

((Crosstalk))

Ev: And even when you think it’s positive criticism...

Kat: Like constructive?

Ev: ...or constructive criticism, like what comes to mind when I think of, you know, people saying, "We're going to use constructive criticism," is that it ends up not being criticism. And that the whole thing about like, you know, in this sense, theatre as being a point where people will actually critique, you know – like there's going to be a critique of this, you know?

Kat: Yeah.

Ev: And you're so used to that at YPT. But, you know, in terms of the school system, you don't get that. You don't get that critique thing. And – but I think it's so useful. And we went around and we went to shows and what did we do? We critiqued. You know? And no holds barred at that point.

Ev: Right.

Tav: You know? And it doesn't – I'm not talking about...

Kat: Well I think – but that's also what was interesting – it's funny that – I mean that Gerry's directing class keeps was coming up. But as an educational experience it feels like it was one of the sharpest – because it engaged my mind in critiquing and really thinking things through in a way that often – partly as an actor, like when I first was in the program I was in an acting program [Kat was in Performance Studies at U of T before she came to Concordia] And you were being encouraged not to think, in some sense.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: Like you we being encouraged to like stop...

Tav: Stop thinking so much.

Kat: ...being in your head and just – and then, yeah, the irony is that, A, you're being marked in this really – like it's a weird system to have that in university when you're being marked on something quite subjective.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: Everybody said it. Everybody always says it.

Ev: Exactly. And then – and so like it should be a pass/fail system, I suppose. Or that would be my solution to that sort of thing.

But also I was going to say, and I think this ties into what you were saying about people being afraid of criticism or afraid to just say anything bad, that I think at Concordia at that time I experienced a lot of frustration around discipline. And sort of feeling like certain boundaries – rules were set up that were never adhered to that nobody ever took seriously. There was this thing when I came into performance that was if you missed three classes – if you're late for a class you're not admitted so you've missed the class. And if you've missed three classes you're out of the program. And it just – like it was disregarded from day one. Like it never happened so there were no consequences in the sense that I feel like – and that, to me, this idea relates to teaching. Or I feel like I'm figuring that out in terms of teaching.

As myself, as a young teacher...I feel like in my first year I was really bad with boundaries. Or I would sort of set rules and not have the guts to follow through with them. And that I actually learned that there's a respect that I gain as – that my students give me when I have a firm boundary and then I follow through with them. And that doesn't have to be about being mean or giving unfair criticism. Or cutting people down or whatever. But it means – but it...

Tav: But you know what?

Ev: a better product. Or it's not – and I don't mean product of play, although that's part of what that's going to be. But it makes a better class or it makes a better working unit...when you're all agreeing, "Okay, we're going to adhere to these rules."

Kat: But a problem with that is, I find or I have found or my fear is that the systems don't support that attitude anymore. Like even they themselves have the boundaries and they're bent all the time. Like all those rules are bent.

And I think the fear in high school or public education right now or any educational system right now, any school sort of feels like, well you don't want to throw them out of the room...

Tav: Right.

Kat: ...because then it becomes somebody else's problem. And it makes you look bad. And you definitely don't want to throw them out of the class and send them to the principal's office because that principal might not back up what you're doing because that principal has somebody else to answer to, which are the parents.

And even though you had some sort of a plan happening, which is you actually want to meet those parents – like that’s kind of the root. That is – those are the repercussions of those actions and that should be what’s happening. But the fear now is that – is this whole ‘everything’s under control, don’t worry about it,’ that people don’t like to take such extreme – and I don’t know what’s extreme about having someone not participate really?

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: There’s nothing extreme about saying, “Guess what? Right now you’re not going to be present in this experience.”

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: That’s it.

Ev: You know what? I think this, too – like I think about this a lot right now because I feel like the kind of strength that it takes to be principled as a teacher...or as an educator of some sort, or even as a parent for that matter – any of these kind of roles – really relates to me as an artist to having – being able to have the commitment to my ideas. Or to – like to have the strength of opinion. And you look at the people that rise to the top of their field or that are respected artists. And it’s because they have a vision and they don’t go, “Well what do you think? You don’t like it? Oh well.” They go like, “Fuck that. This is – I’m painting these weird apples and”... “You know what? That’s what I have been doing and like it or lump it.” And then – and it’s like people are actually drawn to that in some ways.

Tav: Yeah. Yeah.

