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DRAMA PEDAGOGY AND POSSIBILITY: BUILDING COMMUNITY AND CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM THROUGH ARTISTIC MEANS

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DRAMA PEDAGOGY AND POSSIBILITY:
BUILDING COMMUNITY AND CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM
THROUGH ARTISTIC MEANS

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the role of drama pedagogy in facilitating both critical literacy and community in the classroom. To achieve this objective, I provide a theoretical overview of several theorists in the areas of classroom community, critical literacy, and aesthetic and experiential learning and compare their research findings to my own experiences with drama pedagogy, both as a student and teacher. These experiences are structured using narrative, and it is hoped that this personalized format will reveal the lived experience behind facts and events, and better illuminate how aesthetically-based, experiential learning might contribute to the development of both critical literacy and engaged learning communities. Ultimately, I hope to bring together the traditionally disparate fields of the aesthetic and critical literacy through drama pedagogy, and suggest possible pedagogical implications for today's classrooms. This thesis incorporates some discussion of feminist theory, and instances of feminist advancement are highlighted as they arise.

Keywords: aesthetic, classroom community, communities of practice, critical literacy, drama, education, experiential learning, feminism, learning communities, narrative, pedagogy.

DEDICATION

For my husband Joon, who has supported me throughout this thesis, and whose love and encouragement is a daily gift.

For my parents, Alan and Marianne, who have supported me throughout my life, and who have always believed in me.

For my brother David, whose gentle memory always reminds me of what matters.

For all my family and friends, especially Xarissa and Jenny, who were there with me from the start.

And for my baby, whose journey is just beginning ...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAVEAT   Canadians Against Violence Everywhere Advocating its Termination

ELL   English Language Learner

EQAO   Education Quality and Accountability Office

ESL   English as a Second Language

OFIP   Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership

PAVEAT   Parkside Against Violence Everywhere Advocating its Termination

SEF   School Effectiveness Framework

Chapter 1: Beginnings

This thesis investigates how the physical, experiential, and emotional learning

structures in drama pedagogy might contribute not only to the development of unique

forms of community in the classroom, but also to students' development of critical

literacy skills. The events and experiences that eventually led to the conception of this

thesis occurred many years ago when I was a high school student participating in

formative drama experiences. Of course I was unaware of their influences until well into

adulthood. It was as I moved through university, then my B.Ed. program, and finally

through my own teaching career, that I began to reflect upon the engaged learning

communities that had been created during our drama classes so many years ago, and

during one collaborative production in particular. And as I retraced all of the tiny steps in

this artistically-based journey towards community and critical literacy in the classroom, I

eventually returned to the very first step of all: day one of grade nine drama class.

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My family moved at the end of my grade eight year, so the first semester at my

new high school was a rather bumpy five months for me. On the first day of grade nine I

entered the school not knowing anyone, feeling as though I did not have a place in this

new city or this new group of students. I was so nervous I am surprised I made it through

the front doors that day.

Throughout the term I made a few friends and slowly got used to my new routine, but largely I recall feeling lost in the enormity of it all; there were hundreds of strangers in this unfamiliar building that was now my school, and while the experiences I was having were at times varied and exciting, it was often easy to feel as though I did not belong in this new and different place.

I recall feeling a similar mixture of anticipation and hesitance on my first day of drama class in term two. My mind was racing, all my teenage hopes and apprehensions about meeting friends and doing well running through my head. I remember walking into the large drama room, taking my shoes off and placing them in the wooden cubby. Standing on the grey carpet in stocking feet, I looked around and saw many familiar faces. Several of my new drama classmates had also been in my first term courses, but some people were completely new to me. Without a desk to sit at I felt a little lost in the openness of the space, not quite knowing where to stand or what to do.

But the drama class started soon enough. Our teacher had us all sit in a circle while she made a brief introduction of herself and of the course. And then the warm-ups began. Standing in our circle, we played various get-to-know-you exercises, in which we said each others' names out loud as a group and added flamboyant actions to them. We raced around the room in fox-and-rabbit chase games, our teenage cool quickly disappearing in the gleeful energy of the exercise. We worked in teams to create elaborate interconnected walls with our bodies, which our opposing teammates had to traverse without touching anyone. I remember the intense cooperation as we directed,

lifted, dragged, and hoisted our teammates to safety. And I remember looking into each of my classmates' eyes that day during concentration games, and during our partnered sharing of self-created "I am / I wonder / I hope / I fear / I love" poems, in which sometimes marvelous and unexpected revelations and commonalities emerged.

I walked out of that first class having learned more about some people in the past hour than I had in the past five months. And these were just the warm-up icebreakers! We had not even begun to tackle the process-driven drama explorations that would soon allow us to negotiate learning material in critical, emotional, and social ways, to collectively represent unspoken perspectives and issues. And through the years, our drama teachers guided and facilitated our aesthetic explorations in ways that, over time, prepared us to independently embark on a community drama project, a collaborative creation that was to have a significant impact on my life and which lies at the heart of this research.

These early beginnings embody three learning structures which will be discussed at length in the next three chapters of this thesis: classroom community, physical interaction and experiential learning, and critical literacy. More specifically, the important concept of community in the classroom will be triangulated (in the sense of holding them in relation to one another) within both aesthetic and critical literacy education. I will seek to place community and the aesthetic, and drama pedagogy in particular, as components of critical literacy education. And while each one of these aspects could be a thesis unto itself, my focus will be to make comparisons and identify

relationships among the three. Rather than exhaustive, these connections are suggestive in nature. My contribution to learning will be to bring together the traditionally disparate fields of the aesthetic and critical literacy through drama pedagogy. I am hopeful that this preliminary study will be useful in its own right, but also prepare me for further exploration.

In this introductory chapter, I emphasize both Peter Abbs' and Kathleen Gallagher's notions of community, aesthetic education, and drama teaching theory as a foundation and rationale for my investigations. In chapter two I expand my argument to include discussion of theorists such as Etienne Wenger, Maxine Greene, and Jeanne Gibbs, specifically comparing drama pedagogy to their conceptions of mutually-engaged learning communities. Chapter three explores current theory and literature on experiential learning, and discusses the work of such theorists as Ellen Dissanayake and Betty Jane Wagner. Using my own experiences with the physical and experiential learning processes in drama, in this chapter I suggest possible ways in which drama education aligns with these theorists' research findings. In chapter four I discuss current critical literacy theory, focusing on the works of such theorists as Paulo Freire, Allan Luke, Peter Freebody, Mitzi Lewison, Amy Seely Flint, and Katie Van Sluys. Here, I attempt to demonstrate how experientially-based drama learning communities may facilitate students' development of critical literacy skills. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate the overlapping connections between experiential learning, critical literacy, and classroom community, and offer drama pedagogy as a means through which to achieve these connections. Chapter five summarizes the connected components of critical literacy,

community, and the aesthetic and explores the implications of this educational framework in today's classrooms. This concluding discussion is framed within the context of The New London Group's educational manifesto *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies*.

All of my chapters include narratives of drama education, and an experiential approach to learning informs this thesis in that the stories or narratives of drama education are used to "argue" the connections that I make among community, aesthetic education, and drama. While I do apply the form of a conventional social-science argument in which a statement is followed by scholarly support, I more often try to embody my "argument" and make it "live" through the experiential stories I remember and tell. As can be seen throughout my thesis, this illustrative use of narrative works by association. One person's story draws forth the listener's story.

To support the arguments within my narratives, I consulted a vast array of research and academic literature on drama pedagogy. And as my research progressed, the question of which theorists and which studies to emphasize became critical. Ultimately, I chose to focus primarily on Canadian researcher Kathleen Gallagher to support my work. While I do review and discuss other drama theorists' work throughout this thesis, there are several reasons for my emphasis on Gallagher. First, Gallagher conducts extensive research of process drama in both Toronto and New York public schools. Both the Toronto location and recent time frame of her studies lend themselves particularly well to my observations of southern Ontario students in the same educational climate; our studies are characterized by similarities in curriculum policy and socio-political influences.

Second, Gallagher incorporates discussion of several major theorists, including Boal, Brook, and LePage among others, and details how their theories and approaches align with her particular research methodology. Such theorists are foundational to global understandings in current drama research; when they are not explicitly cited, they are implied, as is the case here. In addition, since my research and exploration of process-driven drama was also a major topic explored by Gallagher, I felt that referencing Gallagher would allow me to situate my research more specifically, and locally. My expectation is that my exploration of dramatic moments and configurations continually shows the broader dramatic approaches and theoretical understandings that I have absorbed and implemented, much as you would find in any thesis. Where useful, I have aligned my understandings with theorists such as Gallagher and others.

In reviewing Gallagher's research and comparing it to my own teaching experiences, the need for continued exploration and reflection upon drama pedagogy became apparent. In my extensive experience as a classroom teacher and teaching consultant, I have observed that drama education is still often relegated to the "extracurricular" part of the curriculum, viewed merely as "play time" with little cognitive purpose. In addition, in both my past and current educational roles, many of my fellow teachers have often asked me about my drama practices, or expressed a desire not to teach the subject in the first place. These comments suggest that drama may be something mysterious and unknown, possibly causing a certain amount of anxiety for some educators. These observations highlighted a need for further exploration and discussion of drama, and led me to compare my own experiences with other researchers'

findings. Thus, in this thesis I attempt to conjoin an aesthetic medium with critical literacy with the hopes of contributing to knowledge of drama education. This work is intended to explore specific instances in drama and to thoughtfully and deliberately tease out the consequences of such dramatic moments. Because my study is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of all drama theory and pedagogical application, but rather to discuss possible connections between the three general pedagogical areas of community, critical literacy, and aesthetic education, my study contains limitations. Namely, this work is limited to the theorists whose approaches support my experiences of drama pedagogy.

This thesis incorporates a feminist theoretical framework, and as previously mentioned I use narrative to structure my investigations and conclusions; a rationale for both of these features will be offered at the end of this introductory chapter. The narratives focus primarily on my high school drama classes and the previously mentioned collaborative drama production, but will also include diverse experiences throughout my educational career as both a student and as a teacher. Indeed, it was during the course of my teaching career that I began to focus on our high school collaborative production from an educator's point of view, retrospectively noticing new pedagogical possibilities in those long-ago classes. And one of the first times I began to see new critical and community-based opportunities in drama pedagogy occurred during a professional development course ...

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The "autobiographical account" has in some form or another been a recurring form in my academic career. I have numerous, if somewhat fuzzy, memories of sitting in English class, facing front, listening to strictly-timed five-minute presentations made by each of my classmates. Oral reports such as these were fairly standard additions to the written component of our assignments. Sometimes, after the speeches were done, we were given the chance to walk over to the bulletin board, where everyone's projects had been carefully tacked up, to read them for ourselves. From time to time I would find something funny or interesting in what my classmates had written, but for the most part I was simply fulfilling my teacher's requirements: read everybody's work and/or listen to everybody's presentations. Then we all sat down and got back to work.

Curiously enough, this general pattern persisted well into my university years, albeit in much more informal ways. In the opening weeks of tutorials and seminars the instructors would inevitably ask us to introduce ourselves to each other. I remember only that these exchanges were pleasant, and helped us to get to know a little something about our classmates before embarking on the term's work. But that was about the extent of it. As in public school, the occasional classmate's comment caught my attention, but I cannot remember any specifics about their "reports". The favourite movies, pastimes, and pets quickly faded from my memory, just as they did when I was younger.

With one exception.

Several years ago I took a course in Drama Pedagogy, and the class was composed of teachers with diverse subject concentrations and professional backgrounds. Predictably, our instructor asked us to prepare a short introduction for the next day but with a twist: we were to use "any medium we wished" to introduce ourselves. When I arrived the next morning, I found that many of the teachers stuck to traditional introduction formats, but a few took bigger risks. Anne's (throughout this thesis, real names have been replaced with pseudonyms) presentation is the one that stands out most clearly in my mind.

Anne had decided to introduce herself with only a few words, and a lot of movement. With an undergraduate degree in theatre she was well-prepared for her introduction with a simple mask and a non-descript bag. I remember her walking to the front of the room and facing us silently, then removing the plaster mask she was wearing and placing it in her bag. Throughout her presentation, that bag morphed into many different objects, depending on how she held it. At one point, a football … at another point, clothing in need of mending. I also vividly recall her cradling the bag as one would a baby, expressions of happiness, love, and then sadness on her face.

I was completely engaged in her narrative. What did it mean? Why did she look sad? What had happened? Not a single word had yet been spoken, but I was nonetheless immersed in this moment, negotiating Anne's story in relation to my own, attempting to make meaning out of the experience.

When Anne finished, she slowly and deliberately placed the plaster mask back over her face, a white and unmoving grin shielding her expression from the rest of us. But I could not forget the solemn look that lay beneath that mask, which had slipped from our sight only moments before. When she sat down audible comments, words of thanks, and a palpable energy emanated from our class; many were visibly impacted by this sharing.

It strikes me that I remember so much about this long-ago morning – especially since I have not thought of it at all until very recently. The catalyst for my vivid recollection was an article by Peter Abbs, in which he recounts a similarly powerful class "introduction." With his detailed description, the memory of Anne's performance came rushing back with almost instant clarity. And as I ponder the reasons why this classroom moment was so powerful, I see clear connections to drama teaching structures, and the implications of using such methodology to build community in the classroom.

In *Against the Flow* Abbs (2003) posits that "authentic" education is collective and community-based in nature, and he goes on to describe the three principles of this educational framework. Abbs claims that learning must be a) existential, b) collaborative, and c) a cultural activity which must be continually deepened and extended (p. 14). The existential aspect of Anne's presentation was evident; through drama she stood out, made herself and her perspectives visible, and actively participated in the classroom. She exhibited Abbs' concept of stepping "out of the background of our lives and into the foreground" (p. 15) to become the "protagonist" in her own learning. Indeed, by telling her life story through movement and performance she "found an artistic

form for her own experience" (p. 13) as Abbs notes. Abbs further remarks that through

artistic forms students create symbolic worlds, which allow for the revision and reshaping

of their lives (p. 13). Through her performance, Anne seemed to become truly present to

her own learning experience, actively re-telling and re-shaping her narrative. This

existential approach allowed her to become "a maker of stories and a potential re-maker

of herself" (p. 13).

Anne also embodied the second of Abbs' principles: by creating a space for

dramatic sharing, she opened the class to a form of collaborative inquiry. And this

collaboration, as Abbs explains, is essential if new understandings and insights are to

occur:

> The existential act of enquiry arises not in cultivated isolation, but in animated
> dialogue … in the careful exploration of opposed conceptions as uttered by various
> individuals engaged in the common pursuit of understanding. (p. 16)

Our class seemed instantly engaged by Anne's story; perhaps others even reacted as I did,

contrasting Anne's story with their own histories, seeing things both similar and

dissimilar to their own narratives. Anne's performance, by its emotional, imaginative,

and critical appeal seemed to insist on the participation of those present, and called for

meaningful connections between people. Again, the emotional and experiential processes

inherent in Anne's sharing seemed to bring human commonalities and differences to the

forefront for contemplation. Poignantly, Abbs notes that Socrates felt he was

intellectually sterile when he was "without a conversation to participate in, without the

shock of difference" (p. 16). I wonder how often we, as teachers, invite this "shock of

difference" in our classrooms, and inspire passionate and committed conversation among students ...

Finally, Anne paved the way for the third and perhaps most critical element of Abbs' pedagogical principles: the importance of continuously extending meaning-making. Anne's presentation left the stage open for new possibilities; it invited the imagination to contemplate and see anew. Looking back on her performance, I recall feeling as though everyone's attention had noticeably shifted away from themselves and instead focused on the experience of another, that is, Anne. The quiet intensity that settled over the room seemed to indicate genuine interest in hearing someone else's story. As I watched her presentation I saw that Anne, who at first seemed so different from me, might in fact have had many experiences similar to my own. But did others feel this way? It was clear that many people had been touched by the performance, but what specific insights had they gained during this sharing? Unfortunately, there was no opportunity for group discussion after Anne sat down. However, within her dramatic structure lay the potential to engage learners as a "community", with both opposing and complementary viewpoints and ideas. Her performance called for personal connections, and thus left the learning space open for us to engage in dialogue, compare ideas, and expand meanings and understanding. It left the learning space open for us to develop commitment and investment in each other, despite our differences. And although I was not fully aware of it that day, Anne's presentation cleared a path for me in my own teaching, and helped me begin to encourage critical and emotional engagement in my students. I began to see the

ways in which drama pedagogy could create new possibilities for learners, potentially

creating classroom communities in which critical literacy and collaboration flourish.

*   *   *

Looking back on my schooling I notice that reading, writing, listening, and

speaking were at times treated as sets of isolated skills to be mastered independently, and

reproduced on tests. Topics and assignments explored in content area classes were not

something necessarily exciting, or necessarily relevant to my life, and only sometimes

seemed personally meaningful. Many of these learning spaces did not encourage us to

collaborate, to learn from each other. For the most part, we worked independently with

discrete pieces of information that never seemed to connect to a meaningful or purpose-

driven whole. My classmates and I did not have many chances to engage in critical

dialogue, to use reading and writing for authentic and engaging purposes, to work

together to expand knowledge and deepen understanding in the classroom. These

memories bring to mind Wagner's (1998) assertion that "too much time in school is spent

in gaining new information rather than making sense of what we have already

experienced" (p. 62). Indeed, how many hours of class time did I spend looking at

worksheets or textbooks or teachers as they instructed? And how comparatively few

hours did I spend looking into the faces of my classmates, open to new possibilities, and

really listening to what they were trying to say?

In many ways, I see this same approach reinforced in the schools in which I teach today. In our current climate of accountability and quantifiable standards, the issue of "community", as well as its role in facilitating critical literacy, may not be afforded the attention it deserves. As teachers labor under immense workloads to "deliver" the curriculum and prepare students for province-wide tests, student programs of learning may be in danger of becoming even more compartmentalized and focused on independent work. As Greene (2000) notes, "for all the talk of global citizenship, multiculturalism, social justice and the rest, an untroubled positivism (an unexamined split between facts and values) has taken over too many classrooms" (p. 271). Indeed, each school year, I watch English Language Learners (ELLs) in my school continually disadvantaged by testing language and content, I see the repeated look of resignation on students' faces when they receive their latest "level 1" rubrics, and I observe many classrooms in which the dominant teaching and learning methodologies are verbal-linguistic, largely relegating students to quietly listen to their instruction. And while there are teachers who do attempt to differentiate instruction and provide varied programs of learning, I feel that verbal-linguistic methods tend to dominate in a significant number of classrooms. In such environments, where over-reliance on a single teaching methodology exists, critical conversation and engaged classroom communities may be difficult to establish.

I believe the fostering of aesthetically-based community in the classroom may offer pedagogical, social, and emotional benefits to learners. While chapter two will deal in more detail with the features, characteristics, and methods of establishing of learning communities through drama, here I wish to introduce some of the potential advantages

for initial contemplation. In classroom community, we may move away from predominantly teacher-centered models in which learners' roles may be more solitary and self-focused. With teachers providing valuable facilitation and guidance in community-based classrooms, we may offer alternative methods of learning that also encourage the contributions of students. As we move towards "community in the classroom" we may embrace a more collaborative, connected approach to learning that meaningfully includes other learners and affirms their contributions to group learning processes. In short, we may move towards inclusion, where each learner feels that they belong. When classroom community in this sense is established there may be camaraderie, responsibility, and caring for others in the group. There may be a heightened sense of engagement, of being present to one another, of listening as well as telling. There may be personal investment and inclusion of each class member's unique perspective, but done in a way that encourages authentic sharing and negotiation of multiple viewpoints in open and imaginative ways. Classroom community, in which the aesthetic plays a significant role in negotiating learning material, may allow students to come together in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. A focus for this thesis involves investigating these collaborative possibilities.

