

**LIFEWORk: LEARNING AND TEACHING THROUGH DRAMA  
A CULMINATING CREATIVE PROJECT**

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### Abstract

Learning and teaching through drama is the focus of this research. The first half of the project focuses on an interpretation of the students' experience. Being in a drama class is unlike being in other classes in school in some important ways: students experience a strong sense of belonging, of ownership of the curriculum, of being heard. They see drama as an opportunity to learn about themselves and, in so doing, learn to appreciate the uniqueness of each individual in the class. This awareness helps them to overcome the alienation that they feel in some other classes in school. Students indicated that drama helps them become more accepting of other points of view.

Through the interview with Karen, the drama teacher who participated in the project, we learn of the intentionality with which teachers guide students through the dramatic experience. Students are encouraged to question, challenge assumptions, and reflect on their own lives as a basis for their work in drama. In so doing, they gain confidence in themselves, and an appreciation of the pluralistic nature of our society.

The second half of the project explores parallels between drama education and critical pedagogy. Through reference to the experience of drama students and teachers, and to Ira Shor's book Critical Teaching and Everyday Life (1980), parallels between drama education and critical pedagogy are made. It becomes apparent that learning and teaching through drama can be a means to critically view our world. Using some of the frameworks that Shor suggests, the project explores ways in which drama education and critical pedagogy enable students and teachers to work together in connected and meaningful ways.

### Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to the participants in this study: Melanie, Lauren, Brandon, Matt and Karen. Your stories and insights helped immensely to describe our work together as students and teachers of drama. It was good to work with you all again, to be reminded of your openness, your enthusiasm, your intelligence, and especially your goodwill as we each tried to put our experience into words.

To Dr. Cynthia Chambers, thank you for your pedagogical example, wisdom, patience, and your generosity in guiding me through this project. To Dr. Robert Runté, thank you for your writerly expertise and your enthusiasm for this work. Both you and Cynthia helped me to see my experience as a teacher through new eyes, and to understand that experience more fully. Because of your encouragement, and that of my colleagues and professors at the University of Lethbridge, I return to the classroom with renewed vigor and interest in teaching.

Thanks to my parents, whose support is ongoing, and always appreciated. And thanks to the parents of these student participants, who also support their children, encouraging them along the path of drama education. The work your daughters and sons do in drama is important work.

# **Lifework: Learning and Teaching through Drama**

F. Michael Wright

*Drama is about humanity in a mess.*

...David G. P. Spinks

*Science manipulates things and gives up living in them.*

...Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Palmer, 1969, p. 7)

## **Begin at the beginning**

Recalling the above quote from David Spinks seems an appropriate place to begin an inquiry into teaching and learning through drama. David was my first professor of drama at university, and my first teacher of drama in a formal educational setting. The quote is a paraphrase of some of the first words that I recall David saying during my introductory drama class, over twenty-two years ago. The words have remained with me throughout my career as a drama teacher, words which I use frequently to remind my students and myself of the work we are called to do in drama; that is the work of exploring, questioning, interpreting, and reflecting upon the human experience. Drama work is relational. In drama, we ask what it means to be human. It is "life" work.

The second quotation, by the late French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, articulates an attitude prevalent in contemporary Western society that much of what we do is only considered valid or worthwhile if somehow provable through science. Merleau-Ponty's few words help to contextualize the challenge faced by those of us who work in the arts, specifically here, work in drama and theatre; work that can not be categorized conveniently; work that will not succumb to empirical examination; work that will not, indeed cannot, be reduced to a formula or an equation. This project, "lifework" as I have chosen to call it, is an inquiry into the experience of learning to make sense of the world through drama, in our efforts to understand what it means to be human.

The intent of both theatre and drama is to bring us to a deeper awareness and understanding of the human condition. There are important differences in the functions of each. These differences are important to elucidate here, since this inquiry will focus more on the dramatic experience rather than on the theatrical. To help us understand the relationship between drama and theatre, and to describe how theatre can emerge from work in drama, let us consider the words of Cecily O'Neill and Alan Lambert (1987):

Drama is essentially social and involves contact, communication, and the negotiation of meaning...Drama works from the strength of the group. It draws on a common stock of experiences and in turn enriches the minds and feelings of individuals within the group.

The most significant kind of learning which is attributable to experience in drama is a growth in the pupils' understanding about human behaviour, themselves, and the world they live in. This growth of understanding, which will involve changes in customary ways of thinking and feeling, is likely to be the primary aim of drama teaching. A secondary aim will be an increased competence in using the drama form and satisfaction from working within it.

Theatre skills [that is, the refinement of the dramatic forms] are not necessary before a group engages in drama, but working in drama is likely to develop and enhance those skills. (p. 13)

O'Neill and Lambert's distinction between drama and theatre helps us to understand that much of the work in which drama students and teachers engage is not necessarily geared to theatrical performance. To engage in drama is to participate in an exploration of questions of concern to the group members; to explore possible worlds, and our responses to those questions about those possible worlds from the multiple perspectives of those working within the group. Theatre, on the other hand, tends to focus on the development and refinement of skills. The acting process, for example, comprises a number of skills which are sometimes "broken down" or isolated for the purposes of refinement. Studies in voice,

speech, movement, and character analysis suggest a more skill-based emphasis than that in which we usually engage in drama. The focus of this creative project is an effort to unravel and more fully understand the dramatic experience from the perspectives of students and teachers.

Inquiring into the experience of working in drama lends itself to a style of research that will allow us to momentarily reflect upon and interpret the stories of those who have had such experiences. Hermeneutics, the study of understanding, is appropriate to this inquiry and to interpreting the narratives of experience that inform this text.

The narratives for this project, in addition to my own, include those of four former students in my junior high drama classes, and their current Drama 30 teacher, Karen. I invited these particular students to share their stories of experience in drama because they have had a sustained interest in drama for a number of years. They are enthusiastic, open-minded, and articulate. Karen, their present drama teacher, also kindly agreed to participate in this project, and her insightful and thoughtful comments are of great assistance in elucidating what it means to be a drama teacher.

This project has opened new understandings for me of what it means to interpret, and to ask the question: "Upon whose authority do we engage in the act of interpretation?" James Clifford (1986) helped me to understand an interpretive perspective that does not intend or pretend to represent others:

A major consequence of the historical and theoretical movements traced...has been to dislodge the ground from which persons and groups securely represent others.  
(p. 22)

The act of interpretation is not unfamiliar to me. Directors and drama teachers are called to be interpreters of the words and ideas of others, to guide and to collaborate with others in the work of interpretation. Inquiring into the experience of learning and teaching through drama has lead me to a deeper understanding of the meaning of interpretation. This in turn has brought me to recognize that this project, indeed my life, is an interpretation confined

within, and affected by, the context of my own experience. I can only understand from the points of view which I have experienced, and do not presume to claim understanding of the experience of others, apart from my *interpretation of* it. I speak neither for another, nor on behalf of another; however, I *do* interpret what others have said about their experience, while acknowledging that it is *my* interpretation, filtered through my own experience. In that sense, this work is autobiographical; similar, for example, to Natalie Goldberg's (1993) Long Quiet Highway: Waking Up in America, the story of her awakening into a fuller consciousness of her own life. In writing Long, Quiet Highway, Goldberg articulates aspects of her life which had previously remained unsaid. This project has helped me to reflect deeply upon the meaning of my experience as a drama teacher and to articulate aspects of my life as a teacher. I have been lead further to ask what meaning the dramatic experience has had for some others. This is not just my story. It is the story of the "society" of all those students, teachers, and writers who have influenced my thinking and helped me awaken to what it means to teach and learn, specifically through drama.

This awareness becomes a meaningful point from which to begin inquiring into the dramatic experience. My experiences as a drama student increased my self-awareness. I became conscious of aspects of my behaviour and of attitudes that affected my relationship with others. This initial becoming self-aware is intrinsic to the artistic experience, and occurs throughout the process of the experience. The following story, one of my early recollections as a drama student, may help to elaborate this point:

### **Recalling an experience in learning through drama**

*Pools of light dapple the floor of the drama studio. The music plays, slowly and steadily, compelling us, inspiring us to move. Three of us, during a creative movement assignment, summon our concentration and allow ourselves to move in spontaneous, silent response to the music. We watch each other carefully, as we attempt to remain a cohesive unit, while allowing for the independence of each individual within the movement. No leader here. No right answer. There is only music and us. Lighting has been set to enhance the mood. It also provides*



*welcome darkness, hiding places to minimize self-consciousness. Together we move through the music, as though one body. We attend to each other, and respond to the other's slightest movement. We do not want this to end, here as we experience total acceptance of each other, total freedom to interpret, and total commitment to one another and to the work. We merge into a final tableau, faces uplifted toward the sky, hands raised, palms facing upward, creating a tipi-with our bodies. We hold this tableau as the music fades slowly away.*

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*I recall my own vigilance throughout this time, striving not to dictate the next move. We worked in complete silence. We watched each other to see what would happen, to see where we might go together. Living in the present. Although there were many others working simultaneously in the class, to us there was nothing but us: our bodies, hearts, minds, souls, and the music that became the sculptor shaping our every move and gesture. We were as clay in the hands of the music. A time of complete selflessness, of giving inhibition away, abandoning insecurities. Together we became lithe, fluid, and free, while intuitively aware that we were bound by our discipline, by the music, and by our respect for one another. In accepting those conditions and constraints, and recognizing the constantly changing environment, we experienced amazing freedom.*

This is one of the most vivid recollections I have of a drama class. The physical, emotional, and spiritual experience evoked a visceral response within me, the memory of which has remained for over twenty years. To a casual observer, it might appear that the lesson was simply a class of students at widely ranging levels of movement skill, playing about. But for me, the experience went far beyond that--I came to an awareness of some of that which contributes to creation, interpretation, and self-expression.