Kat: To that person. Knowing they keep painting those apples. They’re talking about it.

Ev: Yeah.

Kat: And getting somewhere.

Ev: I mean its part...

Kat: It is what they are. You know? They are what they are. Like they are a little truthful.

Ev: Yeah. And they can be annoying. Like (unintelligible) made for good art, necessarily.

Tav: No. But something...

Ev: But there's something to be learned, for me. And I feel like as a woman, too in a certain way...

Tav: Yeah.

Ev: ...like to have...

Kat: Isn't that...

Ev: ...conviction...

Tav: Yeah.

Ev: ...in what I'm doing, like the strength to say, "No, that's the way."

Tav: Yeah. "That's not acceptable," or "That's not" – yeah.

Ev: "This is my idea. Here it is."

Kat: And then here's the unfortunate thing is that a lot of times that perspective, which is great – and like, you know, you basically want to instil that in younger women and yourself. You want to hold onto it. But when you meet up with someone that looks as that as either too ballsy like being way too bravado, way too tough, way too annoying, way too, you know, "This is my way or the highway, Mister,"... Or, "I don't understand your perspective. I don't get you." You know what I mean? Like you having to back up why it is that you take this so seriously, which means you have to be a little berserk because...

This is what I – I'm going to bring it back to something when you were asking us about theatre and rituals and stuff like that.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: And when I think about – and we talked about this theatre culture before, I think, with the superstition thing that might've been cut off before. But the practices for theatre happen and rituals happen when you take off your shoes.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: When you're – if you are sitting in a circle, there is a collective warm-up for the most part if you're going to be performing. It's – I mean there are

solo things that you can do but there's got to be at least a look or something amongst a group for – if you're going to be a group.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: If you're going to pretend that you're a group then I guess it doesn't matter. But if you're going to be a group, that's necessary too. But – and then I think of Oriental theatre and a lot of times just that stillness in the room of not even just having a place for shoes but having a place to leave your personality, as well. As actors they have a place where they leave themselves.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: And then they go on to be actors.

Ev: Right.

Kat: And that, for us too in theatre, is a lot of different spaces. Like maybe we – Western theatre isn't as conventional. But when I think about that stuff, that's the respect that I'm talking about. And that's the respect I'm talking about or thinking about when I – what everyone was just saying about...when you stand behind what you say. And those are principles. And those aren't things that I can then listen to someone lead me through a workshop or a learning experience and be that absolute because these are the ways – these are the measures that we're going to use to get to where we're going. And they're tried and we've used them before.

And you know what? It's like you get to kind of try it on. You get to feel whether or not that is the way that you want to be. But you always have the respect for it, regardless of the fact that you're going to use it tomorrow and use it until the end of time. You know what I mean?

Discipline and Critique – Part of 'Becoming'

Fear of criticism left a gap in our education. The usefulness of critique is its ability to bring about a dialogue between audience and performers. It provides us with checks and balances or quality control measures to guide our participation in practice. It helps us to stay connected to the larger community and to further our roles as artists, teachers and students. I remember at the beginning of one course being given a sort of mild lecture on how to respond with constructive

critique so as not to hurt anyone's feelings. But as Evalyn says, in theatre there will always be a point at which people will critique you and preparing students for this is a part of the art educator's responsibilities. Being offered more forthright critique would develop our ability to respond to it, learn from it and perhaps strengthen our convictions.

The joy we took in seeing shows and critiquing them down to the minutest of details was a great part of our camaraderie and also gave us a forum and a framework for articulating our own aesthetic. In Montreal we were exposed to both French and English theatre traditions and sometimes a unique melding of them. The French traditions of physical theatre were inspirational in our attempts to put poetry on the stage. This conjoining of forms came about from our experiences in participating in theatre both as practitioners and as audience members. Being free to critique was an important part of becoming artists in our own right.

Evalyn notes that for her, being 'principled' as an educator; including knowing her boundaries and sticking to the rules she has set up, is related to how she works in her other communities of practice, particularly in her artistic pursuits. Having a "commitment of my ideas" and the "strength of opinion" translates into having an artistic vision that people are drawn to. It is perhaps something we all discovered practicing theatre outside of university as well as in teaching.

By comparison Kat has seen problems with boundary and honest critique become systemic problems in the public school system. Interestingly she notes, "I

don't know what's so extreme about having someone not participate really".