Yet there may be additional pedagogical advantages to aesthetically-based learning communities beyond group cohesion and a sense of inclusion, namely in the area of critical literacy. Literacy in its most basic sense involves a set of productive and receptive language skills: the ability to read, write, listen, speak, view, and represent effectively. However, educational theorists such as Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002)

expand this definition into the realm of critical literacy: the ability to question, engage in social dialogue, negotiate multiple and conflicting viewpoints, to make meaningful connections to one's community and, ideally, effect change. Critical literacy, in this sense, potentially allows students to become active and engaged citizens, with an awareness of the socio-political conditions that define and structure our world. Considering the social ills that plague many of our communities, both local and global, such community-based awareness is undeniably necessary. Powell (1997) reiterates this important connection between school and community:

> If schools are to produce engaged, critical citizens who are willing to imagine and build multiracial and multiethnic communities, then we presume schools must take as their task the fostering of group life that ensures equal status, but within a context that takes community-building as its task. The process of sustaining community must include a critical interrogation of difference as the rich substance of community life and an invitation for engagement that is relentlessly democratic, diverse, participatory, and always attentive to equity and parity.
>
> (as cited in Gallagher, 2007, p. 96)

This "critical interrogation of difference" seems to insist on deeper learning connections within communities – and I posit that aesthetically-based classroom communities may have an advantage in encouraging the development of such critical literacy skills. While a more thorough exploration of current critical literacy theory in relation to drama pedagogy will be offered in chapter four, here I wish to draw attention to some of the drama experiences in my life that have suggested such connections between the aesthetic and critical literacy.

In my own classrooms, I have found that drama pedagogy – when effectively facilitated and guided by teachers – can encourage the development of community-based, critically literate learning environments. The same year that Anne's performance made such a strong impression on me, I also taught a grade eight drama unit dealing with the issue of homelessness which prompted further reflection on drama pedagogy. I chose the book *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting as a central text, and used discussion and drama-based learning strategies to explore the controversial story with my students.

At the beginning of the unit, many students expressed rigid views about people who were homeless. A general sense of judgment and indeed condemnation seemed to be present in many of their statements – and these opinions did not waver when we began to read the book itself. *Fly Away Home* tells the story of a small boy named Andrew and his father, who live in an airport. The circumstances surrounding their homelessness are never fully explained in the text, but my students were quick to fill in this ambiguity with their own certain conclusions. At the end of the book I asked the class to describe Andrew's father, and hands immediately flew up to assert negative characteristics. The usual reasons were offered: the students claimed his father must be a "deadbeat", or a "drunk", and that he should be providing a "better life for his son". I noticed during this lesson segment that students did not look at each other, and for the most part seemed uninterested in others' opinions. Many students seemed convinced they had the right answer, and thus there was no need for listening or sharing.

And then we began the hot seating exercise.

In this drama exercise, a teacher or student sits in the "hot seat" and answers questions in role from the class. I took the role of Andrew's father, and invited questions from the students. I recall one girl asking me, "How can you live with yourself, knowing the kind of life you are giving your son?" I distinctly remember this moment because as I began to explain in role the circumstances that led to our being homeless, I could see the expression on my students' faces begin to change. As I talked about my love for Andrew, how I wanted a better life for him and what I was trying to do to give him that life, the class quieted and a tangible sense of focus settled over the room. A new possibility seemed to emerge for some students, one that they had not previously considered. Andrew's father was no longer a stereotypical figure, but a living person who had met with difficult circumstances and deeply cared for his son.

The questions that followed this exchange were markedly different from the initial "accusatory" inquiries. Some students moved from certainty and condemnation to curiosity and openness. They asked more about the character's circumstances, how it made him feel, if he missed his wife ... The willingness to learn about another was suddenly present in our dialogue. Drama had seemed to highlight the humane and the complexity in the discussion. We were no longer simply a group of people with the "right" opinions. We were now, on some levels, a community of learners with the capacity to learn from each other. Dramatic teaching structures allowed us to move from the basic story to reveal, as Abbs (2003) terms it, "the central drama at the heart of the work ... providing the highest moments of absorbed attention and fulfillment" (p. 12). Thus, through drama some students began to embody Abbs' concept of existential

education; they were actively participating in their learning, seeking to understand rather than simply reiterating their own "truths". As reflection, questioning, and imagination gradually replaced righteous assertions, we moved from being observers and judges to engaged participants.

But it was during the students' tableaux presentations that I myself glimpsed new insights. The next day the class was working in groups to physically enact a problem identified in the story, as well as a possible solution. As I circulated about the class, assisting each group with their tableaux and interpretive movement, I stopped to watch Jeremy's group.

Jeremy had encountered many challenges throughout his school career. He had been diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome, and had endured a fair amount of bullying in elementary school. By the time he reached his middle school years, he presented as very reserved in class, almost never raising his hand to speak or volunteer for activities.

Yet in this quiet group, off to the side of the classroom with some of his friends, I now watched Jeremy portray Andrew's character in the airport. As other members of his group took on the role of passengers on their way to catch their flights, Jeremy simply remained still in centre of all the movement and commotion. As his group members passed by his still figure, again and again, Jeremy simply stared into the distance, a look of sadness, resignation, but also faint hope on his face. He said nothing, and at last slowly raised his hands to cover his face.

In this moment, I saw my student so quietly and so powerfully revealing a devastatingly lonely boy; the character's isolation in this particular moment seized my attention. Jeremy's interpretation revealed, in slightly new and different ways, the heartbreaking situation of his character.

Moments such as these, when Jeremy and Anne and others seemed to wordlessly express human stories and diverse perspectives, prompted me to investigate further the related critical processes in drama. During my graduate work I have studied several drama educators whose research supports the aesthetic learning advantages I have observed in my own classrooms. Kathleen Gallagher, as previously mentioned, notes comparable findings to my observations. In *Drama Education in the Lives of Girls: Imagining Possibilities* (2001) and *Theatre of Urban: Youth and Schooling in Dangerous Times* (2007), Gallagher investigates how drama pedagogy encourages urban youth to negotiate the dialects of "self and other" in the context of broader sociopolitical issues, and explores drama's impact on learning in various contexts across the curriculum, including language and literacy.

Gallagher's (2001) observations during her class' "Mary Morgan" unit paralleled my own observations of the *Fly Away Home* lessons. In both cases, student participation and reaction suggested that drama pedagogy is conducive to community-based learning. Indeed, the drama work surrounding Gallagher's controversial tale certainly invites negotiation of divergent points of view. "Mary Morgan" is a short story which describes the murder of a newborn baby at the hands of its teenage mother, and Gallagher notes

that the class' reactions to this story were strong and varied: "Some sympathized, some judged, some condemned – but they all wanted to understand the actions of the character" (p. 47). Using drama structures such as group role play and improvisation, the students were given the chance to explore multiple roles and perspectives in the story, trying on new ideas and viewpoints. Because of this physically and emotionally collaborative structure, Gallagher notes that "the students became acutely aware of the complexities of the story, whether they were playing Mary herself or another character they imagined in the work" (p.47) – and post-drama written reflections by students support this observation:

> I learned that in every situation everyone views their own story as the truth, builds up their own truth. And through acting out different points of view we understood why everyone wanted their story to be the truth. (p. 50)

Just as my grade eight students slowly became aware of the new possibilities in Andrew's story, so too did Gallagher's students become more fully "present" in their learning by engaging personal opinion and ideas. In both instances, dramatic teaching structures somehow helped students understand how certain perspectives are shaped, reinforced, and upheld by others as the "truth". Thus, texts that in more traditional settings may have been read individually (or discussed with a few others) were physically and emotionally actuated for students in collaborative settings. Again, this type of learning embodies Abbs' first and second community-based principles of education; the dramatic structure allows students to present themselves and their ideas in immediate and engaging contexts, and enables them to "get inside the story" in multiple ways, from multiple perspectives. The result, at least in some cases, is not only an awareness or tolerance of

other perspectives, but "understanding why someone might need to believe his or her

own creation of the truth" (Gallagher, 2001, p. 50). Thus, a learning community emerges

in which conversation and interaction become catalysts to learning.

But how precisely does drama pedagogy create this sense of community and

evoke complex thought? It is hoped that possible answers may be found not only in the

analysis of relevant theorists' work, but also in the narratives of my own schools and

experiences ...

*   *   *

Maxine Greene and numerous other educational theorists stress the importance of

"imagination" in learning, the ability to move beyond rigid absolutes to view issues in

multifaceted ways, from multiple perspectives. Indeed, the highlight of any drama lesson

for me is the moment I see students' expressions begin to change within role play. When

an idea or viewpoint is presented in a new way, I can see some of them pausing,

considering that idea in a completely different light. To me this is an essential aspect of

not only critical literacy but also of strong learning communities. The ability to embrace

difference, to be open to the ideas and vantage points of others within the classroom,

workplace, or greater community is an undeniably important skill.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) notes that teachers must become

engaged practitioners along with students, assessing, re-visiting, and re-visioning their

positions and ideologies – and I feel it is necessary to reflect in a personalized way upon

both theory and practice in order to accomplish this kind of critical engagement. Thus, as previously mentioned, the written component of my thesis employs narrative as a method of negotiating and expressing research findings, and revisiting my teaching memories in hopes of making meaningful connections to theoretical material. If I aim to investigate the "imaginative possibilities" of community in education, it is only fitting that my exploratory discourse should reflect this ideology.

McNiff (2007) cautions against "a traditional positivist assumption of cause and effect" (p. 312) in educational research, and instead emphasizes using personalized writing to learn, explore, and assess "what works and what does not". I do not intend for my research to result in the narrow cause-and-effect patterns McNiff warns against, backed up with quantified data. The narrative/memoir structure is therefore appropriate for my study precisely because it does not demand these rigid outcomes. Indeed, the complex and ever-shifting dynamics of classrooms ensure that there can be no single correct answer, no hard-and-fast formula that will promote learning and student success in all cases. Accordingly, my use of narrative emphasizes the evolving nature of learning and community; rather than one possibility, it is my hope that many will emerge. While I do aim to provide teachers with fully formed and reasoned pedagogical approaches, it will be gratifying if my narrative ends not with a single conclusion but a "condition of continuing renegotiation" (Buss, 2002, p. 13).

The narrative segments in this thesis take the form of personal memories, informed by my research and teaching experiences. The questions I explore in relation to

these narratives will be derived from (and thus limited by) the theorists listed at the beginning of this chapter. It is hoped that these narrative pieces explore new possibilities and applications of theory in a form that is complex enough to capture the emotional, social, and pedagogical conditions present in building classroom community and critical literacy. The questions I will investigate during my research are of a deeply human nature, and emphasize imagination, emotional response, and connections between and among people. Narrative writing, with its ability to reveal the "lived experience" behind facts and events, may allow the reader to access the emotional truths and human stories within the educational issues discussed – in much more immediate ways than mere expository writing would allow. It is hoped these narrative pieces will capture in an emotionally-resonant way the main issues discussed in specific chapters, and allow me to fully express the imaginative, sensory components of the topic. It is also hoped that the these narratives will give voice to the complex human issues embedded in my thesis discussion, and allow me to explore and communicate the emotional, imaginative, and sensory features in other theorists' work.

Narrative writing frames and in many ways defines this thesis. In my use of narrative writing, I attempt to reveal learning experiences that are emotionally correct and pedagogically appropriate, which may be corroborated with other research and which may be applicable to teachers' practices. As such, the narrative construct and reflections upon personal teaching memories are interwoven with relevant research and supporting academic literature. To differentiate or separate these two intrinsically connected

features, either stylistically or structurally within my thesis, would detract from their interrelatedness and inherent connections.

Since I am exploring personal memories and teaching experiences in the context of related academic literature, the question of reliability naturally arises. First, I feel it must be stressed that any research or analytical approach contains a measure of risk with respect to reliability of observation. In my particular case, I have taken several measures to ensure that the analysis I produce is, as previously mentioned, emotionally correct and pedagogically appropriate. The first measure involves consulting documents directly related to the collective creation that frames my discussion, documents that were created at the time of the production. These include personal journals that detail the production and rehearsal process, and record events throughout the play. Additional measures include consulting newspaper articles from several sources, noting reporters' reactions to the production as well as their observations of the students involved. I also remain in close contact with the student referred to as "Sarah" throughout this thesis. In recalling my memories, I often discussed with her the events and reactions that we both had witnessed, attempting to secure the accuracy of the memory's events and emotional essence. Furthermore, it must be said these memories were not hastily recorded within the pages of this document. The exploration of the memories, in the context of current research, was a slow, methodical, and deeply reflective process. The analysis of the social, emotional, and pedagogical events was a lengthy process which required extensive analysis. Writing the many drafts can, in itself, be a reflective process that encourages insights and connections. This was the case in my experience.

Teaching is a social, community-based vocation. It brings diverse people together for the sake of learning, intertwining their ideas, viewpoints, and histories. To fully consider the possibilities of educational theory and research, the "lived experience" of teaching must be actuated in the discussion. I feel that narrative, with its emphasis on the personal and the human, is uniquely suited to make this connection. As Buss (2002) notes, memoirs and narrative writing can "accommodate both the factual and the theoretical, and it may concern itself as much with the life of a community as with that of the individual" (p. 2). Adams (2000) eloquently describes the multi-layered structure of the memoir, and details its potential to impact and inspire readers:

> In general, what does a memoir do? It encapsulates, through the telling of an individual's story, a particular moment or era. A mix of the personal with the contextual, an autobiographical narrative intersecting with history, memoir gives its readers an author as guide, an informant whose presence lends a unique perspective to the historical moment or event or actor being recorded; the author's status as participant observer lends the history she chronicles significance, humanity, and insight. (as cited in Buss, 2002, p. 1)

In my narrative writing, I hope to capture and clarify teaching moments that impacted me and my students, to explore and discover their connections to theory, to bring a distinct and human viewpoint to bear upon research findings and pedagogical definitions. Through this personalized exploration, I hope to discover and communicate new possibilities for community and critical literacy in our classrooms.

I have also attempted to "ground" and enrich my own memories by viewing them in light of what I now know and understand about the classroom in general and about teaching. Any student's experiences will be very different from a teacher's, and while I

remained true to my own experiences as a student as I explored them in my thesis, I aimed to present these memories in their complexity and implications – something I could not have done as well at the time.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Since this thesis deals with subject matter of a deeply personal nature, and a methodology which I have observed produce powerful pedagogical results (that is, drama), the question of bias in this study was of great concern to me. Accordingly, throughout the complex process of recalling and analyzing my learning and teaching memories, exploring lived experiences within the classroom, and reviewing relevant research and literature, I have endeavoured to be vigilant in my attempts to present an unbiased analysis of the material.

A fundamental guiding principle of my educational philosophy is the belief that over-reliance on *any* particular instructional methodology – including drama-based pedagogies – may not best serve the students at whom the instruction is aimed. Indeed, as mentioned at various points throughout this thesis, educators must weigh their knowledge and observations of their students – their personalities, histories, learning styles, interpersonal dynamics, and aptitudes – against the skill sets and potential pedagogical benefits in any teaching and learning approach. Rather than focusing on the particular merits of one methodology over another, selecting diverse and engaging teaching

methods that best serve students is of paramount importance. I feel drama may be one way to accomplish this balance.

I acknowledge that I have experienced (and do believe in) drama's potential to result in transformative learning experiences for some students. I also acknowledge that equally transformative and engaging learning may occur in other pedagogies as well. My wish is to explore more fully the possibilities in drama education which may not be often acknowledged or included in mainstream pedagogical practice and discussion. One of my overall goals is to produce, through my memories and teaching stories, starting points for discussion of drama approaches and pedagogy that might offer potential benefits for educators, which in turn may be of potential benefit to students. I have not included step-by-step practical guides or lesson plans which detail the intricacies of implementing drama teaching and learning methodologies across the curriculum; such a complex exploration would be a work unto itself. Rather, it is hoped that this thesis may inspire further discussion and inquiry into drama pedagogy.

*   *   *

In re-reading my personal accounts of drama teaching and learning experiences, I note that many of the stories and memories discussed are characterized by enthusiastic description and at times earnest endorsement of drama pedagogy on my part. This earnestness is not meant to negate other forms of pedagogy, nor is it intended to disparage those educators who do not employ drama teaching methodologies. The lived

educational experiences I describe in this work were indeed powerful learning moments, both for me and for my students. Yet the vigor with which I at times support admittedly experiential and subjective drama pedagogy stems from what researcher Walter Pitman (1998) perceives as a prejudice or the "hierarchy of knowledge" within educational institutions (as cited in Gallagher, 2001, p. 4). This "hierarchy of knowledge places the measureable and objective subjects at the top, leaving the experiential and subjective at the bottom" (as cited in Gallagher, 2001, p. 4). This is where "vigor" may be seen as an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which drama serves the concepts of community and critical literacy, thereby compensating for lack of status in the "hierarchy of knowledge". While Pitman acknowledges that some schools do create rigorous and authentic arts programs, many schools (and educators) in his studies continue to reveal "a perception of the arts as 'play', entertainment, a kind of relaxation at the end of the day," (as cited in Gallagher, 2001, p. 4).

Speaking from my own years of experience as an educator, in both public and private institutions, in both international and domestic settings, in a vast range of socioeconomic sectors, and across the primary, junior, intermediate and senior divisions, I have noted similar observations to Pitman's. The tendency to attribute increased pedagogical value (in the form of time allotted to instruction, emphasis on standardized tests, placement and space on report cards, and so forth) to traditional, quantifiable subjects such as math and language is often a challenging phenomenon to address. Persuasively engaging educators in authentic discussion of these entrenched preconceptions, as well as promoting dialogue surrounding the pedagogical, critical, and cognitive benefits of arts education, is at times a great struggle. Again, my argument in

support of drama pedagogy is an attempt to make clear the possible attributes and benefits of a traditionally underrated and disadvantaged subject area.

And exploration of this disadvantaged subject area may be of critical importance when considering the issue of equity in education. Indeed, with classrooms and communities becoming more diverse every day issues of inclusion and equity are becoming increasingly important. Yet in my experience there are many schools that have yet to create inclusive and equitable environments for their learners. If, as bell hooks (1994) posits, education is a "process of self-actualization" (p. 15), then consideration must be given to the diverse voices that comprise our school communities. Teaching in a manner that empowers all students is a key goal in this framework.

This thesis incorporates some discussion of feminist theory, and instances of feminist advancement are highlighted as they arise in my exploration of the aesthetic, community, and critical literacy in the classroom. I feel drama pedagogy is uniquely suited to feminist theoretical explorations because it not only invites multiple and diverse viewpoints, it emphasizes the declaration of self in relation to others. It seeks to make conflict visible in the hopes of negotiating that conflict, imagining alternatives to "the way things are". An exploration of drama pedagogy through a feminist lens will allow for a consideration of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality as defining and sometimes marginalizing factors in classroom dynamics. Investigation of these defining social features is undoubtedly necessary if one seeks the creation of communities in which students empower and contribute to each other.

hooks views education, and literacy in particular, as an opportunity for learners to develop critical consciousness – and this critical consciousness can be used by students to empower themselves in the face of discrimination and marginalization. She notes that the classroom is not a neutral ground in which all students are equally advantaged, but is rather a socialized space which can mirror dominant ideology (p. xv). In such spaces it is possible "for certain students to have potentially the power to coerce, dominate and silence" (p. xv). hooks' feminist concept of education offers an empowering alternative to this structure:

> Learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

In this light, redefining "community" with attention to the socializing factors that shape educational discourse and practice is essential. My research will thus view drama pedagogy, community, and critical literacy through a feminist lens that takes into account the "boundaries" faced by many students, highlighting and exploring the various paths by which both learners and educators may "transgress" them.

*   *   *

In the following chapters, it is my ultimate aim to create an exploratory work that suggests possible relationships among the aesthetic, critical literacy, and community. At

the conclusion of this thesis I hope to provide new possibilities for teachers and students, which complement and balance other forms of pedagogy, including more traditional approaches. In the next chapter I begin this exploration with a more detailed examination of the concept of classroom community, in the context of a collaborative production my friends and I embarked on in our final year of high school.

Chapter 2: Drama and Community in the Classroom

Exposure to works of art and the nurture of the capacity to engage with them are what make it possible for us to notice the flower, the moonlight, the song of birds... It requires a release of the imagination, a moving beyond mere facts and the cultivation of a dialogical community. It requires a space and a community where diverse views can find expression, and diverse hopes take form, energized by shared art experiences...
To ponder about the future of school can only be to explore such moments, to expand the spaces where deepening and expanding conversation can take place and more and more meanings emerge.