This story points to a mindfulness of a relational way of being with others, a way of engaging with others attentively in the dramatic activity. As I became conscious of this awareness, I recognized that the other two people involved with me in this movement interpretation appeared to share a similar disposition, and in recognizing that, we became

open to recognizing each other, to set aside our own personal agenda, to make room for the other. [In this class, we literally *did* make room for the other, although no pun is intended here, because this was a movement piece.] For the work to continue, we had to be aware constantly of the position and gesture of the others in our group, to respond to their movements, and to be aware of our own. It was an embodied knowing, an embodied awareness about opening a space for the other. It was a continual and recursive interpretation and reinterpretation of the shifting circumstances in which we found ourselves. This awareness of self and others is vital to the ongoing life of the dramatic process, and points to the relationality of dramatic work, work that cannot be done in the absence of others.

The story also points to my own discovery of the power of the visceral experience. This was not the "intellectualized" learning that I had come to expect in an educational setting. It was something quite different and very physical that resonated within my being in a new way. I could not articulate clearly the experience at the time, only to say I had a sense that this way of learning was important. I responded intuitively to a way of knowing that was highly engaging and very exciting for me. In attempting to describe this experience, the word visceral seems appropriate; it is a "gut response" which, because our bodies are physically engaged in the action of the work, leads to embodied knowing. This embodied knowing is significantly different from intellectual knowing. In considering what it means to know in an embodied way, I have come to reinterpret what it means to educate and to be educated; what it means to be a learner and what it means to be a teacher. As a teacher, it is a way of knowing to which I want to bring as many students as possible, because it is the experience of living in the work, and the work living in us.

Drama is a medium through which we are able to experience embodied knowing. It is an inclusive process, since drama does not exclude intellectual learning, but rather engages our whole being in the learning.

Embodied knowing is not given a great deal of consideration in Western culture generally, and remains largely unacknowledged in Western education. Lous Heshusius (1994) has synthesized the writing of several people who offer insights into embodied knowing:

Polanyi's (1966, p. 4) concept of tacit knowing is precisely the knowing that we know but cannot tell. We "extend our body to include [what we come to know]--so that we come to dwell in it" (p. 16). Berman (1981, 1990) refers to his bodily knowing as "somatic knowing," the most vital and essential aspect of coming to know. The "feeling for the organism," the tacit and somatic modes of knowing all describe a nondescribable, nonaccountable form of knowing that is crucial and vital. In traditional quantitative research the validity and significance of such knowing are denied. I fear, in being told to articulate and bring under management what is seen as the researcher's subjectivity, we continue to repress a participatory mode of consciousness, and therefore restrict what we otherwise might come to understand about both other and self. (p. 17)

The "dwelling in what we come to know" (as Polanyi calls it) is an important concept here, because it is this becoming aware of the physical knowing, the reflecting upon it, the living within it, that creates embodied knowing.

Melanie, one of the high school drama students who participated in the study, describes embodied knowing from her experience:

It's active. Like in one of our classes, [our teacher] would explain things, then very soon we'd be up there doing it. Every concept she brought up, we were doing it, so it wasn't just "notes on the board, copy them down, test on Wednesday."

The "test" was doing it, basically.

It is the *doing* it, the physical engagement in the work, that enables the visceral response to occur. In any kind of physical work, we develop a rhythm, one which we remember. So too with the physical work of drama; we remember the physicality of the movement, either

within the context of our own personal exploration or within that of a character. Learning through drama is recursive in this respect: it engages our memory in the recall of our experience, and commits experience to our memory in an embodied way.

Being engaged in this work, at the moment of the experience, calls the participants to be fully mindful, fully willing to participate in the experience. Gadamer (1975) points to this when he says, "Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in his play." (p. 92). This concentration on and becoming absorbed in the work is referred to colloquially as being "theatrically there." This describes an attitude of willing suspension of disbelief, realizing that the work is not real at that moment, and that the work is a re-creation of what was or seems real. In spite of its apparent playfulness, drama is serious work. We understand that to fully participate in the game (or, work in this case) we must give ourselves over fully to the playing. Again, Gadamer helps us understand this: "...only seriousness in playing makes the play wholly play" (Gadamer, p. 92). Melanie and Lauren's story about an acting experience illustrates this losing of oneself in the work:

Melanie: Well, in drama, and learning about it and becoming really close with these people and expressing your ideas, I don't know why, but all of the things that are holding you back just kind of fall away. Eventually, if you get as comfortable as you can with yourself and with the people around you and with a dramatic performing environment, then you can go a long way with a character. I remember this one time in Drama 20, my friend Crystal and I got so into this thing we were performing that it became very real and eventually we just looked at each other and started crying. That is just an amazing experience the first time you like....

Lauren: break through the wall

Melanie: Yeah, break through the wall. That's what Ms. G. calls it.

Wright: And what does that mean, "break through the wall"?

Melanie: It means when the character just sinks right inside you...

Lauren: And you don't know who you are for a second. It's the scariest feeling when it first happens because you don't know what's going on with you.

Wright: Because it's a new experience?

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Wright: Because it's a new experience?

Melanie: Yeah. Very new.

Lauren: Totally new. And then you don't know what happened to yourself. You've worked through drama to find out who you are and all of a sudden you know who you are. You can take yourself ...

Wright: As in accept yourself?

Lauren: Accept yourself and who you are and the way you think which drama helps you with. You finally find out you can be your own person and then all of a sudden another person enters you. You know who you are, but you're focusing for a scene and all of a sudden it becomes so real you don't know what reality is anymore.

This story speaks to the act of interpretation. Again, the dramatic experience is not only an intellectual one, but involves our entire being in the act of interpretation. It is experienced intellectually, emotionally, and physically. To engage in interpretation, actors (that is, a person *acting within* a situation--which may include, although is not exclusive to, actors in the usual sense) ought to understand consciously the context of the experience, and also be aware of the prejudice that one brings to their interpretation of a situation. I refer to "prejudice" in the context in which Gadamer uses the term: the prejudgments that arise from the cultural and historical conditions in which understanding takes place (Devereaux, 1991). Gadamer's term "tradition" suggests an authority that is both temporally and culturally grounded, a nonfoundational source of value which goes beyond, yet recognizes, the personal. To understand that all of our interpretations are filtered through our own being and through our own experience is to remain open to the possibilities of otherness.

It is this understanding that allows us to first recognize and acknowledge, and perhaps to accept, difference among individuals, societies, and cultures. In drama, much of what we do focuses on this orientation toward the other. As participants in drama, we are able to become aware of our own tradition and then move beyond that into an exploration of what it might mean to "be" other. At times, this may mean simply working with different individuals within the drama class.

The temporal and cultural grounding of which Gadamer speaks provides the language to express where we begin to explore ourselves in the context of the drama

classroom. We begin with who we are *now*. We acknowledge that who we are *now* is a product of all of our life experience to this point, including both our collective and personal histories: including such things as our family backgrounds, societal influences, the school we attend, the friends we have, the teachers we have, and so on. Although we may be aware of all of this unconsciously, we learn in drama to become conscious, to awaken to influences that shape our lives. Maxine Greene (1994) offers an interpretation of this awakening:

...Our subjectivity has a greater role to play in the province of the arts than in mathematics, for all the fact that subjectivity and subjective vantage points can never be ignored. From these and other perspectives, in any case, we are enabled to attend to our life worlds "in different modifications" (Schutz, 1967, p. 258).

Schutz was describing consciousness thrusting into a world shared with others for the sake of understanding it, not of controlling it. He continued to seek, as he wrote, a "heightened plane of consciousness" or what he (like Thoreau before him and Camus) chose to call "wide-awakeness" (p. 213). The term refers to an active mode of attention to projects and plans of action...he treated the knower as wholly active, wholly involved, wholly embedded. (Greene, p. 436)

This passage points to several notions which may help to further contextualize this creative project. First, this project is an interpretive inquiry about a subjective experience. In this project, I am attempting to uncover ways in which participants in a drama become more fully mindful of themselves and of others. Second, the project is my interpretation of the experience of teaching and learning through drama, and is not intended as a means of controlling and defining knowing, but rather a means to fuller understanding of the experience. Third, teaching and learning through drama is a way in which students and teachers can move toward this fuller understanding in a conscious, or "wide-awake" way. Drama students and teachers *intend* to find things out and to become as fully aware of our discoveries as we can, within an educational context. It becomes a starting point for

exploring who we are as individuals living in the world. It is from this perspective that I begin to interpret aspects of my own teaching, the experiences of four high school drama students, and those of their teacher, all of whom were interviewed for this project.

### **Asking "Who am I?": The shifting horizon of identity**

During our conversations, the students spoke frequently of their understanding of the need for awareness of self, so that they could recognize their own biases and prejudices. Through drama these students were able to unravel some of the threads of their own life experience. While this process occurs on one level so that actors can choose those aspects of their experience which might be appropriately called upon in the interpretation of a role, there exists a deeper significance to this work. The moment we begin to undergo the process of personal reflection and understanding of self in order to interpret a role, we begin to enter into the realm of otherness, to pose the question: "What does it mean to be 'other than' who we are now?"

To begin with our own self-awareness is no simple matter, but one that is significant in the experience of all of the students interviewed. It was the first thing that Matt and Brandon commented on when asked about their experience in drama:

**Matt:** The best thing about drama is that you can find out who you are...You can understand why people are different, why people act certain ways. You've got to look at yourself to see how you act before you can take on another character and be someone else.