Wenger notes that non-participation can manifest itself differently in communities of practice (1998). Non-participation can have an inbound (towards full membership) or an outbound (towards full non-participation) trajectory in its relation to that practice or it may remain as either marginal or periphery.

Scaffolding (Bruner) in the educational context provides an example of non-participation where novices may not be able to fully understand or participate in the practice as full members until they learn more (Wenger, 1998). Another example that Wenger gives is of workers looking forward to the weekend, which is a form of non-participation (1998). Non-participation can be seen as a "strategy" or as a "compromise" or as a "cover". It is not, as Kat observes, always up to the community of practice itself but is controlled by a larger institution and in possibly its least pedagogical form, "can become the defining characteristic of practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 168). As with all things that involve our participation, there are elements of choice and also lack thereof. It seems that in many classrooms, conventions and boundaries are given help and sometimes define our practice and that non-participation in this context has an element of choice that is not respected. The flip side of that is that if institutions disregard their policies around discipline than the seriousness of the endeavour is called in to question by the participants themselves. One question that arises from this is, "Are institutions such as schools and boards aware of the extent to which their own system encourages or discourages non-participation?"

Kat contemplates how certain traditions in theatre are concerned almost entirely with disciplining participants. In a way, paying attention to conventions in theatre creates a kind of built-in discipline that allows for participants to actually ‘try-on’ or ‘flirt’ with different roles. It is an act of ‘becoming’.

As the conversation continues we begin to discuss an apprenticeship model for teaching.

Excerpt

Tav: Do you remember when I was talking about apprenticeships? Like when we were talking (unintelligible) and I was saying, you know, the idea of an apprentice and whatever you want to call it – master or whatever – that they – the whole idea that you actually have more information as a teacher.

And that in your subject, whatever you’re in, you have that information, which brings you to a point where you’re a master and there is an apprenticeship, you know, happening. And that, I think, in a lot of ways that the system is trying to kind of even everybody out.

So, you know – and I’m not talking about power for power’s sake. I’m talking about you enjoying the person who is the master because they can tell you stuff. They can share – you can feel it. And also the master also needs to have the – they need – okay. It is their responsibility to share that information, that part of being a master is to share that...

Kat: Or finding a way to convey it.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: Of making sure that it’s getting...

Tav: And Gerry is an example of that, I think...

Ev: Yeah.

Tav: ...because I remember I said – you know, when we talked before, you know, and it was about being a director and he said, “But it’s also about being a teacher.” And I think that that for him, it was about one in the same because this is what he knew and this is what he was going to tell us. And this is what he was going to share.

Kat: I think it's just like opening a bag of history.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: And a bag of experiences and sharing them. Like...somebody said that nostalgia is taking something off a shelf that's got ugly areas on it – like that's dusty or that's been worn out – and painting over the ugly spots. And then handing it to the person and explaining the goodness of that moment. And that's nostalgia, that it didn't not come with ugly or bad. And it didn't not come with that toughness of having to get the experience in the first place.

But because you painted it over, that's the nostalgia. And explaining it and giving it to the person – and that's why that's so beautiful.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: And then on top of that I'm thinking, Wow, then – and then that's also advice too. You know what I mean? Like nostalgia is – if you're going to describe that as nostalgia, that's also advice. That's probably where advice comes from is more from nostalgia and good and positive...than it is from negative and saying, "I had the worst time. So my advice is that you, you know, do that too because it was awful."

Tav: Yeah. Oh yeah. Totally.

Kat: You normally give advice when you want someone to enjoy or learn.

Tav: Yeah. And I thought that was like... My mom – I was talking to her about apprenticeship. And I said, "You got taught by" – she took an art appreciation course but from one of the Group of Seven.

Kat: Oh wow. Art appreciation.

Tav: And I said, "Well what was that like?" Like, "Why was it so good?" She said, "Because he was so goddamn good." You know? Because he was so goddamn good.

Ev: Well that's sort of the same even that you think of – like I've heard from so many people. But a university like – I guess this advice was particularly about liberal arts degrees or whatever. But it was like; just take courses from good teachers. It doesn't matter what they're teaching.

Tav: Yeah.

Ev: Just take the things...

((Crosstalk))

Kat: Yeah. You're going to learn from the people that are...good at what they do.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: And that are passionate about it and that inspire.

Tav: That's so true.

Kat: If you think about that, yeah. Like...

Tav: Yeah. So – but the apprenticeship thing is also part of the problem, too. Like...

