

**INSIDE ACTIVATED DRAMA PEDAGOGY**

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I dedicate this project to  
the student cast and crew of our collective

*The Way Back:*  
*Why life Sucks Sometimes and How to Discover Your Real Self*  
Fall 2011

This is my story and your story too.

## **Abstract**

This is a story of a life lived as an artist and teacher. This is a story of living and writing inside dramatic space while activating creative pedagogy. What does it mean to create inside a theatrical collaborative production? In the midst of meaning making in every student written/teacher directed drama that I initiate, I question what our collaborations really are? Are they authentic voice(s) of students or the mimicry and manipulation of their teacher? Creating theatre is a complex and multi-dimensional activity. The voices heard on the stage are a messy mixture of spin off ideas, inspirations, and collaboration. Students come to their authentic voice and I learn to participate in collaborative theatre without my voice interfering with theirs. Drama education, for both students and teachers, contributes to developing imagination, to increase flexibility and creativity. It creates energy to activate knowledge, to gain understanding and experience about the world. Researching this lived drama research experience activates cognition to explore new paths of being. Students are not passive recipients of knowledge and teachers cannot be satisfied with a simplistic, inactive understanding of collaborative work. The very foundation of this project is that I live and write myself as I actively research myself as a collaborative leading teacher. This project offers knowledge and understanding of the lived experience of arts-based teachers and includes reflections from students that will deepen our understanding of the arts-based student.



### **Acknowledgments**

Thank you, my darling parents for always giving me an accepting and loving home to fly to whenever I need a hug or a hiding place. You are my safety net.

*Hvala, moja najbolji prijatelj*, Michael Panic, for loving me. You are my blessing.

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## Chapter One: Inside Activated Drama Pedagogy

*This is my story*  
*of coming*  
*to the brink*  
*the edge*  
*the border*  
*the precipice*  
  
*the abyss*  
  
*of not caring*                      *of*      *dis*              *engag*              *ing*                      *not doing*  
  
*of withdrawing*  
  
*of letting things spoil*  
  
*of being detached from*                      *life*  
  
*finding the path v a n i s h e d*  
  
*being dead to pleasures*  
  
*turning away*                      *tuning out*  
  
*rejecting life.*  
  
*This is my story of falling, slipping, tipping,*  
*being swept into and finding realizing*  
*waking up to recognizing*  
*myself in the void.*  
  
*This is my story of being disengaged from my authentic self.*  
  
*And this is my story of*  
*living claiming understanding love*  
*loving others and focusing on goals and finding*  
*wonder of just getting off the couch of mindfulness of*  
*being blessed*                      *being me again*                      *finding the way back.*

*This is my story and your story too.*

## Prologue

This is my story of a life lived as an artist and teacher. This is a story of living and writing inside dramatic space while activating drama pedagogy. This is a story of exploring with students while making research real. This is a story of giving life to concepts and theories. This is a story of taking two and half months to create a collective creation on student engagement and *writing* the experience rather than writing *of* the experience (1990, Van Manen). And this is a story to reflect through orbitals of narrative analysis (Fowler, 2006).

## Research Question

What does it mean for an artist and teacher to activate pedagogical spaces while creating inside a theatrical collaborative production with students? This guiding research question, reflects a post-structural belief that “reality is multiple and shifting and that truths evolve and transform over time” (Taylor, 1996, p. 37). The lived experience-based paradigm of a phenomenological practitioner in education allows me to be open to the range of “diverse interactions, which inform an [artistic-aesthetic] educational event” (Taylor, 1996, p. 37). My teaching praxis supports a multiplicity of meanings for the term *pedagogical space*. It is a space to locate the learning process within a mental framework in which “all the ideas, principles, and cognitive tools fit into a format that will...[support] imaginative lessons and units” (Egan, 2005, p. 39).

What does it mean to create inside a theatrical collaborative production? I do not stand on the edge of the productions I create. I am in the midst of meaning making in every student written/teacher directed drama I initiate. I question what our collaborations really are: the authentic voice(s) of students or the mimicry and manipulation of their

teacher? Creating theatre is a complex and multi-dimensional activity. The voices heard on the stage are a messy mixture of spin off ideas, inspirations, and collaboration. I find it incredibly challenging to let go of my own ideas while at the same time include those from the other participants. Students finding their authentic voice and finding a way for me to participate in collaborative theatre without my voice interfering with theirs is my life's vocation: toiling inside the dramatic process.

Drama education, contributes to developing imagination, which increases flexibility, creativity, and contains an energy to activate knowledge known and unknown to gain understanding and experience about the world (Egan, 2005). Movement and action are fundamental for humans and learning. Researching lived experience will activate my own cognition and push me to explore new paths of being through flexibility and creativity. I do not treat my students as passive recipients of knowledge so I will not allow myself to be satisfied with a simplistic, inactive understanding of my work. The very foundation of this project is that I will be living and writing myself while actively researching, reflecting and analyzing.

I turn to the words of drama educator, Dr. Lynn Fels (2003) to define creativity in drama education pedagogy: “performance not as a process nor as product, but as breath, intermingling, unexpected journey landscapes reeling against the sky in a sudden moment of recognition” (as cited in Hasbe-Ludt & Hurren, 2003, p. 173). It is in the “moment of recognition” that I have a deep sense of what this job of education is really about, a generational understanding of the human condition and a connectedness to the world at a visceral level (as cited in Hasbe-Ludt & Hurren, 2003, p. 173). I honour the individual, the cyclical nature of master and apprentice learning, and a learning process that

embodies reflective self-evaluation and co-operative learning situations. Imagination is the key for students to embrace, in complex ways, our emotional lives. “To bring knowledge to life in students’ minds we must introduce it to students in the context of the human hopes, fears, and passions in which it finds its fullest meaning. The best tool for doing this is the imagination” (Egan, 2005, p. xii).

I need to understand the intertwined nature of pedagogical spaces of the intellectual, the physical, the emotional, and the lived. I reference the existential dimensions of spatiality, temporality, corporeality, and relationality to help navigate my reflective exploration of pedagogical spaces (van Manen, 1997). This project proposes to increase the knowledge and understanding of the lived experience of arts-based teachers. This study also includes reflections from students that will deepen understanding of the arts-based student. Many high school drama students refer to the drama room as their second home, they feel safe there to be who they really are. Perhaps their lived experiences will begin to explain how an ordinary urban Canadian high school becomes home.



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Drama as Aesthetic Constructivism**

Drama education, as I have lived it, is a constructivist epistemology. More than just a convenient label to legitimize the arts, aesthetic constructivism balances subjective and objective truth, rational and aesthetic knowing and emotional and rational thought (Rasmussen, 2010). Dewey (1934/2005) defines the experiential aesthetic experience as a mode of knowledge. Joining Dewey's theory of creating meaning through social, participative behaviour or social constructivism is the work of Lev Vygotsky. Drama education, with its experiential process of creating meaning and knowing fits the constructivist's view that knowledge is developed under the influence of "all present and interacting language, materials, environment, bodily acts, cognitive and affective representations...[meaning] situated experience and generated cognition does not emerge primarily from 'literature or curriculum' alone but possibly from all locally invested stimuli and experience" (Rasmussen, 2007, p. 533).

The artistTeacher lives a constructivist's epistemology through reflective praxis. Taylor (2000) understands a drama educator's praxis as going beyond active planning, teaching and assessing but also reflecting on the interplay between theory and practice through action. This action introduces student self-evaluation to best practice enhancing student self-efficacy and increasing intrinsic motivation (Rolheiser, C., & Ross, 2001). The teacher's role of telling the class whether or not its consensus corresponds to or differs from the prevailing consensus of the larger learner community is an amazing definition of our job (Bruffee, 1999). It is a striking notion, the teacher representing a body of knowledge, a standard that their students strive to attain. It takes away the image

of students as empty shells being filled by the knowledgeable teacher. Rather the students are on a journey to join the teacher in a joyous state with a community of learners. The idea of the student becoming the teacher, knowledge expanding through the ages is engaging. It connects with the process of negotiating that goes “beyond reliance upon external authority toward learning more about the process by which ideas, values, and standards are constructed, established, and maintained by communities of knowledgeable peers” (Bruffee, 1999, p. 47). Hope lies in the craft of interdependence to solve the challenging issues of the future. Teaching students to work together, depending on each other, constructing knowledge, and belonging to a learning community is exactly what I signed up for when I began this sacred vocation (hooks, 1994).

### **Drama vs Theatre**

My personal praxis led me to abandon advice given to me by my mentors. They educate in a teacher-centred style that focuses on the big theatre production and the teacher-as-director; dictator of productions ambitiously staged with questionable educational value (O’Neill as cited in Taylor & Warner, 2006). Their classroom work is skill-based rather than holistic, experiential and secondary in importance, the main emphasis being the extra-curricular production: the flashy sets, expensive ticket prices, and elitist star-system for student-actors. My Bachelor degree training in university covered the elements of a liberal education in theatre: acting, directing, voice work, movement, and technical theatre. I was trained in the art form of theatre, additionally however, I studied process drama as conceived by its founder British-born Dorothy Heathcote and fellow researchers: Brian Way, Gavin Bolton, Cecily O’Neill and Canadian David Booth.

Process drama is a student-centred approach to drama education. Process drama is an experiential form of self-expression guided by the imagination. Whether process drama is focused on skill development, creative inclination or personal development the process of the teacher working in/out of role with students is a hallmark of the concept. Traditional scripts and acting techniques are abandoned for a demanding pedagogy that requires the teacher to react in the moment as the story unfolds. Characteristic of process drama students react and recreate their imagined world as it is lived in the moment. Typically students are working within the drama for half of any given class time. Revisiting is part of the continuum of process drama that also includes a stimulus, preparation of scene, and moments to step out of the drama to refocus before caring on and finish with reflection. Much research has been devoted to the role of the teacher who occupies a space between performing when needed, guiding when needed and observing and allowing the drama to progress as the students intend. “If the event is to remain genuinely improvisatory, implying spontaneity, uncertainty, ingenuity, exploration and discovery, the sequences of episodes or scenes will not be predetermined, but discovered” (O’Neill as cited in Taylor, 2000, p. 105).

A tedious debate still rages between the learner outcomes of simplified theatre training in Canadian schools aimed to keep theatre included in governmental funding schemes and the complicated process-based format of drama education with its uncompromising emphasis on experiential knowledge and an artistic way of knowing (O’Neill as cited in Taylor & Warner (Eds.), 2006). This debate is unproductive and soulless. “Drama and theatre are not just part of the same continuum; they are the same medium, whether or not they are concerned with presentation to an audience” (O’Neill as

cited in Taylor & Warner (Eds.), 2006, p. 32). Both words: theatre and drama come to us from Greek antiquity: theatre from *theatron* means to behold and drama from *dran* or to do or act (Taylor, 2000). The energy of drama's action intrigues and provokes. Theatre's performance or that which the audience beholds, demands attention and hates to be ignored.

Lost in the fog of ego and a resistance to change are the exciting contemporary offerings of Canadian scholars: Dr. Lynn Fels' theatre as performative inquiry is a dynamic form to explore curriculum *through* drama (Fels, 2008, 2004), Dr. Diane Conrad creates with at risk students in Canadian juvenile institutions (Conrad, 2007) or Dr. Kathleen Gallagher who enhances self-efficacy in girls through drama (Gallagher, 2000). Allowing educational drama to explore social issues through ethnographic script writing by students opens the door to the exciting potential of comprehensive interdisciplinary arts education which allows for an understanding of art that goes beyond the art form and applies that knowledge to real life (Lazarus, 2004). Americans Dr. Johnny Saldaña and Dr. Philip Taylor along with Canadian Dr. George Belliveau empower student voices through collective creations on social issues or fictional stories (Belliveau, 2000; Saldaña 2005; Taylor 2000, 2003). Their learner-centred approach encourages students to research and write productions for learning *through* performing (Belliveau, 2000 & Saladaña, 2005).

To stay in step with educational initiatives like Alberta Education 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner drama education needs to refocus on what the medium does best: engage students in a wide-awake knowing of the perceived world and the imagined world (Greene as cited in Lazarus, 2004). As part of current discussions by Alberta Education envisioning

21<sup>st</sup> century learning, creativity is identified as a key competency required for all Alberta students to master. Competencies, defined by Alberta Education “enable students to understand their world, engage fully in their education, relate well to others, manage their lives wisely, and contribute positively to their communities” (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 9).

Alberta students...take advantage of opportunities to be productive and have an appreciation for creative works. They are curious and open to new ideas. They demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in response to change. They demonstrate initiative, imagination, spontaneity and ingenuity when engaging in a variety of creative processes to develop original ideas. They recognize that they can take risks, learn from their mistakes and in doing so, develop resiliency. They persevere, demonstrate optimism, maintain a positive attitude, and see opportunities when faced with obstacles and challenges. (Alberta Education, 2010, p.10).

Drama education could guarantee its place in Alberta schools through judicious integration of the medium’s exciting and artistic way of knowing. This list of skills prized by 21<sup>st</sup> century learners is the backbone of the performing arts. Drama education is an empowering occasion that opens spaces for creative agency (Conrad, 2007).

### **Collaborative Collectives**

Collaborative productions, as a form of theatre, are an important medium for knowledge production (Gallagher, 2007). The process of creating a theatrical production has always involved researching human life resulting in social commentaries that hold a mirror up to our motivations, dreams, and desires. Theatre shrinks the world, creating “connections between our lived realities and those of others (un)like us” (Gallagher, 2007, p. 111). This could be said about traditional theatre and is in fact a very clear definition of play performing. How do collaborative productions differ from traditional plays?

O'Neill (1994 as cited in Taylor & Warner (Eds.), 2006) defines what collaborative productions are not: they do not use the traditional language of climax, plots and sub plots but rather they employ “the language of episodes, transformation, ritual spectatorship, alienation and fragmentation” (p. 44). O'Neill adds that co-artistry and shared responsibility for the direction of the production plus negotiation of meaning clearly defines collaborative productions from the top-down director-driven art of traditional theatre (1994 as cited in Taylor & Warner (Eds.), 2006).

Taylor (2003) defines collaborative productions from a social justice perspective: a production where individuals connect with and support one another and where opportunities are provided for groups to voice who they are and what they aspire to become, a medium through which storytellers can step into the perspectives of others and gain entry points to different worldviews, an art form central to storytelling, to healing, to teaching, and to learning. Taylor (2003) cautions collaborative production participants of the dangers of emphasizing “a moral platitude or to insist on a course of action. Simple solutions to life's problems rarely address the complex and challenging dilemmas in which people find themselves” (p. 29).

Belliveau (2006) reminds that along with creating meaningful explorations collaborative productions are an “ever-evolving yet polished product” (p. 140). These creations are for an audience; they must include performance concept consideration of motif, colour, set, costumes, lighting, sound, props, and digital technology. Professional grade acting is also required. Collaborative productions stretch an actor to perform abstract movement or vocal pieces as well as traditional scenes and monologues.

It is not surprising that collaborative productions demand polished acting and scenography as this theatrical form was conceived by a Canadian commercial theatre company. In 1972, Paul Thompson, artistic director of Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille, coined the phrase collective creation or collaborative production to describe his process for involving actors in the creation of plays (Lang, 2007). As a company they travelled to communities, collected stories and created productions that relied on theatricality rather than realism; utilizing representational conventions: soundscapes, monologues, movement work, and collective playwriting. It is impossible to verify the providence of collaborative theatre or completely credit Theatre Passe Muraille with being the first to create this dynamic theatrical form but they were the first to do so in a professional setting. Saldaña (2005), a prolific researcher in ethnodrama, explains that Theatre Passe Muraille is unique as "it is rare that an original work developed by a group devoted to such causes will be remounted by another theatre company. These performance pieces sacrifice mainstream canonicity in exchange for socially conscious merit and higher social purpose" (p. 8). Being unique does not make Theatre Passe Muraille exclusive, many university theatre classes in the United Kingdom and Australia were experimenting with a collaborative form of theatre at the same time Canada's Theatre Passe Muraille was producing their famous *Farm Show* in 1972 (Lang, 1999). Contemporary practitioners are comfortable with this ambiguity; it has limited impact on the power of collective productions to create multiple places of encounter (Taylor, 2003).

A collaborative production differs from an ethnodrama primarily because an ethnodrama is created through ethnographic research methods: collected narratives, interviews, field notes, journal entries, and then data is then dramatized. The actors speak

the exact words of the people and issues that the ethnodrama is researching. Saldaña (2005) refers an ethnodrama as “creative non-fiction” equating it to some genres of qualitative inquiry (p. 3). Collaborative productions or collectives also rely on authentic data researched by the participants but artistic license filters the material in favour of “a polyphonic narrative with a spectrum of voices and no leading roles” (Saldaña, 2005, p. 17). An ethnodrama protects the verisimilitude and the universality of the script through working with primary source material only: more reality than artistry (Saldaña, 2005).

The process of creating a collaborated production is organic rather than prescriptive. Theatre making is messy not a “sterile formalism or an effete aestheticism” (O’Neill, 1978, as cited in Taylor & Warner (Eds.), 2006, p. 72). The roots of art are in direct human experiences that are ever changing in their interaction between people and their environment (Fels, 2002). Participants of collaborative collectives must be brave enough to “project themselves into the work—they need to encounter it and allow it to speak to them” (Taylor, 2003, p. 70). Practically, this encounter begins with pre-text material that contains the seeds of enquiry (Taylor & Warner, 2006). Pre-text material weaves ideas, images, and patterns “making intertextual links” with the participants’ personal experiences creating a frame for the drama to be created within (Schneider, Crumpler, & Rogers (Eds.), 2006, p. 83). Framing or containment limits the collective to the adage: theatre is life with the boring parts taken out. Far from being arbitrary, the art of reducing a topic to its salient core is the hallmark of successful productions (Saldaña, 2005).

Encounters with the pre-text material take on a highly theatrical nature as participants explore a multitude of conventions creating improvised material, characters,



scenes, monologues, and visual or oral vignettes that are then negotiated into the frame of the production. It is at this stage of the process that participants must be comfortable living with ambiguity. In fact, they need to be dominated by the object of their own creation and let the process take over; resisting results in short-circuiting the process and creating contrived work (O'Neill, 1978, as cited in Taylor & Warner (Eds.), 2006). If a company is mature and courageous enough to accept, with humility, that they cannot control the process the end product will be creative. It will also have been a site in which the performativity "represents the performance of subjectivity, a means by which students can attain political agency as they learn to critique dominate cultural paradigms from the perspective of personal memories and cultural histories" (Garoian, 2001 as cited in Medina, Belliveau, & Weltsek, 2007, p. 141). This process is complex but exciting as it opens up institutions and cultural practices for critical inspection and evaluation. Greene (1995) refers to this as seeing things big rather than small or reduced to surface features or statistics. Collectives push for the stories beyond simple facts and figures.

How a production is refined and edited after the explorative stage is basic for traditional as well as collaborated collectives. The difference lies in the power structure. The ensemble as a whole decides what is kept and what is edited out. This is in contrast to the solitary reductions made by the traditional playwright. An astute leader and carefully cultivated rules of respect make this dynamic group editing a location of creative choices and expansive moments. Neelands (2009) affirms that a safe zone gives witness to the power of the ensemble as a way of working to push young people towards new levels of collective social and artistic excellence. Powerful synergy is released through collective artistry and solidarity of being and purpose (Neelands, 2009). With

the goal of creating a verisimilitude that can be labeled artistic integrity around value-laden topics the ensemble must safeguard the production by presenting a polyphonic narrative engaging a spectrum of voices, choices and opinions (Saldaña, 2005). How that goal is manifested on a stage pushes the ensembles' conversations and efforts to the more pragmatic issues of form.

Exploring with theatrical conventions is the joy of a collaborative production. The audience knows they are not attending a conventional production and are more willing to suspend their hold on reality or concrete timelines. Narratives may be played in their totality or broken into episodes inter-laced with monologues, movement pieces, and sound work. A simple monologue (conversation between one character and the audience) can be enhanced with the participation and commentary of the ensemble acting like the chorus of Greek antiquity. This participation can be a combination of vocal and physical choices, with or without masks enhanced with digital sound effects or visual aids. Creative tinkering can be applied to all conventions: scenes, whole group movement pieces, choral speaking performances, soundscapes based on words or made sounds, dance choreography, tableau, sculptures, flashbacks, and montages. Juxtapositions in attitudes or opinions benefit from a broad range of conventions where multiple perspectives can be highlighted or presented with economy, epiphany, or empathy maximizing audience engagement.

Scenography or the elements of scenery, props, costumes, make-up, lighting, sound effects, and technology may be deceptively simple in collaborative collectives. Scenography establishes time and place, evokes mood, and creates atmosphere problematic when a collective production demands numerous possible access points for

complicated conventions. Basic design elements of colour, texture, line, and shape must be considered from an emotional viewpoint: are the emotions evoked appropriate for the production? Traditionally, collectives use abstract shaped sets with many levels or acting areas, painted uniformly, so as to not create just one mood or atmosphere. Sound can be used ambitiously to move the audience into different locations. The same is true for props. They are easier for actors to grab and use than clumsy set changes. Costumes, like the set, tend generally to inform or denote the time period or style of the character. The actor may play many different characters without the luxury of traditional exits written in especially for costume changes. Character can be indicated through a hat or simple costume piece. Projections of video or still images are very effective short-cut journeys to locations when it is important to transport the audience to a setting that is detail dependant.

Creating a collaborative collective offers a very particular lens or perspective on a subject. The kinaesthetic and emotional nature of performance evokes a response that is not available through other art forms (Belliveau, 2006). Collectives entertain an audience. Collectives initiate and invite the voices of the performer and the audience into a dialogue of action and change. Collectives are a meaningful method of inquiry-based learning. Collectives activate creative pedagogy.

### **Student Self-Reflections**

Is *reflect* the root word I should be using to describe the activity my students have been engaged in? I find the word ambiguous: *reflecting* bounces light or sound waves off an image without the image being effected by the experience and *reflecting* can also mean representing, in an authentic manner or embodying, that which something stands for.

Maybe both definitions cover the spectrum of responses: the raw, off the cuff first impressions and the deeper comments that result from thoughtful consideration and contemplation. For reassurance I consider the etymology of reflect: Middle English: from Old French *reflector* or Latin *reflectere*, from *re-* 'back' + *flectere* 'to bend' (Oxford Dictionary, online). hooks would suggest I *bend* my understanding of students' reflections and just celebrate student reflections as a dynamic dialogue and "our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voice, in recognition that everyone influences...everyone contributes" (hooks, 1994, p. 8). Eisner (2002) adds personal transformation is possible when students are given the opportunity to "connect what they have learned in their school to the world beyond it" (p.13).

Education in drama is a "personally transforming cultural response" which, makes the invisible influences of culture visible and discussable and serves as mirror of who we are and what we may become (Neelands, as cited in Innes, Moss & Smigiel, 2001, p. 212). Students involved in theatre making need the opportunity to voice their experience. As educators we cannot expect to fully comprehend the learning experiences as processed by our students. The results of students' reflections are epistemological. Our knowledge of the creative process of working inside a drama increases the more all participants are allowed to voice their unique experience. Greene (2000) reminds us that the story is never compete, rather there is always more to be discovered through multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points.

The 20 student-actors cast in creating the collaborative collective: *The Way Back* created a "heartscape—an expansive and energetic and enthusiastic space where people

can connect heartfully in writing truth” (Leggo, 2007, p. 36). Our praxis included a small black journal that each student was given to personalize as they wished. They were asked to bring it to every rehearsal. These journals became a physical witness to the creative process of each individual student-actor.

### **Photographs as Research Narratives**

The process of using photographs of our collaborative collective as additional narrative for the lived experience of the various pedagogical sites activated during our rehearsals needs framing. Photographs are easy to manipulate making their use in the social sciences a traditionally unreliable source of documentary evidence (Weidel, 1995). Why should this study of the lived experience of the creative process in collaboration trust words over pictures (Weidel, 1995)? I want to risk objectivity. Why should the observer and their logbook of descriptions warrant trust over a present or witnessed photograph of the action captured in the moment with its “relationship to memory and reconstruction of history” (Weidel, 1995, p. 73)? I agree with Emme and Kirova (2010) the notion of the camera as a supplement to our perceptions.

Photographs are present in the moment artifacts of narrative research. “A photograph creates an immediate if vicarious sense of being here that is stronger than most readers will get from reading a description or selected interview transcripts” (Weidel, 1995, p. 74). People are experts in their own lives. When used as a tool for self-empowerment, photographs find their voice by stimulating conversations and reflections of the captured event (Wang & Lykes as cited by Mitchell & Allnutt in Knowles & Coles (Eds.), 2008). Their capacity to stimulate talk is derived from photographs “as social

documents in social science research” (Mitchell & Allnutt in Knowles & Coles (Eds.), 2008, p. 251).

Tableau, is understood in theatre, as physical blocking, the backbone of all productions. Visual pantomime is theatre without text. This technique is used to check for clarity. Can action alone tell the story? Similar to turning the volume down on the television set; some stories are engagingly communicative while others become incomprehensible (Converse, 1995). In theatre, tableau interrupts the actors’ flow of energy that cycles between intention, reaction and realization. All elements of this reflex excitability cycle “induce physical changes in the body, which in turn produce emotional change and then evoked an emotional reflex in the audience” (Felner, 1990, p. 63). Action is stopped to heighten the event, to highlight a moment of importance, to slow down emotion, or to stop action to notice details. The only difference in rehearsal is the composition of the audience. Actors creating a piece of theatre do not work in isolation; a director is always present to send the flow of energy back to the actors in the form of feedback. This feedback is corporal communication as the director is equally engaged in the excitability cycle.

When a photograph is taken of a moment within the reflex excitability continuum, whether on stage or in rehearsal, it is an embodied moment engaging the body, mind, and heart of the actor. The photograph is present or witness to action that for the briefest of an instant is recorded. The photographs in this study were not posed and action was not stopped. The student-actors and I ignored the camera and continued our work while the shutter clicked. But, did we really? Plenty of photographs were rejected because you can plainly see us aware of the camera. These photographs are in sharp contrast to the ones

taken without any awareness registered by the participants. How much meaning within the experience can be attributed to the photographer's choice of what was framed in the viewfinder? What editing went on in the moment the photograph was taken? Is this any different than the choices that a writer engages in when writing a lived experience (Weidel, 1995)? Is not all phenomenological writing highly edited, trying to entice the best choice of words to describe the moment (van Manen, 1990)? I join Emme & Kirova (2010) in asking for a more contemporary notion of reading, writing, and literacy that includes an understanding of visual syntax allowing for hermeneutic phenomenology to emerge.

When the student-actors join me in reflecting on our mutual experience multiple perspectives engage in phenomenological seeing (Emme & Kirova, 2006). Photography is a form of capturing and communicating the “unspeakable in an experience” (Emme & Kirova, 2006, p. 7). Photographs can record a range of nonverbal dimensions of a situation and catch and portray aspects of a situation impossible to record using only written observations or transcribed interviews (Weidel, 1995). But photographs are not reality. There remains an “interpretive, hermeneutic practice where there is no room for simple reductionism” (Emme & Kirova, 2006, p. 8). I am willing to dwell in a difficult place to create a “fusion of horizons surrounding the photographer, the photograph itself, and the viewer” and the convergence of meaning shared between participants and the viewer (Davey as cited by Emme & Kirova, in Mullen & Rahn (Eds.), 2010, p. 177).

### **Narrative Analysis**

Finding the way back to the lived experience of a teacher located within the creative process of a collective creation is the challenge of a phenomenological

practitioner writing inside aesthetic education. “We embody what and how we teach; the medium is the message” (Taylor, 2006, p. 152). As an artistTeacher my creating/teaching is constructed of multiple narratives. My values, culture, family, physiology, psychology, religious beliefs, political choices, sexual, intellectual, and emotional interests all influence the material I select and how I interact with colleagues and students (Taylor, 2006). My lived experience is ever evolving, ever twisting, and returning to the centre. Taylor (1996) stimulates research in this area by offering that “we too [should] join hands, clasp ankles, and form a net, a network of folk dedicated to a journey of becoming which will raise the streams of consciousness to which an artistic-aesthetic curriculum aspires” (p. 55). This is a “living inquiry...the work of the heart, the hands, our sensemaking body, our many-toned voices” that responds to Greene’s (2000) hope that teachers awaken (Neilsen as cited in Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Goizouasis, 2008, p. xvi). Through writing the pedagogy of wideawakeness we move in partnership with our students in releasing them into the unknown away from dullness and boredom and repetitiveness and the mechanical life (Greene, 2000).

Phenomenology is the study of the very essence of the lived experience (Merleau-Pont, 1962). This kind of research writing is so crystal clear the reader grasps the essential nature of the moment-to-moment reality of the event. The goal is to infuse the written experience of the phenomenon with a description that is “both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive” (van Manen, 1990, p. 39). This must be achieved through an exploration of what is meaningful rather than just the factual aspects of the event. “Similarly, phenomenology is less concerned with the facticity of the psychological, sociological, or cultural peculiarities of



differences on the meaning structures of human experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 40).

No pat answer or analysis is required or necessary. The experience stands alone.

To drill down into any lived experience it is helpful to orientate yourself to that which is of special interest (van Manen, 1990). I am an *artistic teacher* in the dramatic arts, further I am learner-centered interested in activating a space for leading while facing my students “conscious of where the group is at and what they are capable of achieving” (Taylor, 2003, p. 60). “I walk backward to the future” (Taylor, 2003, p. 61). My phenomenological practice is a knowing that resides in the twisting intersection of *artistic teacher*. My work is grounded in “ongoing forms of recursive and reflective inquiry” creating intellectual, imaginative, and insightful spaces activated by the partnership between students and their *artistic teacher* (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Goizouasis, 2008, p. xxii).

A theatrical event dwells on the threshold of our imagination. We are in a state of reality when we arrive for the performance but as soon as the play begins we are “posed on uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another” positioned to slip into the imageries of the theatrical offering (Helibrun, as cited in Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 99). This places the arts-based researcher in a site of honouring two realities: the world of the play and the world that is impacted by the play. Discovering meaning within creative pedagogy demands stepping through several thresholds to discover significance and “the possibilities of interconnection” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 99). Tapscott (2012) refers to inter-creativity as a state of combining art forms to validate meaning. The storytelling aspect of theatre naturally links drama to narrative, which, in itself, has a relationship to

educational research. “The power of good narrative, then, lends itself particularly well to the chaotic, contextual, and complex matrices of educational research” (Fowler, 2006, p. 12). The outcomes of arts-based research must then hold suggestions for more than just the world of aesthetic education; the time has come to look beyond our narrow concentrations.

Authentic analytical narrative research as proposed by Canadian scholar Dr. Leah Fowler (2006) engages educational narratives in eight orbitals of analytic thought. “If one of my human intentions is to be a reflective practitioner engaged in the lived poetics of teaching and learning, then analysis of stories about teaching and learning can enhance self-understanding as both teacher and learner” (Fowler, 2006, p. 35). Fowler (2006) asks what we should pay attention to when we cross the doorway into narrative data? It is easy to dwell in the simplistic and not push for the analytic and thoughtful. Fowler (2006), created eight analytic portals or orbitals to frame textual understandings through key questions and guiding concepts. These spheres of thinking stimulate deep analysis and take answering the question of the meaning of creative pedagogy out of the realm of an interesting event to explore with student-actors and into a greater understanding of awakefulness and education’s role in challenging student-focused work (Greene, 2000).

### **Chapter Three: Methodology of Creating, Producing, and Researching Dramatic Pedagogy**

This research project investigates dramatic pedagogy through the vehicle of the collective creation. *The Way Back: Why Life Sucks Sometimes and How to Discover Your True Self* is a collective creation developed by 20 students, working collaboratively with their drama teacher, from various grades attending an urban, Catholic, western Canadian high school. The production was researched and rehearsed from September 13 to November 21, 2011. The production performed for a paying audience November 22 to November 25, 2011 at 7pm in the performing arts theatre of the high school. Two matinees were performed during the school day on November 23 and 24 for junior high feeder schools. Over 1200 people saw the performance. The production ran 90 minutes with no intermission. All students involved gave permission for their self-reflections and images to be used in this University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Education, Human Study Research project. Their parents gave permission for their participation in the project. The student-actors agreed to submit a self-reflection in the form of a journal entry or collage, every week of the rehearsal process and participate in a final group summation activity. The University of Lethbridge and the Calgary Catholic School District sanctioned the project's methodology. The following is a detailed explanation of how to create, produce, and research a collaborative collective.

#### **Creating**

Collective creations are driven by inquiry (Belliveau, 2006; Taylor, 2000). Once a direction is agreed upon then a pre-text stimulus is developed. The stimulus maybe presented in the form of a story, an image, a poem, a PowerPoint presentation or a collage

containing several mediums. Depending on the focus of the drama the participants create the pre-text or it is created for them. The pre-text launches the drama. It needs the complexity to support many themes and suggest a clear purpose. It supports the structural function of the drama used to establish patterns, imply roles, suggest a setting, set in motion the weaving of multiply stories, and it hints at future connections with the audience (Taylor, 2000).

Theatre conventions are employed with the pre-text stimulus to create characters and story episodes. There are several techniques to employ, some very successful conventions are:

Tableau creates story moments through frozen images. Tableau is used for quick narrative glimpses that stimulate bigger ideas. In the final production tableau used in conjunction with Marking the Moment is a directing technique to highlight, for the audience, important moments.

Improvised Character Building is an enhancement activity using brainstorming and sharing with cast members to create a list of traits for each character. Then the character is improvised. The participants can then edit the characters knowing they are playable and have a story to tell.

Altered Ego helps to deepen character work as subtext is voiced immediately after a character speaks revealing what they are really thinking.

Hot Seating a Character places characters on the spot to answer questions. This allows the actor to add to the story of the character and their understanding of who the character is.

A Day in the Life allows an actor to improvise a day in the character's life. This is an excellent device to discover episodes for plot.

Flashback and Fast Forward are plot devices to discover the past or the future of a character or a scene.

Marking the Moment is a chance to pause or reflect on action, a moment to review what has happened. When used during rehearsal it acts as a check for clarity and tightens plot and refines characters.

If several theatre conventions are faithfully explored by week three the process finds the participants drowning in ideas. Time is needed to regroup, refocus the work, and edit choosing elements that express the most compelling stories with the most ambitious characters. The overriding concern is preserving the response of the participants. The teacher's role at this stage is to guard the pre-text and push the participants against being satisfied with recognized platitudes and moral certainties (Taylor, 2000). A working script, "the forever unfinished dialogue", may be completely written like a traditional script or the improvised episodes may be organized in an outline (Taylor, 2000, p. 41). In either case by week six the entire production needs to be performed without interrupts followed by a debriefing session. This is the refining process, it may continue until the production is performed and even between performances.

It is at this time that scenography is introduced. Once the set is in place then directing can happen in earnest. Costumes, props, sound effects, and lighting choices are unified under the production concept. Once again the pre-text is mined for ideas around colours and texture and other artistic choices informing all elements of the scenography. Student-actors require several full dress rehearsals to ensure a correct or polished

performance. This does not refer to the content of the show but rather the actors' responsibility to respond, in a timely fashion, to all technical cues.

As this collaborative collective is a research project. Students used a journal to contain all reflections and impressions. These can be formally shared through a closed website or just passed around during rehearsal. The teacher/researcher required a journal to document the process and record monologues of insight and understanding.

Timeline of rehearsal process: *The Way Back*. The following timeline accounts for the official time used to create our research project's collaborative collection. Personal time outside the schedule was required to add to journal entries, and write and share reflections on process and progress. It was during these private moments that many of the monologues and reflections in Appendices A, B, and C and in Chapter Four were created.

Rehearsals: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 3:30-6pm between September 13 to November 25, 2011.

	September 13 Auditions	14	15 Pre-text & Monk's story improvisation	
	20 Character sketches	21 Character improvising	22 Character & scene creation	
	27 Scene building	28 Scene building	29 Built set	
	October 4 Scene building	5 Scene building	6 Scene (re) imagining	
	11 Blocking opening scene	12 Blocking monologues	13 Blocking monologues	
	18 Finish scene building	19 Full run through	20 Full run through	

	25 Revising scenes	26 Revising transition scenes	27 Last day for changes on any scene/transition	
	November 1 Blocking void & hope scenes	2 Full run through	3 Full run through with costumes/props	
	8 Full run with lights & sound, costumes/props	9 Full run with lights & sound, costumes/props	10 Full run with lights & sound, costumes/props	
	15 Full run with lights & sound, costumes/props	16 Full run with lights & sound, costumes/props	17 Full run with lights & sound, costumes/props	
21 Final dress rehearsal	22 Opening night performance	23 Matinee & 2 <sup>nd</sup> night performance	24 Matinee & 3 <sup>rd</sup> night performance	25 Closing night performance

## Producing

After ten full weeks of preparations the production is ready for an audience. There are several techniques to engage an audience in a dialogue with the production. The student-actors may initiate conversations with the audience. After the matinee shows, because of the younger audience members, this conversation covered questions surrounding plot and characters but was guided towards thoughtful reflections on the topic. Other devices for audience feedback may be a comment wall, a large mural set up in the theatre's gathering space allowing audience members to reflect through written comments left on the wall. This is very effective in a school as students who saw the production may reflect days after the event. Many conversations with audience members and cast were informally experienced through Facebook, Inc. and Twitter©.

## **Researching**

There are many research methods that successfully acquire data and an analytical understanding of an experience. This research project chose to use reflective practice through narration and photographs. While the collective was in production the cast spent a lot of time waiting in between performances. This time was used to review the research data or all the photographs, journal entries, collages and feedback accumulated during the rehearsal stage. During three sessions the cast, guided by their teacher sorted through all the reflections and debated and finally agreed upon spaces of activated drama pedagogy. The students did not use those words, indeed they referred to the divisions as: what we did during rehearsal. The cast assisted in picking which reflections and photographs best represented the experience. It was evident from the first session that it is very difficult to reduce the multi-layered experience of collaboratively creating a collective to a few words and pictures.

With the activation spaces identified further refinement of the data and a deeper exploration of the data through narrative analysis is required. The eight orbitals of narrative analysis created by Canadian educator Dr. Leah Fowler (2006) frame understanding of educational sites like this research project on collaborated collectives. Fowler (2006) advocates narrative research for teachers interesting in researching teacher self-awareness, reflexivity, and professional meta-cognition. The student-actors left the project with an understanding of how much they learned about the creative process, immense satisfaction of taking a first impression of a difficult topic and transforming it into theatre, and a wonderful family-like sense of closeness to everyone involved in the



project. The student-actors risked personal involvement in an artistic/aesthetic experience and it did not disappoint. The narrative analysis will function as professional development for the teacher answering what it means to work within activated dramatic pedagogy with students.

#### **Chapter Four: Research Findings: Spaces of Activated Drama Pedagogy**

Activations are operational spaces where dramatic pedagogy engages student-actors and the artistTeacher in theatrical story making. This is a situation-specific site of pedagogy (van Manen, 1991). Activations are phenomenological sites tracking, through photographs and narratives, the lived experience of creating impressionistic tales (van Manen, 1998 as cited in Saldaña, 2005). Tales created without grand theorizing. Tales infused with youthful romanticism. Tales initiated through student voices. Activations are those teaching moments where the lines blur between students and teacher and both are required to travel down uncharted paths in order to find their authentic story.

Teachers and students sharing sites of pedagogy stimulate opportunities for educators to respect the student's situation in terms of our "situated relationship to the child" (van Manen, 1991, p. 72). Together the student-actors and myself highlighted seven foundational moments of learning during the creative process of our collaborative production. These sites of activation were deliberate and conscious moments where we found ourselves creating, struggling, and rejoicing together. We were profoundly moved to reflect on the moment while living the moment. Our conversations were stimulated by the shared experience; these found sites of activated dramatic pedagogy is our attempt to articulate what we discovered about creating together.

Each activation space contains photographs taken during rehearsals from September 15 until November 22, 2011. The narratives and reflections were gathered through out the rehearsal and performance process. The texts are identified and dated with specific student identity information withheld in favour of generic labeling that

includes grade level and gender only. The presentation format is an organic mixture of embodied witnessing through photographs, reflections, and interviews. The commentary includes blended conversations between the student-actors and myself. The following photo/text boxes comprise the data for this project. Please attend to Appendix C: Images, Interviews, and Insights from the Cutting Room Floor for more data.

### A Space for Creating


	<p>Brainstorming. Creating on demand. Step one: create from within. It is not a method of character creation that resonates with everyone. “I don’t work well when there is a time limit, too much pressure.” (Gr. 12 girl).</p>
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Figure 1: First day of creating characters September 20, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila


	<p>“Honestly guys I have nothing...” (Gr.11 girl). What if you try this...collaboration becomes the key to productive creating sessions when you are not “thinking of way too many things at once” (Gr. 10 boy). Step two: sharing and offering suggestions.</p>
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Figure 2: Collaboration on character traits September 20, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila


	<p>Characters are created in one's imagination first but they have to live in the actor's body and soul. Step three is a check to see if what works on paper is playable. "I find when we just go for it and improv, I get really good ideas and can build on them" (Gr. 12 girl).</p>
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Figure 3: Embodied character work September 20, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

<p>I create by talking to peers, by combining and considering other ideas. I do like improvising ideas and making mistakes and I like writing it all out as well. Seeing and helping other people with their ideas really helps me. I come into the theatre and mind is blank; I step on the stage a thousand ideas rush in on me. (Gr. 12 girl self reflection during an interview September 21).</p>	<p>The ability to articulate how you best create characters for a collective engages the student-actor in metacognition. This powerful activity grabs our attention; we are aware of being in a moment of possibilities.</p>
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<p>Every student has a different goal for his or her created character. "I want to create a character we all know and are familiar with but at the same time a character that is nothing like me" (Gr. 12 girl self reflection from journal entry September 22).</p>
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## A Space for Waiting



Sharing ideas means listening and more than that it means waiting with your idea and waiting patiently as others struggle to articulate an elusive idea. “Gosh, I hate waiting. Ok, the truth...honestly it is the one thing I hate most about rehearsal is giving others their turn. Sorry I sound like a jerk but I like attention ok! Man, this makes me sound so lame and I’m one of the oldest members of the cast! (Gr.12 girl).

Figure 4: Student-actors sharing ideas while sitting in a circle September 22, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila



I really feed off others. I guess I rely on their ideas and their energy. I like to sit perfectly still. I say to myself keep this pose until three more people have spoken. I get nervous if I am speaking and others are twitching so I sit without moving. The words flood over me and I pick out important ideas to pass on later. I try to listen with my eyes as well as my ears. I take in all they are not saying with words. I love to listen it makes me good at waiting. (Gr. 12 girl self reflection in journal entry September 28, 2011).

Figure 5: Student-actor waiting to share ideas September 22, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

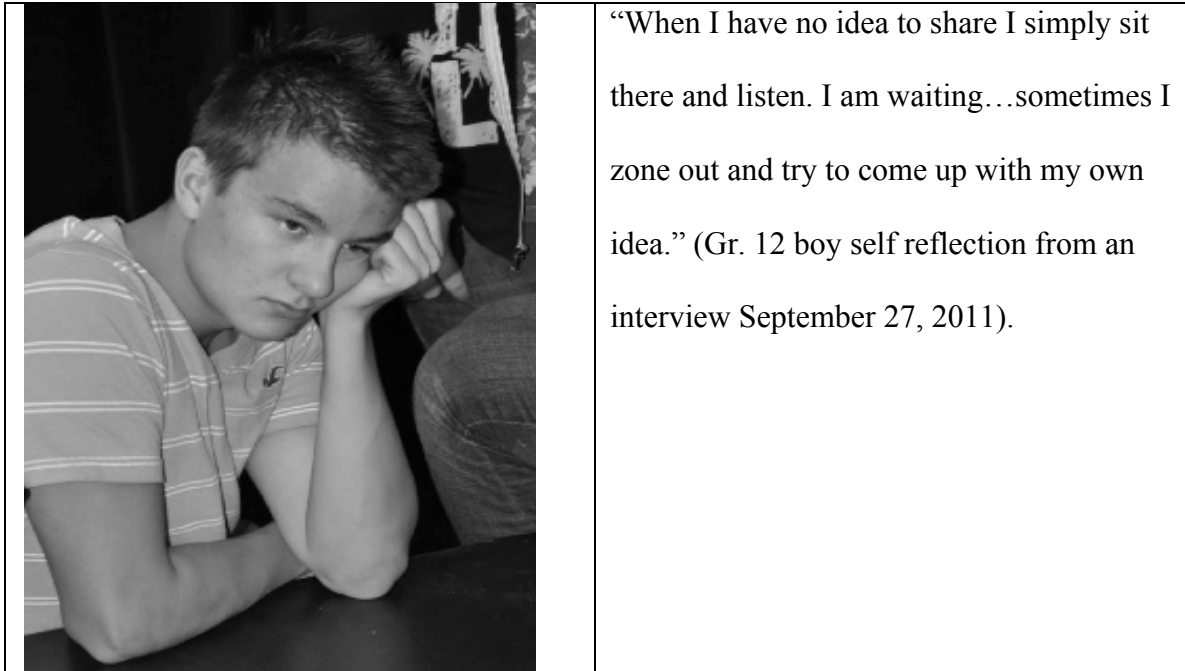


Figure 6: Waiting October 4, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

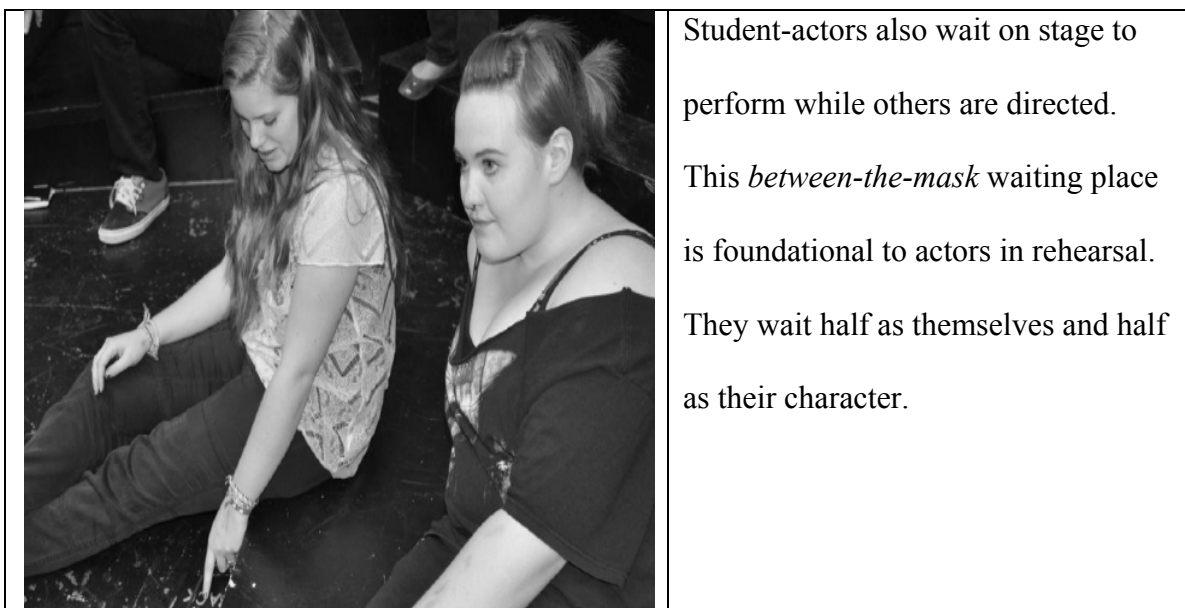
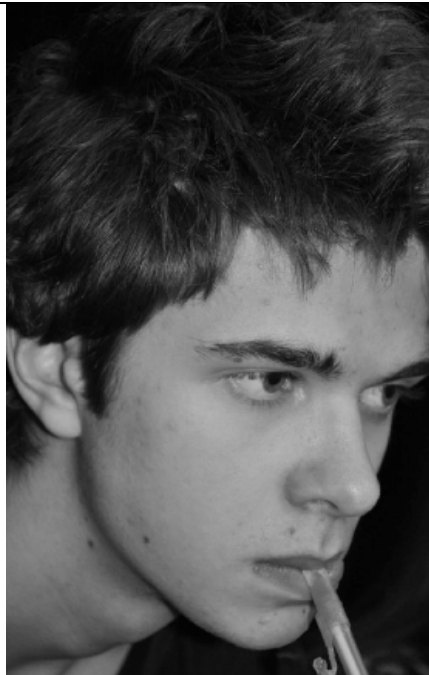


Figure 7: Student-actors waiting to perform October 6, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

## A Space for Rejecting



The process is awash with ideas some helpful, some dreadful, and some of them brilliant! The job is to shift through them all, collaborate, and choose. “The cast has rejected three of my ideas. That’s fine. I think I’ve offered over a hundred. They weren’t really my ideas anyways. They were hybrids: some of my stuff mixed in with what the guys said and mixed up again. I only care about making a good play. If every idea is dropped I’ll just come up with another one.” (Gr. 11 boy self reflection in journal entry October 6, 2011.)

**Figure 8: Student-actor facing rejection October 12, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila**



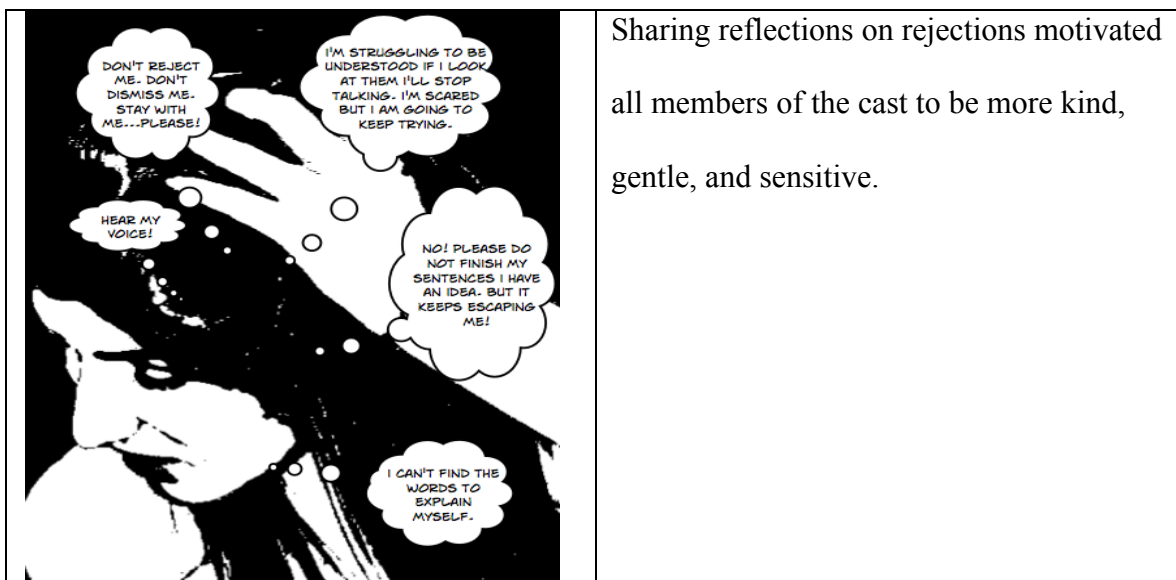


Figure 9: Student-generated reflection October 13, 2011

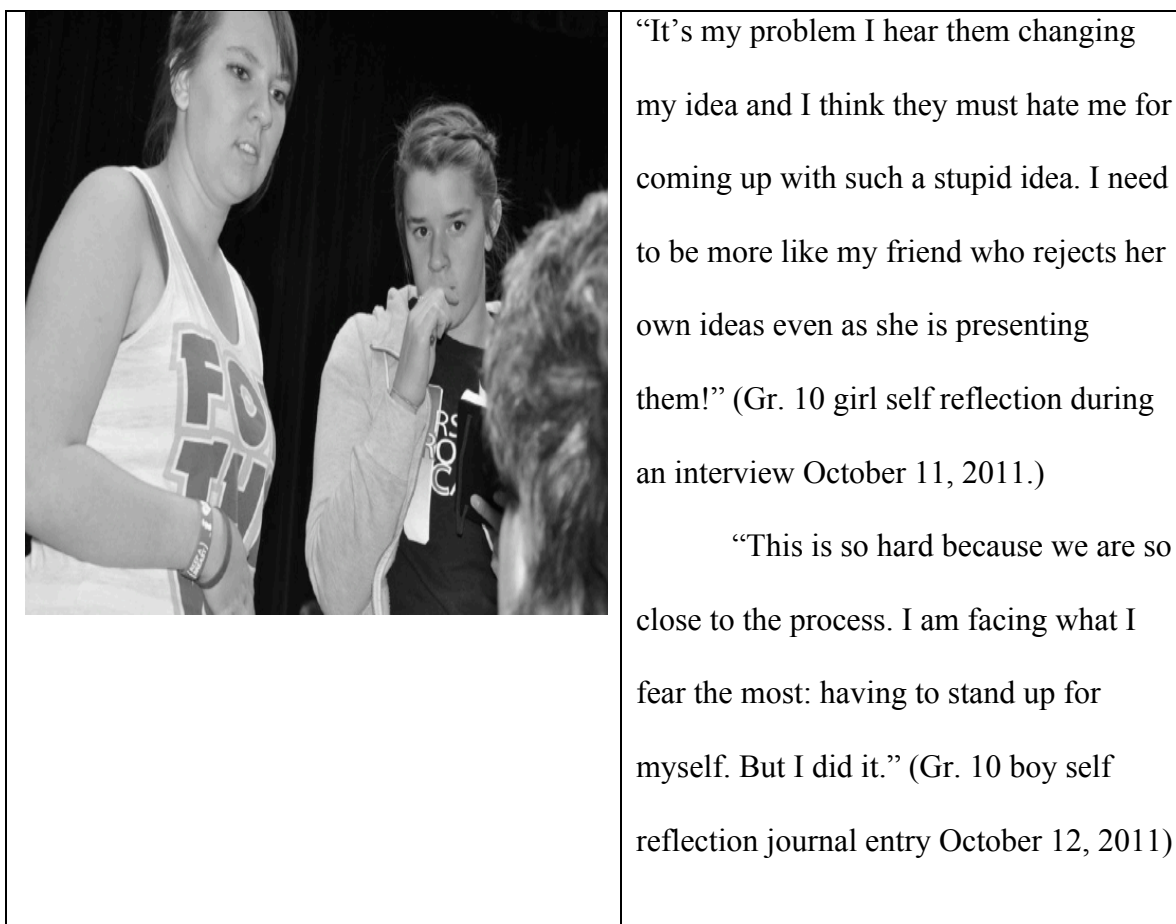


Figure 10: Rejection October 13, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

## A Space for (Re)imagining



	<p>One day in rehearsal no one had any new ideas; that was when the collective was set and we started to tease apart every element to make it perfect. Original plot choices were scrutinized for consistency. If found wanting we reorganized, reworked, and reinvented.</p>
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Figure 11: Selling the new idea October 12, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

	<p>“Someone said ‘Hey don’t worry it may change yet again!’ I get it, it is just part of the process. I can’t imagine making a play any other way. I love being in rehearsal when a thousand ideas are flying around. I’m never bored or look at my phone.” (Gr. 11 girl journal entry October 18, 2011).</p>
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	<p>“We were scheming. I couldn’t tell you how much of the idea was mine and how much it was hers but we created something and I acted like the spokesperson. I represented ideas, she fleshed it out and it was like two voices speaking as one.” (Gr. 11 girl journal entry October 19, 2011).</p>
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Figure 12: A/B scheming October 19, 2011 Photos by Vanessa Boila


	<p>“I just put up my arm and interrupted the entire rehearsal with my idea. I knew everyone would listen. I knew we could change it up because it was right for the production. I feel confident with my understanding of the scenes, not just mine but the scenes of everyone else. In fact, I’m better at suggesting things for other people. This is what directing/playwriting is when it is all mashed together like what we are doing.” (Gr. 12 girl journal entry October 12, 2011).</p>
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Figure 13: Reworking October 12, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

## A Space for Trusting



Actors must trust the process of the embodiment of ideas. A student-actor shares a conversation with her parents:

“ ‘How was rehearsal today?’ My parents always ask.

‘Well, today I played a ballerina going crazy, I was a flower growing from ground and rotting on the vine, I was a faceless tourist, and I slapped a boy around.’ I add ‘trust me it was fun’ when I see their confused faces.” (Gr. 11 girl interview October 25, 2011).

Figure 14: Trusting to try an idea October 18, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila


	<p>Actors learn to trust each other. “Is it ok to say that I like him even though I just met him? What I really love is how open, kind, and trusting he is. My part was pure improv, every night he was right there for me. I knew I could touch him or grab his arm or snuggle close in and he would just respond the same way.” (Gr. 12 girl journal entry October 26, 2011).</p>
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Figure 15: Trusting each other October 18, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila


	<p>Reflecting and writing <i>in-role</i> opens powerful portals for character observation. Actors learn to trust what the character is telling them. “The walls closed in. I couldn’t get out. I kicked. Punched at imaginary bounds. I was gasping finally I screamed: make the pain stop! Make them hear me! I’m lost so lost the pain is too much to bear. I have to get away...get away. Run! I’m falling...anything but this pain in my heart.” (Gr. 12 boy in role reflection October 26, 2011).</p>
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Figure 16: Trusting to take emotional risks October 19, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

## A Space for Performing



Figure 17: Opening sequence: The Way Back November 22, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

Performing alters perception: temporally, spatially and relationally. Moment by moment the actor forms and re-forms the character as they weave through their awareness of the audience, fellow actors, lines missed, costumes, and props. “To be in character or performing a character is to be completely lost in another world. You loose your own words and how you would react to a situation is now how the character would act in the



situation. The moment of losing yourself and becoming the character is a moment you can only understand if you do it. I would surprise myself with what I say when I'm in character. It is a whole transition of personality. I succumb myself to my character and at times even have difficulty coming out of character. Performing is mind warping and a transitional experience that is addictive, interesting, and really fun." (Gr. 12 girl journal entry November 22, 2011).



Figure 18: Student-generated reflection November 23, 2011

## A Space for Celebrating

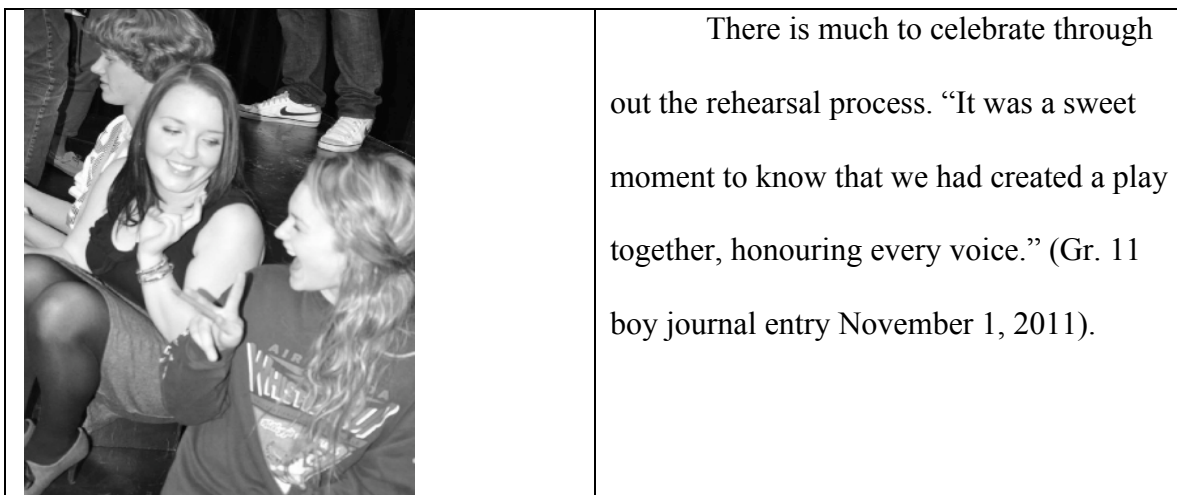


Figure 19: A moment to celebrate November 2, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila

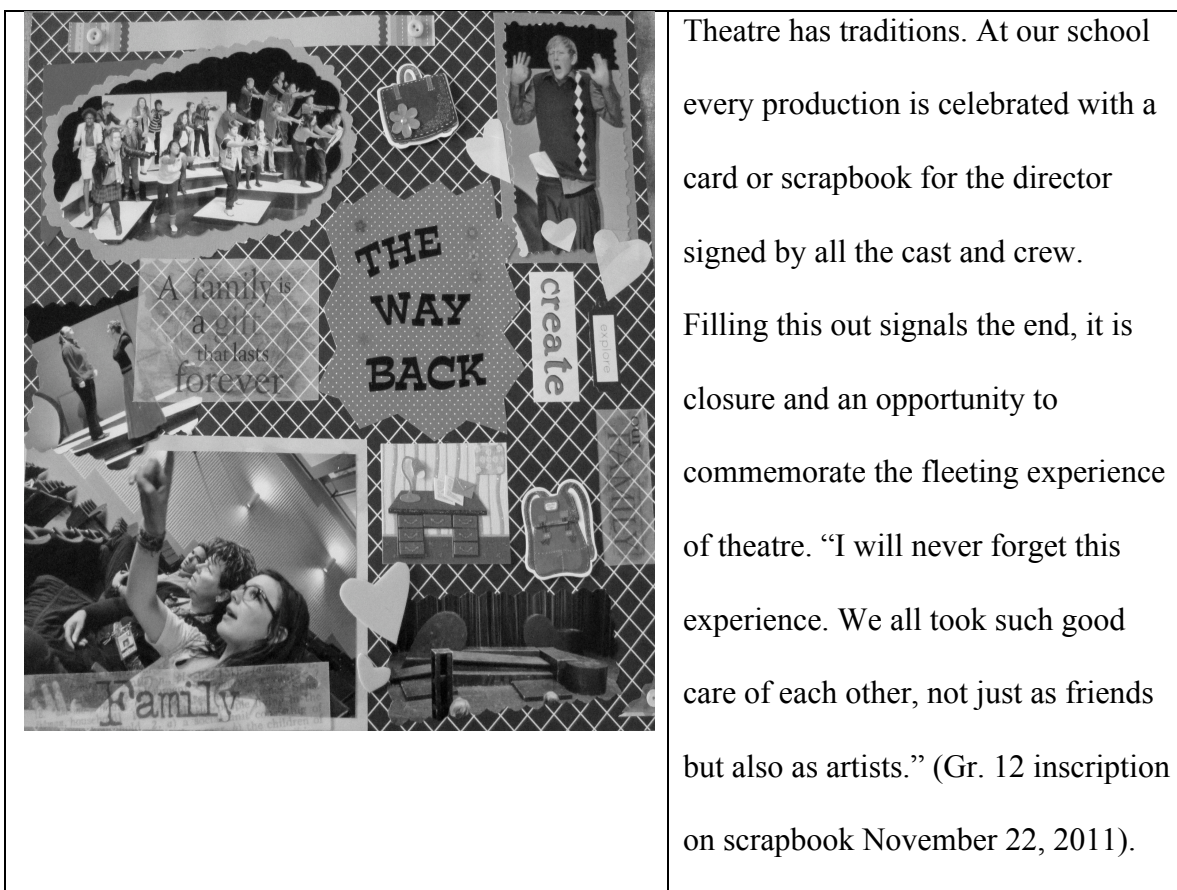


Figure 20: A page from the commemorative scrapbook November 22, 2011 Photo by Vanessa Boila



“This is my story” was the opening line tonight at my 17-year-old daughter’s high school play. It was powerful. There was a profound moment as my jaw was hanging down...staring at my daughter and her friends...they nailed it...and they are in high school! At 43, conversations with my friends revolve around a need to be heard and to be seen. Not as mothers, as volunteers, or in our careers but for whom we are underneath all the labels. Then in front of me was a cast of high school students talking about the exact same thing. We are two different generations looking for acceptance. Maybe they have uncovered the secret to their lives at an early age. To be who they truly are, not wrapped up in what anyone else thinks. The greatest gift you could ever give yourself is to listen to your self as your own teacher. The one that tells you who you are. Believe. It saves decades of time in self-doubt and barrels of money in counseling. Just saying from three decades of experience.

Blog entry by Karma Sister, mom of a Student-Actor, Grade 12 girl, posted November 23, 2011.

The students were very excited to get this level of feedback from parents. *The Way Back* explored complicated and powerful ideas and life stories. It was very gratifying for the cast to get such a clear response signifying that they had accomplished their performance goals.

## **Chapter Five: An Analytic Reflection**

### **Eight Orbitals of Narrative Analysis: This is our Story**

As a reflective practitioner thoughtfully engaging in Fowler's (2006) eight orbitals of narrative analysis, I am mining for convergences or intersections of understanding. The story is the lived experience of the collaborative collective. The narration comes from the collage of words and photographs found in the spaces of drama pedagogy activated while creating the theatrical collective: *The Way Back*. The data for this research originates from a site of engagement with an artistic work. "Textuality as praxis" challenges dominant forms of knowledge and pedagogy as it suggests a wider set of implications due to the translation of one medium or art form into another (Lather as cited in Gallagher, 2007 p. 113). Gallagher (2007) suggests that by using research from a dramatic source and re/searching through another such as narrative analysis an intellectual and a creative/artistic/aesthetic or embodied response is possible. This is unfinished research that offers a challenge to dissemination (Gallagher, 2007). If we accept that narrative is a threshold to understanding then theatre's ability to link the known with the not yet known encourages an interstanding (Fels, 2004; Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009). Fowler's (2006) narrative analysis categories play a key role in methodically taking the reflective practitioner through a challenging re/searching journey that honours the experience and links intelligent analysis to insight.

Naïve storying explores why the story is being told, what it is about and how is the narrator connected to the story. The story of creating collaboratively with student-actors is unique. There is research into the use of collectives used in student teacher training (Belliveau, 2006). And in student organized collectives (Lang, 2007). But there

is little written about the interconnection between a teacher embedded in the dramatic process of creating a production and student-actors. The group dynamics involved in sharing the creative process is messy and not for the faint of heart: twenty-one playwrights instead of one. This alone is a good reason why this story of collaborative collectives needs to be told. Others include: the data highlights painful moments within the process of being made to come to decisions quickly without consideration for thoughtful mulling over of ideas, it is very challenging to take something as unique as the artistic process of different people and day after day condense it into something collaborative and workable, and suppressing egos and buying into the process, moment by moment. The narrators own the story, as it is their story, their experience. It is impossible, as with most works of art, to tease out what part of the process and product is original and what has been excavated from the lives of those involved and what has become a hybrid of the comingling of ideas and experiences.

Psychological De/Re Construction looks for the thoughts, ideas, feeling, emotions, and the cognitive aspect of how can we think about this story. Joy is the reoccurring emotion of the collaborative work. Joy in creating theatre, joy of being with fellow student-actors, and joy in working on a project involving self-reflection. The collective was also a commitment on the part of the participants to embody the honest stories of the characters and share these stories with an audience. Rehearsals were spent taking the time to (re) imagine every aspect of each character. Ideas were honoured and voices were heard. Student voices were empowered with trust to create a performance piece that would reflect the values of their school community while challenging life as lived for the unfortunate and the unloved. Looking at the experience from the outside the

process is difficult. This project is no different than any other story of an amazing experience; all the words in the world cannot capture the nuances and moment-by-moment sites of learning and personal insight that was afforded those who were a part of the experience. Hard and careful reflection was needed to reduce the egotistical desire to create a closed club. Effort was made to articulate the experience through tolerating the photographs being taken every rehearsal and the consensus creation of the activated spaces as an investigation of what it was like to work on the project. Through images, words, and dialogue it was hoped that understanding is possible for those not involved in the process.

Psychotherapeutic Ethics is interested in the truths revealed by the story, ego driven interests, psychic wounds, relational patterns, and accepting responsibility for our selves. The participants learned very quickly that the rules of engagement must be followed or people were left behind or unintentionally dismissed. Everyone became very clever at reading body language during the whirlwind of brainstorming; we did not move on until everyone had a chance to contribute. Without question the more confident participants lead the way and impressed everyone with their unselfish sharing and leadership toward younger or less experienced student-actors. Much was shared and is evident in the reflections about letting go of ownership issues, subduing personal goals, the need for glory and working to the greater good. Students will take ownership if it is truly offered to them. Once the pre-text material was presented my role, as educator, was to watch very attentively from the side, step in when needed and fade into the background when ideas were flowing (Belliveau, 2006). It was not easy for anyone in our group to let go of our pet ideas and honour the decisions of group. Would the collective have been

different if I had just written it myself? Or just the students? Of course but that was not what the project was about; this was a consensus driven production.

Narrative Craft questions the structure of the story and asks how the story is a crucible to hold the narrative long enough for investigation. The structure of reflection by its very nature is disjointed and open to interpretation. When one reflects on an experience the assumption is that you do not have to explain every detail as you have lived through it and the audience for the reflection is yourself. This is even truer for a reflection on an experience that only a select group has participated in, a shorthand jargon results making talking about the situation very private and inaccessible for anyone outside the experience. The photographs witness the lived experience: the actors may not have been able to describe the energy needed to wait with an idea but the photograph depicts students almost vibrating. Or am I imagining this because I experienced it in real time and it left a clear impression on me? Describing the creative process is a challenge for mature artists. Student-actors asked to reflect, some for the first time, floundered to articulate their feelings. If given more time the answers may have been more coherent. But that was not the experience so the narrative crucible like so many of the reflections is raw, unfinished, and honest. The photographs tell a story that those involved immediately recognize. Perhaps their inclusion in the data is not as helpful to someone outside the experience as we hoped they would be. Some of the more mature or self-aware students created thought bubble collages with the photographs and managed a deeper reflection. The photos they included reinforced their thoughts.

Hermeneutics searches for concealments and hidden messages, interpretations and origins. In theatre, that which is not said but acknowledged is called subtext. The student-

actor reflections do tell of personal frustrations with the process. Students write about being tired, of justifying a lack of contributions of ideas, and with not being able to concentrate or create during the set rehearsal times. But what is not recorded? Despite the grumbling the work was done. Was it their best work? The assumption is what was offered was the best available in that moment. Perhaps that is why traditional theatre clings to the single playwright who is free to create during optimal times. Are collective productions inferior to traditional plays? Is it even possible to measure the objective difference between one person's voice and the polyphonic experience of a collective?

On the surface we were blessed with cooperative and supportive team of student-actors. If there were frictions they were not reflected upon or they were solved without becoming common knowledge. One of the benefits of a collective that require the cast to be on the stage the entire time is that there is no official time for personality clashes. The ego is suppressed as everyone has an equal role. If the harmony we experienced was an illusion what was the cost of such a cover-up? Lang (2007) revealed that personality clashes can overwhelm a cast resulting in a poor performance that those involved were not proud of in her study of teen collectives created without a teacher. The collaborative aspect of a teacher working with students is a deterrent for older students who could not then take over and diminish the input of the younger or weaker members of the cast. "From a pedagogical perspective too much tension within a drama process can hinder the learning of individuals" (Belliveau, 2006, p. 11).

The student-actors insisted the space of rejection be included in the activations of Chapter Four of this study because they felt it was an important step of the process. What they wrote in their reflections exposes a comfortable understanding that ideas will change

and they could not have everything their own way. The photographs depict moments of pain or moments of having to accept rejection. There is clearly a disconnect between the reflection which was distanced from the moment and the photograph which witnessed the moment. In honour of the rules of engagement, if students were keeping track of whose ideas were most rejected they did not share this potentially derisive statistic.

Curriculum Pedagogy focuses on what can be learned and known about teaching and learning, the implications for teaching and teachers. There is a narrow space that the teacher embedded in creative work with student-actors operates within. Their presence is absolutely needed and needed in an instant so they must remain engaged through out the process. There are also many moments when the teacher needs to be silent and let the process work (Belliveau, 2006). This silent vigil also guards the process from students giving up because it is challenging. This is true of inquiry pedagogy as well. Students are free to investigate but they need a teacher to guide them (Egan, 2005). This guidance is correct and worthwhile but it takes patience and a commitment to the process of allowing all to be heard and insisting on consensus. This narrow space has to contain the ego of an artistTeacher. The teacher, of course, can offer their talents and experience to perfect the production and challenge the students to work to a high standard. It is in the subtle and nuanced moments of metaxis or creating and existing simultaneously in two worlds that the teacher needs to guard their ideas from overriding the students (Belliveau, 2006). The teacher must also ensure the project honours the initial idea and offers multiply perspectives. The students have to trust that the teacher will guard their choices but will not let them flounder if they experience difficulty. This collaborative work requires the teacher to be the encourager when the process gets tedious or the students run out of

momentum. This process does not offer the teacher a break nor is it easier than the traditional paradigm of teacher as director, rather it is a meaningful site for professional development.

Poetics of a Relational Teaching Self notices truth for self, professional insight, and honours balance between the professional and personal. When the student-actors assisted in creating the spaces for activated drama pedagogy I was struck by what a difficult but amazingly powerful process we experienced together. I would leave rehearsals exhausted; creatively and emotionally empty. I prefer this sacrifice to the sterile space of creating by myself. As an artist, theatre has always been my medium; I am a happiest when I am with an ensemble. I need the opportunity to refract ideas and be inspired by others who recognize performance as a portal of meaning. This is how I identify myself as a teacher, a fellow explorer rather than the definitive keeper of the answers (Conrad, 2007). When forced to direct a show in the traditional style as teacher as director I do so by turning the cast into a collaborative team and I include ideas from everyone involved. This models to students how to cooperate and belong in the world. It is also really good for me as it reaffirms my place, my role, and my purpose. The work is difficult to keep doing year after year. The sheer effort of will to keep a project like a collective moving forward for three months feels like climbing a mountain.

Collectives are an inclusive strategy for increasing student engagement and honouring the student voice (Lazarus, 2004; Taylor, 2003). All the reflections and the images reinforce for me that it is worthwhile work even at the personal cost to my own interests. Living and breathing a project for three months is three months of my life I will never have back. Theatre is so fleeting and ethereal; a performance ends with nothing to



show for your work but memories. Teachers are not paid for extra-curricular activities. The money is not an issue to me. What I do object to is the devaluing of my time while working with other people's children.

Restorative Education heals and restores through actions of care. As the only adult in this collaboration I have laboured alone. I have done so for many years. I have researched and explored the details of what I have been doing for a long time. It is clear, in the activation space of celebrating, how the student-actors benefitted from the collaborative experience: they felt trusted, their ideas and words were performed on the stage, they grew to be more confident as performers, they became as close as a family, and they persevered through a demanding but rewarding creative process. I can also articulate benefits and insights from the experience. I do have more than memories now I have words. I have the words to express why teachers should activate drama pedagogy with their students, why they should share the process and open their productions to engage the voices of their students. I witness theories at work. I have become a student. I lived Greene's (2000) wideawakeness, Fels' (2004) spiraling on the wind of possibilities, and Taylor's (2003) polyphonic medley of voices. This investigation has given me a voice in a chorus of educators who affirm that the creative act breaks down barriers and opens wide "implicit joy in learning where outcomes are unknown" and that education must involve an "insatiable seeking after wonder" celebrating meaning making through an honouring of individual needs and collaborated contributions (Kelly & Leggo, 2008, p. 256-257).

### **Answering the Research Question**

What does it mean for an artist and teacher to activate pedagogical spaces while creating inside a theatrical collaborative production with students?

It means to engage with students through the portal of aesthetic education.

It means students becoming teachers and teachers become students.

It means to dwell where understanding and thoughtfulness thrive (van Manen, 1991).

It means to honour the moment.

It means waiting with ideas while being patient with each other.

It means mindfulness of the task at hand, finding fortitude in paying attention.

It means freedom to follow joyful improvisations.

It means breaking down barriers.

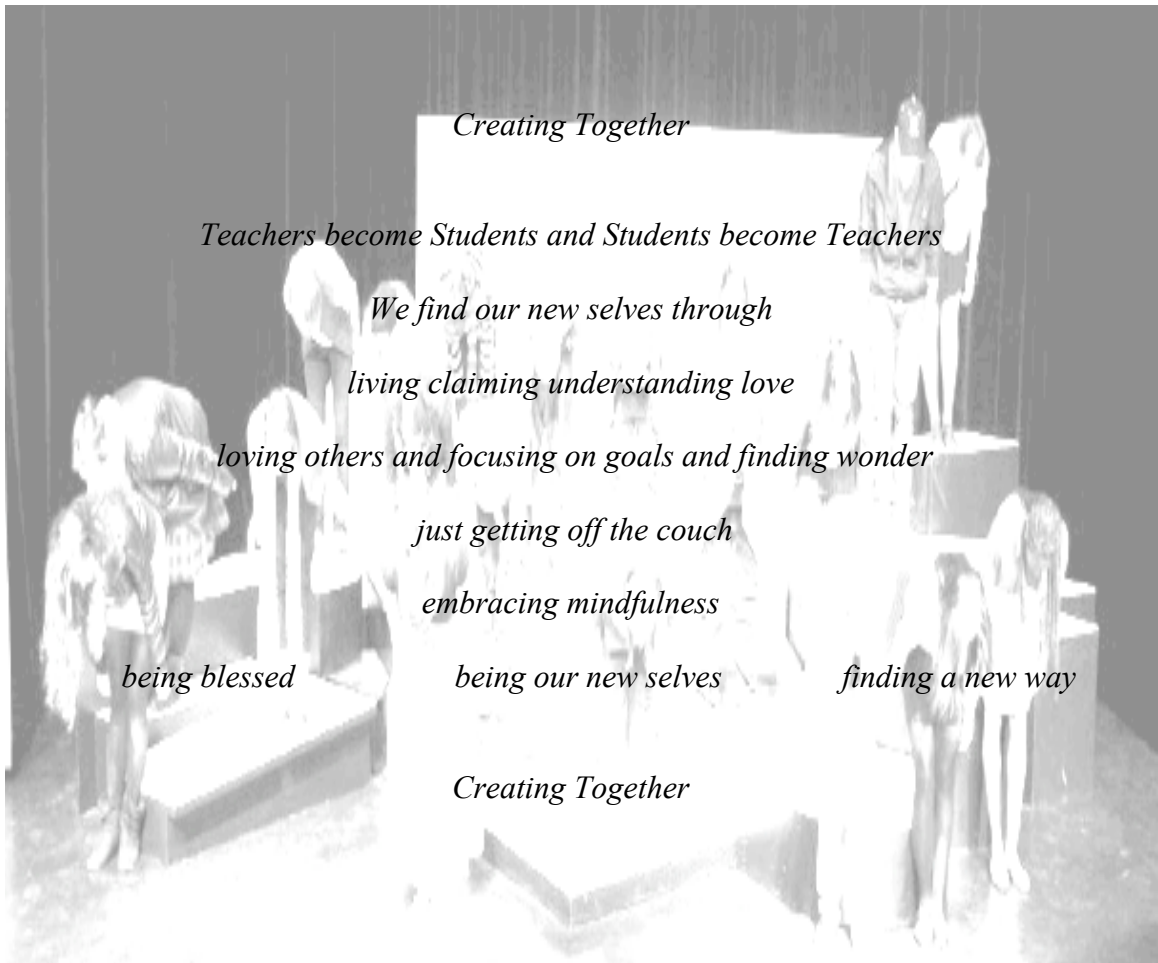
It means to trust to cross thresholds into new experiences.

It means to embrace educarita and risk love (Fowler, 2006).

It means to find one's voice.

## Epilogue

*This is Our Story of Creating Together in Drama Pedagogy*



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## Appendix A

### Coming to the Research

The following two reflections locate my teaching praxis firmly within Greene's (1995) wideawakeness or alert state of consciousness where individuals reflect on their world to stave off the fear of becoming a stranger to their own teaching vocation. I consider this revisiting, with the possibility of transforming my work, as professional development.

### **artisTeacher Intersection**

Stretching on my lime green yoga mat I feel the  
c l i c k

cl i ck

click

of each vertebra shifting; creating a space for breath. The Jathara Parivartanasana or twisted belly is my pose of choice. I lay on my back, spine straight, arms stretched out like pear tree branches trained to grow along a fence. Breathing helps my left knee to lead my stiff hip to cross my abdomen allowing the knee to rest on the floor on the opposite or right side of my body. I repeat the pose on the other side. This stretching engages the memory of muscles.

I breathe in the centre. Lying in a suspended twist energy is freed to flow: up stream, down stream, and across streams, bucking the waves of rutted thoughts, a synthesis occurs within the two hemispheres of my brain (Lark, 2002). Toxins are released. I breathe in the centre.

*T intersections allow travelling left or right, this way or that.*

*A point where a crossing occurs*

*An                      overlapping*

*A      linking          association*

*A    common    point      event*

An artisTeacher is a practitioner of the pedagogical intersection of creation and education. As an artisTeacher, I twist, hold and breathe in the profound responsibility of a teacher while honouring the artist within. “Tactful educators have developed a caring attentiveness to the unique” (van Manen, 2002). Aesthetic education is unique and “integral to any educational enterprise” (Green, 2001, p. 139). ArtisTeacher sets a tone for teaching that addresses the artist within me and the need for thoughtful and tactful pedagogy that acknowledges that education is concerned with issues of the heart as well as the head (van Manen, 2002).

*T intersections allow travelling left or right, this way or that.*

*A              point    where a crossing occurs*

*Dead          endblind alleylend    of a street*

*beyond which it is impossible to proceed*

Dwelling in the dead end zone of the intersection of the artisTeacher produces dull pedagogy and soulless art. Drama used as a frill, an add-on. Students acting out a commercial in a social studies class may give an academic course an injection of diverse

accommodation in assignment choice for exceptional students but it is not theatre. Just as the hand-drawn poster on nutrition for health class is not art. The artisTeacher makes dynamic choices through activating intertwining moments of true art and sincere education. Students are impacted by artisTeachers making pedagogical decisions informed simultaneously by artistic concerns and educational tact. Tactful and thoughtful pedagogy drives artistic sensibilities and artistic sensibilities pushes pedagogy into creative ways of being.

### **Createach**

The goal of my vocation is a deep and profound learning experience for my students. To get there I must place myself in the center of the experience. I accept that this is a push back on modern research, which suggests the student be in the middle of discourse to achieve best practice (Wales, 2009). My intentional and unintentional subjectivities are not fixed but relational. By gaining an understanding of the “multiply and shifting nature” of my subjectivities and the way I process and present them in my classroom I can bring change to my praxis of createach resulting in a heightened experience for my students. Createach is the reason for my interest in writing as a phenomenological/reflective practitioner of the lived experience of creating with my students.

My imagination is who I am. Everything I do or think is coloured by my empathy, creativity, and joy in seeing many possible worlds. I value creativity and model it to my students by being open to “weirdness, eccentricity, and differentness” (Samarasekera as cited in Millar & Dahl, 2011, p. 17). Offering a safe and accepting place for students to explore their imaginations into is a central tenet of createach. More than that, it

empowers me to advocate for any of my students who may be marginalized because they are daydreamers (Wales, 2009). I am someone who always seeks a safe and accepting place for my own imagination so it is critical that students play and “awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected” (Greene, 2000, p. 28).

It is not enough for me to arrange a safe and creative environment for my drama students or strive to be a more articulate example for them. I must work within the creative process sharing the experience. When left alone students tend to default to what they know. “Without the teacher to challenge and extend their ideas, it is difficult for students to achieve new insights through drama” (O’Neill as cited in Taylor, 2006, p. 51). High school students may even shut down or avoid all together the hard work of creating for the stage.

Just as my personal subjectivities inform the create part of my work my teaching philosophy drives the pedagogical choices I make every day. My students and I engage in a form of performative inquiry as our primary learning tool. By the time a student is in grade 12 they are ready to take the lead in this form of creating with their fellow classmates. I move into and out of our collaborative creations. This allows the moment-to-moment lived experience to enter a site of illumination, recognizing our embodied relationship with each other, our past and our anticipated future (Fels, 2011). This pushes our work into the wider context of our everyday lives. Createach broadens our encounters with the world outside the drama classroom.

## Appendix B

### Monologues of an artistTeacher

My field journal is a black moleskin journal. If you flip the book open you would encounter all my musing and revelations about the process of a collaborative collective. I have drawn, doodled, and documented the experience. As the performance date loomed my logbook became my director's notebook with daily comments on what was needed to improve on the stage and a list of practical items that needed attention. If you flipped the book over (reading it backwards as it were) you would encounter my automatic writings, a process that the student-actor cast and I used every day at the start of rehearsal to centre our minds and hearts after a hectic school day. The following monologues are personal insights and significant clusters of formulated meaning making of the experience as I lived it.

I perch on the edge of the seats. My shoulders hunch up and my breathing becomes short and shallow as I watch the actors act out the monk's tale. I am caught up in their silent struggles. I mirror the way they move. I imagine what I would feel attacked by the noonday demon and caught in a cell with no way out with only a tiny window for air. I try to pay attention to the time...three more minutes. I side-coach, "It has got to the point where you don't know if you can stand another minute in that cell". I'm holding my breath I can feel my chest aching for air then someone screams. I wretch out a breathe as I watch a student break down, she is crying. I think: I should end this improvisation but I will not as I want them to get control and find hope again. "You have been blessed with the grace to carry on. You find peace in your prayer". I move closer to

the girl who was crying but now she is under control. This is what I do: I witness, I suggest, I make note of moments of clarity, moments that can be transformed into theatrical story telling. I am an involved watcher. I cannot help myself getting caught up in their stories; their emotional states resonate through me. I share a singular experience with each actor and I am the only one who is privy to all actions by all actors.

September 15, 2011

I was asleep or at least I think I was! I was dreaming or at least I think I was! What I do know is that the entire opening script, the frame for the entire collective came to me, presented itself like a gift. I was aware, cognoscente that I had it! Complete and fully formed a soundscape made up of the phases of acedia. I ran the words again in my head. I could see the actions, the stage, and my students. I had to just get up and type it. It was 4:09 am. I shifted my sleeping cat. My ahh moment was not so spectacular as to wake her from reverie. The leather chair at my desk was cold on my legs as I touched my computer awake. *Was* I really awake? I tried to stay in a semi-sleeping state so not to lose the idea and the words. Like holding water in cupped hands I feared the words were slipping, sliding out of my memory. Placing my hands on the computer sent my brain into a different place and I froze...the words were gone. I took a breath and like a radio operator seeking signals in the void I tuned into my illusive creation. Suddenly I was hard wired. It was all there in front of my eyes...Ijuststartedtypingnotworryingabout-spellingorpunctuation. I just wanted to get it all down. It poured out phrase after phrase. I don't remember breathing or having any other thoughts. Once it was on the screen I pulled back from the keyboard and came back to myself. I read the paragraph half expecting gibberish. I was overjoyed. It made sense and was in fact a concrete version of



what I dream/created. Pressing save I slipped off the now warm chair and stumped back to my cold bed. My cat stretched and recoiled as I glanced at the clock 4:28 an hour until my alarm.

September 21, 2011

I wait for magic. All it takes is a word or a gesture or someone says half of something that someone else finishes and *bam*...no, not *bam* like a punch, more like *zing*...magic rips right into my heart and brain at the same time. I mostly see magic as an image. An image representing a way forward in the plot, a way to deepen a character, or heighten a moment. My students tell me I am so patient. Really, they have no idea that I wait with shaking anticipation for magic to happen. I just know that if you push it or force it magic will remain elusive. So I sit casually, nonchalantly, appearing to ignore all manner of behaviour; presenting a façade of calm. While all the time I am fishing, baiting my line, trolling and waiting to snag magic.

October 20, 2011

The words catch in my throat. I cannot do it. I look into their eyes. Trust is paramount; I will not say anything that will jeopardize the trusting bond between us. I give alternatives I suggest new paths to take the character on. I do anything but outright and unequivocally dismiss an idea. We both know what I am doing; we are in a dance together I have taken the lead but I will not let them fall. The girls leave with new ideas to consider. Egos remain in tact as does our trust but they are back to square one with coming up with an idea. I watch them whisper to each other and then I see one of them get a new idea and the cycle begins again. We have a frame to work within. We are all

keepers of the frame in whatever manner we interpret that frame. I guard my tongue to keep the ideas flowing and fresh.

September 28, 2011

I do not move around much during the planning stage of a collective, I sit on the edge of the seat watching and willing my students to stay engaged in the rehearsal process trying to keep my mouth shut. I hunch my shoulders a lot during these rehearsals: all the tension lives there. Directing the traditional way is so easy but if I just sit still and let my desire to interfere go to my shoulders instead of out my mouth we will get to the same creative place but the student will have taken the play there not just me. When I sense they are floundering then I interject, that is when my help is really needed. I do this mostly through our stage manger. She is usually already there ahead of me. All I do is lean in closer to her and she looks back at me (she always sits a row below me so I can chat easily to her and keep an eye on the stage). She will say a couple of words that sum up what I was thinking and then elaborate the idea to the cast. Is this what telepathy is? She can read my mind and has since she became our stage manager in grade 10. She just showed up with this intuition or is it in-tune-ition? Our relationship is uncanny. I don't even talk to her that much, not enough to justify why she just gets me but she does. When she is talking to the cast I sit quietly behind her supporting her through nodding in agreement and giving her my focus. She is our voice. In these moments I feel what parents must feel watching their child on the stage or scoring the winning goal. I am filled with pride, not the sappy, that's my girl kind of thing but a transcendent knowing that this is what teaching is: not being needed. I witness these moments of students claiming their commitment to the project, sharing their talents, and their sensitive

understanding of a difficult topic. This is art and learning (e)merging right before my eyes. Rehearsal ends, I am forced to notice myself. I am thirsty, my shoulders ache, and I have a head full of images and voices. Driving home I blare Debussy's String Quartet in G Minor filling my head with beauty until I find myself again.

October 25, 2011

"Can we just try this? Keep the pain close to you and let it grow, getting more and more unbearable until all you can see or feel and all you know is this horrible pain. This pain of loss, of giving up, giving in, of not being true to yourself, of failing, of losing love, of never being loved, or of being lost. Let it grow."

The light on stage faded to a hideous blood red and a sound, a horrible clanging beat came through the speakers. Our stage manager has slipped into the booth and was representing with sound and light what the actors and I were creating on stage.

"Now, try to break away. Get free your life depends on it! Push! Kick! Squeeze your way out! Use the space the whole space run if you want run and stumble and fall on the stairs over each other but still that pain is with you."

Between my voice, the actors screams and moans and that noise coming over the speakers we are all going mad. I motion to our stage manager to kill everything: sound and red lights. The dark shocks the actors to stillness. We hold our breath and then the centre light slowly comes alive. Hope! It is hope! We all exhale at the same time and everyone slowly moves into the light, looks up and finds hope, finds themselves again, finds strength through hope.

This is how the climax of the collective was created. We just went with for it with our hearts wide open and ready to try anything. We looked at each other in

amazement. Did this really just happen with out talking it out first? Without organizing each moment? On opening night I looked down on the audience, mere shadows in the dark, from the window in the booth. I could see women and men wiping tears from their eyes; they were so moved by this scene of being in the void and finding hope.

November 10, 2011

A part of me sits in the dark watching the performance, night after night, barely patient for the show to be over. I have heard it too many times. I dream about it at night and stew on it while driving. The jokes sound dull and the emotional scenes too shrill. The other half of me however, is acting: living and breathing every line, every nuance and movement, noticing every change instantly judging it and making a note. And so I sit as critical director, bored critic and engaged actor. This is not easy company.

Well meaning people come up to me after the show and ask if I am enjoying the fruits of my labour? Labour is the right word. I have not been privileged with a child but my God physical labour cannot any more painful then sitting in the dark and keeping my mouth shut and allowing the show to unfold as it will moment by moment. I am no longer a part of the show. The intimacy I shared with the actors has been transferred to the audience. Like a jilted lover I not only have to be alone amongst a sea of people united in their excitement over the production, but I am forced to watch my pride and joy entertain for someone else. After the show I mostly hide in the lighting booth. I take a really long time to turn off the equipment and lock the door.

After closing night and for about a week fellow teachers smile and say I must be so glad all that's over. The students get it too: now life can go back to normal. On one hand it is nice to have more time, many responsibilities and pleasures have taken a back

seat during the performance week. But the emptiness is palatable. Something nurtured for so long is ripped away and gone. We strike the set the very next day. Someone texts someone else and soon half the cast are skipping their classes wanting to see the set one more time. The cast tends to hang out in the drama room for days after the show closes to savour or recapture what we experienced together. So much pressure to perform, to have the audience love our work, and then it is all over. Roses are always given to cast members and directors alike on opening night. They are a fitting motif: something so deliciously perfect fades, crumbles, and dries up never to be the same again its moment is over. That is theatre too. Grand and magnificent but blink and you missed it.

November 22, 2011

I prefer the anonymity of the dark. That is why I am a teacher of drama and not a thespian myself. I shift deeper into the shadows at the top of the theatre. No one knows I am standing here watching the last few minutes of the show before I am needed to turn on the house light and open the doors for the audience to leave the theatre. The show ends. I have a huge smile on my face as I say my traditional prayer of thanks and start clapping with the audience. Suddenly my view of my students is obscured as the audience gives the cast a standing ovation. As the applause comes to a natural end I don't trust myself, my emotions are too close to the surface so I duck into the light booth and hide until most of the celebrating with friends and family is over. I emerge always to be greeted by old students and parents who really want to thank me before they leave. Other people write me letters, sometimes weeks later, articulating what the production meant to them. These comments help ground me. They help me shift through all the stress and the millions of

details, creative and pedestrian, and know in my heart that the work is worthwhile...then I celebrate.

November 25, 2011

I give myself a pep talk as I enter the boardroom of our high school for a department head/ administration meeting. I feel like running away. I sit in a chair by the door and the meeting begins. So far so good, I have made a couple good observations, got a smile out of the Head of Social Studies...maybe this time it will be ok. Agenda item three: schedule for the last week of classes in the fall semester. After the fourth comment about field-testing for the academic courses I pipe in with the suggestion that the last two days should be reserved for final presentations or exams in the fine arts and other non-academic courses. Now I have done it! My mere suggestion that the academic courses accommodate the non-academic courses has sent the Department Head of Science into a tirade about diploma results with the Head of Math nodding in agreement. I feel myself shrinking into my chair. I am getting smaller and smaller like Gulliver in Brodbingnag...say something...stand up for the arts and learner-centered education do it...do it now! Suddenly the scene morphs and I am on a stage...

*The stage is in blackness; silence...then quickly a harsh spotlight shines centre stage revealing artisTeacher sitting on the floor hugging her knees.*

ArtisTeacher: (*Beat. Resolved artisTeacher stands*) Let me get this straight, I'm being charged with solipsistic navel-gazing? Just so I am clear on this...by suggesting that the fine arts become an equal partner at the educational table you are accusing me of narrow-mindedness? I address myself to those who sit in the dark and judge. What colour is your hair, your kid's hair and for that matter your

dog's hair...fur...whatever? The point is we are different, in looks and in motivation, in talents and predilections. We are all different. It is our right to be different a condition, in fact, of being human. In one aspect we are, however, the same: we all have a voice and now you will listen to me. I, artisTeacher, have endured in silence being labeled a flake, disorganized and incompetent, not because I actually possess any of those traits but because I am one of those 'artsy types'. Just because when I stand on the abyss and stare into the void I don't see the black I see stories, characters, colours, shapes, and emotions. When I step in front of my students I choose to teach through play, celebration, and imagination. Let's ask the inventors, the brilliant men and women of science, does imagination come into your equations, your leaps of faith that brought us understanding of our solar system or our own bodies? They would agree with me, you know they would. So why are they honoured while artists are called the frills of society? How come when problems come up it is the imaginative ones, the ones who can bend space and time, that discover the solutions? Why is it that the passion of the arts moves people to greatness?

You label us because you are the navel gazers. Because when you look into the void you just see blackness, nothing and you are scared. As educators, our job cannot be passionless. We have to look at our students and feel their struggles, understand their reality and teach with empathy and compassion. We all agreed to teach each child, each one is special but that isn't going to happen in neat rows. It is going to take a messy, unique solution, one that everyone can contribute to, one that is going to need ideas from the artists as well as everyone else. So, yes, I

have every right to speak my mind. Do not dismiss me when I am offering solutions, proven solutions to help a variety of students just because my voice rings with excitement and concern and you are uncomfortable with public displays of joy. If we are going to truly help 21<sup>st</sup> century students then you who sit in the dark and judge are going to have to get used the solutions because they are bold, democratic and in your face. These charges are false. I see the reality of the students I teach and I react to them. (*A bell rings*) Excuse me I have work to do.

December 14, 2011



## Appendix C

### Images, Interviews, and Insights from the Cutting Room Floor

Each member of the cast was asked to reflect in the form of a journal insight once a week ruminating on the rehearsals, the process, and progress of the collaborative collective. The cast could express themselves writing in their journals, using programs like Comic Life™ or they could collage their ideas. Several cast members participated in inform oral recorded interviews where they discussed specific spaces of activated drama pedagogy. The interviews were conducted during the last week of rehearsal. Grade, gender, and the date identify the student-actors' reflections and photographs. The data extrapolated for Chapter Four is a small sample of all the material that was generated. The following may have hit the cutting room floor but are worthy of a place in this inquiry.

This wordle is a compilation of the goals of each member of the cast and crew created at the beginning of the process. (September 15, 2011)



Student-Actors recording insights during a brainstorming session. The journal became a record of fragments of scripts, character sketches and hundreds of ideas. (September 20, 2011)

Student-actors in role as a monk tortured by  
acedia as part of pre-text explorations.  
(September 15, 2011)



I am such an idiot. Why a monk? Why the hell did I come here? I'm trapped in this cell. I want out. I want air. I want anything but this. Just breathe. Just breathe. Just...what did they say... just breathe ...you know this is just the demon. Don't give in! Don't give in. Get away from me. Leave me alone. I can't breathe. (Gr. 11 girl, September 15, 2011 in role reflection of pre-text exploration.)

This student-actor had so many ideas she was constantly writing everything down. Her journal is a remarkable record of her process. (Gr. 12 girl, September 27, 2011)



Student-actors engaged in (re)imagining scene work, offering changes or additions. (Gr. 11 boy/Gr. 12 Girl, October 4, 2011)




One of my flaws is that I take things too personally and I can be over emotional. Whenever there is creating that needs to be done I tend to pull certain things from the way I've felt in the past and strip away all the personal issues that tie in with that and I get the foundation of whatever I or someone in my life felt at that point. I build on that, I try not to trigger any really personal and really heavy situations because I don't want to bring those experiences to the stage. Too personal, my story not the characters.

(Gr. 11 girl, September 21, 2011)

Once I have the general structure of the idea, I put it in the back of my mind. It then sneaks its way out when I'm alone, or going for a walk or even going home on the bus. Sometimes if I'm stressed or overwhelmed those ideas don't ever come out. (Gr. 12 boy, September 22, 2011)

<p>My mom says she can always tell what I am feeling, that I wear my emotions on my face. I have a hard time not showing that I am bored waiting. But I am not rude I'm not bored if others are telling stories or ideas. I get bored with waiting to act. I love acting. I step into someone else and in the moment that the character becomes me I am light. There are no more math tests to worry about, no more friend drama. I escape. Rehearsal kills me when I'm in character and then I have to stop and I lose my character and all my own issue drop down on me like a ton of rocks. Damn and I am back to me again. I wait as someone figures out a problem. I'm not one who can sit still like some people so I move, a lot, and I make faces. It's not my fault I just look my friends and I start smiling or laughing. (Gr. 12 boy, October 19, 2011 reflection on character building)</p>	<p>I can't help myself I just jet so excited with my ideas I have to get them out. But is it not my turn... crap! Crap! Crap! I move in closer to the people around me or I stand up, this draws attention to me and I interrupt the conversation with my idea. I am a bad person I know. I'm like a fountain and ideas are the bubbling water just flowing out of me. I've been told to write my ideas down so that waiting won't be so hard for me. I start to write and then another idea happens because someone has said something so then I am writing down two ideas at the same time and before I know it my mouth is open and I am interrupting again. Sometimes I jump in and finish the sentence of the person talking. I see their faces; they think I'm cute, just as long as they don't get mad at me. (Gr. 12 girl, October 20, 2011 reflection on waiting with ideas)</p>
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<p>I am waiting. I give eye contact to the person talking. My body is relaxed and I could care less about time or where we are. I'm in rehearsal and that's all that matters to me. I keep my face neutral or if what was just said works for my character then I start scheming, forming ideas, and building on what others have just said. I open my heart to advice. I am happy waiting and listening.</p> <p>(Gr. 12 girl, October 19, 2011 reflection on rejecting)</p>	<p>My thoughts cannot be contained so I share with my nearest neighbour none of this waiting business. I become frantic. I nod and fake laugh trying to hurry the person talking so it will be my turn. I talk or comment on everything said so I don't have to wait in silence, that's just not me.</p> <p>(Gr. 11 boy, October 25, 2011 on (re)imagining)</p>
<p>Oh, I have been waiting forever. My arm is sore. Switch. And switch again. I put my arm down but I am afraid I will forget what I want to say so I don't listen to who is talking I just think about what I want to say. I focus on a speck of dirt or my shoe to focus my mind, block out what others are saying. Oh, what! What was I going to say now I've waited so long I've daydreamed and forgot what I wanted to say! (Gr. 12, girl, October 25, 2011 on (re)imagining)</p>	<p>I think my idea over and over as I wait to say it. I almost scream it out loud. I get all jittery and impatient I move around to make myself noticeable and then it just happens...I blurt out my idea. I must work on waiting!</p> <p>(Gr. 11 girl, October 25, 2011 on waiting)</p>

<p>This is my first play even though I am in grade 12. Man, do I wish I had auditioned before...I'm tentative... ok... outright scared to share ideas in the middle of rehearsal. Before, when we were planning, I was good, but just putting up your arm and changing everything...scares the life out of me! But I have good ideas and what the hell up goes my hand. I was almost hoping they (stage manager and Ms. S) wouldn't see it. But they did and now I was stopping rehearsal with my ideas. Cool. It made me feel special and listened to. Like my voice mattered. (Gr. 12 girl, November 1, 2011 during (re)imagining)</p>	<p>I could never do what the others do. Just interrupt rehearsal with their brilliant ideas. I need time to think of things. In fact I'm bad at getting into character and staying there without caring about the others. But I am better in groups, small groups, and then I feel safe to share my ideas. My friends help me find my voice: they ask me what I think and I feel ok to say what I think. It is a personal thing with me but maybe with more opportunities like this I could be better at getting my voice out there. (Gr. 11 boy, October 20, 2011 during (re)imagining)</p>
<p>The girl from the reflection above.</p> 	<p>I make a suggestion and four people add to it. I see scenes in my head. I even hear the voices of my friends playing characters I know as well as my friends who are playing them. It's a short cut. (Student-stage manager, Gr. 12 girl, October 3, 2011 on creating characters)</p>

<p>I don't let too many people in to my heart, yet the characters I create are very open. That's a good word like a gaping wound that is not healing. The cast respects me. That gives me confidence. Someone suggested that rest of the cast play the father, my character's dad who abused him with a beer bottle and caused me to slowly go blind. They added a backhand slap each time I said father or dad. My father...slap! was a drinker. Just my dad...slap and I lived now that mom was gone. The slaps were so loud I could feel the hits around my head, across my face, I winced over and over I could not help the tears, they just poured down my face. It felt right to crumble into a sitting position so I crumbled. No one said anything then Ms. S spoke in a very soft voice: you are so brave, that was brilliant. I jumped up thrilled that it worked! (Gr.12 boy, November 2, 2011 reflecting on creating a monologue for his character.)</p>	<p>I found I could share with everyone in this cast. Some actors I didn't know very well but I still felt I could open my journal and show them my scribbles, half written ideas, and scraps of dialogue. No one ever laughed at me. They just got excited and starting feeding off me. I would start one of these moments and it would be as if a bubble surrounded us and we were the only ones that mattered. Our stage manager yelled at us twice to get our attention.</p> <p>(Gr. 11 boy, October 25, 2011 during (re)imagining).</p>
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These four photographs were taken during the dress rehearsal November 21, 2011. They offer a glimpse into the finished project and serve as a reference point for many of the reflections.

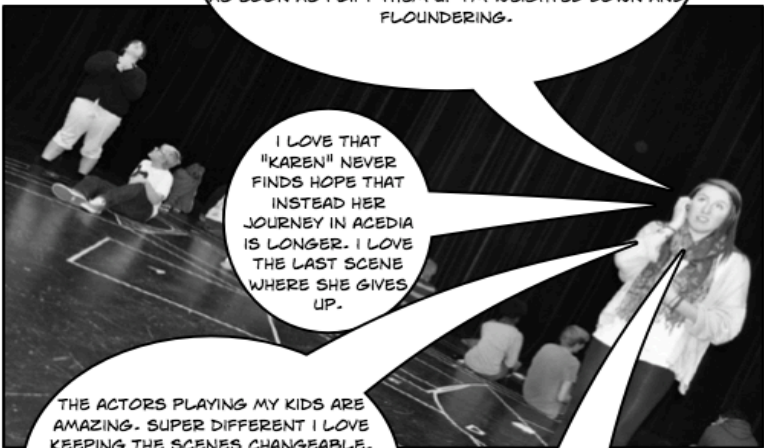
A: close to the beginning of the play the actors move through a day in the life of their character and then stood still to allow each character a chance to share a thought bubble of what they are feeling at that moment. The play was set in an urban high school. We filmed a day in the life of our school and that was projected behind the actors.

B: each character went through some event that sent them spiraling down into acedia or deep melancholy.



C: each character presented a monologue on their deepest thoughts. A photo that reflected their comments was projected behind each character. The rest of cast wore a neutral mask and acted out what the monologue referenced. This character discussed his tortured relationship with his alcoholic father who beat about the face until he went blind. The cast played his father and slapped their hands together each time he mentioned his name.

D. after the monologues the characters plunged into a theatrical representational movement/vocal piece in red light of being in the void-the depths of pain and anguish. This was followed by a remarkable resurrection scene of each character coming into the light of hope.

<p>Performing and being in character is a power thing. It's sometimes hard to remember it's you being someone else, and not someone else being you!</p> <p>(Gr. 11 boy, November 20, 2011 on performing)</p>	<p>(Gr. 12 girl reflecting on performing her character "Karen" November 22, 2011)</p>  <p>I FIND "KAREN" IN OUR VOICE FIRST IT IS HIGHER PITCHED THEN I NORMALLY TALK. AND THEN IN HER SHOULDERS I FIND SHE HOLDS ALL THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF HER LIFE IN HER SHOULDERS. AS SOON AS I LIFT THEM UP I'M WEIGHTED DOWN AND FLOUNDERING.</p> <p>I LOVE THAT "KAREN" NEVER FINDS HOPE THAT INSTEAD HER JOURNEY IN ACEDIA IS LONGER. I LOVE THE LAST SCENE WHERE SHE GIVES UP.</p> <p>THE ACTORS PLAYING MY KIDS ARE AMAZING. SUPER DIFFERENT I LOVE KEEPING THE SCENES CHANGEABLE. THE MORE WE PLAY OUR CHARACTERS THE HISTORY WE ARE WRITING FOR OURSELVES TO PULL FROM IN PERFORMANCE. EVOLVING AND EXPANDING.</p> <p>PERFORMING "KAREN" IS BIZARRE. I AM NOTHING LIKE HER WHICH MAKES EVERY CHOICE FRESH AND SURPRISING. I GO HOME AT NIGHT AMAZED AT THE CHOICES SHE MAKES!</p>
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I like to have a deep understanding of the character's story. The time when I'm most nervous is always right before I get on stage and that's when I tell myself that I'm

freaking out and my character wouldn't be doing that right now. I also like to spend a few minutes alone in a quiet place before a big performance. I spend my time clearing my head, running scenes in my mind and hearing my lines. This gives me a sense of relief because I feel like I'm ready and I have it fresh in my mind. When trying to portray a certain emotion I remember moment in my own life and try to recreate how I felt at the time or put myself in my characters position. I also like my costume and being in the lights and hearing our sound cues. (Gr. 11 girl, reflecting on performing November 24, 2011)

When I am in character it is so intense. Almost scarily intense. I love it. Being in Aubrey's head is so completely different and so completely other than any other experience I've ever had. She is relatively difficult to channel completely seeing as she is this terrible angry, torn-up, and hurt little girl. There are so many facets to Aubrey. When I am completely in character, I essentially see red. My heart speeds up, my nose flares and I also feel weighed down with this incredible sadness and this fear. Audrey always feels like she has to lash out or no one will hear her and her biggest fear is to be ignored. I also feel a great degree of tenderness for my brother Peter played by John and regret that I cannot be affectionate toward him. Aubrey is deeply jealous of Peter that he can hang on to his childhood and still has light coming from him. Aubrey doesn't so much walk as throw her body around in a direction. She has the tendency to stomp and swing and drop her arms. It is also rather difficult to be neutral midway through the performance for the monologues of the other characters when I've spent all this energy and emotion becoming Aubrey. She is hard to come in and out of if I want to not do so haphazardly and be at any

point half Aubrey half neutral. It feels strange to be that. Performing her night after night gives me a deeper understanding of her. (Gr. 12 girl reflecting on performing November 23, 2011)

There is moment. One breath in and an exhale when the character fades and I come rushing back in. It happens with a thundering crash of applause. I am frozen waiting for the lights to fade. Another performance over. My heart feels so happy and proud that I think I will look down and it will be protruding from my chest. No such anomaly but it does feel full, full of a weird combination of happiness and relief. Good thing it is not sticking out as the lights come on again and I am standing, smiling for an audience standing, cheering, and clapping. They are just shadows beyond the glare of the theatre lights but their response surrounds me and fills me pure joy. Off stage we jump and grab at each other and run up the stairs to more applause and praise. (Gr. 12 boy on celebrating November 22, 2011)

I can be creative at times but it only comes to me when I am stress free and involved in conversations. I think best at the most random of times: sitting on the couch watching TV. When I have a lot of things on my mind it is hard to be creative because I am figuring out other things. Also for me to actually be creative I need to have time and not feel pressure. Usually something that is said triggers my creative spark. I like how this play is coming along and how I am part of the directing process. (Gr. 11 girl on creating November 23, 2011)