(Maxine Greene, 2000, p. 278)

"Community" is a ubiquitous term in current educational discourse. There are, for example, 520 mentions of this word in Ontario's 2009 elementary curriculum alone (interestingly, the Arts document contains the most at 160). All of the elementary subject areas – with the exception of French as a Second Language – explicitly mention this term in curriculum expectations, encouraging students to make connections among their home, classroom, school, neighbourhood, and even world communities. Multiple curriculum documents describe the importance of "learning communities" and detail the roles of administrators, teachers, parents, and students in creating these welcoming and inclusive school environments. And accordingly, many of Ontario's public school boards' official websites mention goals related to community as part of their mission statements and/or board-wide character education programs. Yet for all this emphasis on community as an important factor in learning, I have noticed a disconnect between official sanction of the concept and the reality in our classrooms.

In visiting dozens of schools and classrooms in my years as an itinerant ESL teacher, I am continually disheartened at the amount of "in-class support" time I spend sitting next to English Language Learners (ELLs) in silence, both of us facing the classroom teacher, and listening to him or her speak. And although there are teachers who do emphasize cooperative and student-centered learning tasks, a significant number of educators, in my experience, do not. In the most severe cases a teacher will stop talking long enough to allow (if we are lucky) perhaps 10 minutes of uninterrupted independent or group work, at which time the ELL can finally begin speaking and interacting with other students. Although recent decades have seen researchers and educators re-shape the way we view teacher and student roles in the learning process, such teacher-centered models still prevail in a surprising numbers of classrooms I visit. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, Gallagher's research observations also indicate an overemphasis of teacher-centered instructional approaches. Collaborative and engaged learning "communities", in teacher-centered environments such as these, would be difficult to establish at best.

Compounding the effects of this over-reliance on teacher-centered, verbal-linguistic methods is the current emphasis on high-stakes testing – and this emphasis, in my opinion, can result in significant impediments to classroom community. Indeed, of all the staff meetings I have attended in schools across the system in my current role, not one has focused on community-based, collaborative learning in the classroom. Instead, EQAO scores, Smart Goal reading and writing assessments, and School Effectiveness Frameworks (SEFs) usually dominate the agenda, with teachers expected to relentlessly

report on these tracking tools throughout the school year. When I recently offered to work with the SEF team at one of my schools to create a piece on inclusion and diversity in the classroom, my offer was politely turned down. As an Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP) school, it was claimed we needed to focus on math and language as guidelines for instructional improvement.

While standardized testing and related accountability measures may provide potential pedagogical advantages, such as increased professional development for teachers and clarified assessment and evaluation expectations, specific disadvantages may result as well, affecting classroom learning and community. As my previous descriptions suggest, I believe the learning programs at many schools have focused overwhelmingly on the literacy and mathematics initiatives that are so closely monitored and publicized by Ministry offices, boards of education, and the media. And while these subjects are indeed critical areas of study for our students, other subjects often receive comparatively less attention – with drama being perhaps the most expendable of all. Although new mandates have increased the required reporting periods on Drama and Dance, I wonder about the amount and depth of the drama and dance instruction that will be received. These process-driven, community-focused, and sometimes time-consuming activities are already a rarity in the classrooms I have observed. When teachers feel mounting pressure to focus on verbal-linguistic accountability tasks, a more narrowed pedagogical emphasis may result.

My own observations of the effects of standardized testing on curriculum focus

and teaching methodology are supported by numerous studies, both domestic and

international. In multiple works, University of Toronto researcher and ESL specialist Jim

Cummins explores current research on high-stakes testing, most recently within the

context of U.S. standardized testing models. In *Literacy, Technology, and Diversity*

Cummins, Brown, and Sayers (2004) synthesize and analyze several research studies on

standardized testing in the U.S. And while it may be argued that Canadian and U.S.

models do differ in some structural and socio-political areas, it may also be argued that

many of the fundamental issues at hand are similar: both the Ontario model and U.S.

model emphasize a standardized curriculum, accompanied by high-stakes testing in the

areas of math and language. Both systems espouse highly-publicized and much-analyzed

test results, and both systems attempt to serve a diverse socio-economic student

population, to name but a few commonalities. As Cummins et al note, Neill, Guisbond,

and Schaeffer's (2004) review of recent research on the effects of standardized and high-

stakes testing indicates its potentially negative consequences. These authors cite von

Zastrow's (2004) studies, noting that "subjects like social studies, civics, geography,

languages, and the arts are being given short shrift because of increasing time devoted to

reading, math, and science" (as cited in Cummins et al, 2007, p. 77). In the same review

of research findings, Neill et al (2004) "note considerable data showing teachers are

aware of the effects of high-stakes testing on their instruction and consider that 'testing

caused them to teach in ways that contradicted their views of sound instruction' " (as

cited in Cummins et al, 2007, p. 77). Indeed, with such a narrowed emphasis in

predominantly teacher-centered classrooms, opportunities to cultivate dialogical learning

communities "where diverse views can find expression, and diverse hopes take form" (Greene, 2000, p. 278) may be few indeed. Yet, ironically, fostering community in the classroom may be a key determining factor in the success of our students.

As I began my research on classroom community, I encountered a plethora of resources, theories, and definitions of this seemingly pervasive term – many of which assert that a "community" may be necessary in order for engaged learning to take place. Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave have explored the notion of community in relationship to schooling, with Wenger's concept of "communities of practice" gaining increasing attention and influence in educational discourse. As Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) succinctly summarize, "communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4). More specifically, Wenger (1998) claims this fundamentally collaborative and experiential model is an intrinsically natural component of the human learning process, and suggests current models of education may be directly at odds with the way children and adults naturally learn:

> Our institutions, to the extent that they address issues of learning explicitly, are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching. Hence we arrange classrooms where students – free from the distraction of their participation in the outside world – can pay attention to a teacher or focus on exercises. We design computer-based training programs that walk students through individualized sessions covering reams of information and drill practice. To assess learning we use tests with which students struggle in one-to-one combat, where knowledge must be demonstrated out of context, and where collaboration is considered cheating. (p. 3)

Rejecting these assumptions, Wenger prompts us to view "learning in the context of lived experience of participation in the world ... that learning is, in its essence, a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing" (p. 3). Thus for Wenger learning is not a teacher-caused, individual process; rather, it is inextricably related to and dependent upon contextualized interaction and collaboration within communities, with social negotiation of meaning a central focus. Indeed, based on his research, he posits that "the primary focus of this theory is on learning as social participation...being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities" (p. 4).

Jeanne Gibbs, the creator of the Tribes Learning Community program, holds similar views to Wenger. Gibbs (2009) outlines the goal of her internationally-recognized project on the Tribes official website, claiming that "every school should be a model home, a complete community actively developing future compassionate citizens capable of creating, leading and contributing to the kind of democratic communities in which we all long to live." Such mission statements imply a focus on collaborative, socially-interconnected living and learning, and as I previewed her book several years ago I quickly saw how she intended to accomplish this objective. I will never forget the surprise of realizing that many of the games, activities, and community-building tasks in the Tribes Learning Community Program were in fact the same drama warm-up games I had participated in countless times during my high school years. Gibbs (2001) notes that such collaborative learning activities may instill a sense of social connection, and that

"the repeated sequence of inclusion, influence, and community enables the group to experience increasingly more profound interaction" (p. 84).

Education theorist Maxine Greene also explores the potential benefits of fostering community in the classroom, mentioning both the cognitive aspects of models such as Wenger's as well as the social cohesion emphasis inherent in approaches such as Gibbs'. Greene emphasizes that in light of increasingly divisive social, political, and environmental crises (in both our local and world communities), creating powerful classroom communities to address these challenges may be a critical goal for educators. Greene (2000) asserts:

> To educate for the mode of associated living that is called community, teachers must think about what is involved in inventing the kinds of situations where individuals come together in such a way that each one feels a responsibility for naming the humane and the desirable and moving together to attain them. (p. 274)

For Greene, it would seem that a sense of "community" not only provides pedagogical advantages in the classroom, but also beyond its walls in our societies. Indeed, if we are to prepare our students for the eventual task of constructive citizenship, then fostering the ability to critically evaluate and collaboratively address human challenges may be a crucial goal in our schools.

As illustrated above, proponents of community-based pedagogy such as Wenger, Gibbs, and Greene suggest that collaborative community-based learning is an inherently natural way for people to learn, with cognitive as well as social benefits in the pedagogical process. Each theorist offers varying descriptions "classroom community".

However, I have noticed several common themes among these and other theorists'
definitions. Most accounts of "classroom community" that I have consulted include
some or all of the following characteristics:

1) Membership and a sense of belonging in the group.
2) Efficacy and being able to contribute to the group in active, meaningful ways.
3) Fulfillment of individual emotional, social and learning needs.
4) Emotional connections and commitment to others in the group.
5) Collaborative learning, shared purposes, and mutual engagement.
6) Extending learning to positively impact and contribute to others, both inside
outside of the classroom.

While certainly not an exhaustive description of the complex features of learning
communities, the above commonalities may encompass their main characteristics.
Again, in light of these characteristics, I am forced to wonder how a new Canadian, for
example, can feel a "sense of belonging" if her culture is discounted and first language is
never used in school; how a student with a verbal learning disability can feel a sense of
efficacy and "contribution" when group learning tasks and provincial standardized tests
are predominantly verbal-linguistic in nature; how a student experiencing systemic
racism can feel "fulfillment of individual needs" when there is no authentic collective
means with which to explore and address issues of social justice; how students can
develop "emotional connections" to one another when there is a dearth of experiential,
emotional explorations in regular classrooms; and how students can feel a sense of
"collaboration" or "commitment" to one another when the pedagogical emphasis always
seems to be on individual achievement, test scores, and report card marks.

I believe that drama pedagogy, with its emphasis on multimodal, emotional, and social learning structures, may address these potential obstacles to collaborative and equitable learning, and provide a student-centered means of building engaged learning communities. In such aesthetically-based classroom communities, interconnected and inclusive learning relationships may develop – characterized not only by group cohesion but also by emerging critical literacy skills. To clarify, the type of drama I assume in this discussion is not the typical school play or musical, in which a handful of students win scripted parts to memorize and perform. While such endeavours are indeed valuable learning experiences about the theatre production process, I will concentrate on a less-often employed form of drama: process-driven drama explorations of learning material within the regular classroom, with an emphasis on student-created collaborative productions.

Using current research on learning and classroom community, as well as my own school experiences, I will introduce in this chapter the ways in which specific forms of drama pedagogy – collaborative, process-driven, socio-political drama structures – may provide effective teaching and learning alternatives to the potential limitations of the current education system. Specifically, I will explore memories of my own participation in a collaborative drama production, and provide a subsequent comparison to Wenger's concept of "communities of practice". This comparison is not intended as an exhaustive analysis of the two models, but rather to suggest general commonalities between them. It is my hope that these commonalities will provide a context for the detailed explorations in chapters three and four, which investigate specific ways in which drama contributes to

the creation of classroom learning communities and critical literacy. I have chosen

Wenger's model of "communities of practice" for my initial comparison for two reasons:

first, Wenger's in-depth research addresses both the cognitive and social aspects of

collaborative, community-based learning; second, his model encompasses the six

common features of "classroom community" evident in multiple theorists' work.

*   *   *

The most powerful learning community I have ever been a part of began on a

hallway bench in high school.

I was 18 years old, sitting beside my best friend Sarah. We had just come from

English class, where we had been copying poetry terms and definitions from the

blackboard. As I recall, I had finished the work as quickly as I could so I could flip the

page and begin writing about something else, something that had been occupying my

mind for a long time. All through that class I thought and wrote.

And now on the wooden hallway bench, settling in for our spare, I asked Sarah if

she wanted to write a play with me about the violence that had been occurring in our

school community.

I made this request for both personal and collective reasons. That time period had

marked the end, in many ways, of the sense of security and safety we had taken for

granted all our lives. As we sat on that bench only two years had passed since Leslie

Mahaffy and Kristen French, so close to us in age and geography, had been abducted and

killed, a mere 15 minutes from our homes. Only a year had passed since one of our

closest friends told us about the horrific abuse she had suffered at home since childhood,

which we had not suspected for a moment. And it was that year that violence touched

many of our friends' lives and our own.

In speaking with Sarah during the writing of this thesis, we both recalled how

much these incidents changed us, one incomprehensible event after another. And we

carried them with us everywhere, silently, trying to make sense of them, trying to deal

with them. But it seemed that we were powerless to do anything at all about these issues.

As more and more people in our lives were profoundly affected by violence, we felt a

sense of rage and helplessness that was at times overwhelming and nearly always

isolating. There was no visible community discussion or action taken, no collaborative

recognition of these critical issues. And so to us, it seemed that there was no way to fix

what was happening, to address the horrible injustice of it all. And we needed to fix it.

We needed to do *something*.

And a play, I remember thinking, was something we could do. A play could

engage others in public discussion and sharing of these issues. A play could help others

who were dealing with violence in their lives. I also remember hoping that it might

change some minds and attitudes – at the very least it might make some students think

twice before making light of these significant issues or dismissing them as personally irrelevant. Maybe it would help us find a little peace, too.

Sarah must have felt at least some of the same things, because her answer was an immediate 'yes'.

From the time we first spoke about the idea in December, to the time the final play went into performance for hundreds of students and community members in April, we did not stop working. Our goal was to produce a 45-minute collective theatre production that dealt with issues of violence against women, followed by Q & A sessions after the performance with the audience. And right from the start, we needed others to complete this community-based project. Indeed, we could not write, produce, direct, perform, and discuss this play single-handedly, or even with only a few select others. And so the process of forming a learning community began. At first we expected only our classmates from drama class would be interested in the production. But as the rehearsals progressed and our production became more visible to the whole school community, we noticed many different people join our ranks: friends who wanted to help us write, act, and rehearse; teachers who allowed us to borrow their classrooms at lunch; students we didn't even know, from across the grades, who had heard what we were doing and wanted to know if they could help too. Something about the process and nature of the production inspired diverse participants to come forward ...

As script workshops and rehearsals progressed, we thrived on this new project that meant so much to us personally, and which provided the chance to give voice to personally-relevant social issues. Regular classes became furtive planning sessions where Sarah, I, and other members of our cast passed notes back and forth about the upcoming writing workshops and rehearsals after school. We could not stop talking and thinking about this play, to the point that some teachers began to let us leave class early so we could set up the drama room for rehearsal. But something unanticipated began to happen during this complex production process: many of my original viewpoints and plans began to change, morph in response to contributions and aesthetic sharing from the cast. While the specifics of this process will be detailed fully in subsequent chapters, I wish to introduce these events here as evidence of an emerging community in which mutual engagement facilitated personal learning, critical literacy, and contribution to our endeavour. As our diverse group of participants met each day in the drama room to collaboratively workshop scenes, alter dialogue, physically represent new perspectives, discuss newfound insights, and revise our collective creation, I noticed more and more issues and connections emerge which I had not previously considered. My conceptions, not only of the goals of the production but also of the roles of the participants within it, altered significantly. What started out as "my play" truly became a community project, with a community of learners contributing to its growth and completed form. And embedded in the final product was something of each one of us, a medley of perspectives and diverse viewpoints unified in the dramatic construct physically, emotionally, and aesthetically.

There was one moment in particular that now stands out for me as the beginning of this authentic collaboration ...

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I remember sitting cross-legged on the carpet in the drama room, during a dress rehearsal, watching a scene from the play we had created together. Two characters, a young woman and a young man, were discussing a friend's claim that she had been assaulted. I remember sitting there, watching my friends perform and thinking that this was one of my favourite scenes in the play – although it hadn't been in the beginning. No, it would be more than fair to say that initially the scene Sarah and I had written was flat and one-dimensional. There was no ambiguity, no complexity, and definitely no possibility. We had written it simply to illustrate a point that we believed, in our teenage wisdom, to be indisputable fact: girls were the only ones who suffered as victims of assault, while boys always minimized the violence, blamed the victim, or simply didn't care.

I am happy to say that scene (and our perspective) underwent some major changes throughout the course of our rehearsals, largely due to group collaboration within our learning community.

Our friend Cory was now performing in the scene that was the final result of our group collaboration. In fact, he had been instrumental in changing the tone and messages within the piece – and it was now full of compassion and self-doubt, of sorrow and rage,

of answers and even more questions. The transformation of this scene began when we were all sitting in a circle, reading over rough drafts of the script. As I recall, Cory stared at his copy for a long time while everyone else started talking about ways to enact the scene.

Finally he spoke.

"I don't think the character would say that," Cory said.

We stopped and looked at him. He paused for a moment, and then continued. "This whole scene … it's like he's just going to believe his buddy's version, no matter what. But the girl is his friend too, isn't she?"

In writing this paraphrased account of our conversation, I recall my initial stubbornness and inflexibility. I was unwilling to listen. In fact, I was even a little annoyed. Who was he to question what we had written in this scene? Hadn't we watched people react this very way? Hadn't we seen the pain caused by events such as this? I was so immovably rooted in my own certainty about this scene and this issue that I would not listen to arguments about how it was presented, even when a few others in the group nodded in agreement with Cory.

And that is when Cory rose to improvise the scene. As I watched the drama unfold with Cory pausing after certain lines, expressions of doubt, fury, and sadness fleeting across his face in counterpoint to the lines he was speaking, the dialogue took on

new life. Suddenly, as Cory's character grappled with a terrible tragedy in his friend's life, a new possibility gradually unfolded for me too. It was as though I had been invited by Cory into an open and unguarded place, where I began to see and participate in another person's very different perspective. Physical enactment and expression somehow conveyed the complexities of this emotional issue; gesture and tone created a non-verbal communication that reached me in ways that reason, logic, and argument could not. Through dramatic sharing, I began to see new possibilities in this very human dilemma.

Looking back, Cory played his role with remarkable depth. The scene required him to reflect on the actions of his best friend, who had committed a terrible assault – and Cory brought a multi-dimensional approach to his character's reaction. It was not a scene of absolutes, or right and wrong; rather, it was a scene in which a young boy must negotiate the mistakes committed by and against his own friends. It was a scene that revealed a boy trying to make sense of nonsensical actions, feeling rage and helplessness at his inability to stop what had happened. A scene that had started out devoid of possibility, portraying a character who unquestioningly sided with his friend's version of events, had now grown into a multifaceted and complex treatment of the subject matter. The dramatic process, in this case, helped me to forge emotional understanding and deepened awareness of another's perspective; it helped me to see Cory, to begin to authentically listen to him, to realize that there was strength and value in the diverse perspectives within our community, to realize that perhaps I didn't have all the answers after all. This personally-transformative experience brings to mind Wenger's (1998) assertion that "education, in its deepest sense and at whatever age it takes place, concerns

the opening of identities – exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state" (p. 263).

Our rehearsals continued this way, with our role play acting as a conduit to bring forth new points of view, to represent them in ways that could directly and emotionally impact the observer. And in speaking with other cast mates, it seemed these character explorations became learning moments for all of us. To watch our discussions and divergent opinions being physically and emotionally represented impacted my views in ways that mere words could not. In this sense I am reminded of Greene's (2000) assertion that "it is not that the artist offers solutions or gives directions. He nudges; he renders us uneasy; he makes us (if we are lucky) see what we would not have seen without him. He moves us to imagine, to look beyond" (p. 276). This is perhaps one of the most critical features of community: the willingness to listen to another's perspective, the ability to see human and emotional connections in people different from ourselves and, in turn, expand our own awareness and perspectives. Such potential benefits of drama pedagogy are critical in light of Wenger's (1998) assertion that "the ability to apply learning flexibly depends not on abstraction of formulation but on deepening the negotiation of meaning. This is turn depends on the engaging of identities in the complexity of lived situations ... identity is the vehicle that carries our experiences from context to context" (p. 268).