Ev: That there's not a role for that or...

Tav: There isn't a role for the – that it's not really seen in that sense.

Ev: Well it's not...

Tav: You know, you're here to learn, right? But it's this kind of like...

Kat: But not to do.

Tav: But not to do, not to actually – I don't know. But it's like we have these objectives that are educational objectives but not actually like, I don't know, related to... Do you know what I'm saying?

Kat: But that's just it. It's like you want to attach it to something, life skill-wise or real and...

Tav: But not just life skills because – or skill because when I think of skill I think of like, okay, how do I hammer this (or do that), right? But, you know, it's not just about skill. It's about – and that's the cultural thing that I'm talking about.

That's what it is, is that when you have the school it's set up about, you know, like our educational objectives, you know, and classrooms where it is more about educational objectives than understanding a subject culturally, okay, then you get into a sort of situation where the student

doesn't understand that there is an apprenticeship happening in any way, you know?

And that – and even the idea of – you said something, and I remember this, about, you know, that you don't – if we're not learning the why, you know, like why is this, you know – oh, it was about stage managers. Why aren't we learning the why? You know, like where did this come from that stage managers do this and do that and et cetera, right? But then I think about it and it's like sometimes it's up to the student to discover the why. Do you know what I mean?

Like – and by going through something, that's how you discover it. And that like if I show you this house, you know, and like well how – why it's there, you know, whatever. Like how does it happen? Well you actually have to go through it to understand, you know? I don't know if this is really frigging basic what I'm talking about or...

Ev: No, no, no.

Tav: But I think it's just like it's something that's lost and when I go into a classroom and it's just so much about like, let them, you know, see a little bit of drama today or whatever it is the hell I'm doing that, you know, isn't really that fulfilling for me as a teacher, it's because there's not that connection to, like the idea of, you know – they call me a guest artist but I don't think they look at me as a guest – as an artist. I'm a guest.

And I come in and I entertain you kids for an hour in some fashion that is – you know, we can kind of connect it to some educational objective.

((Tape Paused))

Tav: Do you have something to say to what I was just saying about the apprenticeship or are you...

Ev: I have something that I'm not sure really is what exactly you're talking about.

Tav: Okay.

Ev: But I had a thought that I'll say. It was just that it's interesting how that kind of – I think that part of the reason why there's one-on-one sort of learning or kind of learning in a relationship with somebody is a little different – I don't know, maybe I'm wrong but different than the relationship to being sort of in a group with one teacher

Tav: But – okay. But in terms of theatre, often you're learning in the group, right? So – and that – the master and apprentice happen very much like whatever if you...

Kat: The director to actor...

Tav: You know, you have a director to actor or, you know – that it's not always – you know, that in different fields it's one-on-one.

Ev: Right.

Tav: Like the idea of the tailor.

Ev: Right.

Tav: Okay?

Ev: Right.

Tav: But in other fields it's not, necessarily.

Ev: Yeah.

Tav: And even if you're, you know, like building a house or whatever, you're not building a house with two people.

Ev: Right.

Tav: You know? But you're still going to have people who are apprenticing and learning in that situation. But does that whole – I don't know. And maybe it doesn't kind of cross all fields but it just it seems to me like something that's missing in both the master side and the apprentice. You know?

Ev: Yeah.

Tav: And the problem of the way we share knowledge or the way we think knowledge is shared. And that we're always thinking about it in terms like – or – not always but a lot of the time thinking about it through, you know, these psychological like individual moulds of people, you know? You know, you're this kind of learner, you're that kind of learner. You know...

Ev: (It's really) the fact that – again, I'm not – I don't think I'm being relevant to your point. But – so that's just the way it is.

Tav: Yeah. All right.

Ev: But I was just thinking while it's funny that we don't have that many of these interesting conversations in a – like that I feel like my education was sorely lacking in mental challenge, actually. (Gerry)'s class being a great example of a class that excited me and was hard.

Tav: Yeah. Yeah.

Ev: It made my brain work. Like it made me rise to a certain kind of challenge and have to think on a new level and cut through – like understand things and grapple with that. And I honestly don't even know why this relates to what you were saying. But I was just thinking that like I wish that I had – like even with this conversation it's like a kind of – it's like making me think through things in a way that we don't engage in this kind of conversation. I don't think we're even encouraged to, especially once we're out of school.