**Brandon:** We had to write a 'Credo' about our values and beliefs, and it just made you think "Who am I?"...Of course, it will change...

Brandon's comment "Of course, it will change..." is an important one to explore. The statement seems to imply that "who we are" is not a destination, but that we live continually in the becoming, in the changing of our perspective [though subtly so, at times] as we engage in new experiences or acquire new information about the world. It is part of the difficulty of postmodern existence; it is the realization that the world in which we live and even our immediate circumstances are impermanent and subject to change. This points to



the need to attend to others with an awareness of the shifting horizons of the relationship. The act of making ourselves *conscious* of our relationships with ourselves and with others is the starting point for all subsequent inquiry that occurs in the drama class. Their teacher, Karen, offers her perspective:

[When you are] a drama student, you have to get to know yourself before you can play with getting to know anyone else. You have to understand all the different aspects of your emotion, for example, and so we'll talk about what it is to be afraid, what it is to be strong, the difference between façade and truth. Until you start to think about that, you're play-acting, and it's not very satisfactory.

How do we open a space in the lives of the students where they can explore meaningful questions about their lives? Working collaboratively in developing a trusting relationship with and among students is a beginning. It is unlikely that self-disclosure, that is revealing our hopes, beliefs, values and fears, will happen in an environment which is anything but tolerant, trusting, and accepting. Students are sometimes very self-conscious, feeling insecure about various aspects of themselves, or inadequate about their abilities. Drama teachers work with all the students in a class to develop an environment in which students can attempt to overcome these feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness, and to work toward accepting themselves and each other for who they are at this moment. There is a relationship between the degree to which people are self-conscious and insecure and the degree to which they are willing to self-disclose. Self-disclosure in this context requires the setting aside these fears and inhibitions in order to fully participate in the development and structuring of a dramatic scene. This is not to imply that participation in drama, requires students to "bare their souls" and reveal aspects of themselves that are of a confidential nature. In establishing an environment where students and teachers are at ease in expressing their views, they become more able to fully enter into relationship with each other, to try their ideas, and to learn about themselves by learning about each other. This is the place where the interplay of views, opinions, and ideas calls upon all participants in the class to unravel their thoughts and feelings through a fluid, shifting discourse. As the discourse unfolds, permission is given to enter more fully into the conversation, to set

aside self-consciousness, and to engage in the discussion. During discursive interplay we are able to uncover new interpretations of ideas, to affirm or revise positions. In this way, we become more self-aware, more fully conscious of the diverse ways in which we, and others, view and live in the world. Although not primarily intended to do so, the drama work has a therapeutic effect on students. Karen says this to her students:

I always tell kids that if you're self-conscious you can't perform; you have to be immersed in the character. So if you're concerned about "am I tall enough, is my stomach pulled in, do I have a zit?" - if you're thinking about these self-conscious things, it paralyzes you, and I think that's true with everyday life when you're walking down the street. If you're really self-conscious you can't say anything, you can't ever sound natural, you can never be natural because you're too worried about how you're going to be perceived. And believe it or not one of the things I think drama does most for kids, and what I like about it, what it does for me, is that it allows me to be more fully human than I think I would have been without it.

Here we also come to discover the relationship between ourselves and art. This is an important realization, particularly in the modern world where art is seen as removed from ourselves. Mary Devereaux (1991) suggests the relationships among self-awareness, self-disclosure, and art:

[T]he truth to be found in art involves two...important concepts: Heidegger's notion of *aletheia* and Plato's notion of *anamnesis*. Heidegger describes truth as *aletheia*, an uncovering of what was previously masked or hidden. Gadamer adopts this idea of art as discovery or disclosure. Art is mimetic not because it copies the world as it is but because it illuminates what the confusion of everyday life obscures...

To truth as *aletheia*, Gadamer adds the [Platonic] notion of *anamnesis*. Having seen what we could not see without the artwork...art's truth is both the truth of discovering something new and the truth of recognition...

Once we understand art as providing truth on the hermeneutical model, its pedagogical importance in human experience becomes clear. Art's function is not simply aesthetic in the traditional Kantian sense: art informs us, allows us to see and understand in ways we might not otherwise be able to do...Art and aesthetic

experience contribute to education in ways which no account of art's merely formal qualities can fully explain. (p. 65)

As drama teachers, we work hard with our students to develop an atmosphere in which we unconditionally accept one another, to diminish self-consciousness while providing possibilities for self-awareness. It is critical to establish this atmosphere of acceptance so that students may become fully present in their work, or, as Gadamer might say, lose themselves in the play. Sometimes, the drama class is the only place in which the students are encouraged to formulate and voice their views, to try them out amongst other students, the teacher, and the diversity of viewpoints which exists in classrooms. Once the students experience voicing their views, accepting them, and shaping them in some dramatic form, they begin to understand the relationship of art to their lives in a significant way. They begin to see how art (in this case dramatic art) calls upon our lived experience in order to create the work we do together. This occurs in direct contrast to the experience of the students in some of their other classes, where their voices are not heard, and they see little meaning in the work they do there.

### **The reality of alienation in schools**

All those interviewed frequently spoke of the problem of alienation in school. The students expressed feelings of alienation in many of their other classes, because they simply did not know the people around them. I heard from my own students the very words that Ira Shor (1980) writes:

alienation is the largest learning problem of students (p. 103)...Critical learning challenges alienation by connecting student awareness to the mesh between interior psyche and external control. Dissociating mass psychology from mass culture involves designing courses which jointly address self-in-society and social-relations-in-self. (p. 95)

The drama classroom can provide an environment in which this alienation is diminished. It is the examination of self-in-society and social-relations-in-self which form the basis for the work of drama students and teachers.

Karen also spoke of the alienation students feel in other places in the school:

Karen: Kids are in a process of growth all the time, and when you put them in desks it's so isolated, and all the stuff just sort of sits inside them. They come finally to a room without desks and it comes out one way or another, whatever's happening to them comes out.

W. They talk about that in the interviews. They talk a lot about the freedom that they feel because there aren't desks in the drama room.

K. And desks are just symbols, the rows - and I don't want to say that's wrong, it's not. But I know that kids come in and they explode in here. They feel relaxed and they're so grateful. You see them smiling at each other and that's part of the reason they can actually grow in here because they're so grateful to be out of there...I think there are some kids that probably profit by it [the more traditional teaching, desks in rows], but I know that when I start to lecture to kids that they just go "night-night". And I'm a good lecturer. If they're starting to sleep, I'll start to jump up and down and I'll do what's necessary. Are most people not auditory learners, or do I not get them? I don't know what the answer is, but I know that on PD days [when teachers typically get "lectured to"] I die pretty fast.

Working consciously in relation-to-the-other can be difficult. Students move from class to class, seldom sharing even two classes with the same group of students. Getting to know one another in schools is a challenge. Typically in senior high schools, every sixty or eighty minutes students and teachers are re-grouped. In junior high, this re-grouping occurs even more frequently, sometimes as often as every half hour or forty-five minutes. This is just one example of how school systems militate against establishing relationships among students, teachers, and students and teachers. Working relationally requires a great deal of time, and does not always come neatly to a close when the time to end a class draws near. Neither does it accommodate the banking model of education (Freire, 1984) in which students are viewed as empty vessels that require filling with knowledge and information. Working relationally serves far different purposes as well. Exploring relationships invites discussion about our lived experience, and about what those experiences mean in our own lives and in the world. The learning shifts from acquiring

external, objectified knowledge to exploring the various meanings of our lived experience. Developing relationships with one another requires opening up a space for dialogue, reflection, and consideration and accommodation of other views. In the busy-ness of the school day, regardless of the age group, the tyranny of time controls us to a large degree, and inhibits opportunities for students' knowledge of one another to develop. Theodore R.Sizer (1984) considers the issue of systemic alienation at length in his book Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School. Sizer maintains that the structure of school schedules is so complicated and so opaque as to render them meaningless to students. In the face of the complexity of the school's operating systems, the primary purpose of schools, namely to challenge young minds to think actively and creatively, becomes lost.

The students, Lauren, Melanie, Brandon, and Matt all have similar stories to tell about alienation, and about not knowing the students with whom they work in their other classes. During our conversations, the students related several stories of the alienation they feel in some of their other classes. They also were consistent in their descriptions of the care their drama teachers take to ensure that every person in the class is acquainted with one another. In trying to convey their experience in drama classes, stories of alienation in other subject classes emerge from each of the students. Melanie speaks of not knowing the students in her other classes. Lauren reinforced this by adding that they don't even know each others' names:

Melanie: In drama class you actually know the people and you become more bonded with the people from working together with them in a creative and... a whole different setting than the rest of school. But in other classes you don't really talk to other people so there's still that segregation of who's cool and who's not so cool and who's cool in different ways.

Wright: How's that different in drama?

Melanie: In drama, you can't *not* talk to somebody just because of a big nose ring or whatever.

Wright: So you *have* to talk to people when you're in drama class?

Lauren: There's no way to get through drama class without talking to people. You say your ideas and your ideas are accepted, where in social [studies] class you are in groups and sit there for the first fifteen minutes saying "What do you guys want to do?"

Wright: So, you work in groups in drama and you work in groups in other subjects as well. How is it different in drama?

Lauren: In classes like social and math when they stick you in a group situation, I don't know the people in my group. I see people walking down the halls and I think, "Hey, that person was in my math class but I have no idea what their name is."

Wright: So what happens in drama class that makes you get to know the people in your group? Do you do stuff that gets you to know people?

Melanie: Well, things like name games. I mean, you don't play name games in math class, but you play them for the first week in drama class. There's lots of interaction.

Brandon and Matt spoke of the difference in the atmosphere between drama and their other classes:

Matt: Well, it's not beat into your head like with chalk and a blackboard.

Brandon: It's not memorization. It's more of a subliminal thing almost. It just all of a sudden comes natural. It's the atmosphere.

Wright: So, tell me about this atmosphere thing. What do you mean by the atmosphere?

Brandon: Well, if you walk into a drama class there's a whole different atmosphere than there is in a math class. I think there's more respect. Like respect and trust.

Wright: Respect for whom?

Brandon: Respect for the teachers, respect for each other.

Matt: The main thing is people want to be there.

Brandon: Yeah.

Matt: You just see that on the faces. They want to be there sitting in the theatre. You see the smiles. But, when you walk in other classes people are ...

Brandon: And Ms. Goerzen or the teacher is talking to you during the little break they're not sitting at the front getting all the notes ready and stuff...It's also a good break in the day. A break from the regular schedule.

Wright: Lot's of people see it that way. Why does it feel like a break?

Matt: 'Cause it gives you a chance to be yourself.

Brandon: Yeah, and you want to be there. It's hard being somewhere faking for so long in a day. Look at us. If it wasn't for drama, we would be nowhere near where we are today.

As Matt and Brandon continued in our conversation, they referred to "faking" in the sense that they believe they cannot really be themselves in other classes, that they have to play a particular role in order to live up to the expectations of other students and teachers. They often are not given an opportunity to express how they feel about issues that arise in these other classes. In some cases, human issues never come up at all, and there is no apparent connection between the work they were being asked to do in class and their own lives. This results in a desire to question the relevance of the work, but students are rarely given the opportunity to do so. Students feel alienated from the other people in the class, and often see little connection between the work they do in class and their own lives.

### **From alienation to belonging: Smashing down the barriers**

Melanie and Lauren have been friends since grade four. Perhaps it is their lengthy friendship that prompts these girls to select each other as working partners in their drama class, because they already know each other, and can work together comfortably. But they understand that to do so may also be limiting; they may miss an opportunity to expand their own horizons in order to move toward an understanding of otherness. Their own words tell the story:

Melanie: There's lots of interaction [in drama]. Lots of different games, where you have to choose a partner you've never worked with before, then you work with them for three minutes, then the teacher says "OK, choose another partner." Moving around the class, meeting all the people. Even introducing yourself to other people and things like that.

Wright: Is that important to do?

Melanie: I think so.

Wright: Why?

Lauren: Because if she [the teacher] didn't say "work with someone you haven't worked with before", I'd pick Mel. Not even me - everyone would do the same. I've known Mel since grade four and I know her and I should feel more comfortable with her. But then she [the teacher] says "go and work with someone else," and you do, and you find out you're comfortable with

them, too. By the time you work through the whole class, you realize you're comfortable with the whole classroom.

Melanie: Yeah.

Lauren: And you start to know people.

Wright: What about people that you might not normally associate with? How do you deal with that in drama class?

Melanie: The same way that you deal with everybody else in drama class. All the kind of walls that separate people into their different categories or cliques or whatever they kind of get smashed in drama. Just through that interaction, getting to know one another on a personal level.

Years ago, while reading Brian Way's Development through Drama (1967) I was reminded to "begin where you are" (p. 28). How I struggled to find meaning in those words. As a beginning teacher, I was unable to listen to my students in any deeply meaningful way. I was bound by the notion that we had a curriculum to "cover," and that I was responsible to "deliver" that curriculum, much as in the "banking model" to which Paulo Freire (1984) refers. It was not until much later that I realized that for me, teaching begins with who we *all* are in relationship together. I am beginning to understand that working with students in authentic ways means (for me) beginning where the students are by discovering what the students know, learning about their life experiences, drawing on the teacher's expertise in the curriculum and developing a curriculum that will make sense to the students based on the interplay of the students' and teacher's knowledge. This is not simply connecting what the students do in the classroom to their lives, but allowing the curriculum to be created in relationship to the current, lived situation amongst those in the class. Our attempt to understand together what it means to be human is the content of dramatic activity, and is the focus from which all other learning in drama takes place. Dorothy Heathcote, one of the most highly regarded practitioners in educational drama, uses the lived experience of her students as the focus for exploration in their drama work together. Richard Courtney's (1986) description of this work may help us to more fully understand the relationship between drama and human experience:



Heathcote is specifically *not* concerned with theatre but with "living through" spontaneous dramatic experience. Improvisation is not a subject-area (like history), but a tool for learning. ...Drama *as a learning medium* has, as its content, the problems of life itself: "The kinds of associations and conflicts which people in their public, personal, and religious lives enter into." By spontaneously working in roles, children imaginatively experience a social situation through identification; as a result, they learn it better. (p. 6)

Drama teachers and students at the outset of the year spend a great deal of time in getting to know their classmates by name. Karen acknowledges spending months playing various name games. This naming activity is an important one in attempting to minimize, or eliminate, the alienation spoken of above. There are nearly two thousand students in the high school which Melanie, Lauren, Brandon, and Matt attend, and it is not uncommon for students to become lost in the crowd. The naming activity allows teachers and students to recognize, to attend, for a few moments in the day at least, to every individual in the class.

Moving into relational work is sometimes difficult for teachers and students. In encouraging exploration of self, and in sharing aspects of self with others, drama teachers recognize that we are asking students to risk. Taking risks is not easy. Thus, drama teachers must be sensitive to the risks we are asking the students to take: we are asking students to disclose themselves to members of the class.

It is possible that students new to a drama class may never previously have been asked to work consciously in relational ways with teachers or students. In such situations, the students often feel the risks of self-disclosure very acutely. At the beginning of the year, I try to let the students know that I understand these risks, and I begin each class with "The Purple Lion" story. It is a story of my own personal history, but one which I recall vividly from my childhood. Its lessons remain with me, and I share the story with my students, sometimes asking for their interpretation of the story.

**Hearing Purple: the roaring silence**

*One evening, when I was about six years old, I saw a picture in the newspaper. It was a drawing of circus animals, and there, right in the middle, stood a proud lion. Above the picture was an invitation for children to colour in the cartoon, and send it to the newspaper office. You could win TWO tickets to the Ice Capades, coming soon!! I ran to my room, and took out the box of good crayons that I saved for special projects - like this one. I was going to enter the contest.*

*Eagerly, I coloured the picture. Yellow for the giraffe. Green for the turtle. I saved the lion until last. Lions were special. What colour for the lion? Brown was too dark. The giraffe was already yellow, and orange just didn't seem right. Then I remembered...of course! Purple! The colour of royalty. Just right for the king of the jungle. Soon, the lion was purple, from head to toe. I felt as proud as the lion. I couldn't remember ever doing quite such a good job, feeling quite so proud.*

*"See my picture?" I said to Mom...*

*"That's beautiful dear, but why is the lion purple? There's no such thing as a purple lion."*

*"See my picture?" I said to Dad...*

*"Very fine work, son," he said, "but why is the lion purple? There's no such thing as a purple lion."*

*Now I wasn't feeling quite so proud. I looked at the purple lion. I looked at the yellow giraffe and the green turtle. And then back again at the purple lion.*

*"No," I decided. "The purple lion is just right."*

*And I went to the drawer where the envelopes were kept, and sent the picture to the newspaper office.*

*Every day, when the mailman came, I would look to see if there was a letter from the newspaper. The days turned into weeks. It seemed like forever. Then*

*one day, a letter did come from the newspaper. Inside the letter were two free passed to the Ice Capades!*

*I remembered the purple lion, and the proud feeling returned.*

### **Purple lions and pedagogy**

At the beginning of each term, I relate the story of the Purple Lion to my students. The grade sevens are interested, but sometimes mystified as to what it has to do with drama. The grade eights, most of whom have heard it by now, seem to enjoy the retelling all the same. The grade nines, also many of whom have heard it at least once, groan, or roll their eyes with that "Here he goes again!" attitude that only grade nine students can convey. But it is interesting to watch the faces of those who recall the story, and understand it's meaning. Rarely do they "tune out." Mostly, as they are listening, they look (with a "we-know-where-this-is-headed" expression) at the faces of the uninitiated, to see what their reactions will be.

Where am I going with this story?

What does it have to do with drama?

In telling this story, I attempt to lead my students to recall a time when we have been proud of an accomplishment, only to have it diminished or negated [intentionally or otherwise] by others. This is the place where we all have lived in affinity with all of those who have had their achievements delegitimized, and thus have been hurt. We discuss what it is like to feel this way, sometimes reflecting upon other examples from the students' lives which illustrate a similar experience. But perhaps most importantly, we point to the place, the event, the circumstance that prompts the restoration of our self-esteem.

I offer my interpretation of this story to the students, as an illustration of how our stories might make us conscious of aspects of living in the world that we might want to explore further. I also explain that for me, this story points to a way of viewing the world

which does not dictate that we see things in the same way as everyone else. My interpretation sounds something like:

The lion is different. Unique. Perhaps not-quite-what-you-would-expect. Which is one of the points of the story. Each of us is unique, not-quite-what-you-would-expect. The Purple Lion may be our inner voice, telling us to move forward in ways with which others may not agree. We try to remember the "silent roar of the purple lion!"

What I am doing consciously here also, discloses part of my personal self to my students. I want them to know that it is alright to tell their stories, that our own stories have meaning to us, and that it is not always necessary for others to agree on our interpretation of the story, because the story holds personal meaning for us. In reflecting upon personal interpretation and meaning, I hope the students might come to feel more comfortable with taking risks, the kind of risks which will help us to illuminate our understanding of ourselves, and our understanding of our relationships with others.

### **Watchfulness and pedagogy: a careful leading to the edge**

As teachers we aspire to challenge our students. The rigour of pushing the edges of our own personal limits is indeed a challenging one. Yet there is a proportional intrinsic reward, a feeling of great accomplishment, which comes from having challenged our limits and attained new understanding. The themes that emerge in a drama class seem to call us to revise continually our thinking, to "push our limits" in revisiting our assumptions about the way things are; to learn to question, to refuse an easy acceptance of a received view of the world, to ask where we fit in relation to others and the world. To question or to reflect upon our own values and beliefs, our own situatedness in the world, involves a level of risk. After all, when we question, we open up the possibility for change. In this way, some drama teachers continually ask students to risk themselves, place themselves and their world views "on the line" as it were. As Palmer (1969) says: "One must risk his [sic] personal 'world' if he is to enter the life-world of a great lyric poem, novel, or drama" (p.

7). These circumstances call for an atmosphere of careful watchfulness on the part of the drama teacher. Karen describes her own watchfulness this way:

[A]ll my kids say they would be more shy without drama - and it's not like therapy in the sense that I know more or teach them anything. It's therapy in the sense that you give them a safe environment in which to push their own limits, and once they push their limits a bit and say "Hey, I did that ...well, maybe I could do this...maybe I could..." ...we allow them to keep pushing - in fact encourage them to risk and push their limits, watching them all the time so that if it looks like they're going to be in danger, I run up and we talk.

Teacher watchfulness is part of the caring, safe environment in which teachers such as Karen, ask students to question and challenge. This watchfulness is a way of being with each other in the class - for it is not just the teacher who must remain watchful, but the students must attend to each other as well. We learn to respect each other's limits, that is noticing when a student (or teacher's) limits have been reached, and to leave space for contemplation and reflection, while at the same time, encouraging one another to move forward. Again this speaks of the relational nature of teaching and learning through drama. Maintaining a mindfulness, a watchfulness for each other is an aspect of the culture of caring which develops in the drama class. It is done with full conscious effort; that is, it does not just happen, but is socially constructed by the teacher with all people in the class.

Ted and June Aoki (1990) remind us how very meaningful a teacher's watchfulness can be; such a way of being with students is fondly remembered long after the student and teacher part company. In the story of June's childhood experience, she speaks of the caring relationship between her seventh grade teacher, Mr. McNab, and his students. It is a powerful story about the bond that forms between student and teacher, and the strength of the memories of that fondness that endure over many years. We are reminded here that what is remembered, from our years in a classroom, may not be the schoolbook knowledge, but the story of relationship among students and teachers.

These stories help us to understand what it means to be a teacher in moral, ethical, and caring ways. It is a story that points us toward an understanding of what it means to be human.

## **Moving from one to the other: understanding pluralism as a way of living in the world**

*Nothing so well defines our world as the absence of a synthesizing allegory.*  
Stephen A. Tyler (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 132)

As we get to know one another in the drama class, relationships become more complex. We live in a world of diversity of thought, values, and beliefs. While this diversity is potentially enriching for all of our lives, it may cause us to confront our own assumptions about the way we view the world, and challenges our "cherished notions" about the way we believe things are. Karen tells how her parents perceived the way their lives might unfold and how different this is from the way we understand the world now:

My parents' world was one of certainty even though it wasn't a true certainty, it felt like it. And so what you know to be true *is* true. Whether or not it's true. So what you believe is true, until you disbelieve it. And so with my parents, they thought they'd be two parents and a family, two kids, and they knew they'd have a house by [age] thirty, and they knew all kinds of things which didn't turn out to be true, but they knew it. They knew that there was one God and they knew that the God was the same God as every other person believed in. Their community was a Mennonite community, and so it was very small. My class of 30 do not have the same gods *ever*. Their views of what God is are not the same, even person to person never mind within little groups.

Being situated in a world in which we do not all share the same beliefs, or value the same things, has been described as the postmodern condition (Giroux, 1988). The extent to which we can establish meaningful relationships with one another depends upon our own willingness to suspend our judgments on how others live their lives long enough to come to know them. This is not easy work. Another difficulty, but one which seems important to surmount, is coming to an understanding of the constraints provided by our own cultural contexts. Our own experience frames how we view others, and we do need to recognize those limitations. Differences can be respected if we are open to the possibilities of conversation with one another.

*I recall an event from my own teaching. At the time, I was a student of Tai Chi, and recognized not only the potential physical benefits of using Tai Chi in my drama classes, but also the spiritual, emotional, and mental ones as well. In*

*accordance with the drama curriculum, (which suggests beginning each drama class with a physical and mental warm-up) I decided to use the exercises from Tai Chi as a physical warm-up and as a means to focus and relax students in order to prepare them for the work ahead. I was also very conscious that the meditative aspects of the exercise would help to center the students, and experience drama class as a point in their day in which there was time for reflection.*

*It happened that one of my students was the daughter of a minister of a Christian congregation. Upon learning that Tai Chi was being employed in my class, the minister became immediately concerned. He called the school, and arranged to meet with me to present his views. When he arrived at the appointed time, he was in a state of extreme agitation. He nonetheless tactfully indicated his extreme concern that elements rooted in Eastern religious practice were becoming part of the teaching in public schools. The minister genuinely believed that I, as the teacher was opening the door to Satan through the use of Tai Chi. He had brought an armload of Christian texts, decrying the evil influence of Tai Chi and other meditative practices.*

*I explained why I believed Tai Chi to be an appropriate beginning to each drama class, yet the minister's fears were alleviated only somewhat. He insisted that his daughter no longer be required to be present in the drama room during the warm-up. Respecting the wishes of the minister as a parent, I complied sadly with his request.*

Teachers in public education face the challenge of being called to serve many masters. This story helps point to the sensitivity with which teachers are asked to comprehend a point of view which may differ significantly from their own. As a student of Tai Chi, I had experienced both physical and emotional benefits from that exercise. In an effort to help students to begin the drama class mentally and physically refreshed and focused, I

introduced the T'ai Chi into my students. The drama curriculum suggests that students engage in warm-up activities for such purposes, and I believed that adopting this meditative yet physical form would be ideal. Further, I believed that T'ai Chi would help students to increase their self-awareness, to awaken to themselves. Also, by sharing a life experience with my students, I was making a conscious attempt to deepen the relationality among all of us in the classroom. Students and teachers bring our uniqueness to the classroom. As we encounter new ways of learning and of being in the world, we are often anxious to share those ways with one another. By introducing T'ai Chi to my students (some of whom were already familiar with the form), I was presenting myself as "lifelong" student and learner.

Shortly after the interview began, the minister came to realize that I was genuinely interested in the concerns he raised. As a result of my careful attention to his concerns, the minister's position shifted from initial demands for my resignation, and threats to bring this matter to the attention of school board members, to suggesting that his daughter simply remain outside of the classroom during the warm-up whenever it would involve T'ai Chi. To this request, I agreed, although with great reservation.

The story raises many issues of concern to students, parents, teachers, school boards, and administrators. It evokes sadness in me about the daughter's apparent lack of voice in the matter. It points to ongoing concerns many educators share about who gets to determine what goes on in classrooms, and issues of the role of public education in a diverse, pluralistic society. It raises questions about the public trust reflected in freedom (or lack of it) allowed teachers in the development of a lived curriculum in schools. This story points to the complexity of the work of teachers in responding to the other (in this case, two "others," the minister, and the teacher's students), of a teacher's need to hear and allow for difference. It brings to our awareness how the delicate balance between shifting one's perspective to accommodate the other view and completely acquiescing to the other. On this matter Mary Devereaux (1991) speaks:



...for Gadamer, as for Plato, dialectical inquiry serves as a model for the rational adjudication of competing truth claims. The to-and-fro movement, or play, of conversation, serves as a "regulative ideal." It challenges us to engage with, instead of acquiescing before, the authority of tradition. (p. 63)

The teacher's experience in relationship with the other, in this case the minister, reminds us that it is this kind of challenge which our students are asked to explore regularly in the drama classroom. It involves the ongoing interplay of potentially conflicting values and beliefs.

The story also helps us to understand the inextricable connection between the personal and professional development of teachers. I began to study T'ai Chi in an effort to engage in a new life experience and to learn to see the world from another point of view. It was a positive experience for me physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I believed it would be of benefit to my students in these same ways by opening them up to the possibility of experiencing "serenity in the midst of activity" (Stone, 1984, p. 6). Seeing the connections between T'ai Chi and the curriculum-as-plan, I introduced it to the class. Not content to rely on past knowledge and experience to teach my drama students, I chose to share this new perspective and experience with them. In doing so, I was attempting to reflect my beliefs about teaching and learning as living-in-the-world in a lived way, to live and act as I encourage my students to live and act. Learning T'ai Chi was a challenge for some of the students, in the same way that it was a challenge for me: it placed my students and I on the same level in that we had to act, and consequently to think differently. Of this experience, Matt says:

...You made us take things further like with T'ai Chi. We thought "What the hell's going on here?" but it made us stretch, I think. You made us think.

This example points to a view of learning and teaching, particularly learning and teaching through drama, as an effort to live within the "relational complexity of life itself." (Sumara, in press, p. 10)

## **Learning and teaching through drama: A critical perspective**

Earlier in this text, O'Neill and Lambert (1987) were quoted as saying that "working in drama involves changes in customary ways of thinking and feeling." (p. 13) Other educators outside of the field of drama also challenge students to think critically so as to question what may for many be received notions of the way things are in the world. For example, critical pedagogy promotes the asking of questions, in an effort to understand how things are they way they are, and how they got that way, with a view to changing circumstances or perceptions if so warranted. Thus, drama and critical pedagogy have much in common.