As previously stated, I believe the drama processes in our collaborative production align with multiple features of Wenger's theories. However, a complete analysis of Wenger's community-based learning in relation to drama pedagogy might consume the entirety of this thesis. Again, rather than an exhaustive comparison between

the two learning models, this introductory discussion of community and drama will focus

instead on Wenger's overall dimensions of education design, or the basic requirements as

he sees them, for creating transformative learning communities. It is my intent to

highlight commonalities between these requirements and drama pedagogy (and our

collaborative production in particular), thus exploring drama as a possible answer to

many of Wenger's questions and guidelines about how to best facilitate the development

of learning communities. It is my hope that this initial exploration will set a foundational

context for the more thorough analysis in chapters three and four of the specific drama

features that might contribute to the creation of critical literacy and classroom

community.

Wenger outlines three general requirements that support the formation of learning

communities, stating that students need: 1) places of engagement; 2) materials and

experiences with which to build an image of the world and of themselves; 3) ways of

having an effect on the world and making their actions matter (p. 271). The first

requirement of this educational design, offering opportunities for engagement, may align

with drama pedagogy. Indeed, Wenger posits that learners must be able to participate not

only in the negotiation of subject matter, but do so within the context of "socially-

meaningful enterprise":

> Unlike in a classroom, where everyone is learning the same thing, participants in a
> community of practice contribute in a variety of independent ways that become
> material for building an identity. What they learn is what allows them to contribute
> to the enterprise of the community, and to engage with others around that enterprise
> ... Our communities of practice then become resources for organizing our learning
> as well as contexts in which to manifest our learning through an identity of

participation. What is crucial about this kind of engagement as an educational experience is that identity and learning serve each other. (p. 271)

As evidenced in Cory's scene study, the collaborative drama construct provided the opportunity for community engagement around a shared, meaningful goal: addressing personally-relevant issues of violence. During such drama explorations we negotiated not only new information, facts, and ideas – the "subject matter" of the endeavour – but also new forms of participation, in which the drama construct facilitated unique and diverse contributions from participants. Multiple modalities (movement, dance, discussion, writing, emotional enactment, reading, representing, revising) provided diverse opportunities for many of our community members to participate. And this participation and interaction, at least in my case, seemed to facilitate increased personal understandings, not only of the topic and issues at hand but also of our roles in contributing to each other's learning, our "identity of participation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 271). When Cory's dramatization allowed me to view issues in profoundly new ways, I became aware of the critical role others can play in shaping understanding.

Drama processes may also facilitate the second of Wenger's requirements in educational design. Wenger asserts that social interaction and connection alone are insufficient to create a mutually-engaged learning community, and that the second requirement of educational design involves "experiences with which to build an image of the world and themselves" (p. 271):

> If the purpose of education is not simply to prepare students for a specific capability, but rather to give them a sense of the possible trajectories available in various communities, then education must involve imagination in a central way...

When imagination is anchored in a learning community, it can become part of a lived identity ... it is more important for the informational content of an educational experience to be identity-transforming than to be "complete" in some abstract way.
(p. 272-273)

Indeed, our collective production was built on the foundation of imagining possibilities quite different from current situations. We hoped to fill our school spaces with dialogue where previously there was none; we wanted to share what we knew in hopes of preventing violence; we wanted to effect change. And our "imagined possibilities" were given life through gesture, movement, and dramatic scenes. We used the drama aesthetic to bring new stories and possibilities to the community for contemplation and discussion. And while drama is certainly not the only method by which students may negotiate imaginative possibilities, it may have distinct advantages in relation to Wenger's model. Indeed, drama's intrinsically social and aesthetic medium has the potential to create powerful spaces for sharing, for collectively imagining new possibilities.

The third of Wenger's requirements, having opportunities to meaningfully impact the world, was also encouraged within our collaborative production. In his discussion of this third feature, Wenger states:

Educational design must engage learning communities in activities that have consequences beyond their boundaries, so that students may learn what it takes to become effective in the world ... To be able to have effects on the world, students must learn to find ways of coordinating multiple perspectives ... What is not so widely understood is that this ability is not just a matter of information and skill ... Rather, it is a matter of identity ... and finding new ways of being in the world that can encompass multiple, conflicting perspectives in the course of addressing significant issues. (p. 274-275)

Throughout our collaborative production and in the months following the final

performance, we realized first-hand the tangible impact our play had made – on fellow

students, teachers, parents, and members of our local community. And our ability to have

these "effects on the world" was indeed, as Wenger notes, a matter of identity. Cory's

scene study – and indeed the community of learners who contributed to it and other

scenes throughout our production – offered me "a new way of being", the capacity to see

others in a new light, to entertain multiple and diverse perspectives while "addressing

significant issues" within our play. The dramatic process somehow resulted in a new

way of seeing myself in relation to others – and this personally-transformative process

resulted in expanding my own insights and understanding of others' perspectives, which

in turn provided opportunities to positively engage others and effect positive change in

both our school and local communities. As I recall our first evening performance, so

many years ago, I see the ways in which our collaborative production shook us out of our

complacency, our self-interest, our relentless defense of our own point of view as

ultimate truth. I see how drama pedagogy helped us to truly *listen* to one another.

                    *   *   *

The night of our first evening performance I looked around the darkness of the

theatre, packed with parents, members of the community, and students who had returned

to school to watch the play. It was an intimate performance space, and scattered around

the stage area I saw my friends, dozens of people whom I had come to know and value so

much over the past months. I saw them in their roles, organizing costumes, running the

house, cueing lights, all with a quiet intensity unlike any other "opening night" I had ever witnessed. The usual giddy excitement young people feel before performing, the egocentric preening, the anticipation of a moment in the spotlight … it simply was not present. If I had to describe the energy that evening, the words "connected" and "focused" would be the closest fit. And not a single adult was in charge, directing us, keeping us in line and telling us what to do. We were doing all of it. This was our creation, and we wanted to share it powerfully.

As I recall, our performance that evening carried a tangible energy, the one that you can feel settle over a crowd when a single idea or moment has captured everyone's attention. As the play ended and I finally looked out into the darkness to see expressions of the audience members, I felt sure we had accomplished what we set out to do. I remember feeling a rush of pride that we had managed to create something that had seemed to engage others. But when the house lights went up, I was met by a sight I did not expect.

The first face in the audience I clearly saw was in the back row. A boy named Andy. He had been in almost all of my classes throughout high school, but I don't think we had ever exchanged more than a few sentences. He was a class clown, with a very distinct and unpredictable sense of humour. He always seemed always to be wearing a bemused grin on his face, putting teachers on edge for his upcoming antics – which is why the sight of him made me stop cold at the end of the performance.

He was staring straight ahead, his face completely still, his expression making him look much older than he was. He looked nothing like the Andy I saw each day. He looked devastated.

He sat there silently throughout the post-performance discussion, as adults and teens alike raised their hands, asked questions, suggested courses of action, listened to points of view different from their own. In this lively discussion, it was the teens who were most vocal, as I recall. I remember seeing the adults listening intently to their comments, seemingly quieted by the seriousness and thoughtfulness of the young people around them. Perhaps it was the fact that the traditional teaching and learning model, in which authority figures direct learning, was completely absent. In its place was dialogue and exchange, with energetic students fully engaged in the process. And we were indeed bursting to share what we'd each learned, and to listen to what others in the audience had learned.

As I look back on this memory now, I see that the Q & A session went very differently from how I had originally envisioned it. I suppose in the beginning I felt I already had all the answers, and that this was going to be an educational play presenting our point of view to "enlighten" others. But the final product was different from that original and somewhat limited conception. It had expanded to include multiple points of view. It had shifted from me wanting to "teach" to wanting to "contribute" to my community. It had evolved to engage others in discussion, making the connections between our ideas and perspectives evident to me in that moment.

We were all onstage for this discussion with the audience: students who had helped write, act, construct props, and make publicity flyers. Everyone had a voice and a chance to share what they had learned in the process of creating this play. On the way out of the theatre, I overheard one of the trustees for our school board say, almost to herself, "I didn't know students could think like this."

But Andy never said a word. And the next day I discovered why.

I was walking down the backstairs, a shortcut to my next class, when she stopped me. I didn't know her name, but I knew she was Andy's girlfriend. A year younger than we are, I thought. She said she had seen the show, and wondered if she could talk to me.

So we sat there on the steps and I listened. I listened to her story, about how some of the things that had happened in the play had happened to her too, a long time ago. How she had only told Andy about it recently, how she hadn't been able to for a long time. How he wanted to see the play when she told him about it.

I remember being amazed at how this girl trusted me, how willing she was to share herself. From my perspective, it seemed as though she had seen something of herself in our play. She had heard her story discussed openly and authentically by peers, teachers, and parents and suddenly a space had opened up for her. So I just let her talk. The last thing she said to me was that she had enjoyed the post-performance discussion on social action, and wanted to do something to help too.

As I re-visit this encounter, I realize that one of the greatest gifts this production gave me was the knowledge that I could make a difference, that our performances had "consequences beyond their boundaries" (Wenger, 1998, p. 274). Together, we had created something that had opened a space for positive dialogue and, as will be demonstrated in chapters three and four, inspired others to continue and extend the discussion we had started, creating anti-violence initiatives in our school and local communities. Through our collaborative creation I realized that I did indeed have the power to contribute, to find "ways of having an effect on the world" and of making my actions matter (Wenger, 1998, p. 271). When the play concluded, after months of negotiating the stories of so many different people, I realized that the ability to effect positive change lies not just in the capacity to work with others towards a common goal – it also lies in the ability to connect with others, to enroll others in possibility, to inspire action based on knowledge, and to enable others to find their own answers and make their own unique contributions.

Drama may have an advantage in creating these complex community connections because of its experiential, emotional and gestural aesthetic. I posit that the physical and aesthetic structures in drama simultaneously facilitate the kind of deep social connection and cognition necessary for true community to develop. And as such, I now wish to delve deeper into the specifics of those features, and reveal in detail precisely *how* they may create and sustain learning communities. As the following chapters indicate, community and critical literacy may be inextricably intertwined in the drama process, with one encouraging the other – potentially resulting in the kind of engaged learning community

Wenger and others describe. In the following chapter, I demonstrate how the physical

interaction in drama is a critical component of this reciprocal relationship.

Chapter 3: Drama and Experiential Learning

Our first experiences both before and after birth were centered in our bodies. As a newborn, we knew when we were hungry, dry, comfortable, held in strong and calm arms. Even then we were aware of language – not as a system that encodes meaning but as a phenomenon of consummate interest. As an infant every part of our body was engaged in making sense of our world – in constructing meaning. Words surrounded us, but they were not a predominant way of knowing.

(Betty Jane Wagner, 1998, p. 63)

When I think back to the drama classrooms in which I was educated, I recall empty rooms free of desks and chairs. I recall the painted black walls and the grey carpet upon which we moved, always in stocking feet, filling the large spaces with our movement and actions. I remember the sturdy wooden cubes and boxes, of varying size, upon which we would jump, dance, leap, lean, and otherwise physically enact our drama. Finally, I remember an exhilarating sense of freedom as we ran about during a gleeful drama game or moved unrestricted through a scene study. Contrasted with the more traditional and comparatively restrained physical environments of other classrooms, to me the openness of the drama classroom felt like an unspoken and irresistible invitation to move, to fill in the empty space with my body, to explore and learn experientially.

Movement is one of the most inextricable features of drama pedagogy, and the learning activities in my drama classrooms certainly required it virtually from the moment we walked in the door. From gestural "trust" and "concentration" exercises, to exploring texts through tableaux, to creating movement and dance pieces based on narratives, our bodies were the primary tools with which we negotiated learning material

and interacted with one another. Naturally, the learning environment itself reflected this basic requirement of drama, containing open spaces as described above, which were conducive to physical movement, interaction, and "bodily learning".

Most of my other classrooms, in contrast, seemed designed around the presumption of relative inactivity while learning, of more or less sitting still to read, write, speak, and listen. And currently, with the exception of gymnasiums and kindergarten activity centers, most schools I have observed contain classrooms which largely deter various forms of movement and thus also potentially deter, to varying degrees, the experiential learning so closely connected to it. Indeed, with many schools and portables packed to capacity, the spaces available for experiential learning in our schools seem to be getting smaller and smaller. And while there may be variations in student arrangement and groupings in mainstream classrooms the basic format, in my experience, is generally the same: chairs to sit in, and desks to write upon. Undeniably, such learning environments provide their own rich pedagogical benefits, and are of course necessary for many verbal-linguistic activities, visual art lessons, access to information technology and classroom organization, to name only a few advantages. However, I feel there may currently be an overemphasis of these "sedentary" learning environments and activities in our education system, resulting in potential pedagogical limitations.

Gallagher's (2001) research findings support similar conclusions. In her study, 89.5% of students interviewed claimed they "saw themselves as 'very different' in drama class compared with other classes in the school" (p. 85). Gallagher elaborates on the

descriptor 'very different' and identifies that one of the general themes characterizing the students' answers was the "informal or relaxed setting of the drama class that allowed them to 'express feelings' and be 'more yourself'"(p. 85). In this regard, student responses highlighted the dichotomy between the sedentary learning environments that characterized their mainstream classrooms and the more physical and experiential modes of learning in the drama classroom:

> Sandy: Yeah because in drama class you can act, how ... you ... like you know in other classes you just sit down at a desk and write off the board but in drama class you really get into what you're doing. (p. 86).

In Gallagher's (2007) subsequent research on process drama, similar comparisons are made by the students in the study. Here, Gallagher cites observations at three different high schools, beginning with Middleview Secondary School in Toronto. Again, a response from a grade 12 student referred to as 'Sanjeet' indicates distinct differences between mainstream pedagogies and drama:

> The drama classroom plays a huge role. Again, if it was drama but we all sat in straight rows and desks, we wouldn't interact as much, but, um, it's very open. And maybe it's a reflection of what the class does to you inside. It opens you up, just like the open space. (p. 143).

Student responses seem to indicate an overemphasis of more sedentary learning, with the experiential aspects of drama pedagogy a welcome contrast. In my own investigations, I seek to explore further the potential benefits of the experiential and the physical in drama learning structures.

During my thesis research I discovered several theorists and educators who have explored the connection between experiential learning and cognitive development. From Vygotsky's (1978) discussion of the relationship of gesture and play to verbal and written language, to Dissanayake's (2000) analysis of physical and manual interaction with the natural world, to Wagner's (1998) connections between role play and Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, and to Greene's (1978) concept of "wide-awakeness", the research I encountered seemed to suggest that gestural and physical explorations are necessary, intrinsically human components of learning and cognition – and it was Dissanayake's theories in particular that prompted me to consider the cognitive and social implications of the physical learning inherent in drama pedagogy.

Dissanayake (2000) discusses the benefit and indeed the human need for physical and experiential interaction with the natural world:

> Manual movement and material interaction with the world are multisensory –
> multimodal ... They are among our earliest experiences of our bodies and of the
> world, and they become a tacit part of the knowledge with which we continue to
> experience it. Infant development and inclination suggest that hand use and
> involvement with the material world are integral parts of our species program. *Not*
> *to do these things contravenes our fundamental nature.* All together, the
> psychological traits that emerge from mutuality – a sense of belonging and identity,
> a reliance on shared meaningful systems and stories that explain the world, and a
> hands-on relationship with the natural world – lead to a basic sense of competence,
> or aptitude for life.   (p. 100-101)

It was Dissanayake's notion of the intrinsically natural aspect of physical interactions, and that such interactions may lead to "competence" and feeling a sense of personal efficacy, that intrigued me. Indeed, her argument posits that gestural, experiential explorations with the natural world (such as growing one's own food, creating clothing

and tools by hand, and other "hands-on" life tasks) lead to a sense of connection and responsibility to the environment, as well as to "aptitude for life" (p. 101). Although Dissanayake focuses on physical interaction with the natural world and its ability to foster this sense of self-reliance in humans, I began to wonder about the interactive physicality in drama learning structures, and the social and pedagogical parallels to Dissanayake's "hands-on" model. Could the inherently gestural and experiential processes in drama not only aid students' cognition and learning, as theorists such as Vygotsky and Wagner have suggested, but also foster a sense of social belonging and competence, feelings of "efficacy" and positive control over their learning and lives? Could such aesthetically-based bodily learning contribute to the development of classroom community and students' developing critical literacy skills?

Using current research on gestural learning, as well as memories from my own schooling and our collaborative drama production, I hope to illustrate some of the potential ways in which the experiential learning in drama pedagogy may enhance and complement verbal-linguistic teaching methods, and facilitate student learning and understanding in unique ways. I suggest that the physical and gestural learning structures inherent in drama may provide effective learning alternatives to balance the current overemphasis of "sedentary" learning approaches in schools, facilitating the development of critical literacy skills, attention and engagement, a sense of personal efficacy, and classroom community. As such, one of the first memories that come to mind is of my high school English class ...

* * *

John Donne's poetry has, to be sure, graced the pages of many an English course syllabus – and as mentioned in chapter two, my high school English classes were no exception. Donne was right at the top of the senior poetry list, as was Shakespeare, and other familiar canonical names. As our unit progressed, we copied notes from the blackboard on the Jacobean and Elizabethan periods, listened to the teacher explain the features of metaphysical poetry, and completed quick round-robin readings of some of Donne's and Shakespeare's work. In the finest New Critical tradition, our teacher placed particular emphasis on conventions of poetry, making sure we had copied definitions of "simile", "metaphor", and "imagery" into our notebooks. I had had some experience with Shakespeare prior to this class, but none at all with Donne. I recall our teacher handing out photocopies of Donne's poem "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", and my sitting at my desk, peering at the typed words on the handout:

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
  Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
  Like gold to aery thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
  As stiff twin compasses are two ;
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
  To move, but doth, if th' other do.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
  Like th' other foot, obliquely run ;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
  And makes me end where I begun.

Having gleaned no dramatic revelations on the first read-through, I skimmed the poem again, hoping to understand a little more. Yet the unfamiliar verse remained largely impenetrable and irrelevant to my teenage sensibilities. I made few connections between

the notes we'd been copying and the language in the poems. When I read the verse

silently to myself, I didn't notice much of the imagery Donne was so famous for, that our

teacher had copied so carefully onto the blackboard. So when I was later assigned John

Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" for oral presentation, I did not know

where to begin.

I recall a feeling of resignation, thinking that there was no way I was ever going

to understand, much less enjoy, the antiquated language in the poem. I wondered if other

students in the rows around me felt the same way, or if they understood it all just fine. In

this particular class, however, I was limited in my ability to gauge the understanding of

others around me, because we rarely had any chance to discuss the text in meaningful

ways, to use diverse learning modalities to explore the verse and bring it to life. Rather,

most of our instruction and activities were firmly rooted in the verbal-linguistic realm of

the traditional classroom. There was little opportunity to work collaboratively with other

students, and the dominant learning modalities included independent reading, copying

notes, and whole-class discussion. On the whole the learning process was predominantly

teacher-centered, tacitly reinforcing my belief that I did not have much to contribute to

the construction of knowledge, and that the correct answers would be provided by an

"expert".

To clarify, I do not feel that all verbal-linguistic classrooms create this kind of

restrictive, teacher-centered approach; indeed, it was in some of my "traditional" classes

that truly gifted teachers used engaging and interesting language-based methods to teach

and inspire us. However, in this particular English class a mostly passive model of instruction pervaded, with over-reliance on a narrow range of teaching and learning modalities. As a result, the class format generally precluded engaged learning, personal interest, emotional response, and active construction of knowledge.

I have no idea how my John Donne presentation would have turned out if I hadn't spoken to my drama teacher about it a few days later.

Several of us were standing around after drama class talking to Ms. J, who had taught our drama courses and clubs since grade 10. Unlike the drama classes at my previous school, which were on the whole teacher-centered and based on surface concepts of performance and theatre, Ms. J's approach to drama was process-driven, and involved complex and collaborative explorations of texts. We both respected and felt at ease to approach our teacher. That day, she was telling us about her many years experience as an English teacher, which greatly surprised us at the time – in our young minds there could have been no other job for her but a drama teacher! During this conversation, she also told us how much she enjoyed combining drama and literature in her teaching. Her recollections on this past segment of her career may have been prompted by our complaints about the challenging poetry unit in English class ...

And with my presentation date approaching I knew I could not let this opportunity slip by – I asked her if she could help me with my John Donne assignment. When I told her which poem I had to present, she nodded and said that she had taught that poem to

her students every year she had been in the English department. She stated that the poem was essentially a farewell to Donne's wife before embarking on a long voyage, and then asked us to wait a moment. She walked out into the hall and went into the classroom next door, returning a few moments later holding a large, wooden blackboard compass in both hands. She sat back down with us and began to recite some of the poem, as she had no doubt done in countless English classes over the years, all the while turning the compass to illustrate Donne's images.

I remember her words, spoken with quiet strength, making all of us stop and watch. Every syllable she uttered, infused with subtle emotion and accompanied by a physical action, seemed important to me. But the main focus of attention was her hands. We intently watched as Ms. J twirled and pulled and stretched the arms of the compass. And as she held them, the wooden arms remained solidly connected at the top despite the great distance between the points. *"If they be two, they are two so as stiff twin compasses are two."* The words that had been so obscure and silent on the page of my English handout suddenly sprang to immediate and tangible life. I saw Donne and his wife represented in the symbol of the compass, the powerful connection that they had despite the distances he was forced to travel. As one arm of the compass leaned after the other, each arm moving in response to the other's movements, I saw the profound connection and love Donne was trying to express. And when the final line was spoken, and Ms. J closed the two points of the arms to meet each other once more, I saw what Donne was trying to tell his wife: he would always return to her.

It seemed to me that the meaning of the poem had become clearer to some of those standing in my group as well. There was an audible response from a few of my classmates as Ms. J spoke the final line, and some students nodded. I remember one of my friends enthusiastically proclaiming at the conclusion of the poem that Donne had chosen "a cool way to say it". At the very least, our reactions were far more emotionally charged than the blank stares that had pervaded our English class a few days prior. When Ms. J finished, I remember eagerly reaching for the compass, already planning my upcoming presentation.

Throughout our high school years, Ms. J had afforded us many similar opportunities to explore stories, ideas, and language through movement. I remember these learning moments were active and alive, allowing us to make personal and emotional connections to the material we studied. How different, how palpable Shakespeare always seemed for me in drama class, when the silent words from our dingy paperback copies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were suddenly hurled around the room by 20 voices at once, repeating only one line, as we marched, swaggered, snarled at each other: "Get you gone you dwarf, you minimus, of hindering knotgrass made!" How clear became the plight of Titania, Queen of the Fairies, as I watched a classmate enact her character, staring in quiet desperation at the ravaged hills and meadows, the result of King Oberon's misdeeds. How immediate her sorrow became as she gazed past us, slowly sinking to the ground and clenching her fists, regarding the decay and discord of her beloved forests. And how apparent her blame and fury at Oberon in her squared

shoulders, her rigid arm pointing accusingly, her outraged voice booming around us *"But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport!"*

As a class, we did not merely memorize and recite verse, we explored it physically and experientially. We created movement pieces surrounding Oberon and Titania's tempestuous relationship. We sang songs to Titania as she fell asleep in the forest. We painted pictures and enacted tableaux of her confrontation with Oberon. Our physical, aesthetic representation of Titania's words and emotions forged a conduit through which we came to know her character, her story. And the connection to and sharing of our own personal stories and emotions in the process offered us a way to tap the universality of Titania's feelings and perspectives. We needed to feel what the characters felt on some level, to relate it to what we already knew and felt, and from there to make meaning of the experience. Through bodily learning, our drama teacher provided us a way to do this; the physical representations helped engage our emotions and past experiences. And we used these experiences to remain alert to the human component of the story, to the possibilities within the verse, to "understand" Shakespeare. Thus, for me, a deepened cognitive as well as emotional understanding of the material emerged from these multimodal explorations.

Drama classes such as these engaged a community of learners to work together to enact, negotiate, and perform meaning in physical and sensory ways. Unlike the mostly independent seatwork in our regular classes where more traditional learning tasks were emphasized, the physical and aesthetic work in drama required a different kind of

participation from the group, one which enabled us to explore material in emotionally

relevant, deeply human ways. We were emboldened to offer our own ideas and

connections to the material being studied, the drama process itself encouraging the

diverse forms of physical expression, participation, and engagement.

This emphasis on meaningful student engagement adheres to Maxine Greene's

(1978) concept of "wide-awakeness" which calls for an active, arts-centered foundation

of learning:

> By the term "wide-awakeness" we want to denote a plane of consciousness of the
> highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its
> requirements. Only the performing and especially the working self is fully
> interested in life and, hence, wide-awake ... This attention is an active, not a
> passive one. Passive attention is the opposite to full awareness.   (p. 163)

In reading Greene's words, I am again reminded of the passive, indifferent faces of the

students in my English class, starkly contrasting the engaged attention of the group

around Ms. J, as well as the full and enthusiastic participation of our classmates as we

explored Shakespeare's texts. It seemed to me there was a heightened sense of

engagement in those moments, an energized "wide-awakeness". Indeed, if the aim of

education is to move beyond mere "delivery" of curriculum outcomes towards fostering

empathetic awareness, highlighting the complexities of issues and promoting engagement

with our communities and our world, then Greene's concept of wide-awakeness is critical

indeed. Wide-awakeness demands complex connections material – and I believe drama,

through its fusing of physical expression and personal exploration, may facilitate this

journey into engagement and awareness in the classroom.

As I was later to see, the "wide-awakeness" that resulted from our physical and aesthetic representations offered learning benefits beyond a deeper understanding of classic curriculum texts. As Sarah and I embarked on the creation of our play, I was to discover that physical and gestural learning played a key role in the construction of knowledge, competence in learning, critical analysis of social issues, and the creation of community – both in the classroom and beyond.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

It was January, and Ms. J. had agreed to be our staff advisor for the duration of the play. She let us use her drama room during lunch hours, and she was there for our first fledgling rehearsals. At this point, Sarah and I had written some tentative scenes, and we were meeting as a cast to decide what to do next.

I remember Ms. J sitting quietly off in the corner for a while, watching us as we talked about the issues in the play and tried to decide where to begin. After a while of listening to us, she stood and asked if she could make a suggestion.

She asked for a volunteer to represent a victim of violence – she said it could be someone who had been bullied by other students, for example, but the choice was ours. Candice volunteered to play that character, and Ms. J asked her to freeze in a tableau that represented what the character might be feeling after the violence occurred. Candice immediately sat alone on one of the wooden boxes, a withdrawn, detached expression on

her face, arms crossed and hands hidden. Ms. J then asked for two more volunteers to play characters who knew the victim. Meg and Sarah stood to enact these characters, Meg choosing to stand well-back from Candice, her body angled away indifferently. Sarah stood a little closer, hands slightly outstretched towards Candice. Ms. J. asked the rest of us to view the tableau and simply state what we saw in the image.

We had done this drama activity numerous times in Ms. J's classes, and over the years I have encountered it in one form or another in many drama workshops, AQ courses, and guidebooks. Most recently, this exercise has been referred to as The Gallery, and in it students form groups and create a "painting" with their bodies to depict a particular poem, story, or idea. This activity moves beyond simple tableau because it introduces a critical, collaborative element: one by one, each group presents their creation while other students enter "the Gallery", in role as patrons. Through teacher facilitation they are asked to comment on the images in the paintings before them. However, patrons must use one sentence pattern only: "I see _____". The activity concludes when each group in the class has presented their paintings for others to contemplate.

At first, there was only one "painting" to consider during our rehearsal. As we surrounded the frozen scene created by Candice, Meg, and Sarah, we began to speak in turn, stating what images and ideas each of us saw:

Pain.
Fear.
Friendship.
A coward.

A triangle.
A connection.
Weakness.
Walls.
Strength.
A bully.
Waiting.
Hesitation.
Despair.
Wanting to belong.
Everything closed.
Injustice.
Jail.
Rage.
A kid from grade 6.
Me.

These words, paraphrased from memory, seemed to contribute to critical awareness of the

issues presented. There were pauses between the sentences we spoke, and I remember

listening to what others had said and looking for the image or gesture that may have

inspired my classmate's response. Again, there were some audible exclamations from our

cast, whenever someone pointed out an image or idea the others had not considered.

These moments of discovery were akin to the experience of staring at an optical illusion

picture, squinting to try to make sense of it, and suddenly having the new image pop out.

It was there all along, but was only now visible.

Ms. J let us continue for a while and then invited us, one by one, to tap the

shoulder of one of the students in the tableau and to take their place, changing the scene

to reflect a different aspect of the situation. As each new painting came to life, the

tableaux revealed different levels of understanding of the original issue Ms. J had asked

us to negotiate. Some groups focused on the victim's suffering, evident in clenched fists

and forlorn expressions. Others used physical expression to focus on the perpetrator's motivations, and still others emphasized the perspectives of the bystanders. Some students created symbolic representations of unity and friendship, which usually involved holding or extending hands. Some scenes represented complete detachment and indifference. These diverse physical representations evoked a rich array of responses from the cast, and when the task was over we engaged in a discussion of our statements, and how they fit with the themes of our play, why some of the characters in the tableaux may have reacted to violence the way they did. We explained how and why each image reminded us of particular emotions or events, and we worked together to construct emotional meaning. Each of us was required to negotiate others' interpretations of the issue at hand, to physically enact and view this issue in new and imaginative ways. Here, drama seemed to provide an embodied understanding that strengthened emotional connections to and awareness of the topic.

Such moments in which the gestural and the experiential enhanced, and even led, our learning bring to mind Wagner's discussion of enactive learning. To emphasize the connection between physicality and cognition, Wagner (1998) cites Debra Jacques' (1993) study of kindergarten students' comprehension and communication skills, noting that as students' understanding of a text increased, this comprehension was "marked by an increase in body movements to convey the meaning of the story," (p. 65). Quite simply, our bodies respond as we hear and process words, ideas, and emotions. Dissanayake (2000) cites similar research in infant language development, stressing that intense emotional communication is always expressed physically as well as vocally and

that "*not* to do these things contravenes our fundamental nature" (p. 101). Thus, physical

interaction may be necessary to forge the kind of deep emotional connection required for

Greene's concept of "wide-awakeness" in the classroom, to facilitate meaningful

engagement with texts, ideas, and other students. Indeed, the gestures, movement, and

dance creations in drama all involve emotional interpretation and communication. And

this physical expression of ideas necessitates not only personal reflection but also a

reaching out to others to share interpretations.

Dissanayake (2000) elaborates on the interconnectedness of cognitive, emotional,

and bodily learning and stresses that physical and gestural representations themselves can

be a "way of knowing" (p. 126). To illustrate her point, she quotes Stravinsky's

comments on his creation of the ballet Petrouchka:

> The different rhythmic episodes were dictated by the fingers themselves ... Fingers
> are not to be despised; they are great inspirers and in contact with a musical
> instrument often give birth to unconscious ideas which might otherwise never have
> come to life.   (p. 126)

The idea of the body, the hands, leading learning and creation is intriguing – and worthy

of exploration considering current approaches to teaching and learning. It may be useful

to ponder more fully the implications of the predominantly sedentary learning processes

that tend to pervade our classrooms, in which the cognitive activity of the brain is

distinctly separated from the physical and gestural activities that may facilitate it. I can

recall numerous instances in my own schooling in which texts, characters, and ideas in

print form suddenly took on new meaning through my physical enactment of them, new

complexities emerging through the movement and gestures of others. For me, in these instances a communication emerged between classmates that could not be conveyed through words alone. In these cases, actions led my thinking and negotiation of text.

But not only did these emotional and physical negotiations seem to lead my learning, they also seemed to result in a strong feeling of ownership in the learning process, of ability and competence. Using physical expression and universally recognized gestures seemed entirely natural and indeed effortless to me. In short, I felt confident in the learning process. Undeniably, possessing a sense of efficacy and control in learning can be critical to student success. Both Greene (1978) and Dissanayake (2000) explore this issue, with Greene (1978) observing that the fragmented, dissociated nature of modern society has made "more and more people feel impinged upon by forces they have been unable to understand," (p. 162). Her description of the resulting passive acquiescence, the "quiet desperation" of society (p. 162) echoes Dissanyake's (2000) sentiment on the effects of physical inactivity and physical disengagement with the natural world:

> I wish to emphasize another consequence of the repudiation of hands-on living that is less often described. I argue that we also insidiously promote *psychological* unhealthiness and damage by something that may seem paradoxical in an age of pushbutton convenience, namely decreasing our ability to feel competent in our lives. (p. 116)

The issue of "feeling competent" is critical in educational discourse, and drama pedagogy may be instrumental in facilitating it.

In this regard, drama pedagogy may provide a powerful learning alternative, in which physical and gestural modalities encourage feelings of efficacy and competence. In my own experience as a drama teacher, I have observed that students who usually exhibit a "learned helplessness" in most pencil-and-paper tasks often do not appeal for direct assistance in drama games and activities – and Gallagher's (2001) research supports these observations. She states that many of her struggling students, including English Language Learners, often produce impressive examples of expressive and written work during drama activities. Gallagher goes on to note that these students "in a contextualized and sometimes charged drama, have expressed themselves with more passion, clarity, and eloquence than they have been able to unleash before" (p. 67). In light of these observations, it seems that physical and gestural methods of learning and communicating knowledge may allow students access to a kind of independent and natural creativity. Dissanayake (2000) also discusses the naturalness of physical creativity, with particular focus on the creativity of the hands – and I believe this segment of her theory is applicable to drama pedagogy as well. She notes that for thousands of years, hands "were the primary instruments for building and making the human way of life. Everything humanly relevant and recognizably human was made by human hands. To be human was to make" (p. 99). Dissanayake goes on to describe the emotional and cognitive benefits of such "hands-on" explorations:

> Human brains and minds have evolved to enable the learning of manual skills from others and the devising of practical solutions for the requirements of ancestral environments – to cope, "hands on", with the demands of life. Simply by doing what we were born to do evokes a sense – subliminal or fully felt – of competence, of being at home in the world. (p. 100)

Again, whereas Dissanayake's work focuses on a hands-on relationship with the natural world, "leading to a basic sense of competence or aptitude for life" (p 101), I believe the "hands-on" approach inherent in drama pedagogy can also foster competence and connection in learning and classroom community. During the production, drama representations seemed to provide greater opportunities for most students to participate in ways "fundamental to our nature". Indeed, the drama space provided learning alternatives to the usual verbal-linguistic obstacles that so often frustrate second language learners, the learning disabled, and struggling readers. Using our hands, bodies, and voices to create emotional expressiveness seemed to come to us so naturally and allowed us, in many ways, to be "competent" participants, with new ways with which to contribute to the learning process. And I observed this same sense of "competence" emerge in one of my most reticent English Language Learners (ELLs) several years ago ...

It was mid-way through the winter term, and a new student joined our grade seven class. Her name was Hawlar, and she had just arrived from the Middle East. She spoke very little English, and for the first few weeks barely said a word in class. Faced with an entirely new culture and language, she seemed overwhelmed, uncertain, and likely felt less-than-competent in her daily school life.

During my time talking with Hawlar, I had learned that she loved watching and performing dance. During one lunch hour, I saw her and a friend dancing a little at recess. Just a few quick steps, choreographed spontaneously on the playground, as many girls

love to, and then it was finished. But even those few movements revealed considerable talent. She was a very good dancer indeed.

With this newfound knowledge, I selected a dual-language picture book to read to the class entitled *The Woman Who Outshone the Sun* by Alejandro Cruz Martinez. It is a Mexican folktale that deals with the universal issues of fear of the unknown, acceptance, and living in harmony with nature. And despite its picture book format, there were complex issues embedded in the text for all of the students in my class to negotiate and critically evaluate. However, instead of having them write or speak about these issues, which would put struggling ELLs at a distinct disadvantage, I chose an aesthetic medium – movement and dance – as the primary vehicle for presenting and commenting on these topics.

I had already done significant drama work with my class, building their comfort level and familiarity with dance and movement techniques. But I knew Hawlar had something special to add to the other students' repertoire of knowledge. So I chose the moment in the book in which the main character, Lucia, is driven away from her village by citizens who fear her almost-magical connection with the birds, animals, and natural surroundings of the community. Students were to re-enact this scene through dance, movement, and tableau, specifically focusing on the emotional perspectives of Lucia and the villagers, some of whom supported her expulsion from the village, and some of whom did not.

Hawlar joined with two of her new friends, and almost instantly I saw her take on a leadership position within the group. The others were looking to her for direction, for ideas, for guidance. As their dance and movement presentation developed, with intricate hand gestures and fluid motion, I noticed other students stopping to watch them as well. I remember her hands, so expressive, waving one moment like trees in the wind, another fluttering like birds, the next flying up to shield her face against the angry villagers. I remember her crouching to scoop water from the river, cupping her hands to drink. I remember her hands creating a fantastic story, sculpting events and objects in the air with her movements.

Although I did not require students to present their pieces to the entire class, Hawlar's group chose to do so. And when they finished, her group received authentic applause from the class. Judging from their admiring comments, the other students likely saw her as the "expert" in this particular assignment, as a source of knowledge, as someone who could contribute powerfully to the learning in our classroom. I speculate that her sense of efficacy in the learning task, her sense of competence, increased during this lesson.

The sense of competence resulting from physical and gestural drama work could pave the way for perhaps an even more profound educational advantage. In her discussion of modern society's alienation from the natural environment, Dissanayake (2000) states that "our bodies and minds are adapted to lead a life of physical engagement (yet) we normally experience the natural world at several removes" (p. 115), never

having to grow or prepare our own food, or create clothing and shelter. She goes on to note that physical connectedness to our environment is essential if we are to reverse the "negative consequences of physical inactivity and alienation from the natural world" (p. 116) to rekindle a sense of unity, caring, and obligation to the world in which we live (p. 116). Although her argument focuses primarily on the environment, I feel useful parallels can be drawn with today's predominantly non-physical teaching practices and their effect on students' *emotional* engagement and sense of connectedness and responsibility to one another. With ever-increasing time constraints and mounting "expectations" to cover, process-driven physical and aesthetic drama activities may be sacrificed in the name of curriculum coverage. In such an environment, students may indeed be operating "several removes" (p. 115) from imagination, community, and "conscious engagement with the world" (Greene, 1978, p. 162) – even from meaningful discussion and contact with fellow classmates. Indeed, such potential detachment was illustrated this past year when I visited a grade 6 classroom, looking for an ELL who had moved to the school five months prior. The teacher of the class in question employed a rather traditional approach to learning and possessed highly effective classroom management techniques, which frequently caused other staff to marvel at the quiet and orderly atmosphere always present in his room. When I slipped in and asked a boy if he could point out the "new" student to me, he looked up and pointed, then turned to the student across the row from him: "What's that kid's name again?" Neither boy could answer.

Although this may be an unusual case (certainly there are many verbal-linguistic based classrooms in which students do know and interact with one another meaningfully), I feel that as educators we must ask ourselves what about that particular learning environment prevented students from even hearing or saying each other's names enough to remember them. There is an affirming power in the simple experience of hearing your name spoken by others, in being included in the everyday workings of a classroom, in collaborating with other students in the class in active and productive ways. As educators we need to be vigilant of activities that may potentially exclude or marginalize students, particularly those not proficient in verbal-linguistic tasks. Equally important, we must be aware of activities that are empowering and accessible to diverse students, and which promote active engagement in the classroom community. Commitment and connection to others and their ideas cannot be developed if opportunities for authentic, purposeful interaction are not present. If teachers emphasize a limited range of learning modalities, it is possible students will remain "several removes" (Dissanayake, 2000, p. 115) from classroom community and all of its social and pedagogical advantages.

The potential of drama pedagogy to encourage social connection and feelings of competence was evident during our collaborative production. Without ever having to confront issues in powerful, immediate ways, without having extended opportunities for meaningful dialogue, it is all to easy to remain complacent, to sweep aside events and social ills that seemingly have no personal relevance. However, I believe that the physical and gestural modes of learning and representation in drama may have helped us

to make connections to significant issues and to each other as members of a learning community. Looking back, I recall moments in which it seemed that the dramatic process helped to eliminate "several removes" (Dissanayake, 2000, p. 115) of distance between students, offering access to imagination, community, and engagement with social relevant issues. These moments did not just occur among the actors, but also among the audience members.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

During the post-performance discussion, the boy in the second row would not put his hand down. I knew he was in grade 10, but I didn't know his name. I saw him every day at lunch, always sitting at the back of the cafeteria, always wearing his red baseball cap and playing cards with his friends. I did not know anything about him beyond these casual observations. But listening to him after the show, I marveled at the new way I was now seeing this person, now so engaged and inquisitive. It seemed that from the moment the house lights went up he was ready to engage in dialogue, listen, and ask questions. He had posed hypothetical situations, wondered how he and others could recognize the warning signs of abuse, what he could do prevent it. With each answer that our cast gave, I could see him evaluating what had been said, weighing it against what he knew, and then continuing the dialogue, building upon his new discoveries. Afterwards all of us in the cast reflected on the sheer number of questions he had had, not only about what he had seen in the play, but also how those issues related to his life.

Sarah ended up speaking with him a few days later. He had stopped her in the hallway to tell her how much he had learned from seeing the play. I remember Sarah recounting what he said: "It makes me think. It makes me realize that how I view the situation isn't necessarily what's really going on. You have to ask questions. You can't just assume." This paraphrased account, in my opinion, reveals a student who had moved beyond his previously-held assumptions, suddenly seeing the relevance of this "women's issue" to his own life. And by the time the final performance was over, I had experienced similar discoveries. Before we began our production, I myself held many "truths" to be indisputable, assumptions about both victims and perpetrators of violence. Due to lack of opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue and connection with others surrounding these issues, I was assured that my truths were the correct ones. But the dramatic process allowed me to traverse conflicting ideas, to move closer to new perspectives, to view others and their situations in complex ways that challenged my rigid thinking. The collective imagination of the performance space had allowed me to see new possibilities in my community.

*   *   *

I previously described the sense of need, even urgency, both Sarah and I felt surrounding our play. We were trying to negotiate an increasingly real and menacing social reality. We felt a personal need to address these unsettling events that had so profoundly impacted our lives. And it wasn't enough just to talk about it, or write about it. There was a need to take action, to create, to *do* something about the divisive and violent issues that had seeped into the collective being of our school community. Both

the physical and aesthetic features of drama provided us our means of taking action. Significantly, the physical representations in our play led to further reflection, and further action in a wide variety of community issues beyond those explored in our production, as will be demonstrated in chapter four.

The power of creation, the "latent mobility", available to students in physical learning, may offer new and inspiring ways for communities of learners to address and give voice to social suffering. Dissanayake (2000) notes the potential healing power inherent in physical work and creation:

> Beautifying city parks in the aftermath of civil war in Bosnia gave people something "hands-on" to do in order to regain a sense of humanity and dignity, as a means of "community healing". (p. 111)

In many ways, drama pedagogy also answers this urge to express and create something physically, to produce an aesthetic conversation for the group, to employ not only ideas and the mind, but also the voice, the body, and physicality in expressive sharing. The play that Sarah and I created in the final year of high school was rooted in this need to create, to forge something positive out of profoundly negative experiences. In retrospect our play was, as Dissanayake phrases it, an attempt at "community healing" (p. 111). The aesthetic, physical element in drama pedagogy also responded to this need to take action, to create – and did indeed bring about moments of great healing: Andy's girlfriend speaking to me after the show about her own experiences, students revealing how the play had opened them up to new perspectives, my own new-found insights and

new ways of seeing and relating to people. All of these experiences were incredibly restorative, in both personal and collective ways.

I believe drama may have a distinct advantage in the realm of aesthetic learning approaches. Its inherent physicality taps a fundamental human need to experience and express with the body, encouraging engaged and collaborative meaning-making. Drama also calls into being a collective sharing space, in which dialogue and re-visioning of ideas can occur in the emotional and gestural ways so fundamental to human nature. These two factors combined have the potential to forge connections between people, resulting in moments of sharing, discovery, and healing. In these ways, and as will be discussed in chapter four, drama pedagogy may also lay a solid foundation for the development of critical literacy skills in our students.

Chapter 4: Drama and Critical Literacy

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.
                    (Richard Shaull, 1970, p.34, Foreword, Pedagogy of the Oppressed)

My initial investigation into critical literacy and its possible connections to drama pedagogy led me to numerous theorists, both past and present, including Freire, Luke, Freebody, and Lankshear, to name but a few. As I consulted their articles on critical literacy in education, I uncovered a myriad of definitions and descriptions, of which the following are but a sample. Offered as a brief theoretical overview, critical literacy is:

Reflecting on multiple and contradictory perspectives.
                    (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2000, as cited in
                    Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 383)

Allow(ing) students to be active and challenging participants as they respond to texts of all types. It provides students a lens through which to look critically at written, visual, spoken, multimedia, and performance texts, and to challenge the intent and content.
                    (Curriculum Services Canada, 2007)

Acting on the knowledge that texts are not neutral, that they represent particular views and silence other points of view.
                    (Luke & Freebody, 1999)

The premise that language is always used in some context that includes power relationships. Thus language is a form of politics.
                    (Temple, 2007)

Using literacy to engage in the politics of everyday life.
                    (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, as cited in
                    Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383)

Developing the language of critique and hope.
                    (Shannon, 1995, as cited in Lewison et al., p. 383)

Reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.
                    (Freire, 1972, as cited in Lewison et al., 2002, p. 384)

Although the above quotes are by no means an exhaustive definition of critical literacy,

they do reflect several trends I noticed during my research. Whether Neo-

Marxist/Freirean in origin, or connected to the more current Australian movement, most

descriptions of critical literacy mention the idea of multiple viewpoints, as well as the

importance of teaching students to recognize and negotiate these diverse points of view in

a questioning manner, to understand how texts, ideas, and language "position"

individuals (Luke and Freebody, for example, are major proponents of this approach). As

such, two main themes stood out for me in critical literacy discourse: 1) the inherently

social nature of critical literacy, the *requirement* of engaging multiple points of view in

order to expand understanding and insight, and 2) the intrinsic connection of critical

literacy to reading, writing, and representing, the media and "texts" where these multiple

points of view are represented and negotiated. With these two themes in mind, I began to

reflect on the pedagogical methods most often employed to teach critical literacy skills to

students – and I noticed a disconnect between the dominant teaching approaches I have

encountered, and the ultimate aim of social negotiation and awareness inherent in critical

literacy studies.

In my experience as both student and teacher, I have observed numerous

educators employ predominantly verbal-linguistic instructional methods and learning

tasks to teach critical literacy skills to students. From class discussions surrounding

personal reactions to texts to written analysis and shared reading, the ability to negotiate and analyze language is an undeniably important part of critical literacy. And certainly many of these approaches may have achieved various measures of success in today's classrooms. But when dealing with a subject which requires students to employ at least some measure of empathy towards others' viewpoints, "going beyond the personal and attempting to understand the socio-political systems to which we belong" (Boozer, Maras, & Brummet, 1999, as cited in Lewison et al., 2002, p.383), I began to wonder if an overemphasis of verbal-linguistic techniques would limit the reach and effectiveness of critical literacies, not only for students less verbally gifted but others as well. Indeed, would a verbal-linguistic emphasis effectively teach students not only analytical skills, but also the social awareness and emotional investment in others required for true critical literacy to occur? Surely the teaching and learning methods used should be able to foster both of these essential outcomes. How best to facilitate students' negotiation of texts, ideas, and representations to arrive at new understandings and insights, not only on intellectual but emotional and human levels as well? I believe that drama pedagogy, with its emphasis on socio-political issues as well its inherently social and aesthetic learning structures, make it a uniquely powerful vehicle with which to encourage the development of critical literacy in students. However, before I detail these advantages of drama pedagogy, I will first highlight and further explain some of the potential shortfalls of more traditional teaching methods, followed by a discussion of the ways in which specific forms of drama pedagogy – collaborative, process-driven, socio-political drama structures – provide powerful teaching and learning alternatives.

I will focus on three main potential limitations of an over-reliance on traditional verbal-linguistic pedagogical methods to teach critical literacy: 1) comparatively limited opportunities to foster the emotional, empathetic, and human connections so necessary for critical reflection on others' points of view; 2) the widely varying speaking, reading, and writing abilities of students (including various stages of ESL acquisition and learning exceptionalities) which may potentially impede access to texts and responses to them; 3) limited student access to diverse teaching/learning modalities and styles when negotiating texts, potentially resulting in decreased student engagement and participation.

Recently, I uncovered an example from my own education that illustrates these potential shortfalls in critical literacy instruction ...

*   *   *

Last month I was digging through my old high school boxes in the attic, looking for memorabilia from our play. I managed to uncover banged-up copies of our script, newspaper clippings, programs, photos ... and something else that caught my attention: an old edition of our school newspaper. This particular issue featured work by three students who had experienced violence, either directly or indirectly. The articles were released early in the school year, before Sarah and I had decided to write our play, so no one in the school knew of our upcoming production. Contributions to this particular edition remained anonymous, as they detailed students' very personal experiences of dating violence, including assault and sexual assault.

Holding that crinkled-up paper, I thought back to the day it was released. I remember looking across the cafeteria, and seeing that almost every group at the long tables had at least one copy being silently shared. I can still clearly see the image in my mind, and recall being so surprised ... usually the only kids who cared about getting a copy of the school newspaper were the ones who wrote articles for it. Now, students were getting up out of their seats to look for their own copies. I had never seen so many of my peers reading the same thing, at the same time, of their own volition.

I remember thinking at first that it was great that people were finally paying attention to the issues about which I so deeply cared. And many years later, as I tried to determine and describe the source of this heightened engagement, I first centered upon the fact that the learning material – the newspaper articles that were inspiring all this writing, reading, and discussion – were events and topics chosen by students, directly relevant to our lives. As an educator, it is easy to become excited by the memory of the sheer engagement of those students. After all, how often do we see students independently and enthusiastically reading? Moreover, how often is that shared reading material addressing socio-political issues, told from usually-silenced viewpoints? At first glance, it would seem that the stage was perfectly set for the teaching and use of critical literacy, of re-evaluating personal opinions and beliefs from different points of view. However, the factors of choice and relevance could only go so far in promoting true critical literacy, for as I look back with a more discerning eye, I recall that some of the conversations among my peers embodied a critically literate approach, but many did not.

Several of my teachers addressed the newspaper articles in their classes that day, authentically trying to present the issues for contemplation and discussion. We were even asked by one teacher to write a journal entry about the issues presented in the newspaper articles, detailing what we had learned. However, merely presenting these issues in written form or discussing them in structured, guided ways did not lead to effective "interrogation of multiple viewpoints" or taking "action to promote social justice" (p. 382), two essential and interrelated factors of critical literacy as posited by Lewison et al. (2002). Conversely, it seemed that the class conversations were dominated by the most vocal students, leaving others (such as English Language Learners, students less verbally inclined, and more reticent students) without an effective method of contributing to the discussion and learning. And although teachers intelligently guided students with thoughtful questions and comparisons, at times the exchanges I witnessed turned into somewhat mean-spirited debates, with students remaining firmly and rigidly fixed in their own viewpoints. Developing a "language of critique and hope" (Shannon, 1995, as cited in Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383) was altogether absent in such arguments, with familiar misconceptions and stereotypes about "the kind of girl this happens to" recurring in the discourse.

Walking down the halls later that afternoon, it seemed to me there was at times an air of sensationalism, rather than sober awareness or negotiation of issues. I remember a girl rushing up to us with her copy of the newspaper, gushing "Oh, I really want to know who this happened to!" Reflecting upon these events today I believe it may have been, in some cases, the appeal of teenage gossip that fired students' interest, rather than concern,

empathy, or critical engagement. It was almost as if the faceless anonymity of the newspaper articles kept a safe buffer between the students who were reading the articles, and the students whose stories were being told. Moreover, it would seem in this case that there was no effective teaching method with which to assist students in making the deeper emotional and empathetic connections necessary for critical re-evaluation of social issues; merely reading, discussing, and analyzing the articles seemingly did little to help students connect to the deeply human element embedded in them. However, I notice a significant difference between the "un-connected" reactions of students to the newspaper articles, and their quite different reactions to the dramatic performances that were to occur later in the year ...

Perhaps the articles in that school newspaper allowed some students to see the issues in a new light. I am sure there must have been critical conversation among students, but in isolated pockets, between small numbers of people. Perhaps the articles simply cemented the original opinions and biases of others, as they appeared to in the class discussions I witnessed. I am sure isolated conversations of this nature occurred as well. Truth be told, I do not know how many assumptions were challenged by those articles, how many students re-evaluated their original positions – because opportunity for community sharing and dialogue was almost completely absent. What I do know is that after a week or so, no one spoke of those newspaper articles again ... it was almost as though they had never been published. I also know that once we created a shared dramatic space to present these same issues many months later, the conversations that sprang from theatrical representations were on-going, in-depth, and inspired action in

others. The serious engagement I have described in previous chapters, the increased awareness of others' positions, the willingness and ability to truly listen to another's story and negotiate one's own relationship to that story ... all of these elements of critical literacy surfaced during and after our production, both formally and informally.

Drama pedagogy may address the above-mentioned potential shortfalls of verbal-linguistic approaches in three main ways. First, unlike some traditional teaching methods, drama provides a uniquely inclusive approach to language and critical literacy, and responds to the need to allow all students (regardless of verbal-linguistic ability) access to the critical discussion and creation of texts. Indeed, during her research of drama teaching methods Gallagher (2001) notes that she "learned that inviting the aesthetic into the classroom can give external form to often subjugated lives" (p. 22), enabling normally "silenced" students to find expression for their experiences and ideas. In this sense, I am reminded not only of the diverse perspectives in texts that may be aesthetically brought to life, but also of the students who enact these perspectives in personally meaningful ways, whose experiences and insights are not usually heard in traditional classrooms but that finally find expression in dramatic sharing. Whether dealing with verbal-linguistic or socio-political barriers to learning, drama pedagogy may provide normally "subjugated" students the opportunity to contribute to classroom learning visually, aesthetically, and collaboratively. In the words of bell hooks (1994) students may begin to "collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries" (p. 207) through dramatic representation and gain a voice in critical discussion.

To this end, students in our production were able to express their viewpoints in relation to others, and to develop their language skills collaboratively through drama. Writing and reading, and their relationship to critical literacy, is a key issue in educational discourse – and when coupled with drama processes these features combined in our production to create an effective vehicle with which to "deal critically and creatively with reality" (Shaull as cited in Freire, 1970, p. 34). Our collaborative production encouraged critical discourse based on dramatic sharing, not only during performance but also during the creation of the script. What started out as a primarily individual writing endeavour transformed into a truly collaborative writing project in which we negotiated opposing ideas aesthetically to create a written dramatic structure. In significant ways, this process differed from other "collaborative" writing projects I had been involved in at school. Unlike my previous experiences, the process of writing the script included diverse students in meaningful ways, with diverse skills and ideas. Students who disliked reading and writing within the classroom had active, voluntary and involved roles in this project. The multi-modal exchanges (gestural, emotional, spatial, verbal) inherent in dramatic sharing helped to ensure, for the most part, that diverse students could participate in the creation of our written structure, not just those strongest in verbal-linguistic skills. Instead of requiring students to tackle the script individually, the drama process allowed us to collaboratively enact, visualize, discuss, negotiate, read, write, and re-vision ideas in the text.

The second way in which drama pedagogy may address the potential gaps in traditional teaching methods is through its unique ability to foster emotional connection and empathy for others. And while I believe that promoting choice in reading and

writing and encouraging students to explore issues of personal relevance and importance to them is an essential first step towards social awareness and critical literacy, there are other factors to consider. It is true that students must have some choice and personal investment in the issues at hand to provide context, interest, and engagement – but in order to activate the kind of emotional connections with others which result in re-visioning and flexible thinking about those same issues, a more powerful teaching approach must be employed. I believe drama may have a distinct advantage in this capacity precisely because it facilitates aesthetic sharing in a community-based forum, in which multiple perspectives and viewpoints can play out in ways that emotionally impact participants, where the humanity and the inter-connectedness of people's truths is made apparent. As our play progressed, many students' awareness of the complexities of social issues grew, and many of us began to recognize and understand why people different from ourselves might think or act the way they do. The inherently collaborative and social learning structures in drama embodied and reflected the social nature of critical literacy, requiring us to negotiate others' perspectives in collaborative ways. In spite of lack of specific choices surrounding topics, students were still able to voice personal perspective and experience in ways that contributed to the overall dramatic construct and to collaborative learning.

The third advantage relates to drama's role in fostering student engagement. Drama pedagogy incorporates aesthetic learning modalities such as symbolic representation, emotional expression, visual and musical creation. And it is through these aesthetic forms that drama encourages a unique form of attention or "attending" to others.

I do not attempt to deny the potential of verbal-linguistic tasks to inspire passionate interest and discussion, to present and negotiate multiple viewpoints. I do suggest that the issues and ideas presented may have greater impact on students' attention and engagement with others, and thus their development of critical literacy, if accompanied by dramatic sharing and negotiation. It is my hope that the following memories, along with current research on the nature of attention and the aesthetic, will illustrate how these three main features of drama pedagogy encourage the development of critical literacy.

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I remember moving through Sarah's packed living room, the mid-summer heat oppressive, live music filling the house. Many of Sarah's friends were musicians, and they always gave her parties a spectacular energy. Several of them had been playing for hours, but I needed a break from the stifling room. So I nudged and wove my way around the band, past people squished in together singing and dancing on the creaking wooden floor. Finally, I reached the screen door that led to the deck and the comparatively cool night air outside. I was 25 years old, had just completed my first year of teaching, and with July almost at a close I was about to embark on my first overseas teaching assignment in Japan. This was the last party I'd be at in Canada for a while. A little over seven years had passed since Sarah, and I, and others had performed our play.

There were many people out on the deck that night, and two of those people I hadn't seen in a long time: Sarah's younger brother Greg, then 24 years old, and his friend Silvana.

Silvana had gone to the same high school as we had, but would have been in grade nine when our play was performed. I barely recognized her ... She was now almost finished her own university education. When she saw me, the play was one of the first things she mentioned.

"I went to the performance," she told me. "Twice, in fact. I went to the first show with my English class, then I came back for one of the lunch hour productions. I thought what everyone did was wonderful."

What followed was a conversation about how the play had affected her and her friends. As this young woman spoke, I remember her words feeling at once familiar and also a little strange. It had been a long time since I had spoken of the play at any length. But hearing Silvana talk, the memory of it came back in a new light. Having just begun my career as a teacher, I was now considering what we, as students, had actually accomplished. It was not that our play had been a masterpiece of theatre, or brilliantly written and acted ... certainly it was not perfect! But Silvana reminded me that it had encouraged people to talk to each other, to evaluate, to critique, and to take action – all key components of critical literacy.

Silvana reminded me that our production had inspired a student in grade 10 at the time to form an anti-violence committee at our high school, a fact which I had all but forgotten. This student had named the group PAVEAT (Parkside Against Violence Everywhere Advocating its Termination), echoing the name of Priscilla deVilliers' national anti-violence lobby group CAVEAT, which had been formed in Southern Ontario in 1991 following the murder of de Villiers' daughter Nina. The creation of PAVEAT, as I recall, was an unexpected but definitely welcome result of our play. We had mounted our production during our graduating year, and as the final school term drew to a close I knew that this young student was enthusiastically planning PAVEAT projects for the following September. I remembered feeling regret at the time that I would not be at the school the next year, to see what she would accomplish.

When I related this to Silvana, she informed me that the group was still in operation, and that her younger sister was on the PAVEAT committee. I remember pausing when Silvana told me this, surprised that the group was still running after seven years. I suppose I had expected the committee to endure for a year or two at best, and then gradually fade away to make room for new initiatives and interests. I was gratified to learn that something I had helped create as a teenager had inspired more creation, and enduring positive action taken by others for others. Reflecting on this particular memory for my thesis, again after many years, I paused to Google the word "PAVEAT" and the results revealed that the club is still operating at my old high school: http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/parkside/main.htm.

Not an insignificant number of students were inspired to take action, in some capacity, following the production of our play. The students who joined PAVEAT that first year, for example, were involved in a number of initiatives, which I heard about indirectly from friends and acquaintances still at the school. Their accomplishments included organizing letter-writing campaigns to newspaper editorial boards, hosting local community advocate groups to speak at round-table discussions, and forming peer education groups within the high school. The topics and issues they confronted were diverse, and sought to oppose violence in many forms.

The actions of these students bring to mind Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of "praxis", which is to reflect upon ideas and social conditions in the world and to take action to transform them. Contemporary critical literacy theorists Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) note the significance of Freire's theories in educational discourse and state that the concept of taking action and promoting social justice "is often perceived as *the* definition of critical literacy" (p. 383). The authors clarify this assertion in the context of their comprehensive review of the major critical literacy definitions and theories appearing in educational discourse and practice over the past thirty years. They synthesize these theories and approaches into four main dimensions: 1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, 3) focusing on socio-political issues, 4) taking action and promoting social justice. This fourth and last category, as aforementioned, may be the most reliable and comprehensive indicator of critical literacy because, as the authors claim, expanded understandings and insights must first be achieved in the first three dimensions of critical literacy before the fourth and final stage,

praxis, is possible (p. 383-384). When considering the PAVEAT initiative it would seem

that our collaborative creation, rooted firmly in community and lived experience, had

somehow provided our peers an effective forum for reflection upon their world, and acted

as a catalyst to take action based on new insights, ideas, and information. A very relevant

and indeed socially-destructive issue which had remained all but completely ignored in

my time at the high school, was suddenly given the voice it needed to present itself

meaningfully in the collective awareness and inspiration of our students, resulting in a

form of socio-political action. Freire's (1972) concept of liberation as praxis, "the action

and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (as cited in

Lewison et al., 2002, p. 384) was in many ways lived out during and after the

collaborative production at our school.

But how specifically did our production contribute to the development of critical

literacy, not only in the PAVEAT initiative but in other areas as well? How were

students' developing critical literacy skills evidenced during the actual drama process

itself? And what was the specific evidence that drama pedagogy presented potential

advantages over other teaching methods in promoting critical literacy in the classroom?

While the creation of PAVEAT may have been the most visible evidence of students'

developing critical literacy skills, looking back I can recall each of the dimensions of

critical literacy being evidenced at various stages of our production, in less visible but

certainly powerful ways. Beginning with the first dimension, "disrupting the

commonplace", it is my intent to illustrate how each of the four dimensions outlined by

Lewison et al. (2002) manifested themselves during the course of our production, and to

suggest reasons why they are naturally and powerfully encouraged within the dramatic structure.

Lewison et al. (2002) describe the first dimension of critical literacy, disrupting the commonplace, as students learning to see "the 'everyday' through new lenses" (p. 383), critically re-evaluating ideas, language, and social "truths" from diverse perspectives and points of view. The authors further note that this dimension requires a problematizing of topics and subjects under discussion as historical product, and cite Luke and Freebody's (1997) required "interrogation of texts", trying to understand how a text, idea, or statement is "trying to position" individuals, (as cited in Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383) as an essential component of this dimension. There were many instances of this kind of critical repositioning during our production, and one of the most memorable examples occurred during a series of scene-writing workshops that focused on the play's main character and her attempt to cope with a violent attack. Our friend Candice played this part, and I vividly recall several instances when critical literacy skills emerged during our negotiation of her scenes.

Sarah and I had created a working script for this section of the play, and brought it to the rehearsal for group revision. As we sat in a circle and began our first read-through, I recall that most of the cast were relatively quiet. The scene was an emotional one, and detailed the ongoing struggles Candice's character faced, not only in dealing with an assault, but also confronting other characters' unsupportive or accusatory reactions to it.

Despite the intense nature of the topic, there was little discussion or contribution during the read-through, especially among the young men.

But it was when Candice rose to improvise the first scene that the engagement of the cast palpably changed. Candice was a powerful actress, and to this day I can recall her standing in the centre of the drama room, revealing a character desperately trying to explain her situation to skeptical friends and acquaintances. The intensity and emotion with which she spoke made her voice sound as though it belonged to someone else, it was so choked with outrage and desperation. The dialogue, which we ourselves had written, shifted subtly in meaning and emotional effect as Candice aesthetically brought it to life using her own background experiences and insight. I was struck by the different meanings and interpretations that emerged during Candice's performance. I remember watching her story and her perspective unfolding before my eyes, her pain and frustration tangible – and I recall feeling deeply sad for her, for the situation that I had personally not faced but that her character now dealt with. Here again was that open and unguarded place, an unshielded glimpse into another person's struggles and human vulnerability. I also remember the other cast members as they watched the scene; it seemed to me that an intense seriousness, a connection between Candice and the others present, had emerged – it certainly had in my case. With a quiet and focused attention many cast members seemed to be immersed in her portrayal of the character, as though an exchange, an unspoken conversation of sorts, was occurring.

When Candice finished her performance, others joined in to contribute to the scene, exploring the characters' actions and words through drama. As I watched, new interpretations of the dialogue, new ambiguities emerged that I had previously not considered. We continued this way at each rehearsal, making alterations and adjustments to the script collaboratively, always in response to dramatic sharing. During the drama process our learning was actuated by a multitude of modalities: reading aloud, physical enactment, discussion, aesthetic representation, writing, emotional response, revising, ongoing dialogue. For me, this multi-faceted approach awakened the text and dialogue in ways more vivid and accessible than pencil-and-paper tasks could. The collaborative drama structure provided the essential elements of exploring texts and ideas critically by actuating multiple character viewpoints in emotional and aesthetic ways. I recall Gallagher's (2001) observations of her students' drama work, and its impact on their learning:

> Part of the strength of this kind of collective process is its inclusion of voices and its overt position that there is not just one way to experience a story. It is not clean, fast, or direct movement to a conclusion. It is slow and meandering in its progress. Opinions are strong and strongly held, but the process resembles a slow drawing out of ideas and suggestions that begin to come together because of the differently held views in the room. As a result, the 'final product' is a collage of ideas and images. The characters are multidimensional, context collectively imagined.
> (p. 69-70)

New understandings, re-evaluations, and "collectively imagined contexts" occurred for me throughout the production. But I was not to realize the full learning and critical impact of Candice's scene on my fellow cast mates until many weeks later, when Albert and I discussed it after one of our final performances.

Of all the conversations I had with students describing new critical insight and new awareness of issues, the discussion I had with Albert was perhaps the most personal and honest example. During our exchange Albert stated that he could not stop thinking about Candice's scenes. He also stated that he had never before realized or acknowledged that (and his words are paraphrased after all these years) "there are advantages to being a guy, related to power and safety, and there are things I never thought to consider, things that don't bother me but that might make others feel threatened, uncomfortable, or unsafe ... even the things I say, to me they might seem harmless, but to someone else with different experiences ... they could take it much differently." He then went on to admit that, looking back, he could see instances in his own life in which he wished he had been more sensitive to this power imbalance, how he would now do and say things differently than he had in the past. Albert's statements strike me as significant. Even well-meaning adults may find it a difficult task to authentically confront and understand any privilege or power that social conditions grant them, whether based on race, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or ability/disability. Even more difficult is the resolve to actively reject one's own privileges which necessarily disadvantage others, to remain aware and mindful of this power imbalance throughout one's life. Yet Albert appeared to have developed at least some awareness of these complex issues.

This exchange indicates, as did many of the conversations surrounding our play, a developing sensitivity to social construct, an awareness that power imbalances exist within our society, and a willingness to confront these imbalances. Albert's growing awareness of how his actions and words may impact others reflect multiple aspects of

Lewison et al.'s (2002) first dimension of critical literacy, including "studying language to analyze how it shapes identity, constructs cultural discourses, and supports or disrupts the status quo" (Fairclough, 1989, as cited in Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). It would seem that our play had created a kind of "conversation" – verbal, aesthetic, emotional – which resulted in Albert critically re-evaluating his original assumptions, and gaining a greater ability to empathize with another person's perspective. And in a sense, this aesthetic conversation rooted in drama yielded a small form of political action, evident in Albert's ability and willingness to confront situations which he now recognized as potentially marginalizing or hostile. As Gallagher (2001) observes, "doing drama is a process, often simultaneously involving a loss and discovery of realities as students respond to abstract or fictional worlds" (p. 21). This "loss and discovery" was certainly evident in Albert's re-visioning of the issues presented in Candice's scene, in his viewing "the 'everyday' through new lenses" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 382).

It was not, however, merely the actors who engaged in critical re-evaluation, it was the audience members as well – and Silvana reminded me of this fact during our conversation: "I remember the play was the first time anyone had a discussion challenging the assumption that this kind of thing wasn't prevalent, or that it only happened to a particular type of girl – and we all very clearly knew the names for that particular type of girl. Kids used to label some girls with these names that were really hostile, intrinsically tied to their gender, and those names seemed to excuse away any crime that may have been committed against them." This paraphrased recount of Silvana's conversation with me also focuses on the issue of language, how it has power to

define, to shape identity, to give power to some and render others powerless – and how students learned to view these "commonplace" labels in new and critical ways. These issues often came up during the post-performance discussions, many of which Sarah's brother Greg had attended.

Sarah once recounted a discussion she had had with her brother about a month after he had seen the final performance. They had been talking about a high-publicity allegation of sexual harassment in the news, and almost instinctually Greg began to dismiss the complaint because of the victim's alleged sexual history. Sarah recalled that Greg stopped mid-sentence, seeming to re-evaluate what he was saying. She said she could almost see his thought processes shifting again, when she reminded him of what he had experienced and realized during the course of the production only weeks before. The language and labels that Greg had so casually and unapologetically used in the past, each time to Sarah's vociferous objection, now gave him pause. He began, at least in some instances, to make active choices not to use those labels, to confront stereotype in his own thinking when he recognized it. Again, this instance directly relates to Lewison et al.'s (2002) observations of the role of language in critical literacy, "analyzing how language is used to maintain domination ... and how social action can change discourses" (p. 384). Yet if one does not have access to engaging community conversation, it is easy to remain complacent and satisfied with the ultimate truth of one's own beliefs. Our production, however, had somehow disrupted Greg's complacencies, his "truths". This is one of the distinguishing features of the kind of process drama we employed, that "those watching the drama are not there to be entertained but are participants engaged in the

struggle to understand the teaching and learning dynamic" (Heathcote, 1984, as cited in Gallagher, 2001, p. 62).

Lewison et al. (2002) emphasize that the four dimensions of critical literacy "are interrelated ... none stand alone" (p. 382). Indeed, when considering both Albert and Greg's reactions above, one may see numerous instances of overlapping connections among the various components of critical literacy. For example, the second dimension of critical literacy – "interrogating multiple viewpoints" – was evident in the drama process of Candice's scene study. Lewison et al. (2002) note that this dimension asks us to "understand experience and texts from our own perspectives and the viewpoints of others, and to consider these various perspectives concurrently" (p. 383). In the dramatic medium, conflicting perspectives often play out "concurrently" in the theatrical space, as they did during our scene study; these view points are actuated emotionally, physically, and aesthetically for contemplation and discussion, with each participant sharing unique perspectives. During Candice's scene, we were required to enact and negotiate diverse characters, whose motives and opinions we did not necessarily agree with. But in so doing, new understandings opened for us: the reasons why a victim might not report a crime to police, why she may tell no one at all, why some acquaintances offer support, and why others seem to withdraw. Gallagher's (2001) research data yielded similar observations, and based on student interviews, discussion, and written response she concludes that dramatic representation of multiple viewpoints allowed her students "to see plainly the ways in which our 'perspective' is shaped by social constructs organizing that perspective" (p. 53). Ongoing negotiation of diverse characters and viewpoints was

an inextricable part of the drama process for us, and it was through this aesthetic negotiation that we developed greater insight into why characters might think and behave the way they do.

The third dimension of critical literacy – "focusing on socio-political issues" – is also inseparable from process-driven or social justice drama. By its very definition, this type of drama *requires* students to represent and explore socio-political topics from multiple perspectives – and the dramatic medium provided us a dialogic community space in which to present, negotiate, and re-vision these issues. Lewison et al. (2002) comment on some of the challenges surrounding the teaching of critical literacy in this dimension:

> It is often difficult for teachers to encourage students to go beyond personal or psychological responses to texts and experiences. In this dimension, we attempt to step outside of the personal to interrogate how socio-political systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and answers. (p. 383)

In the case of our play, however, I believe the dramatic medium provided possible solutions to this common challenge in critical discourse: it provided a multisensory, physical, and emotional learning experience which actuated and engaged students' critical awareness on a human level, providing the "call to conversation", the shared space so necessary to "encourage students to go beyond personal responses" (p. 383), to create dialogic exchange and critique. During such exchanges, students not only have a chance to represent and negotiate diverse points of view aesthetically, but they also have the opportunity to discuss characters' choices and actions with others, to relate the

characters' situations back to their own experiences and opinions, to agree or disagree, to

negotiate and re-vision if necessary. Indeed, our drama format allowed a community of

people to view the same experience together, witnessing the human journeys of many

different characters together. As the descriptions of Candice's scene suggest, such drama

processes can be in essence "open-ended inquiries", the very term Lewison et al. (2002)

use to describe the negotiation of conflicting socio-political viewpoints. Ideally, the

authors continue, these dimensions of critical literacy should lead to the use of literacy

"to engage in the politics of everyday life" and, quoting Giroux (1993), redefine literacy

as "a form of cultural citizenship ... increasing opportunities for subordinate groups to

participate in society and as an ongoing act of consciousness and resistance" (p. 383).

Such "ongoing acts of consciousness" resulting from dialogic exchange can be seen in

Greg's re-evaluation of his language, in Albert's resolve to be more aware of power

imbalances in social situations, and finally in my own re-evaluation of some rather rigid

viewpoints ...

I recall the scene study mentioned in chapter two, in which Cory challenged how

Sarah and I had originally characterized the male characters somewhat one-

dimensionally:

At first, I was unwilling to listen. In fact, I was even a little annoyed. Who was he to question what we had written in this scene? Hadn't we watched people react this very way? Hadn't we seen the pain caused by events such as this? I was so immovably rooted in my own certainty about this scene and this issue that I would not listen to arguments about how it was presented, even when a few others in the group nodded in agreement with Cory.

And that is when Cory rose to improvise the scene. As I watched the drama unfold with Cory pausing after certain lines, expressions of doubt, fury, and sadness fleeting across his face in counterpoint to the lines he was speaking, the dialogue took on new life. Suddenly, as Cory's character grappled with a terrible tragedy in his friend's life, a new possibility gradually unfolded for me too. It was as though I had been invited by Cory into an open and unguarded place, where I began to see and participate in another person's very different perspective.

Our rehearsals continued this way, with our role play acting as a conduit to bring forth new points of view, to represent them in ways that could directly and emotionally impact the observer ... These character explorations became learning moments for all of us. To watch our discussions and divergent opinions and reactions being physically and emotionally represented reached me in a way that mere words could not. Drama created a multi-faceted discussion, a conversation of depth and feeling that invited the humane into our collaborative space. And in this space, perspective, feeling, doubt, frailty, and strength could play out in a shared arena to arrive at meaning-making, new representations, new discoveries, and new questions. Drama helped me to see new possibility in areas that I had long ago dismissed as unalterable and absolute ...

In chapter two, I used this memory to reflect upon and discuss the power of drama to create "community" in the classroom, to promote engaged awareness and listening to others. By revisiting this memory, I wish to focus on the simultaneous critical discourse that occurred during this exchange. Indeed, our "conversation" – verbal, aesthetic, and emotional – resulted in my critically re-evaluating my original assumptions, and in my being able to listen to another's perspective. It seems again pertinent to mention Wenger's (1998) previously-quoted assertion that "to assess learning we use tests with which students struggle in one-to-one combat, where knowledge must be demonstrated out of context, and where collaboration is considered cheating" (p. 3). In this particular learning experience, aesthetic and community-based collaboration was nothing short of essential to my learning and critical thought. Wenger's comment that "learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing" (p. 3) came to full life during this exchange. But aside from

the inherently social and collaborative nature of drama, I believe another feature promoted increased critical awareness, the ability to re-evaluate our positions in relation to those of others: the concept of attention and attending to others.

Before the processes of critical literacy can be nurtured, taught, and practised, one must first inspire in students the necessary *attention* to do so – and as anyone who has ever been charged with commanding and keeping the attention of a group of restless students will immediately recognize, this is no small task. A story may be rife with intriguing conflict, a newspaper article chock full of topics and issues of direct relevance to students, yet if we cannot foster the extended and authentic attention required to meaningfully examine material, to fully engage with the issues presented, the development of critical literacy skills may be impeded. Again, I believe the inherent physicality and emotional engagement in dramatic performance and expression may provide an advantage in addressing this pedagogical issue; it is through drama processes that we may meaningfully attend to others and their perspectives, forging emotional as well as cognitive understandings. It is this emotional connection with others and their points of view that is so instrumental in facilitating students' development of critical literacy.

All those years ago I watched Cory enact a new perspective for me with the same distinct concentration I have felt myself effortlessly slip into countless times during dramatic performances. The attending to gesture, expression, tone, posture ... these physical, emotional, and aesthetic methods of communication often engaged me in ways

that conventional print and teaching methods could not. The effortless attentiveness in dramatic contexts contrasts sharply with the more common school experiences of "paying attention" – in many classes I recall artificially forcing my eyes and ears to focus on something because I had to or was told to. But watching Cory perform did not feel like work, or something I had to tell myself to do … rather, this shared human connection came naturally. Such emotional and physical expression, appealing instinctually to our most natural ways of communicating, may have played a role in my attending so fully to the experience. When Cory aesthetically represented ideas, beliefs, emotions, and ideas, in my eyes he created the kind of powerful, shared moment so essential to meaningfully engaging in dialogue with others. His story, and all its shades and distinctions, came to life before my eyes.

This issue of engagement and attending to others is inseparably related to critical literacy. Sullivan (2000) offers similar observations in her discussion of poetry and the art of attention and attending. Although she does not discuss drama *per se*, she does posit that the aesthetic – specifically poetry and visual art – encourages a unique kind of attention and learning:

> Aesthetic vision engages a sensitivity to suggestion, to pattern, to that which is beneath the surface, as well as to the surface itself. It requires a fine attention to detail and form: the perception of relations (tensions and harmonies); the perception of nuance (colors of meaning); and the perception of change (shifts and subtle motions). It dares to address the ineffable. (p. 220-221)

I am reminded of how many times simple discussion failed to move me in my high school years, how far too often it seemed we students emerged from classes bored or

complacent, without having glimpsed new possibilities. As Hoogland (2009) notes, "drama aesthetic forms, and in particular social justice drama, are constructed to capture students' attention, to inspire continued inquiry; without curiosity and inquiry, the drama form collapses" (personal communication, March 1, 2009). And even when dramatic forms represent and negotiate points of view with which we disagree, we are compelled to keep watching, listening, waiting expectantly. Indeed, Sullivan (2000) notes that "aesthetic vision is always from a specific point of view, filtered by a specific consciousness. It is personal and situational. It includes emotion, imagination, and paradox. It embraces complexity" (p. 221). The physical and aesthetic expression in drama, for instance, is unique and multifaceted with each new performer, as they bring their experiences, instincts, and imagination to the situations and perspectives being enacted. Perhaps it is this complexity in drama, this symbolic, emotional communication that commands our attention, keeps us captive ... something more lies beneath the surface, deeper questions, new perspectives, we can sense it, we want to uncover it.

Sullivan's (2000) memory of viewing the famous Picasso painting *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon* illustrates how attending to aesthetic forms profoundly contributed to her learning:

> I stood in front of that large painting and stared, allowed my eye to move as it would among the details. I stared with a curious eye that didn't yet know how to understand, didn't yet know what art could teach me. For a rather long time I stood there, wondering what I was "supposed" to be seeing. Then I allowed my imagination to guide my vision. When I imagined that blue line gone and suddenly felt in the painting a shift of energy and balance ... I realized for the first time that all the parts of the composition mattered. Any alteration on the part would have an effect on the whole ... This was for me a revolutionary and long-lasting insight, as

was the new understanding that I could learn about art by giving it focused
attention. (p. 223)

Although Sullivan here focuses on visual art, I believe useful parallels can be made with

drama experiences. The focused attention that dramatic sharing creates, the immediate

and multi-faceted conversations that spring forth in the dramatic moment, may allow for

"revelations" directly related to critical literacy. As stated at the beginning of this

chapter, critical literacy is fundamentally social in nature; it requires negotiation of the

ideas, perspectives, and motives of others in relation to one's own. This negotiation

necessitates advanced sensitivity to the positions and experiences of others, yet we expect

students to master this deeply social and empathetic process while largely maintaining

school environments in which emotional expression and representation through aesthetic

forms – even the mere opportunity of simply looking at another student, truly listening to

what they are saying – is absent. Many students are still facing front, while the teacher

tells them about inferring, making connections, and describing in prescribed and logical

steps how to think critically. Again, I recall Gallagher's (2007) study, the results of which

revealed that the experiential interaction in drama acted as a catalyst to exploring conflict,

and sharply contrasted the critical learning environment in mainstream classes. Gallagher

quotes two students, referred to as Faye and Ruby, to emphasize this contrast:

Faye (White, female, second-generation Canadian, of British descent): It's because
we get to interact with each other ... In other classes, you're sitting here, and
someone's sitting there. How are you (to) interact –
Ruby (Filipino, female, first-generation Canadian) (interrupting): Yeah, and the
teacher doesn't, like, like you talking to anybody ... Like you have to stay quiet in
the class and do your work ...

If a dearth of opportunity for students to experientially and emotionally interact in mainstream classrooms does indeed exist, then investigation into possible alternative pedagogies may be useful. In my own experience, the mere act of attending to others, of students really *looking* at one another, free from teacher instructions and task direction, is somewhat of a rarity.

"How often do we teach children in school this kind of attention? How often in school were we ourselves required to stare?" (p. 223) concludes Sullivan's argument. A focus for her research was how to teach children to pay attention in meaningfully ways, to truly attend to surroundings in ways that result in learning and insight. I believe the dramatic context may be an effective way to encourage and teach children to truly attend, to "pay attention", with significant impact on critical literacy. As Eisner observes, "One job that scholars increasingly want done is engendering a sense of empathy ... because we have begun to realize that human feeling does not pollute understanding. In fact, understanding others and the situations they face may well require it" (Eisner, 1997, as cited in Sullivan, 2000, p. 226).

Chapter 5: Drama in Education – Implications and Possibilities

Despite goodwill on the part of educators, despite professional expertise, and despite the large amounts of money expended to develop new approaches, there are still vast disparities in life's chances – disparities that today seem to be widening still further ... An authentically democratic view of schools must include a vision of meaningful success for all, a vision of success that is not defined exclusively in economic terms and that has embedded within it a critique of hierarchy and economic injustice.

(The New London Group, 1996, p. 61 and 67)

Throughout this thesis, I found it a challenge to discuss the concepts of social-emotional engagement among learners without also venturing into issues of critical literacy. This is because, as discussed in previous chapters, both are intrinsically connected to one another, and thus both are necessary for powerful learning communities to develop and thrive. Drama may be an effective tool in facilitating this symbiosis of emotional connection and critical literacy because, in my experience, the drama construct naturally encourages both of these elements, with one dependent upon the other for continued and deepening mutual engagement and understanding. Indeed, how could my new-found emotional connection to Cory's perspective *not* have led to critical re-visioning of my own rigid assumptions? And how could such re-visioning not pave the way for future opportunities of discovery, of additional commonalities, human connections, and new "truths"?

As evidenced in the scene studies throughout this work, through its experiential and aesthetic features drama may encourage unique forms of emotional engagement, not only to learning material but also to other learners and their perspectives. In the case of

our collaborative production, these connections encouraged key social components of classroom community such as mutual investment and commitment to others, while simultaneously enabling participants to become critically engaged, to collaboratively reach new cognitive understandings of others' viewpoints. For me, aesthetically-based opportunities to glimpse new possibilities in others' life stories often resulted in my gaining increased critical awareness of the situations they faced, which in turn led to further deepening of social connection and investment in others. And as conversations with fellow cast members indicate, this sort of community-based re-visioning occurred for others in the production as well. From Albert's insights into gender-based power dynamics, to Greg's re-assessment of his language and social assumptions, to the grade 10 student who began the PAVEAT anti-violence initiatives, each new aesthetic exchange seemed to engage both our emotional sensibilities and critical awareness, making the humanity in each situation apparent. In this sense, drama strengthened the learning process, with more and more opportunities to create dialogue and address issues of social concern surfacing as our collaborative production progressed.

This type of learning community, rooted in investment in others and critical considerations of multiple social perspectives, may have implications and benefits that extend beyond students' formal education years. As detailed earlier in this thesis, researchers such as Etienne Wenger call for a re-conceptualization of current educational design, placing student-centered, mutually-engaged learning communities as the foundation of pedagogical practice. As previously demonstrated, I believe drama provides one way of achieving this type of learning community, encompassing the six

general features of classroom community introduced in chapter two. Indeed, all of these characteristics – a sense of belonging, being able to meaningfully contribute to the group, fulfillment of individual social and learning needs, commitment to others in the group, collaborative and mutual engagement, and extending learning to positively impact and contribute to others both inside and outside of the classroom – were evidenced during our collaborative production. Yet the long-term implications of such learning communities, the potential benefits and trajectories they may create in students' futures, remain an area open for contemplation. Possible responses to this pedagogical issue may be found in the New London Group's exploratory work on "multiliteracies".

In *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures*, the New London Group (1996) discusses the impact of our changing social environment, both local and global, on literacy pedagogy. The authors posit that in light of the current "multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity" (p. 63) there is not "a singular, canonical English that could or should be taught anymore," (p. 63). Instead of emphasizing this kind of "standard" language curriculum, the authors propose the concept of "multiliteracies" as an alternative pedagogy, expanding the definition of literacy education to include students as active negotiators of meaning. According to the authors, "multiliteracies" is a learning design which emphasizes diverse modes of representation, with social critique and critical re-visioning as one of its main goals:

> A pedagogy of multiliteracies ... focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects ... Multiliteracies also creates a

different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes. (p. 64)

The authors assert that the need for such a multimodal pedagogy is rooted in "the question of life chances as it relates to the broader moral and cultural order of literacy pedagogy" (p. 62). Indeed, if the purpose of education (and literacy education in particular) is to prepare students for active, constructive citizenship and access to employment and life's opportunities, then we must ensure that all students gain such access – regardless of socioeconomic position. A multiliteracies approach, according to the authors, seeks to address this question of unequal access by providing diverse and equitable ways to empower students, to facilitate critical literacy skills with emphasis on socio-economic disparities, to create new possibilities for themselves and their communities.

While the authors clearly lay out the theoretical basis of a multiliteracies design, they leave many of the implementation specifics – teaching methods, class groupings, curriculum and subject areas – open for discussion. Indeed, the New London Group (1996) deliberately presents their concept of multiliteracies as a "programmatic manifesto, a starting point of sorts, open and tentative" (p. 63) with the hope that their theoretical overview of learning within a changing and diverse social context may create opportunities for "open-ended dialogue with fellow researchers around the world; that it might spark ideas for new research areas; and that it might help frame curriculum experimentation that attempts to come to grips with our changing educational environment" (p. 63). In keeping with these aims, I propose drama pedagogy in general,

and collaborative creations in particular, as a possible answer to their call for community-based, multimodal learning environments. The authors "twin goals" (p. 60) related to community access and critical engagement suggest immediate parallels to my discussion, and the groups' focus on "modes of representation much broader than language alone" (p. 64) lends itself particularly well to drama pedagogy. And of special interest are the possible social futures that drama may help to create with regard to future access and fulfillment in working, public, and private lives.

In my years as an educator, certain patterns in student success have become unmistakable. Often, the students who seem to negotiate school culture with the most ease and achieve success according to its measures are those for whom the system has been, intentionally or not, designed. This "design" encompasses not just curriculum, but a host of other issues such as teaching methods, teachers themselves and their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which curricular and social items are emphasized as important, and which are not. And despite the detailed equity policies of boards of education, despite the earnest and authentic efforts of many educators and policy makers, in my experience there remain many barriers to equitable education and access to empowering discourse within our schools. My own board, for example, services one of the most multicultural cities in Canada, according to the 2006 Canadian census. The results of this census indicate that nearly 25% of Hamiltonians are newcomers to Canada, and have a language other than English spoken in the home. According to the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's ESL Department, over 6000 of our School Board's students are English Language Learners, making our schools areas of great diversity and

possibility. Of grave concern, however, is the nearly 20% of our city population who live in poverty, with children 0-14 years making up 24% of the poor according to Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. And while I have observed cohesive and connected classrooms that effectively negotiate this diversity within our School Board, I have also observed schools that struggle in this area. In such cases, one needs only to stand observantly by to note the social discord in classrooms and playgrounds (and in many staff rooms, for that matter), the inability to negotiate difference, the subtle manifestations of socioeconomic privilege, the tendency to approach diversity with "tolerance" rather than embracing the concept as lived reality.

One result of these barriers to learning and community cohesion among students can be observed in our English Language Learners' adaptive strategies in school. In both my own and my ESL colleagues' experiences, some ELLs, after gaining sufficient proficiency in English, refuse to speak or even refer to their first languages, in some cases even to their parents at home. ESL researcher Elizabeth Coelho (1998) details the impact of such cases in her book *Teaching and Learning in Multicultural Schools*. Citing studies conducted by Yao (1985) and Wong Fillmore (1991), Coelho (1998) asserts that "when English becomes the dominant or preferred language of children, poor communication between parents and their children can lead to serious conflict in the home and negative interaction with the school" (p. 41-42). As saddening as such instances are, they are not surprising: when schools overwhelmingly emphasize only one language and culture (in both curriculum and teaching staff) the implicit message about "normal" discourse becomes apparent. Quite simply, the concept of a "normal" culture or discourse cannot

exist without its opposite and, in my opinion, we must re-vision this polar dichotomy.

Indeed, if all students in our diverse school population are to experience pride in their

identities and a sense of belonging in their classrooms, then we must envision a new

system of education comprised of multiple discourses and experiences.

It is issues such as these that become critical as students leave our schools and

enter adult communities – individuals and individual communities that continue to

function in isolation, with neat borders and characteristics distinguishing certain groups

from others, only serve to reinforce societal fragmentation. The ability to create healthy

relationships with others, to nurture thriving and interdependent communities on both

local and global levels, depends on recognizing and affirming our interconnectedness to

diverse people, communities, places, and the natural world. And as the New London

Group (1996) notes, the influence of schools cannot be underestimated in this process:

> Schools have always played a critical role in determining students' life
> opportunities. Schools regulate access to orders of discourse – the relationship of
> discourses within a particular social space – to symbolic capital – symbolic
> meanings that have currency in access to employment, political power, and cultural
> recognition. They provide access to a hierarchical ordered world of work; they
> shape citizenries; they provide a supplement to the discourses and activities of
> communities and private lifeworlds. As these three major realms of social activity
> have shifted, so too must schools shift. (p. 71-72)

As the authors note this suggested shift in school design, to address the crucial areas of

work, citizenship, and "lifeworlds", requires a pedagogy that not only meaningfully

includes diverse learners but also provides opportunities for all learners to collectively

highlight, negotiate, and re-vision key social issues. Drama may help to address this required shift in pedagogical approach.

The first way drama learning communities might align themselves with a multiliteracies design "shift" is through its multimodal, multi-representational nature. Paraphrasing Cope and Kalantzis (1995), the New London Group (1996) asserts that in order to authentically address and negotiate social barriers to learning and opportunity, we must create classrooms "where differences are actively recognized, where these differences are negotiated in such a way that they complement each other, and where people have the chance to expand their cultural and linguistic repertoires so that they can access a broader range of cultural and institutional resources" (p. 69). As previously illustrated, our collaborative production provided an engaged, multimodal space where differences were "actively recognized" and negotiated in ways that gave unique voice to a particular element of social suffering: gender and violence. And the drama construct in general, through authentic and careful teacher facilitation, may provide similar voice to other socio-economic issues such as race, class, culture, language, and sexual orientation. Drama provides a shared space in which to negotiate these issues in ways that potentially impact observers and provide opportunities to effect change, to challenge inequities and give voice to silenced perspectives in empowering ways.

The second way drama pedagogy may complement a multiliteracies approach is in its ability to re-shape the roles of learners and educators. As the New London Group observes, "literacy educators and students must see themselves as active participants in

social change" (p. 64). As detailed in the body of this thesis, the drama process allowed

just such a realization, with our collaborative production creating tangible social

connections, critical re-visionings, and transformations within our school and local

communities, including the creation of PAVEAT, newspaper articles and community

discussions, even personal exchanges in which others revealed new insights and

expressed new commitments. Through drama, our learning and our goals became

inextricably connected to social connection and change. The New London Group further

notes that "pedagogy is a teaching and learning relationship that creates the potential for

building learning conditions leading to full and equitable social participation" (p. 60). As

such, our collaborative creation allowed us to take the first fledgling steps towards such

involved citizenship, to participate in the processes of civic engagement.

The third way drama might respond to a multiliteracies design is perhaps the most

significant: through its meaningful inclusion of diverse perspectives in the learning

process, drama may facilitate transformed relationships and new social "possibilities"

that extend beyond the classroom. Indeed, the New London Group (1996) discusses the

difference between "tokenistic pluralism" in our school systems, which emphasizes

superficial inclusion of diversity while maintaining status quo interests, and "transformed

pedagogy" (p. 72) which "does not write over existing subjectivities with the language of

the dominant culture ... the role of pedagogy is to develop an epistemology of pluralism

that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different

subjectivities" (p. 72). Again, I recall the ELLs who leave behind their first languages

and traditions in the hopes of "blending in", and I wonder about the countless other

students who feel they must alter or subvert aspects of their identities because they do not fit with dominant culture or discourse. I believe the drama construct, through its social and experiential learning structures, has the potential to include such subjectivities, encouraging collective negotiation and understanding of the issues they represent. And yet teachers must also be aware that students' less desirable subjectivities, such as stereotype, may come into play in the dramatic process. In such cases, the role of teachers to maintain a safe and inclusive environment for all students is critical. Clear facilitation of dramatic explorations may allow students to view the layers and complexities of issues, to see beyond simplistic assumptions and rigid viewpoints, and encourage connections between self and other.

In the case of our collaborative production, personally transformative learning moments provided new understandings of others that served me in multiple capacities beyond the classroom walls. While these understandings focused primarily on gender dynamics and issues of violence, the same approach could be applied to a myriad of social issues and concerns such as racism and poverty, two crucial issues for our School Board in particular. While these aesthetic explorations undoubtedly will not "solve" such complex social issues, they may, as the New London Group (1996) suggests, provide a foundation for future negotiation and re-vision:

> We cannot remake the world through schooling, but we can instantiate a vision
> through pedagogy that creates in microcosm a transformed set of relationships and
> possibilities for social futures, a vision that is lived in schools. This might involve
> activities such as simulating work relations of collaboration, commitment, and
> creative involvement ... reclaiming the public space of school citizenship for
> diverse communities and discourses ... (p. 72-73)

In many ways, I believe our collaborative production created just such a microcosm. Our "transformed relationships" – with fellow castmates and others – gave us insights into social conditions as well as new ways of interacting with those different from ourselves, allowing us to see commonalities and interconnectedness where previously we saw little or none. Such drama communities, such "microcosms" of societal interaction, may provide new ways of viewing the world for our students as they enter adulthood and inhabit the multiple communities of our world. Indeed, one of the key advantages of drama pedagogy is that it may make apparent the fact that "identities have multiple layers that are in complex relation to each other. No person is a member of a singular community. Rather, they are members of multiple and overlapping communities" (p. 71).

While I believe the drama construct has the potential to facilitate such powerful learning features, I do not suggest that it will always create these results. Nor is it the only method through which to attain them. A host of complex issues contribute to the success of any pedagogical approach, with teacher facilitation and student dynamics just two of the potential determining factors. Yet I do believe that drama, when skillfully facilitated, may have an advantage; the diverse learning styles, the required social negotiation, the shared aesthetic spaces for dialogue and re-visioning ... all of these features may allow drama to achieve new goals, as suggested by Kalantzis and Cope (1993), for students and educators alike:

> States must be strong again, but not to impose standards: they must be strong as neutral arbiters of difference. So must schools. And so must literacy pedagogy. This is the basis for a cohesive sociality, a new civility in which differences are used as a productive resource and in which differences are the norm. It is the basis

for a postnationalist sense of common purpose that is now essential to a peaceful and productive global order.

(as cited in The New London Group, 1996, p. 69)

Whether drama may play a role in creating such "peaceful" foundations may be of interest to educators. The kind of peace and civility I often found in drama was one of the greatest gifts of my public school education.

*   *   *

The last day of my high school drama class began much like the first. I walked in to our grey-carpeted room, took off my shoes, and joined my classmates in a circle. As this was to be our final class before graduating, Ms. J. asked us to choose our favourite warm-up games and activities – and we spent most of the morning dashing around, interacting, running, playing, and of course laughing at all of the familiar antics, jokes, and personalities in our class.

Towards the end of the period, Ms. J asked us to form a circle again. She explained that she wanted to conclude our final class in a way that would let us remember how our time together had affected each one of us. And she produced a simple ball of red yarn. As she held it in her hand, she explained that we would toss the ball to one another, one at a time. With each toss, we were to state something about the person to whom we had thrown it ... what we had learned from them, what we had appreciated about them, what we would miss.

Holding onto the loose end, Ms. J gave the ball of yarn to Mary first, recalling a hilarious mishap onstage during which she had managed to singlehandedly save the performance. I watched her as she held the tightly wound-up ball, a single red line stretching back across the circle to Ms. J representing that particular memory. Mary then tossed the ball to Candice, and described her powerful ability to portray characters in ways no one expected. And it continued this way, each of us catching and throwing the ball of yarn, and as it unraveled stating out loud what we valued about one another. The red lines slowly growing across our circle were a constant and tangible reminder of our recollections, shared stories, and connections.

As I recall, nearly all of the memories I heard that day involved deepened relationships with others. Albert, for example, stated that he had been best friends with Doug until grade six when they fell out of touch, having become a part of different social groups. He went on to say that the thing he was most grateful for was that our drama class had allowed him to get to know his friend again. Similarly, Brent described how he had been surprised to develop some of his most-valued friendships in drama class, with people he had known for years but who were not in his usual group of acquaintances.

Ms. J allowed us to continue until each person had received at least one memory. When the ball was finally returned to her, she held it and paused for a moment.

Looking around at the intricate and interconnected web of memories in front of me, I recall feeling incredibly happy. Most of the people standing there, holding up that

wonderfully jumbled tapestry, had also been involved with our collaborative production in one form or another. The yarn stretched this way and that, criss-crossing, connecting, and re-connecting me to all of the people who had made this class and our production so memorable, so special, and so transformative. For me, it was a powerful and visible symbol of our community, of how each person was a valued and necessary component of it.

Ms. J then told us that even though we would be graduating in a week's time and heading in new and different directions, she hoped the best for us and that we would remember everything we had accomplished together. And although our class was ending, and we would never come together in the same ways we had during high school, at least we could take a little of the yarn to remind us. And she produced a pair of scissors.

That moment brought an abrupt end to my happy state. As the realization of the loss I was about to experience settled around me, I did not speak. None of us did. Without a sound the scissors were passed around and each of us cut away our particular memories from the whole. I saved my piece of yarn carefully. I was stunned at how quickly the energy in the room had changed. We were losing something, something precious. The silence was almost more than I could bear, until finally Doug yelled out "Somebody say something!" which made us all laugh a bit again.

That piece of yarn is still sitting in my attic, in a cardboard box marked "high school drama". When I took it out recently and looked at it, it seemed a little smaller than

I remembered. But just as I have kept that piece of yarn with me, I have also kept a part

of that unforgettable learning community.

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