Tav: Yeah. Yeah.

Ev: (Unintelligible) encourage you.

Tav: But then...

Ev: But my school experience, I don't even feel like it was enough. You know? And that – maybe it comes back to why we need communities of practice, right? Or it comes back to why...

Kat: You know what they call that instead?

Ev: What?

Kat: Standards of practice in teaching. Like they put it back to standards. They don't have that sense of community to share practices. They have standards that are assigned by somebody that are applied in academic – and they make categories and – you know what I mean? Like...

Tav: It's just not the same thing though, is it?

Kat: Well it's just not right.

Tav: Yeah.

Kat: And it's just not what I think that we felt in elementary school and I worry – like elementary and high school. And I worry about universities too.

Loss of Meaning, Loss of Role – Both Cherishing and Farewell

I would like to include a poem written by Margaret Atwood here before I embark on a discussion of the final excerpt,

MARSH LANGUAGES

The dark soft languages are being silenced:
Mothertongue Mothertongue Mothertongue
falling one by one back into the moon.

Language of marshes,
languages of the roots of rushes tangled
together in the ooze,
marrow cells twinning themselves
inside the warm core of the bone:
pathways of hidden light in the body fade and wink out.

The sibilants and gutturals,
the cave language, the half-light
forming at the back of the throat,
the mouth's damp velvet moulding
the lost syllable for "I" that did not mean separate,
all are becoming sounds no longer
heard because no longer spoken,
and everything that could once be said in them has
ceased to exist.

The languages of the dying suns
are themselves dying,
but even the word for this has been forgotten.
The mouth against skin, vivid and fading,
can no longer speak both cherishing and farewell.
It is now only a mouth, only skin.
There is no more longing.

Translation was never possible.
Instead there was always only
conquest, the influx
of the language of hard nouns,
the language of metal,
the language of either/or,
the one language that has eaten all the others.

(1995)

This poem began “Collision Theatre’s” production “The Former Republic of Poetry”. We struggled for a long time as to how to represent it and in the end we chose to deliver it, in the dark, at the top of the show. We also added a keening song of sorts that used just the lines “The languages of the dying suns/ are themselves dying”. For all of us the meaning of this poem was mediated through our cultural situatedness; for one it could have been about the loss of female wisdom, for another about the loss of land and history through war, yet another, the loss of the ideas that surround collectivity. In the framework of this paper, it could be interpreted as being concerned with the loss of knowledge and craft that has come to surround the teaching of drama in schools. Atwood’s sense that language/history/culture is embedded in the human body connects very strongly with the theories of cultural psychology and in this excerpt, with the discussion of apprenticeship.

In this excerpt I talk about the apprentice/master relationship being lost in education. An apprenticeship model takes into account the context-sensitive nature of how we learn and “enables apprentices to acquire and develop the tools and skills of their craft through authentic action and membership in their trade” (Brown et al, 1989, p. 39).

Though there are many innovative teachers, schools and programs act otherwise, prevalent school practices assume, more often than not, that knowledge is individual and self-structured, that schools are neutral with respect to what is learned, that concepts are abstract, relatively fixed, and

unaffected by the activity through which they are acquired and used
(Brown et al, 1989 p.37).

In fact, theatre resembles apprenticeship models in many ways.

It is perhaps because of the connotations of the word 'master' itself that has led us away from using this paradigm of learning. Yet the 'master' aspect of apprenticeship is integral to understanding how it works. The term 'master' in this context honours knowledge and skill gained through a history of practice. I think I can safely say that in all our minds, Gerry represented such a notion of mastery. As my mother's explanation of the joy of having taken a course by Arthur Lismer of the Group of Seven she said, "he was so goddamn good". Well, Gerry was just that. Kat says that it is like "opening a bag of history" but I would like to contend that it is perhaps not the 'dry, objective-sounding' bag of history we have been taught to be wary of, but the kind that is inseparable from human experience. The kind of history that perhaps would allow us to re-interpret it from our own culturally situated perspective.

In a way, Kat's beautiful description of nostalgia carries some of the sense of humanity and benevolence that is involved in my conception of mastery. The term nostalgia generally means a 'sugar coated' history. Kat touches on this but takes it to another level when she suggests the need to share nostalgia is away to give guidance. It makes me question, as a teacher and an artist what is the importance of nostalgia in our practice? In my own experience, it is sometimes my own nostalgic memories of our company that fuel my teaching practice.