In his book, Critical Teaching and Everyday Life (1980), Ira Shor develops thirteen "contours for an exercise in critical education" (p. 94). These contours describe what life might be like in a critical classroom, a classroom in which "critical teaching challenges the limits on thought and feeling, and...pushes against the conditioned boundaries of consciousness" (Shor, p. 93). Reflecting upon Shor's work in critical pedagogy is helpful in framing the experience of teaching and learning through drama. Although not all drama teachers share the view that drama can be a vehicle for critical pedagogy in Shor's interpretation, I believe that many do. I proceed with this aspect of the project with the intent of opening up the dialogue about drama education from the perspective of critical pedagogy, to consider possible interpretations and parallels between teaching and learning through drama. I have chosen only those contours that seem to most immediately connect critical pedagogy and the experience of learning and teaching through drama.

The similarity between critical pedagogy and drama exists in the potential of both to lead us to question and to re-examine how we live in the various contexts of our lives. Both critical pedagogy and drama education can call us to examine our life experience, and to affirm or revise the way we view and act in our lives, accordingly. Shor (1980) calls this re-experiencing the ordinary. The work of many drama students and teachers is to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Shor's choice of the word contour is an interesting one. A contour suggests a fluidity, a flexibility, which metaphorically offers the reader a sense of life in the classroom as one in which meaning is seen as contextual, open to possibilities, rather than rigidly defined or predetermined. I recall colleagues remarking that the metaphors we use to describe our work reveal a great deal about our disposition to it. For example, if a teacher refers to working with students "in the trenches," an image of a confrontational, warlike relationship with the students comes to mind. None of Shor's language evokes such images. The contours examined here include: symbolic separation, social life in dialogue, self-regulation of process, withering away of the teacher, contextual skill development, and the convertible classroom: spatial functions and the profile of student needs. The phrasing of each of the contours points to a way of being with students that suggests a reconnecting of educational practice with the lived lives of students. It is this connecting of what we do in schools to the lived lives of students that Shor advocates.

To understand these "lived lives," drama students and teachers begin by re-experiencing aspects of our lives within the context of the drama class. We select an issue that we believe to be important, and enact our experience of it. In this way, the stage is set (so to speak) for us to "extra-ordinarily re-experience the ordinary" (Shor, p. 93), to notice and to attend to what we know. This act of finding the extraordinary within the ordinary is the place where learning and teaching through drama begins. With that in mind, let us examine some of Shor's contours of critical pedagogy in the context of learning and teaching through drama:

- **Symbolic separation**

*The liberatory classroom is a break from routines which offers a study of routines so that the familiar shape of life is appreciated with criticism rather than acceptance...Students are separated from the culture which has made them into manipulable objects, and with the critical consciousness replacing false thought, they leave the class as subjects, that is, as people mentally armed against domination. (Shor, 1980, p. 99)*

I interpret Shor's comment about appreciating life with criticism rather than acceptance, to suggest that teachers ask students to examine the contexts of their own lives. Students are encouraged to question circumstances to become conscious of their values, beliefs, and life situations, and thus to examine those values, beliefs, and situations critically, rather than to accept them blindly. Drama teachers and students use the drama class as a site for questioning some of the conditions that exist in society at large. The drama class becomes a site to critically examine issues, to ask why certain conditions exist, to examine why things are the way they are, and to reflect upon human behaviour in order to gain knowledge and insight about ourselves (individually and collectively) and our life contexts. The critical examination is not intended to reject values and beliefs out of hand, but rather to examine them in a way that will affirm the belief or cause us to revise our thinking. In this way, we leave ourselves open to possibilities for change or affirmation of beliefs.

Going from the drama class to some of their other classes, students get a sense of what Shor calls re-entry into the mass experience. As they do this, students bring with them a new awareness, another way of consciously viewing their own experience and the interactions of others around them. Brandon and Matt share their experience of living in the two worlds of the dominant culture of the school and the marginalized culture of the drama student. Matt is student council president and Brandon is vice-president, so they have a high profile in the dominant culture. In addition to being enrolled in drama classes, they are also very active in the extra-curricular drama and theatre activities in the school.

Matt: I know my dad was a basketball star - big jock - big drinker and stuff when he was in high school. And he doesn't mind me being in drama now, but I don't think he was all for it at the beginning, where my Mom totally was. So, my dad wanted me to do athletics, my mom wanted me to do drama, so I just do both. I think because drama does deal with a lot of the so-called feminine qualities of people, like the emotional stuff. People see that as feminine, although I don't think it is.

Wright: It's part of all of our lives, right? It's human.

Matt: Yes. But somehow people have this idea that they are [feminine qualities]. People are scared of dealing with that kind of stuff. We [drama students] are not, we want to get that kind of stuff out. To talk about it.

Wright: Why is it important to deal with that stuff? Why is it important to be as aware emotionally about who you are as it is to be in good physical condition, or good mental health? Why is that important?

Matt: You get better relationships with people, you can understand people, you can deal with stress easier, you can function better, you're more in tune with what you need to do to get the job done in a lot of ways.

Wright: What about you, Brandon. Why do you think that stuff's important?

Brandon: Well, yeah. You can - handle yourself a lot better 'cause you know, you can tap into different emotions easier, and you can let stuff out when it has to come out.

Wright: Do you think that these kinds of stereotypes are changing at all...that emotional qualities belong to women and that the "rugged individualist" is the ideal male? Do you think that perception is changing in the culture of the people in your generation?

Matt: I think so.

Brandon: There's an attempt being made to change it, anyway.

Matt: I think it's more Alberta. Alberta is the least changing province in the whole of Canada in this regard. We're the "Bible Belt" of Canada.

Wright: How does that affect things?

Matt: I've noticed that a lot of religious people don't believe that men should have these qualities. And that they're very against drama and that sort of thing. I hang out with a lot of these heavily religious people, you know they're very "down the line". And I think that's something in our culture that is keeping men from being sensitive, and stuff.

Wright: Do you think that's healthy?

M. and B. No.

Wright: It's interesting that you perceive that about Alberta...Perhaps if we lived in B.C. it [being involved in drama] might be less of a marginalized thing to do.

We have been discussing your perspective on living in a dominant culture at the same time as you live in the somewhat marginalized culture of the drama student. A feminist writer once said something like "Living on the edge, or on the outside of that dominant culture, living on the margin is much more interesting, and that where I prefer to be." That 's where she figures it's best to be. How do you feel about that?

Matt: Well, I think it's best to be on the outside, but what we do is we take that kind of stuff and bring it in to the dominant world.

Wright: And you're aware of that.

M and B.: Yeah.

Matt and Brandon's comments point to a conscious awareness of simultaneously living in the dominant and marginalized cultures. The students shift between the two cultures, and do so with full awareness of their actions. They also share the belief that the dominant culture benefits from hearing voices from the marginalized culture. For example, the idea of men acknowledging their emotionality is questionable in our Western society. The experience of the drama class, however, has led Brandon and Matt to a fuller understanding of themselves, recognizing that labeling human responses as either male or female is not appropriate. Women *and* men experience emotion; the emotional response ought not to be gender specific. The experience of being in a drama class, and exploring these issues has given them the language and led them to a deeper understanding of their experience, which they share with their peers the dominant culture. Shor tells us that "critical teaching challenges the limits on thought and feeling. A critical classroom pushes against the conditioned boundaries of consciousness" (Shor, 1980, p. 93). In this way, as the stories of the drama students illustrate, the drama classroom becomes a place in which students engage in drama as a means of critique.

In the drama classroom, students can not only experience separation from daily life, but also, as we have seen, separation from the life of the dominant culture. This perception is shared by Lauren and Melanie, who speak of their consciousness of being marginalized because they are [high profile] drama students. Their re-entry into the mass experience is changed in part because of the questions and attitudes they have explored in drama class.

Wright: Why do you think some people view drama as "weird"?

Lauren: Because they don't know who they are.

Mel: Exactly.

Wright: What do you mean?

Mel: They have all these veils of who they think they are and who people see them as, whereas people who don't have those veils can move out and take on these characteristics and make them real for themselves. But other people are so caught up in their own, you know, "Oh, did I say that right?"

Wright: So they're really worried about what other people think?

Lauren: They're worried about what other people think, and they're also not ... In drama we've talked about accepting ideas from other people in your group and whatnot, but it also goes out into society. I can look at someone and they can tell me what they believe in and I can say, "O.K.". That's good, that's great that you have those beliefs.

Wright: Whether you believe it or not.

Mel: Yeah. You can see the place in them where it's true.

Lauren: But then there's the people, like the people who would think that drama is Satanic, who aren't willing to accept the fact that this is something that people might be interested in. It's just like the banning of "Of Mice and Men." I mean, the person who wants to ban it hasn't even read it. How can you go through life being that covered? Why don't you try to understand it or experience it before you segregate it or dismiss it?

It seems that as Melanie and Lauren experience re-entry into the mass culture, they do so with a heightened awareness of what it means to "be" other. They become more conscious of their own openness to diversity in others, and at the same time more sensitive to the close-mindedness with which some choose to live.

### Social life in dialogue

*Social practice is the thing studied, while "dialogue" is the form of study...*(Shor, 1980, p. 95)

Much of the work drama students and teachers do in class is based on discussions about issues emerging from the lived experience of the students. It is the stories of these life experiences that form the basis for scene creation and development. The intent during these whole class discussions is to find an issue or theme which seems to resonate with most of the people in the class, one that will touch on the experience of most of the students in some way. In the drama class issues that generate universal interest or have universal significance for the students are explored. Sometimes, however, drama students and

teachers intentionally work in the margins, dealing with subjects that may be unique to a fewer number of students. Part of our effort in class is to deepen our understanding of the other, and to explore the unique, the exceptional circumstance or situation, to journey into the margins of lived experience. In either case, it is the student's stories of experience, their social lives in dialogue, that provide the context for scene development. Matt says:

The best thing about drama is that you can find out who you are. It gives you a new perception on life, I think. You can start looking around you and realizing what things are all about. You look at yourself to see how you act before you can take on another character and be someone else. Drama class makes you more aware of who you are. You talk about real things, and you start to see what your life is like.

- **Self-regulation of process**

*The structure of each class is shaped from the inside by an interaction of teacher and students. Each semester's work is most authentically described at its conclusion, after its organic growth. (Shor, 1980, p. 97)*

As well as selecting ideas that emerge from the discussions, students also decide upon a form in which to present the work. The drama work evolves organically as the relationship between form and content emerges in the shaping of the work. During this "organic evolution," decisions must be made about how best to view, critique and /or assess the work. This becomes integral to the planning process. The form, for example a tableau format, or mime, or an improvised scene with dialogue, is selected on the basis of its appropriateness to the content, tone and style of the scene. In drama class, students usually decide as a group when they are ready to perform their work for the class. In addition to making those decisions, students usually determine order of performance, establish criteria for assessing performances, make decisions whether or not to re-work a scene, and engage in peer and self-evaluation. In the ways just mentioned, parallels can be readily drawn between work in drama and another of Shor's contours: "organic



evolution/evaluation versus behavioural syllabi and testing: self-measurement, feedback sessions, peer and mutual assessments" (Shor, 1980, p. 94) Student self-evaluation occurs regularly in some drama classes. The organic evolution of the work describes how work is accomplished in a drama class, and students themselves carry most of the responsibility for the development of all aspects of their work.

Relinquishing responsibility to the students can be problematic to those (students *and* teachers) who wish to adhere to a rigidly planned, predetermined, and predictable curriculum as well as teaching schedule. Often students need more time to work on a piece, and the participants in the class must revise the curriculum-as-plan to accommodate these needs. For the drama teacher, this calls for an attentiveness to the work of the students, so that negotiation of the curriculum can occur.

In considering self-regulation of process (that is, the students regulate the process themselves or in collaboration with the teacher and the class), teachers in drama need to be mindful that this is the student's process at work, not the teacher's. That is not to say that teachers stand paralyzed before their students. Rather, it means that students and teachers plan their work together, recognizing that the class exists for the students to develop and explore their ideas, and to experience losing themselves in the play.

During a discussion of Critical Pedagogy, University of Calgary professor David Jardine observed that often teachers are perceived to be "standing helpless in front of the class." The phrase describes the confusion that some teachers feel when they begin to relinquish their regulation of the process in the class, and begin to hand that responsibility over to the students. These teachers are having difficulty moving from the authoritative paradigm of the teacher, into a way of being with students that allows the interplay of students, teacher, and curriculum, in the shaping of work that emerges from the efforts of all concerned. It does not suggest necessarily, as some critics have interpreted, that the teacher does not work with the students, that the teacher has abandoned the students, or

that the teacher does not know what is going on. Here, Shor interprets the role of the teacher:

The teacher needs to come to class with an agenda, but must be ready for anything, committed to letting go when the discussion is searching for an organic form. The teacher's initiating agenda and pedagogical materials start a process which keeps redesigning itself in-progress. (Shor, 1980, p. 102)

This is particularly important to remember when students request more time to prepare their work in drama. While they are developing scenes, they need sufficient time to find and explore and issue, and create the context for the development of the scene. How long that process will take varies considerably from group to group, and it is difficult (if not impossible) for the teacher to predetermine how long that entire process will take.

- **Withering away of the teacher**

*One goal of liberatory learning is for the teacher to become expendable. At the start and along the way, the teacher is indispensable as a change agent. Yet, the need to create students into self-regulating subjects requires that the teacher as organizer fade as the students emerge. (Shor, 1980, p. 98)*

Teachers and students live together in drama classrooms in a fluid, spatial relationship. Teachers, by virtue of their authority, are the biggest presence, occupy the largest space. However, drama teachers redefine their relationship with students. In drama classes, the teacher is seen most frequently in a collaborative rather than in an authoritarian role. In such a situation, the "biggest presence" of the teacher withers away. This is not to imply that the teacher is no longer teaching, or that the teacher disappears altogether, but rather that both students and teacher understand the role of the teacher differently. As the teacher withers away, students are able to assume more responsibility for their own work.

Because drama class is intended to be an exploration of some aspect the *students'* lived experience, the work is *their* work in a very real sense. Rather than being seen as the source of knowledge or a disseminator of the curriculum, the teacher's role becomes more

facilitative and advisory, to ensure that nothing impedes the students' progress, to act at times as a resource, and to ensure that students are guided through the learning experience. There are times when the teacher needs to instruct, but these times are brief, and occur in response to the needs of the students at the time. Generally, the presence of the teacher in the class is very much one of membership within the whole group. The focus of the class is not usually on the teacher, and because of this, the teacher is seen to wither away.

Working in a classroom in this way requires a new way of viewing the relationship between curriculum, students, and teachers. None of these three players ever has the focus all of the time. Sometimes the focus is on the student, as they articulate an issue. At other times, the teacher may have the focus, asking the students to elaborate upon an idea, eliciting responses from the students to further extend their thinking. In these ways, the curriculum emerges from the interplay of teacher and student, and while it may well be a version of the curriculum-as-plan, the meaning of curriculum is interpreted through the collective experience and interaction of those engaged in this particular class at this particular time. The work in the classroom then, can never be termed "student-centered" or "teacher-centered" or "curriculum-centered," but rather the educational experience is the interplay of all three.

This "subject-object switch" has interesting implications for re-interpreting the authority of the teacher. It presents the teacher in a light which many of the students have not previously experienced. This is particularly true if a teacher works "in role" with students. Teacher-in-role is a term used in drama to indicate that a teacher has taken a role, or a part to play, in the drama. Dorothy Heathcote's work with students is perhaps the most renowned for this, for it is within role that Heathcote is able to live within the experience of the students at the moment of the experience. In these circumstances, teachers can take a role that is seen to be one of the non-expert, or the non-knower who functions as the questioner in the drama. In this way, the teacher still has an opportunity to question in a way that will encourage the students to reflect and to make informed decisions

relevant to the development of the drama. In her book, Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium, Betty Jane Wagner (1976) describes Heathcote's intentionality in withholding expertise:

Dorothy Heathcote often deliberately puts herself into a situation in which she clearly signals to the class that they know more than she does and have information she needs. She quickly and deftly communicates that it is their ideas, not hers, that will make the drama work, and she asks questions she knows they and they alone can answer. Their answers are the material she dare not ignore, for they show her the children's interests and desires, and carry with them the children's commitment. She does not correct their misperceptions or misinformation at the moment she receives them—she lets her own expertise dribble out little by little as the drama proceeds. (p. 97).

This shift from teacher as expert to student as expert and knower, calls for what Shor terms ego restoration, restoring the students' confidence as knowers, for they are often not used to being given the responsibility that comes with knowledge. Students may not be sufficiently confident to "carry the ball." As Shor says, "Their conditioned self-images interfere with their taking command of the learning process. Each student through group interaction has to shed her or his disempowered character". (Shor, 1980, p. 109).

A great deal of trust must be built between the drama teacher and the students in order for the teacher to function effectively in role. A similar must be established in order for the teacher to become a "peer discussant" (Shor, 1980, p. 101), in which the teacher engages in the dialogue with the class on an equal footing with the other members of the class. Whether or not the teacher can assume this role depends largely on the kind of relationship that has been built between the teacher and the students (and vice-versa). If the teacher is regarded as an authority figure, or is not completely trusted by the students, it is unlikely that the teacher will ever become a peer discussant.

Shor comments, "The temporary separation [away from the other demands of everyday life] permitted to the classroom, as a formal study space apart from the routines of ...[daily life]...allows it room to experiment with reflection on all aspects of social life" (Shor, 1980, p. 99). In drama, students are separated from the rest of the school by their physical presence within the space of the drama classroom. I believe this separation is a positive step in allowing students to remove themselves from the roles they are asked to play in the various contexts of everyday life. The students recognize this as well. Let us recall the words of Brandon and Matt:

Brandon: Drama is a good break in the day. A break from the regular schedule.

Wright: Lots of people see it that way. Why does it feel like a break?

Matt: Because it gives you a chance to be yourself.

Brandon: Yeah, and so you want to be there.

Further separation occurs in the way in which students learn in drama: the creation or adoption of a role. In this way, students separate themselves from who they are in physical, emotional, and intellectual ways. Intentionally, and consciously, they become someone else. Drama students actively use their bodies and their minds to explore another character, to live for a time in a world that is not their own. They imagine and enact what it means to be "other" than who they are. As actors, these students also work in fictionalized situations and consciously create another context within which the characters live out these stories. By losing themselves in the work, through focus, concentration, and belief in the character and situation, actors give themselves permission to become Other.

Drama teachers recognize the need to establish the drama room as a space in which students can take risks, ask questions and make discoveries. They do this in tangible ways to help the students approach their work in drama differently from the way they may view their work in other classes. The following excerpt from the conversation with Lauren and Mel may help us to understand some of the uniqueness that can be found in the drama class:

Wright: You're showing us a circle here...do you sit like that in drama class?

Mel: Yes.

Wright: You still do, even after junior high?

Mel: Oh, yes.

Lauren: We also take our shoes off too.

Wright: Do you really?

Mel: Well, it's interesting. Even that kind of adjuster of taking your shoes off, getting more comfortable. You cannot hide in Drama class. You can try and fake it, but it's quite obvious when you are. That can seem intimidating, but once you're in there and you're in the groove of it, so to speak, then it sticks with you.

I recall a discussion with my students about removing our shoes in drama class. Although it may seem odd, I explain that we do it because it is a signal, a reminder to all of us, that drama class is not like other classes, and that we are being asked in this room to work in ways that are perhaps not the same as those to which students may have become accustomed elsewhere.

Nearly all drama teachers begin class with everyone sitting in a circle on the floor. Just as with removing the shoes, sitting in a circle becomes a ritual for the class. When all members of the class, including the teacher, sit in a circle, an conscious attempt is made (by the teacher) to equalize the status of all members of the class. The teacher tries to minimize the status inherent in the role of the teacher, so that students will gain confidence in their own expertise, rather than viewing the teacher as the "sole holder of expertise" in the classroom. As much as possible, physical domination is minimized, provided that no one in the circle is seated in a chair or a stool when everyone else is seated on the floor. After students have arrived at the drama room and removed their shoes, the next step of the ritual is to assemble in a circle. We can all see each other, which is important as well. No hiding here. We are all asked to engage as fully as possible in the pursuant activity.

In these ways, drama students and their teacher are continually reminded that the roles of teacher and student, and the way learning and teaching occur in a drama class, is frequently different from what is typical in most other classes. The relationship between drama teacher and drama student is different, because the teacher is no longer the sole authority in the classroom, and no longer bears sole responsibility for the ongoing work in the drama class. The teacher, in large measure, has "withered away."

### **Contextual skill development**

Shor (1980) says that cognitive skills - reading, writing, comprehension, laboratory techniques etc. - will be developed through a problematic examination of a real context, drawn from student life. In drama class, students acquire and develop skills as they proceed through the year. During the planning and development of a scene, for example, students need to document their work. If the work originates through improvisation, the students may eventually write the scene in the form of a script, or otherwise make notes which will record the details of the scene. If students are working from an already authored script, their tasks will include reading and making notes on the interpretation of the script, as well as using some form of annotation to record the movement (called "blocking") of the actors in a scene. Skills from the curriculum will be developed within the context of the work. For example, lighting and sound scripts will have to be included in their notes, a stage set and/or costumes may have to be designed and constructed.

Working in drama, students require space--physical, mental, and emotional space--in order for invention and creation to occur. Rather than the teacher always setting the format in which to present a scene, for example, students invent their own modes of presentation. Shor calls this the development of **conceptual exercises**, which in the context of learning and teaching through drama, I interpret to mean that students are asked to develop a form which best suits their need in communicating and in analysing the problematics of the context under examination in the work.

**• The convertible classroom: Spatial functions and the profile of student needs**

The drama classroom, by virtue of the subject, becomes any number of environments, depending upon the work being done at the time. Students are called to create the environment, to make the space work for them in whatever way called for by the work. This is most easily done in a large studio type of space, although many drama teachers and students manage to work in a regular classroom space. Again, thinking about transformational space, it seems to me that the physical environment provided can either work for or against the work of students and teachers. A large drama studio--or any large, open space, free from the clutter of desks and other impediments to movement--provides a physical space in which students can experience a feeling of expansiveness. In attempting to situate students in an environment that will encourage working from a variety of perspectives and working conditions, to ask them to think differently about learning and teaching, the flexibility of the physical site plays an important role. This flexibility also serves to remind us of the diverse relationality which exists among all those who engage in work within the space of drama studio.

**Critical pedagogy and learning through drama: Parallels of thought, intent, and experience**

The critical aspects of learning and teaching through drama awaken us to who we are as individuals and in relationship with others, and thus make teaching and learning through drama a meaningful, ethical, and moral endeavour for all of us who work with our students in these critically conscious ways.

Many drama teachers and their students experience the changing roles and responsibilities of teachers and students as they work together in drama classes. Creating and exploring a lived curriculum, one that is meaningful to the students yet at the same time one that teaches them about dramatic form and the skills of performance, is a goal shared by many drama teachers. Understanding who we are as individuals and who we are in



relation to others is basic to teaching and learning through drama. When the curriculum is owned by everyone in the class, the door is opened to experiencing our learning and teaching consciously and conscientiously. Both drama teaching and critical pedagogy share this connected way of thinking and being in schools.

Re-framing learning and teaching through drama within the context of critical pedagogy has provided a new way of expressing the ways in which many drama students and teachers work together. Like critical pedagogy, drama provides students with opportunities to push against what Shor calls our "conditioned boundaries of consciousness", to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, and to empower students in their own learning. Both the experience of critical pedagogy and the experience of learning and teaching through drama offer students and teachers opportunities to explore their world in critical and meaningful ways.

### **Epilogue: Milestones and stepping stones**

Engaging in the work of this project has opened up space in which to reflect upon my own teaching practice, and to interpret the experiences of others engaged in learning and teaching through drama. The stories and reflections have been significant in unfolding the layered meanings of our work together, work that is relational, and reflective of the complexities of our lives.

This project has called upon past experience--of myself and of those who participated in the project--and I construe meaning from those experiences within the hermeneutic task of seeking understanding. The work in this project has been to explore meanings of past experience for present consciousness, connecting new understandings to the future as I prepare to re-enter into the life of a drama teacher. As I write, I look back upon aspects of this project, itself becoming a past experience, and I observe signifiers, milestones that mark important learnings I have made along the journey.

Through this work I have also become open to possibilities for further exploration, which I will call stepping stones toward future considerations...

### **Milestones...**

*...within a hermeneutical framework, the past is always only appropriate insofar as it becomes part of our present horizon...*

(Devereaux, 1991, p. 64)

The reflection points to some milestones in my work, allowing me to look back and elucidate some of them.

When I embarked on this project, I had some knowledge and some hunches about the importance of working in the arts. I also realized that some of this knowing, and some of the hunches, were shared by others who work in the arts. As the project developed, I began to understand that many people in the world shared the view that the arts are important, and they expressed it in a multitude of ways.

With specific reference to learning and teaching through drama, I have come to more fully understand the relationship between self and other, and the ways in which drama helps us to re-experience diverse ways of being together in the world. Devereaux (1991) says: "Art's truth is both the truth of discovering something new and the truth of recognition" (p. 65). By consciously attempting to come to a fuller understanding of ourselves, by reflecting upon our values, beliefs, as well as our fears and insecurities, working in drama opens us to the possibilities of heightened self awareness. Referring back to Gadamer's words again, we discover our "prejudices" and our "traditions," so that we begin the dramatic exploration grounded in an understanding of ourselves. As we continue to explore our life worlds through drama and other arts as well, we come to realize and to appreciate, the uniqueness of every person. We begin to realize that while we all share certain commonalities of experience, every individual's life is truly unique to them, and that the world we share is filtered through our own lived experience. Through this realization, and in striving for fuller understanding and acceptance of ourselves as

individuals, we open ourselves to the possibility of accepting the diversity of the lives of the Other. As drama teachers and students explore this relationality, we engage in a reflection upon life itself, striving for greater understanding of what it means for us and others to live on this planet at this time in history. These understandings are not all clothed in altruism: we also begin to see the complexity of life, and the conflicts that arise among us as inhabitants of the Earth. However, in so doing, we may see opportunities for creative alternatives and solutions to some of our difficulties.

The works of such writers as Devereaux, Foucault, Gadamer, Greene, Heathcote, Merleau-Ponty, Palmer, Shor and others further inform the interpretation of the experience of learning and teaching through drama. Exploring the relationship between the thoughts of these writers and our experience as students and teachers of drama reiterates the importance of education in the fine arts. It has been my intent in this project to engage in a dialogue between these writers and the experiences of students and teachers of drama.

### **Stepping stones...**

*...the truth to be found in art involves ...an uncovering of what was previously masked or hidden...*

(Devereaux, 1991, p. 65)

The experience of writing this project has also laid some stepping stones to guide me in further exploration. The stones at this point appear to be randomly placed. They may not create a well-trodden path, but rather point in diverse patterns to places of further inquiry and reflection.

I have been captured by Devereaux's question "Can art save us?" As I interpret the word "art" to mean primarily work in the dramatic arts, realizing that the ideas are appropriate to other art forms as well, I become increasingly intrigued by the possibilities that appear. Although I hesitate to place art in the role of "Saviour," the question points to possibilities for a greater understanding of the place of the arts in our lives.

As I begin to live more consciously in the postmodern world, a world in which horizons of belief and understanding are in a continual state of flux, I begin to see spaces opening in which the arts can offer new world views, to envision new ways of living in the world. We can begin to understand these shifting horizons by engaging in the arts as a way of sense-making for ourselves. The arts can help us to apprehend the world not as an assemblage of right answers, as the positivist view would have us believe, but as a complex tapestry of relationships. As Devereaux (1991) says:

Art embodies the order of the past in new form. It provides us with an experience of building a world. It promises order in a world in which everything familiar increasingly gives way to the new and unfamiliar. (p. 68).

The arts offer opportunities for students to unravel possible meanings in their lives. If, as a society, we move toward fuller participation in the arts, stronger visions of our connectedness to each other and to the planet may emerge. Thus, the arts become a moral and ethical endeavour as well as an aesthetic one. The arts could help wean us from the Cartesian view, from the definitiveness of absolutes which, while once appropriate for an historical age, are no longer so. The arts could help us recognize that change *is* the constant in our world, and that we are called to explore ways of living within that context and within the complex relationships that connect us all.

Drama and theatre, with their inherent call to convey our thoughts, to reflect our ways of living in the world back to us, may play an important role in this understanding. As Devereaux (1991) reminds us,

*...art informs us, allows us to see and understand in ways  
we might not otherwise be able to do.*

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