In the theories of drama education there has not been a space dedicated to the idea of apprenticeship. Apprenticeship does not necessarily mean there is a one to one relationship as Lave and Wenger (1991) have asserted:

They redefined apprenticeship from its traditional one-on-one master/student or mentor/mentee relationship to one of changing participation and identity transformation in a community of practice. As persons become more familiar with the workings of a group or organizations, the roles assumed are increasingly demanding. Eventually, they are able to guide novices to assume roles that were once unfamiliar. In terms of identity, persons transform from legitimate peripheral participants to full-fledged experts (in MacCleave et al, 2002, ¶ 26).

When I think back on my experience at Concordia, I recall that we were able to really try on different roles in the theatre. We *had* to work as technicians backstage, as well as building sets and making costumes and props for shows. It was mandatory. In each job in the theatre you learned not just the overt aspects of the roles – but also many subtler facets that helped you to recognize your role in the production, shared by those who had more experience.

In drama for development, or drama as a way of knowing or even drama as a tool for addressing political and social injustice, the fundamental act of passing on a craft ---rich in variation and history has been conspicuously absent. These visions of drama education simply do not see students as having a trajectory in a practice that implies apprenticeship.

At the last, Kat mentions that she worries about that there is no sense of community sharing practice in her milieu and that it has been reduced to 'standards'. Evalyn echoes these fears as she regrets that we do not have a space to have conversations like this more often. In the end, she feels her education was 'sorely lacking in mental challenge', which is perhaps could be part of the problem of drama education as it stands. Alongside experiencing a 'mental challenge' is our need to see ourselves as being involved in important cultural activities that help to shape who we 'become' by developing our craft and initiating us as members of a practice. Drama education need not be about *just* theatre or *just* development or *just* as a way of becoming politically active. Allowing theatre, in all its diversity, to be part of a drama education, could only help to enrich the field and the students' experience.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

Formal sitting is to meditation as playing scales is to music. Even great musicians still play scales, but scales are not the purpose of music. In the same way, even experienced meditators still do formal sitting practice, but formal sitting practice is not the goal of meditation. The concert is the goal of music practice; living one's life fully is the goal of the meditation practice
(Shinzen, 2004, p.19)

Concluding Notes on the Narrative

Throughout this inquiry I have attempted to use selected principles of cultural psychology to examine connections between theatre, drama and education. This work has been grounded in narrative of conversational interviews between myself and two other co-participants. I have attempted to analyze or interpret stories and themes found in these narrative selections along with using them as a tool to help clarify my own thoughts.

Summary Remarks

In closing I have made some summary remarks on each excerpt of the narrative.

Throughout these interviews and particularly in the section entitled “Contexts for Drama and Theatre”, we explored how our dual communities of practice as educators and as artists have affected how we teach. We have all attempted to bring theatre into the drama classroom and have found it very useful in not only engaging students in art practices but also engaging ourselves in our work. “Contexts for Drama and Theatre” also looks at how theatre engages our intentionality by providing a sense of purpose to exercises we learn.

The problems with leaving theatre out of the drama classroom were articulated in “The Second Teachable Subject” wherein it became clear that a number of theories of drama education have in fact helped to limit the practice of theatre in the classroom. Also, our own teacher training leaves us with gaps in artistic knowledge that have the effect of removing the ‘art’ from drama. Therefore the tools and practices of theatre are in jeopardy of being no longer passed down. Drama classrooms become just a series of “floating lessons” (MacCleave et al. 2002).

In “Serving the Text”, I call into question the current discourse on free expression as the only mode in which students can access their creativity. Ernst Kris writes

We have long come to realise that art is not produced in an empty space, that no artist is independent of predecessors and models, that he no less than the scientist and the philosopher is part of a specific tradition and works in a structured area of problems. The degree of mastery within this framework and, as least in certain periods, the freedom to modify these stringencies are presumably part of the complex scale by which achievement is being measured (in Bailin, 1998, p. 43)

I have argued in this section that acting within constraints and having access to theatre skills does not necessarily limit our creativity – it in many cases is a way of actually discovering it.

Reification and participation act in concert to engage members in the world of their practice. My analysis of Ev’s ‘teachable moment’ leads to an

exploration of the teacher's role of initiating students into practice. The example demonstrates how teachers and students alike are able to negotiate the meaning of reified rituals in theatre practice while also engaging with and developing a shared repertoire.

Reified practices and artefacts in the "Aladdin" section act as positive constraints on the participants. "Aladdin" demonstrates how reified customs of the theatre particularly its notions of mutual accountability and the archetypal nature of 'the stage' help to sustain learner engagement in practice. This section also demonstrates how important it is for students to feel they are involved in culturally valued activities.

"The Maine Community" analysis articulates a debate about the efficacy of community theatre forms. In particular, it is community theatre's oscillation between local and global matters and practices that call into question some stereotypes associated with it. It is a widely used and accessible theatre form that perhaps needs to be investigated more to understand its educational benefits.

The audience and performer dialogue in all its forms, from in-class critiques to performed and reviewed plays, enable theatre artists, teachers and students to define their artistic practices and find forums for expression in the larger world. As in "The Maine Community", "Gerry's Directing Class" speaks to the necessity of having local and global arenas inform one another, as it is what necessarily drives theatre as a community of practice.

And finally "Gerry's Directing Class" investigates how theatre can help facilitate a sense of belonging that is forged through the interaction between

community members with different levels of experience attempting to co-create their histories and practices in a dynamic and evolving way. How an apprenticeship model applies to theatre education is also explored particularly the need for strong teacher/practitioners.

Drama Education is an Art Education

I have a good friend who as an art student in Montreal took photos of the outlines of torn down buildings left on other buildings. They were like tracing marks left behind, what was left of their history, their place. I have another good friend who in his art practice would take old machines (TVs, turntables, vacuum cleaners) and reconfigure them to make 'new' machines (one was entitled 'The Orgasmatron'). Both these artists were accomplished in their art. The art student in Montreal did fantastic life-drawings, and the sculptor was also a dab hand at printmaking. They both have studied art; its histories and its practices and both had become skillful at manipulating its tools. Their own art did not just copy what other artists had produced before, even if they used the same tools and were privy to the same body of knowledge. Artists affect and are affected by the traditions and practices in which they work. Drama is part of the arts curriculum. That is a fact. If so, then it needs to be able to hold itself up as an artistic practice with all the requisite components.

I would like to formally disagree with that professor in my theatre class; theatre is *not* a dying art. It may have changed (one only has to watch a reality television show to see how unrecognizably) but it still exists around the world on

stages, in streets, and parks. The one place where its existence is threatened is in the drama classroom.

For the drama classroom to change, it is important to start looking at theatre as a community of practice that is informed by the intersubjective and co-constituting nature of persons and their worlds. In this view culture and self (theatre and theatre artists) are continually evolving as they interpret and re-make their identities in culture. To do this one needs to have a cultural tool kit (skill and craft and artistic fluency) to enable participation. As theatre, like other arts, is a community of practice that is historically and culturally situated, our interaction with its reified forms helps to sustain our engagement in practice and gives us a rich context in which to work.

Through using the narrative for analysis, illumination and inspiration I have gathered together a set of points that helped me to place theatre in the drama classroom as an important part of the curriculum. Here, I will list some points that help to debunk some myths about the efficacy of theatre practice in drama education:

1. Theatre is not about mimicry
2. Creativity is possible in theatre; in fact it is generally inevitable.
3. Using scripts does not necessarily impose binding constraints to student expression and creativity.
4. Theatre skills and craft are learned through practice.
5. Theatre and drama are art forms with a historically rich knowledge base.

6. Art is the purpose of theatre and drama: not moral education, development or learning another subject, although these can be by-products of a theatre and drama education.
7. There is not only one way to produce theatre – the work of “Collision Theatre” is an example of a different way in which theatre can be developed.
8. The audience is an integral part of understanding artistic practice in drama.
9. Roles in the theatre are not necessarily stultifying. They can help the learner to identify with the practice and create a sense of belonging.
10. Transparency of theatrical enterprise helps students to engage with it.

Attending Theatre, Tending to Culture

Finally I end these concluding thoughts with one last question. How might theatre’s place in education effect its place in the larger world? To address this question I would am again calling on the assistance of one of the participants.

Here is reprint of an e-mail that Evalyn sent me recently after completing her first ‘mainstage’ show in Toronto,

Hey Tav,

I’m so glad to hear from you -- I’ve been meaning to be in touch for an age, but correspondence clearly not being my strong suit even (and perhaps especially) in the email age...you beat me to it.

I’m so excited to read your final thesis -- how fun. I miss our conversations, too -- those seem like such wide-eyed times, in retrospect.

It's been really something to finally "arrive" at the stage of having a show produced on mainstage at a respectable (or so you might think) alternative theatre in Toronto -- and find it not quite the experience you thought it would be. The state of theatre in Toronto -- or perhaps, more to the point, the state of theatre-going -- is shockingly, distressingly apathetic. The whole series presented at Passe Muraille has been SO under-attended, it's very disheartening. All the work I've seen presented has been high calibre, really very fine (with the exception of one piece, which ironically is the one all the critics seemed to LOVE LOVE LOVE, but I HATED HATED HATED...but, that's life on the edge I guess...). So if the work is good, relevant, current, boundary pushing, and performances are great, and even the reviews are good, why are the people not coming? It's added up to made me become even more existential and confused about the meaning theatre in our world - well, our culture, our city, our times. It makes me want to fall on my sword, if you know what I mean.

Funny, though: all this existential questioning doesn't at all make me question how theatre functions as a teaching / learning tool, in educational settings and in adolescent experience: in fact, it seems so fundamental, so obviously irreplaceable. When I think back on my own high school experience, drama and theatre were the most profound, meaningful and memorable parts about it. But to arrive at a point where you recognise yourself as an adult, but feel like this art you've dedicated yourself to all this time can't meet you there...like the adult world doesn't seem to really make an important place for it....it's strange and surreal.

But enough of my musings. Can't wait to read your thesis.

Lots of love to all your boys

xo ev

The other day I was in a coffee shop with my husband who is a visual artist. There was a show of photographs on the walls. We looked at them before our food arrived. They were by different artists with a diverse variety of subjects presented. My husband said to me as we ate, that he thought the show was perhaps 'Buddhist'. I looked at him quizzically, "How *on earth* did you come to that conclusion?" I asked.

“By how the artists’ engage with the subject matter”, he replied.

I thought he was being silly. As we left the restaurant I had a look at the description of the show – Buddhism inspired it.

How we see the world, how we read it, comes through our accumulated experience and interaction with culture. In this case, my husband, who has been taught to understand the language of visual art, was able to see and discern more of its intended meaning than I was.

Evalyn’s experience identifies one of the problems of not having theatre in the classroom – it becomes ‘unknown’ as an art and unique skills in understanding it and having a dialogue with it are lost.

In the drama classroom we are hopefully creating some theatre artists, but also importantly, we are creating an audience for it.

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Appendix A

Letter of Informed Consent

As a graduate student at Mount Saint Vincent University I am conducting research for the thesis component of an M.A. Ed in Educational Psychology. I am asking for your participation in a series of conversations that will be a component of this research.

I am interested in exploring how theatre is established as community of practice and how cultural tools of theatre can be reflected in the work of drama educators.

Because we attended the same university program to train as drama educators and subsequently worked together to create theatre, I have chosen a method of research that allows us to talk freely about our shared experiences. This research will be conducted as hermeneutic conversations where we are able to analyze together our involvement in these communities of practice. I myself would be a co-participant in this research. I hope that we will be able to benefit from our reflections particularly on the role of theatre in the educational context as we have experienced it.

Three or possibly four conversations are required if you choose to participate in this research. You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time during the course of the research. The interviews will be audiotaped and if any participant feels that these audiotapes should be destroyed after the completion of the project, this will be done. I will prepare typed transcripts of the audio

recording that I will share with participants so that they may make changes to them before they are included in any written text of this research. The completed analysis of the narrative will also be shared with participants for their review and comments before publication. They will also be available to you for the purpose of reflecting on what has been discussed.

I would like to acknowledge your contribution as participants in this research by citing you in the text. However, as members of the university community may read this research, you may wish to choose remain anonymous and choose a pseudonym.

Research:

Octavia James
Phone: (902) 876-5007

To speak to a representative of Mount Saint Vincent University who is not involved in this research project contact :

Dr. Andrew Manning
Phone: (902) 457-6100
Email: andrewmanning@msvu.ca

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

I, _____ am aware of the purpose of the research project being conducted by _____ and I am willing to participate under the terms outlined in a letter of informed consent which I received. My participation in this project is voluntary and I understand that I may withdraw at any time.

Signature

Date

Please make a check in this box if you wish the audiotapes to be destroyed after the project is completed

I wish to be acknowledged for my contribution to this research using the following name:
