COLLABORATION AND CONNECTION: ATTENDING TO CREATIVE RELATION/SHIP IN DRAMA AND THEATRE EDUCATION

by

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**ABSTRACT**

The focus of this graduating paper is to explore new ways of creating collective drama and theatre works that express the issues and ideas students are passionate about sharing, as well as examining the implications of their artwork. Specifically, I look at how multiple literacies, including physical movement and new technologies, might extend and enhance the development of these works and the people creating them. The first part of this paper reviews a selection of literature that discusses: the connections and tensions in Drama and Theatre Education and the diverse ways in which artists and scholars express their experiences and views; Language and Literacy and our relational involvement with non-text as well as text utterances; how Technology in Drama and Theatre Education is transforming educational drama and youth theatre; and how Art can connect us with what is sacred or unsayable. The second part of my paper examines how I have brought this thinking and reading into practice, including the different approaches I’ve explored that I believe foster collaboration, community and inquiry, as well as what can be the most rewarding aesthetic and learning experience for the students.

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**SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION**

*Things come into being*

*when we pay attention*

*what we pay attention to*

*The design of our responses*

*influenced*

*shaped by our positionings*

*our stances*

*our eternal dialogue*

*with selves*

*others*

*the world*

*Our hearts sing betwixt and between—*

*Listen to them*

*dance!*

**1.1 Purpose and Questions**

After teaching high school Theatre, Drama and English courses for many years, I was eager to extend the ways I collaborate with and learn from other professionals to design projects and programs for youth that foster positive emotional and social experiences while developing their abilities to express themselves artistically and imaginatively. My approach to this has been influenced by an ongoing intention to assist youth with their process of understanding/expressing/creating themselves through the arts-based living inquiry that is characteristic of theatre, film, and creative writing. I am interested in examining the nature of and aesthetic in story telling, visual art, poetry, physical movement, light and sound that supports truthful, compassionate social encounters for today’s youth. What do we produce together that we cannot produce by ourselves, and what does it represent? When many people are telling stories we get a diversified picture of many experiences. These may interact to create a collective impression of some truth, or a collection of many truths that may conflict.

Having created some original work with students I am interested in exploring new ways of collective play building and of creating devised theatre works that express the issues and ideas students are passionate about sharing as well as the implications of their artwork. I am also interested in exploring how multiple literacies, including physical movement and new technologies, might extend and enhance the development of these works and the people creating them. Furthermore, how might students’ print literacies (reading and writing skills) support the development of the multiple literacies they use in theatre arts (and vice versa)?

This paper reviews a selection of literature that discusses: the connections and tensions in Drama and Theatre Education and the diverse ways in which artists and scholars express their experiences and views; Language and Literacy and our relational involvement with non-text as well as text utterances; how Technology in Drama and Theatre Education is transforming educational drama and youth theatre as well as the designing and communicating of performance related works; the nature and purpose of Arts and Literacy Education Inquiry and Reflective Practice; how Art can connect us with what is sacred or unsayable as well as the importance of art for life’s sake.

It also examines the opportunities for collaboration and conversation I have encountered on my journey and how these have informed my practice and shaped where I might go from here.

*So, as an educator, I ask, what have I given my heart to?* (Leggo, 2008)

**1.2** **Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

The methodology of A/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Leggo, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008) as practice-based research involving a living interconnection between art making and writing speaks to the way I would like to approach my teaching practice. A/r/tography recognizes that words and works and beings are interconnected, that learning and meaning can be found in the spaces between and among these connections. It makes room for students to become part of a community of learners who come to understand themselves and their world through artistic and ongoing inquiry. It embraces sensory experiences and an active, relational involvement with the world; it insists we attend to who we become in our connections with others. I would like to share this approach with my students. Would they like to be a/r/tographers?

In our classroom and in our theatre, students have performed their responses to works and experiences they have encountered or created. I would like to deepen and enhance my acquaintance with the methodology of performative inquiry (Fels and Belliveau, 2008) by incorporating an understanding of how the shadow side of theatre makes a powerful contribution to inquiry and meaning making. Performative inquiry is naturally related to a/r/tography, as is poetic inquiry. According to Pendergast (2009) poetic inquiry is a form of qualitative research that incorporates poetry as a component of investigation that seeks to express experience authentically and ethically, sometimes involving original work in a self-study or when presenting the work of others through found poetry. I introduce this paper with a poem and end it with a photograph; I hope these illuminate the process, inspiration, motivation and discoveries I have made while on this leg of my a/r/tographic journey.

**1.3 Definition of Terms**

**Shadow Side of Theatre:** What goes on in the flies, the wings, in the control room and at an organizational level (Lepage, 1999).

**Light Side of Theatre:** What takes place on stage (Lepage, 1999).

**SECTION 2 -** **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.1 Drama and Theatre Education**

A literature review not only shares with a reader the state of scholarship about a given topic, but it also reveals to some extent who the reviewer is, the collector’s positioning and story. This is also true of an editor’s selection and discussion of material presented in a volume of writing. *How Theatre Educates: Convergences and Counterpoints* is an inspiring, informative, eclectic argument for a more inclusive understanding of theatre as an educative force. With this collection Kathleen Gallagher and David Booth (2003) present a wide ranging collection of articles, essays, interviews, memories, poems, songs and plays which together exhibit the variety of contexts in which drama and theatre are emerging today as well as the diverse ways in which scholars and artists explore and express their experiences and views. They insist that theatre outside of the classroom and education curriculum are not separate, that practitioners in both areas are engaged in learning and art making processes. As a collection of analyses and reflections this volume shows how theatre pedagogy *and* performance is relevant to everyone engaged with the arts in general and theatre arts in particular.

Key for Gallagher is the connection to education in the way artists work—they improvise and take risks, they leave themselves open to emerging stories and relationships and learning. Connecting theatre and education can be risky, but not exploring and understanding their connection is riskier. Gallagher also believes that how one pedagogically structures for democracy and empathy is important, that we must examine the social systems in which our stories are positioned rather than simply bridging our differences with passive empathy. The dialectic nature of theatre provides opportunities for connection *and* confrontation that prevents the formation of impermeable cultural boundaries in our classrooms and in our lives. Thus our schools *and* theatres can be sites for building community and facilitating change. In theatre pedagogy, Gallagher explains, “we not only endow experience with meaning, but we are – as players – invited to make manifest our own subjectivities in the world evoked through character and play, a world laden with metaphor and nuance, a world where relationship to other and self-spectatorship are in dynamic and unrelenting interaction” (Gallagher & Booth, 2003, p. 13).

Booth argues why it is vital that young people are given the opportunity to experience different contexts in which to enter the ‘as if, what if’ world. He believes that students benefit from experiencing not only polished professional productions on grand stages but also alternative performances shared in small, fragile spaces, places where we can see the bare bones of theatre creation. He advocates for students to be able to experience a field of theatre that encompasses *everything* theatre entails, to experience what makes theatre a collaborative art involving both the light and shadow sides of theatre (Lepage, 1998), to experience what makes theatre “a unique living collage” (Gallagher & Booth, 2003, p. 18). He also insists that dramatic power lies in the social encounters evoked in theatre events where we can extend the scope of our world, perhaps transcending our lives with experiences more intense than daily life. This collection of pieces reveals Booth’s hope for theatre as a way of learning throughout life, and it illustrates how this hope makes sense.

Specific approaches to drama/theatre pedagogy and practice that expand our notion of curriculum—approaches that encourage the interweaving of inquiry, learning, performance and reflection—include performative inquiry and role drama (Fels and Belliveau, 2008). These as well as process drama (O’Neill, 1995) involve students in the active and collaborative shaping of meaning that emerges from examining the moments and events in and in between their own and others’ lived and literary experiences. A practical companion for implementing process drama and for engaging in performative inquiry across the curriculum is Neelands and Goode’s *Structuring Drama Work: A handbook of available forms in theatre and drama* (2008).

Neelands and Goode’s collection of strategies and structures include forms that also assist with the building of new work that may become part of a scripted scene or full-length play. Forms such as Diaries, Letters, Journals, Messages (p. 16), Collective Drawing (p. 14), Still-Images (p.25), Montage (p. 64), Mask (61), Ritual (p. 69), Overheard Conversations (p. 37), Soundscape (p. 73) are only a handful of the possibilities shared in this handbook. Will Weigler’s *Strategies for Playbuilding* and Errol Bray’s *Playbuilding* are also practical handbooks for creating scripted works that would be useful to professionals in the theatre as well as useful to high school students and their mentors. Weigler provides a practical approach to playbuilding from developing ensemble and building skills (including support for maintaining confidentiality and personal control of stories) to rehearsing and performing. He provides script development workshop procedures and exercises that build confidence and physicality. His approach to identifying and investigating student initiated topics and unpacking stories are straightforward and accessible as are his methods for building and weaving pieces that include dialogue, song lyrics and choreography (Weigler, 2001). Bray’s work is more of a discussion guide for the group creation of plays that includes his own process and how the reader can be guided by this process.

Both Alison Oddey (1994) and Stephen Wangh (2000) offer what are both theoretical and practical publications. In *An Acrobat of The Heart* Wangh takes a physical approach to acting inspired by the work of Jerzy Grotowski. It is a professional and inspirational discussion of his research and less traditional way of teaching acting. For every aspect of acting he discusses— Warm-Up, Les Exercices Corporels, Les Exercises Plastiques, Listening, Voice Work, Scene Work, Character Work, Acting Sanity and Survival—Wangh includes his own stories and experiences as well as practical exercises and why to do them. It is a body-centered actor training method intended to elicit the connection between body and mind, and its aim is to build theatre that explores the connections between personal transformation and social consciousness (Wangh 2000). Alison Oddey’s *Devising Theatre* combines a critical analysis of contemporary devised theatre practice with practical suggestions for any group devising theatre from scratch. She includes descriptions of various companies and their working practices and products: Forced Entertainment Theatre Cooperative, Lumiére & Son, Gloria Production Company, Belgrade Theatre-in-Education Company, Trestle Theatre Company, Age Exchange Theatre, Greenwich Young People’s Theatre, IOU Theatre, Forkbeard Fantasy, Impact Theatre Cooperative.

Today much of the literature regarding drama and theatre education addresses theatre’s ability to assist with positive youth development and social consciousness. In 1984 Heathcote suggested that the possible tension depicted in a dramatic world provides an opportunity for students to observe and examine the laws of social living; in this world students must manage to pay attention to others, to understand that every person fluctuates between participation and spectatorship (Heathcote, 1984). John O’Toole (1992) considers how drama is a group art: its actions and meanings are collective. More recently, Jo Beth Gonzalez (2006) has called her own approach to theatre instruction the “Critically Conscious Production-Oriented Classroom (CCPOC).” She suggests that this critical pedagogical approach departs from traditional high school theatre education. She urges high school theatre teachers to approach teaching in a way that helps students learn to perceive the social contradictions that surround them, including the contradictions between what is presented to them in traditional texts and the reality of the worlds in which they live. She believes that classroom projects and production styles that embrace this approach can help students present messages that reflect their actual lives. She acknowledges that presenting contemporary plays with progressive messages often elicits community criticism of high school productions dealing with sensitive issues. For this reason, Gonzalez suggests that a place to start may be by taking a critical approach to producing a popular and appealing play, a musical for example. Students might examine a parallel between characters struggling in the play and the conditions of people struggling in their own communities, and then act on this heightened awareness by incorporating an element of improvised work or commentary into the show, or follow the production with talk-backs, or organize financial or active support for the people struggling in their communities. She urges her readers to foster environments that experiment with form and content that can reinvent the past and create new work. Because a democratic classroom involves language and ideas that may be risky and possibly censored by some members of the community, a critical look at language and censorship is inevitably a part of such a classroom. This book includes three case studies of how Gonzalez makes the CCPOC work in diverse areas of her theatre arts program. Guidelines are provided for teaching students in the CCPOC way and Gonzalez includes a discussion of how reflective writing increases the range and quality of the learning in her CCPOC.

*Signs of Change* by Joan Lazarus with a forward by Gonzalez also explores the convergence of good theatre and the education of young people. It is a collection of philosophies, activities, and stories of risk-taking that encourages teachers to follow their instincts even though these may contradict the traditions of one’s training or one’s institution’s expectation to maintain “the norm.” This, too, is a call for theatre education reform, an illustration of what “best practice” might look like (Lazarus insists it is not a step-by-step road map), and a promise of the rewards to be gained from a socially responsible theatre program. The educational “shift” described in this book requires teacher-directors and students to negotiate new relationships where the teacher relinquishes the role of authority in favour of a student-centered methodology. The risks of such a program are discussed: crossed signals, administrative condemnation, loss of confidence. We are invited to listen in on conversations with a group of successful teacher-artists who work with young people in dynamic and compelling ways. A concise list of elements of “best practice” is provided as well examples of activities and lesson plans that guide such practice.

Especially relevant to a study of drama and theatre for youth development as well as curriculum development is Kathleen Gallagher’s approach to drama and theatre education. In *Drama education in the lives of girls: Imagining possibilities* (2007) we see the kind of teaching required for a democratic constructivist curriculum. Her students learn to understand and advocate ideas that are different from their own, engendering in them a capacity for compassion, imagination and relation. Gallagher allows her students to move in a non-linear course so they can explore all aspects of the issues they are exploring. She is present for and celebrates what Fels (2010) refers to as a student’s “coming into presence” and demonstrates the necessity of making room for making art in education. She believes that greater research attention needs to be paid to informal learning and the way youth learn from one another and from what many refer to as the ‘hidden curriculum’ of schools (Gallagher, 2007). *The Theatre of Urban: Youth and schooling in dangerous times* is a story of her empirical research at four urban schools with diverse and complex populations (Gallagher, 2007). In this publication she discusses how even though her study received ethical clearance and all participants gave informed consent, there were still difficult issues of representation. Her study was of students’ experiences in the school as a whole as well as their experiences in drama classes. Along with examining the potential of drama as a tool for critical thinking, she critically analyzes the culture of our schools and suggests that what some schools set out to do is not what they accomplish.

Considering the capacity of theatre to foster positive youth development, especially within the context of creative play making, George Belliveau and David Beare (2007) provide a developmental model for collaborative play-creating based on the philosophical principles of social constructivism. Belliveau and Beare claim that although we have access to knowledge about how theatre programs operate, there is less research about the personal processes for youth involved in these programs. They propose a collaborative play-creating process that weaves four steps in play-creating with five developmental stages of performing arts youth: *inclusion,* script-writing, *control,* rehearsing, *intimacy,* performing, *empowerment,* reflecting, *vision.* While presented in a sequential manner, it is understood that youth do not develop in such an orderly fashion. Rather, participants move through a continuous cycle of externalizing and internalizing, weaving self and theatre throughout this change process. Belliveau and Beare discovered that most participating youth operate at the first three developmental stages (inclusion, control, intimacy) and that each participant’s experience is complex and unique. Only a fraction of the students advance to the stages of empowerment and vision.

Augusto Boal’s approach to theatre art also considers the ability of theatre to change people’s lives in a positive way (Boal, 1995). The Boal method of theatre and therapy outlined in *The Rainbow of Desire* begins with an understanding of how the stage (‘the aesthetic space’) can be employed to examine individual oppressions within a larger context. The nature and value of aesthetic experience and engagement is examined by Penny Bundy (2003) through a reflective play-building project. While asserting that connection, animation and heightened awareness are key characteristics of aesthetic engagement, she focuses on the group processes which affect the experience of connection and how this is related to aesthetic engagement. She asserts that we as teachers must know our students as individuals and allow them to know us, and that this is more than a matter of luck. In a later study Bundy asserts that before participants in a play-building project can experience aesthetic engagement, they must experience trust on multiple levels and accept that it is appropriate to publicly or privately question the ideas being explored in the drama.

Gallagher (2005) also examines the nature and power of aesthetic experiences and examines the discourses of aesthetics in the drama classroom (including both the cognitive and embodied responses to events) and calls this the *sociology of aesthetics* in drama practice. Gallagher favours the idea of the importance of aesthetic experiences, especially the exploration of ideas that bring about sociological questions about representation and the nature of engagement in classroom drama. The unusual thing about drama education, she explains, is that the doing and the perceiving are working simultaneously as the artists/makers play audience to their own and others’ creations, and that ‘drama education’ may be the term Dewey was looking for when he felt there was an absence of a term for designating the artistic and aesthetic processes taken together. Gallagher argues that it is the responsibility of schools to help students prepare to live enriched lives, so their learning must include aesthetic experiences; otherwise their images of human progress will be impoverished.

On the other hand, Shifra Schonmann (2005) claims that there is a need to balance the instrumental function and the artistic-aesthetic function of drama and theatre work in education. She admits that this is not a new claim but believes educators have lost sight of this and that they are focusing too much on what he considers the by-products that drama and theatre can produce and de-prioritizing the artistic and/or the aesthetic dimensions. According to Piekkari et al’s “Drama Way” Project there are seventeen different genres, all of them “celebrations of human interaction and creating and sharing meanings together” (Schonmann, p. 34, 2005) and that their common feature is the process of creating, the importance of which is equal to the product or performance itself. She takes issue with this emphasis on drama and theatre in education as “tools” for learning, empowerment, personal development, theme discussion, social change, and decision-making, and that the emphasis of ideas and terminology currently seems to be on instrumental and practical concerns borrowed from social workers and communication therapists. She claims we must solve the problem of the increased interest in applied drama and theatre because it is inhibiting the development of the field by its expansion of the utilitarian function of theatre in and beyond the curriculum. We are no longer challenging the aesthetic language of our field. She uses the two metaphors of *“Master”* (a strong artistic-aesthetic orientation) and “Servant” (theatre/drama as a tool for holistic education focusing on the autonomy of consciousness) to conclude that the real *Master* has become the *Servant* and the *Servant* has become the *Master*.

Anthony Jackson (2005) examines these contrasting claims made by both theatre practitioners and theatre critics about the “work in the world” that dramatic arts can do. Jackson finds it characteristic of dramatic arts discourse that “good theatre” and theatre used as a stimulus for “reflection, argument, action” are often posed as alternatives. He makes connections between the Freirean and Bakhtinian notions of the “dialogic” as a way of arguing that the aesthetic and the instrumental do not have to be opposed, and that this dialogic should be at the heart of powerful, moving, and educationally provocative theatre. He further argues that an audience’s reception of a work involves an interactive process, what Geertz calls “aesthetic activity.” Adapting Wolfgang Iser who usefully distinguishes the aesthetic process from the artistic, Jackson claims that the aesthetic has more to do with the relationship between the audience and the artwork than with the artwork itself – the interaction between the ideas in the play and the audience’s reception of it is an aesthetic experience that puts the audience and learner at the centre of the experience, which is a defining feature of interventionist theatre. Jackson concludes that the supposed dichotomy between instrumental and aesthetic theatre is perhaps a false one, and we must attend more than we presently do to the art at the heart of interventionist theatre.

**2.2** **Language and Literacy**

In his examination of the nature and content of speech utterances Bakhtin explains that any utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion (Bakhtin, 1999). Moreover, complexly structured and specialized works of various scientific and artistic genres are by nature the same kinds of units of communication as utterances. A work-utterance is related to other work utterances like the rejoinder in a dialogue (given to those to which it responds and from those that respond to it). He also explains how and why the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances. This experience can be characterized to some degree as the creative assimilation of others’ words (or works). Our words (or works) are filled with others’ words (and works). Although the words (and works) of others carry their own expression with them and their own evaluative tone, we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate others’ expressions so that others’ utterances are repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation. “The utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones* … our thought itself … is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought …” (Bakhtin, p. 131, 1999).

Similarly, Sumara (1998) explains how what we remember is always reinterpreted in light of new knowledge and in the context of new experiences, and Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) argues that the ‘meaning’ we arrive at when we read is not ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader but, rather, exists in the transaction between reader and text. Iser (1993) suggests that as a text is interpreted by the reader, the reader is, at the same time, interpreted. Adding one’s relational involvement to texts, then, contributes to one’s evolving sense of self. This is likely also true in our relational involvement with non-text utterances. It is in a dialogic exchange of utterances that we, as well as our relationships, are created.

Sumara’s Commonplace Book activities (2001) and the pedagogical practices developed from it show that common-sense understanding of what constitutes self/other, mind/body, personal/collective, fiction/non-fiction, literary/non-literary, exist ambiguously and fluidly in relation to one another and illuminate the processes by which human beings experience a sense of personal identity. This helps us understand that while creative engagements may be considered imaginary, they are not less influential than other experiences. Sumara also reminds us that what is missing from some literary (and non-literary) experiences is an understanding of how one’s current experience is historically conditioned (Sumara 2001): Our words are filled with others’ words (Bakhtin, 1999).

Sumara further explains that the creating of insight and every moment of human experience requires that what we already know must accommodate new information and situations. For this practice to become more fully developed, these daily hermeneutic practices must be made explicit and supported with historical and contextual understanding. “Information alone does not guarantee a self identity that is interesting or satisfying to itself. Information needs interpretation and, of course, interpretation needs a learned method. (Sumara, p. 175, 2001).”

It is interesting to keep this in mind while reviewing Edmiston and Enciso’s (2003) look at dialogic approaches to reading with classroom drama. They argue that teachers will more effectively engage students and extend their literary interpretations by setting in motion the emergence of multiple meanings with conflicting discourses— a dialogic sequencing of discourses rather than a linear attention to plot. Furthermore, they advocate for the use of non-naturalistic drama conventions (photographs, inner thoughts, video, etc.) and a conception of role that includes an attention to social positioning. Students are thereby involved with the intersections of different discourses within a network of relationships, and these are experienced across time, and place, and in relation to one another (Edmiston and Encisco (2003). Returning to Bahktin’s theory of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981, 1999), we begin to understand that dialogic encounters extend far beyond a concern with verbal exchanges. Consciousness, understanding, texts, relationships, art, reading, performance … life itself … is dialogic and dynamic. Ideally, we recognize the ‘interillumination’ of meaning as we experience our discourses in action and relation to others’, and this engenders a depth and complexity in our ideas and future discourses (Edmiston & Encisco, 2003).

With a postmodern eye on language and literacy, Carl Leggo (2006) encourages us to take risks in our writing, to explore creatively language and discourse because these are integral to and inextricable from living life fully, to forming one’s identity, to acquiring knowledge. Informed by Sara Mills’ (1997) notion of discourse as a site of struggle, Leggo suggests that truth and knowledge are not fixed but are produced or created in the interactions of people. He seeks to shake up long held notions of rhetoric and teaching writing, to experiment with language in postmodern ways and promote more creative and flexible kinds of text with which to discuss issues of discourse and writing. To this end, he presents eleven postmodern perspectives on language with eleven accompanying (and engaging) poems that “perform” their relationship with these perspectives: Postmodernism – acknowledges the constructive or constitutive dynamic of language; rejects totalizing narratives; understands that the subject is a construct that is always in process; contests and complicates the understanding of truth and fiction; understands discourse as personal and political; promotes understanding as fragmented and knowledge as partial; promotes critique, interrogation, and resisting closure; promotes text and intertextuality; promotes the subject as embodied; promotes the local as opposed to the universal; and promotes community based on diversity (Leggo, 2006). Leggo insists we attend to language as dynamic and creative while admitting this paper is “more about resonance than reason, more about evocation than exposition, more about performance than proof” (Leggo, 2006, p. 72). Positioning his view within a dynamic relationship, he nods to Terry Eagleton’s *critique* of postmodernism as essential reading.

Leggo alsoproposes how and why it is important to provide a place for students to come to know many different stories as well as to articulate their own stories, how storytelling is relational and reciprocal, that it helps us sustain dignity and avoid domination, that it connects us to others (Leggo, 2007). Leggo agrees with Hutchinson (Hutchinson, 1999) that education means paying attention to the meaning that children are creating in their lives and that we must address how we as teachers remind our students that “in all their writing, truth is always a complex concatenation of courage and wisdom, fact and fiction, process and pedagogy” (Leggo, 2007, p. 28). He suggests that in writing we are not seeking Truth with a capital T, but a truthful exchange with others, that to write or speak is to “invite a proliferation of other texts” (Leggo, 2007, p. 30). Leggo disagrees with Tompkins (Tompkins, 1987) who claims that knowing that knowledge is perspectival, language-based and culturally constructed does not *change* what *she* believes to be true. He claims that we are all in process and none of us complete, and if we write with courage and boldness and imagination, if we write in the pursuit of truth, our maturity emerges from our dialogue with others and through a sense of searching together. He admits that inviting people to write about their lives invites the opening of Pandora’s box, and that people writing truthfully invites the possibility of harm as well as healing. But if people don’t learn to write truthfully and personally in school classrooms, where will they learn to write in ways that foster questioning, researching, learning, and transforming? (Leggo, 2007) Classrooms need to be emancipatory environments for students and teachers to dialogue and collaborate. Classrooms need to be created as safe locations for lively dialogue between students and teachers so they may explore together the significant issues that shape lives. We need teachers and students devoted to questioning and critique and discovery, willing to be challenged and surprised, eager to enter into relationships, willing to make writing “relevant and real and riveting” (Leggo, 2007, p.34). Because writing contributes to identity formation and the possibility for plural truths, “the classroom environment ought to be constructed, not as an escape from the heart, but as a heartscape – an expansive and energetic and enthusiastic space where people can connect heartfully in writing truth” (Leggo, 2007, p. 36).Returning to Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism (1999), this may well apply to all of our scientific and artistic works.

Further examining the importance of understanding personal positioning in the act of discourse and meaning making, Leggo’s *Writing as Living Compos(t)ing: Poetry and desire* (Leggo, 2002)is a reflexive exploration of the nature of writing that explores the act of composition as well as postmodern de-composition. Also, De Freitas (2007) examines how the desire for presence in reflexive writing is not without complication as it may inscribe others’ absence while making the writer visible.

Given that we and our students encounter the world and engage in discourses involving multiple intelligences (Gardiner, 1995), and given the generative power of transmediation for learning (Siegel, 1995; Olshansky, 2008), it is important to consider the possibilities and implications of learning through multiple literacies. To this end, Jensen (2008) explores the significance of multimodal literacy in an arts environment. He acknowledges that technologies have a profound effect on our lives and suggests that we assist students in becoming critical participants in their interactions with new media. He suggests that theatre education in particular offers students and teachers a unique opportunity for critical interactions with new forms of literacy, interactions that are essential for effectively navigating contemporary culture. He calls on educators to engage with their students’ multimodal concerns through interactions that appreciate these new literacies. He believes that valuing multimodal literacies would move arts from the margins of education to education’s centre, and that by using new vocabularies we are more likely to engage with students in significant conversations about their lives and art, as well as our own.

**2.3 Technology in Drama and Theatre Education**

*Real players: drama, technology and education* (Caroll, Anderson, & Cameron, 2006) examines how technology and new media is transforming educational drama and youth theatre. In one scenario, process drama was combined with websites and artificial intelligence software to enact a situation where students responded as reporters to a virtual flood in an Australian town. Michael Anderson claims that youth today have a heightened interest in interactive experiences involving digital media and technology. They are interested in being creative partners rather than passive consumers of entertainment and information, and this has profound implications for visual and performing arts (Carroll, Anderson & Cameron, 2006). *Real players?* illustrates why and how theatre in education companies are using new approaches to the process of theatre devising , integrating digital performance technologies into the devising process. The authors also look at issues related to research in this area.

Kerry Francksen (2007) examines the implementation of *Isadora* software as part of the creative process and shares some of the philosophical and aesthetic challenges emerging from work that combines dance with new technologies. Her work focuses on the nature of the live and mediated body and ideas relating to presence and resonance. She examines the intersection of ‘imaginative play’ and ‘production of a polished outcome’ regarding the use of this software. Francksen claims that the use of this technology enabled her students to renegotiate and reconceptualize their performance space as well as their conception of composition. She suggests that the use of technological resources for composition should concentrate on how the learning of such technology can be part of the creative process and not just about learning how to use the interface, not just about playing with a new toy.

*Digital tools for performance* (AHRC ICT Methods Network) takes a look at some of the ways various performing arts practitioners have used digital tools for planning and designing and communicating and documenting performance related works (Grindley, 2007). Katherine Farley uncovers the way artists are reshaping dance theatre practices by integrating emerging digital technologies by exploring specific interactive technologies designed and employed by *Troika Ranch* artists: *Isadora and MidiDancer* (Farley, 2007). Importantly, central to Troika Ranch’s mission of integrating digital media into live performance is their conviction that technology must serve the dance’s narrative structure and composition (Farley, 2004). She also examines some of *Troika Ranch* artists’ current projects to suggest how their methods and practices might be applied to theatre. She claims that *Isadora* and *MidiDancer*, as media management tools, could be used in theatre as expressive opportunities for actors in live performance—*after* a director and design team consider the dramaturgical considerations of doing so. She insists that the technology serve the narrative. She cautions that the implementation of such technologies demand additional rehearsal time, and that cost of equipment is a concern.

Another consideration of the use of technology in drama and theatre education involves discussions around online drama versus live classroom drama. Rather than looking at this as a dichotomic argument, Michael Anderson proposes that we consider emerging technologies as yet new stages upon which the drama aesthetic can be played (Anderson, 2005). He states that aesthetics, technology and curriculum must engage in an evolving relationship, that the best way for students to understand technology’s influence is to use it. He insists that one of the bases of the drama aesthetic, the centrality of experiential learning, is not devalued through encounters with drama online. Classroom dramas create virtual experiences. Online dramas create virtual spaces as well as virtual experiences. Anderson also discusses the importance of critical reflection in examining whether online experiences are authentic experiences since “transformation depends on the effective exploration of the authentic through drama” (Anderson, p. 129).

Melissa Matusevich believes technology can play a significant role in a constructivist classroom and that the combination of technology and constructivist theory will revolutionize school reform (Matusevich, 1995). She states that appropriate use of technology naturally meets Barr’s (1990) five goals essential to meaningful reform: learning should be more independent, individualized, interactive, interdisciplinary, and intuitive.

Since students’ experience of live performance is likely shaped by the use of technology for design elements such as sound (as well as set and lighting), and I have a particular interest in sound design, it is important to consider the relationship between sound and theatre. Brown (2010) explores sound’s interaction with drama and human performance by suggesting different ways in which sound is created and interpreted to create and interpret meaning. In *Sound: A reader in theatre practice*, Brown discusses the history of sound design, sound as scenography (and its problems), the nature and use of sound effects, and how to think about as well as how to do theatre sound design. Likewise, Sonnenschein (2001) explores the power of music, voice and sound effects in cinema; some of this is directly applicable to sound design for theatre and some might be applied to cinematic elements in theatrical productions. Both volumes include theoretical discussions as well as practical applications and exercises.

In *Connecting Flights* (1998), Québecois director, actor and playwright, Robert Lepage, discusses why he incorporates a variety of media in his work. He confides that with a sense of adventure he is heading somewhere different, and that he is interested in theatre as a place where artists gather together and combine different disciplines and styles. Lepage values the accidental, the coincidental, the diverse, the daring, the difficult, the ridiculous, the transparent, and the transcendent. In *Connecting Flights* Lepage reflects on how both the shadow side of theatre (what goes on in the flies, the wings, in the control room and at an organizational level) and the light side of theatre (what takes place on stage) contribute to the making of myth and memory, powerful and transforming forces of the human mind and heart. He also reflects on the characteristic strengths of film vis-a-vis theatre and his attraction to it as a symbol for gathering, like a fire we gather around to tell stories in the black of night. He considers why we come to the theatre: to witness a transfiguration, whether in the actors, within the story, or in the lives of the characters. He explains how and why this transfiguration is best served with concrete transformations —sets that move, characters who change physically. He suggests that what moves an audience emotionally and makes theatre more enduring is not the expression of emotion but emotion represented, symbolized, stylized. His work is at the forefront of experimentation with new technologies. Lepage provides a compelling argument that if we have something to say, the medium will be our message.

**2.4 Arts and Literacy Education Inquiry and Reflective Practice**

In examining the nature and purpose of drama research, John Somers (1996) begins with a definition of research that clearly differentiates it from mere enquiry. However, he argues that the line dividing individual reflective practice and research is “blurred” and only a little “tweaking” of the reflective process is required in order to call “research” what teachers and practitioners do on a regular basis. He argues that reflection and evaluation are embedded in the practice of drama people, that they are necessarily reflective practitioners, and that the investigations of practice by the people who are doing it must be the basis of drama research. He examines possible subjects of research and likens quantitative and qualitative approaches to research to car headlights – “Each has its distinct and separate source of light, but they are used to illuminate a common view with the possibility of considerable overlap” (Somers, 1996, p. 169). Though the qualitative approach may do the bulk of the work, there is a place in drama research for the collection and analysis of quantitative data. What characterizes all of the work is the use of grounded theory – where the theory emerges from an interpretative study of the phenomenon, rather than being imposed on it. Research methodology exists on a continuum that embraces all possible strategies, and a research approach is only wrong if it is not helpful in illuminating the research focus. At the same time, we must recognize that who we are and what we value shapes our attitudes to research questions and processes as well as how we interpret our discoveries. Somers (1996) insists that research outcomes must be communicated because the purpose of all research is to gain more knowledge and to assess new knowledge against knowledge already acquired.

Carson and Sumara (1997) envision educational action research as a living practice. Their collection of twenty-two essays examines the relationships among forms of educational action research, written reports of action research, and the lived experiences of action researchers. As a collection, these pieces suggest how educational action research practice is a way of living and understanding that requires more of the researcher than simply applying a research method. It is a wide ranging collection of works that include applications, reflections and interconnections of Buddhism, complexity theory, phenomenology, literary and poststructural theory, postmodern philosophy, psychology, and ecology. Carson and Sumara (1997) explain why action research must include some account of the way the investigation shapes and is shaped by the investigator. Some of the essays focus on research into teaching, others on personal learning experiences. All include interpretations of what it means to include action research in one’s life. These essays illustrate the complexity of relations in action research practices rather than provide an explanation of various action research methodologies or procedures. Believing that this edited collection is itself a form of educational action research, the authors introduce the collection with a representation of their thinking and the process they experienced while creating the book (their choice and ordering of papers, and resulting juxtapositions, etc.).

Drawing on traditions of participatory research and performative ethnography, Conrad (2004) discusses popular theatre as a research method. She explains how popular theatre as participatory research can be research *for, with* and *by* the participants, rather than research *on* the participants, breaking down the distinction between researchers and researched (Conrad, 2004). Diane Nowlan (2001) believes that a potential model for teacher professional development lies in action research. She cites Johnston (Johnston, 1994) in her claim that action research is a form of reflective practice that is well known and second nature to teachers, but insists that it adds to reflective practice an emphasis on collaboration and the sharing of found knowledge. Nowlan addresses the tension between action research and more traditional approaches to research (ethnography phenomenology, heuristics, epistemology) as well as how the inclusion of an external researcher often engenders feelings of imposition and enforcement of change leaving one to wonder whose vision and implementation of change is occurring, and why. Nowlan suggests that theorizing about their practice would empower teachers, and that action research allows for autonomy and engaged learning in how teaching and learning evolves in a classroom. McTaggart (1991) identifies participatory action research with critical social theory. He defines principles of action research that can be tested in ongoing practices so that plans can be made for future action that is likely to improve the lives of those who participate. He explains that the critique of participatory action research is less judgmental, more oriented to future action. He supports Tandon’s (Tandon, 1988) claim that participants in this kind of research have ownership of its theory and practice: they have a role in setting the agenda of the inquiry; they participate in the data collection and its analysis; they have control over the use of the outcomes and of the process. He insists that “considerable energy must be directed at ensuring reciprocity and symmetry of relations in the participatory action research group” (McTaggart, 1991, p. 174) and that “the agenda of the least powerful become an important focus of the groups’ work” (McTaggart, 1991, p. 175). Action research, then, is a self-reflective spiral of cyclical planning, re-planning, implementation, observing, and further reflecting. It establishes self-critical communities, is a political process, draws on research methods of phenomenology, ethnography, and case study, and information is gathered in the usual naturalistic research ways. Its primary purpose is to make action taken better informed and more prudent (McTaggart, 1991). McTaggart cites Carr and Kemmis (1986) in his argument that participatory action research is the only form of inquiry that meets the “five minimum requirements” of a critical educational science and insists how important it is to continue testing, amending, and extending its principles.

In *Researching Drama and Arts Education: Paradigms & Possibilities*, Philip Taylor provides a collection of important insights into how research might be negotiated, how studies can be designed, what support systems are needed so that work is documented in an honest manner, and what research methods are appropriate for specific investigative questions. This collection of essays by highly experienced arts educators (Philip Taylor, Sharon Grady, John Carroll, Brian Edmiston, Jeffrey Wilhelm, Lowell Swortzell, Angela O’Brien, Johnny Saldana, Lin Wright, Cecily O’Neill, John O’Toole, Jonathan Neelands, Margo Ely, Gavin Bolton) challenges some of the ‘myths’ of arts based research and champions teacher and practitioner based research and storytelling as a way of knowing. In *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*, Patricia Leavy covers six genres of arts based inquiry: narrative inquiry, poetry, music, performance, dance/movement, and visual art (Leavy, 2009) and illustrates how these practices coincide with critical perspectives on ways of knowing and learning. She explains how various forms and genres of arts-based research are adept at uncovering perspectives that may otherwise be subjugated. Arts based research competently challenges stereotypes and dominant ideology, raises critical consciousness, fosters empathetic understandings, and builds coalitions (Leavy, 2009).

Narrative inquiry can surely be a rational enterprise, suggests Carola Conle, and an important force in teacher education (Conle, 2001). Taking criteria from Habermas’s (1984) concept of communicative rationality she posits that implicit rationality is built into regular conversation in which participants orient themselves toward understanding others rather than “succeeding” with their own points of view. She draws a parallel between these practices and narrative inquiry, and claims that both provide an opportunity for participants to challenge others’ claims to truth and social appropriateness (Conle, 2001). In his consideration of narrative inquiry, Leggo attends to the *art* of discourse (Leggo, 2008). He suggests that the mundane events of our lives become stories when invested with significance in *the ways* they are told. Artists of all kinds frame fragments of experience in order to remind us that there is significance in the mundane, but in storytelling the significance of these fragments is highlighted in “stories that are told and written in energetic and engaging and evocative ways” (Leggo, 2008, p. 5) and must be told with an interest in hearing others’ stories, with a commitment to dialogue and reciprocity and an awareness of audience. Further, Leggo claims, we co-produce meaning with authors. Citing Freire (1993), he reminds us that “every reading of the word is preceded by a reading of the world” (Leggo, 2008, p. 8). Since we are informed and shaped by the views and experiences of others, interpretation needs to be entered into with care and openness and critique, with a sense that interpretation is temporary. Most of all, since there are really only a few stories, what makes a story valuable is the *way* it is told. This is in keeping with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) notion of narrative as both phenomenon under study and method of study. We must transcend straightforward ways of telling stories, urges Leggo, and seek complex and richly nuanced representations of lived experience (Leggo, 2008).

Prendergast (2003) examines the creation and construction of soliloquies as a way to engage in reflective practice and qualitative interpretive inquiry. She discusses how soliloquy is a dialogue between an acting “I” (process) and a reflective “Me”(theory) and an opportunity to move inside the source of an inquiry (Prendergast 2003). Prendergast also looks at poetic inquiry as a form of qualitative research that incorporates poetry as a component of investigation (Prendergast, 2009).

*So, as an educator, I ask, what have I given my heart to? (*Leggo, 2008).

A/r/tography recognizes that thought and action are inextricably linked (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis (2008). To be engaged in a/r/tography means inquiring through an ongoing process of art making of any kind and writing that is interconnected with this art making, not separate from it. A/r/tography is about oneself as artist/researcher/teacher. It is also about communities of artists/researchers/teachers who engage in shared critical inquiries, a/r/tographers who present their collective works to others, works that evoke replies and further inquiry. A/r/tography can occur anywhere in and through time. It is a form of representation that recognizes text and image as well as where and how they meet (through greeting, braiding, weaving, folding) in what Irwin describes as moments of métissage (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). It is a research methodology that “intentionally unsettles perception and complicates undertstandings” (Springay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, p. xxvi) and so alters how we’ve already come to know and live within space and time. It is informed by practice-based feminist, post-structuralist, hermeneutic and other postmodern theories. An a/r/tographical approach to knowing and understanding involves understanding through touch, which suggests an active involvement with the subject matter, as well as sight. It is a way of knowing through relationality. It attends to sensory experiences and knowledge drawn from our bodies and our connections with others (Springay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, p. xxi). Rather than classifying the world in dualistic terms, a/r/tographers recognize that words and works and beings are interconnected and that meaning is constituted betwixt and between them. Thus, educators who consider themselves a/r/tographers are committed to understanding and interpreting within communities of learners and are “concerned with creating circumstances that produce knowledge and understanding through artistic and educational inquiry-laden processes” (Springay Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, p. xxvi).

**2.5 Art, Wisdom, and Community**

*Love is the experiencing of another being in one’s own soul.* (Steiner, 1975)

Before moving into the Collaborations and Connections section of this paper, there are a few pieces of literature to consider that in one way or another have refused to be constrained by categorization. These are works that resonate around and within the literature discussed so far and between and around and within the practical collaborations and connections described in the discussion that follows. Recollecting the opening of this literature review, these works may further illuminate my positioning and story.

Anne Bogart’s *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* examines the challenges of making theatre and creating ‘art with great presence’ (Bogart, 2001). *And then you act: Making art in an unpredictable world* discusses the importance of action, of making art, during times of personal or political difficulty (Bogart, 2007).

*Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* by Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990) illustrates, among other things, the nature of inspiration and creativity, the power of limits and mistakes, the unfolding of form, patience and surrender, and art for life’s sake. *Art & Fear: Observations On the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking* explores the way art gets made and why it often does not get made (Bayles & Orland, 1993).

*Proust Was a Neuroscientist* illustrates how science has never been the only path to knowledge (Lehrer, 2007). *The Wisdom of Insecurity* acknowledges the wisdom of the body, of being aware, of presence in the moment, and of creative morality (1951).

Satish Kumar’s *You Are Therefore I Am* traces the sources of Kumar’s understanding of the world as a network of diverse relationships (Kumar, 2004). Davis & Harré illustrate how “an individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate” and “stories are located within a number of different discourses, and thus vary dramatically in terms of the language used, the concepts, issues and moral judgments made relevant and the subject positions made available within them” (Davis & Harré, 1990).

Leggo’s discussion of writing as a truthful exchange with others reminds us that “we are all in process, none of us are complete, and therefore we all need to write, and we need to write with courage and boldness and imagination in the pursuit of truth” (2007, p. 4). Martin Buber (1970) suggests that the sacred is here and now and in our relationships with others. Cohen and Leggo’s (2008) poetic perspective on mentorship is a living and artful and moving dialogue that serves as mentorship for mentors.

Lyn Fels suggests how we might stop and listen and dwell in performative moments, be fully present for the awakening of and coming into presence of our students, and our responsibility to do this. She considers that we might set aside others’ instruction of how to be and “move outside the unsayable” (Salverson, 2008) to find the courage to bring forth ourselves anew in the presence of others, and as educators be wide awake to welcome each child’s arrival (Fels, 1010). Prendergast (2011) suggests that we can experience glimpses of utopia in performance contexts, that we can shift collective acts of imagination that are the basis of how we currently live to envision new ways to live in the world and how this philosophy can assist our assessment of what we are doing as educators and practitioners who practice socially committed pedagogy.

Conquergood (2001) looks at performance studies as a hybridizing force that rejects the perceived binary between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualizing and creating, and insists that words will never be enough to reveal that which the soul lives by.

**SECTION 3:** **COLLABORATIONS AND CONVERSATIONS**

Since I can remember I have enjoyed living and learning in conversation with others. Before looking at the collaborations I became involved with while working on my graduate degree, a brief look at where I was coming from reveals the momentum of my course’s direction. My work with students often involved written correspondence about our encounters and experiences with text and non-text art works. I adapted Nancie Atwell’s (1987) Reading Workshop Lit Log Letters to the work we do in our drama classes (Appendix A). Also, in addition to occasionally using process drama to collaboratively glean and shape meaning from our literary and lived experiences, we produced the stage play *Ten Lost Years* (a collection of stories and songs from the Depression) which was based on the book by Barry Broadfoot where he published a collection of memories of those who had survived Canada’s Great Depression. We also devised work for school Remembrance Day ceremonies that emerged from our research and reshaping of others’ words and experiences during the world wars. So, I came to graduate studies with a passion for authentic, artistic, reflective, relevant and original work.

I also set out on my graduate journey with a profound interest in the communicative and transformative power of physical expression. Our work in class and in our school drama productions involved dance and tableaux. I collaborated with a former dancer, Anne Davis, to choreograph tableaux and movement pieces in *Ten Lost Years* and dance pieces in our production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Anne worked at our school as an educational aid for students with special needs and volunteered her time with our drama program as well as our gymnastics program. We attended Morris Panych’s *The Overcoat* at The Vancouver Playhouse in 1997, where I was profoundly inspired by the beauty and power of Physical Theatre. I wanted more of this in my work with students and I wanted to explore with them why and how this would affect our performances, our audiences, and our ideas about ourselves. Local actor and director David Mackay worked with us on our Commedia dell’ arte unit, and Gerry Mackay worked with us on stage combat and characterization in our classes and for our production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream.* All of these collaborations and conversations inspired me to further explore this aspect of our work.

I am forever and profoundly grateful for the inspirational and influential collaborations we were lucky to have with the late musician and composer, Oliver Schroer. We worked on many projects together, and he worked directly with students in composing and recording original music and soundscape for our productions. I continue to be especially interested in how sound and sound design shapes our experience of live and cinematic performance.

Before graduate school, my lighting design experience was minimal and I depended on textbooks and friends for ensuring we had adequate stage lighting for our classroom projects as well as our drama productions. The lighting design course I took with Alan Brodie (designer for *The Overcoat*) was at the very beginning of my graduate studies; it set me on a course that had to include an exploration and examination of how the dark side of theatre contributes to the making of meaning and memories. I wanted to know more so I could explore more of this with my students.

The year my senior theatre performance students and I invited elementary school students to an ArtsCamp we designed and held after school every other week for twelve weeks was an exciting one. Sixty elementary students, grades four to seven, signed up; we worked in groups of eight to ten students with senior leadership slightly varying from week to week. Every year since, we’ve had students enrolled in Drama 8 who remember ArtsCamp. This year eleven of our Drama 8 students clearly and fondly remember Artscamp from when they were in grade four. Since beginning graduate studies I have not had time to continue ArtsCamp, but the experience has further provoked my interest in examining drama and theatre as a means and expression of social engagement and learning. My students and I look forward to starting up ArtsCamp again next year.

The opportunities and experiences I briefly outlined here to a degree guided the focus of my graduate studies. I wanted to know more about collaborative play-creating and devised theatre; physical expression in process and performance, movement theatre and dance; the use of technology in drama and theatre education; and drama/theatre as a means and expression of social engagement and learning.

**3.1 Playbuilding and Devised Theatre**

Over the course of my graduate studies I’ve met with several opportunities to develop my practice of collaborative play-creating and devised theatre as well as broaden my understanding of the capacity and limitations of this kind of work. Before taking an ethnography course with George Belliveau, I had not read *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman (Tectonic Theater Project); this was my introduction to research based theatre. I became more involved with the play when I composed the sound design for an LLED reading performance of the play. Shortly after, I attended a high school production of *The Laramie Project* in Vancouver, though in some school districts the play was considered too controversial to mount. We now read this play in our senior performance class every year as a model for research-based theatre, and every year students work through a familiar process of understanding and appreciation which starts out as “This isn’t a play” and “This would be boring” to become “We should do this play. It’s really powerful because it’s true.” I have found that students can envision a powerful production of the play when we stop to discuss ways to present the work that include expressive dramatic structures and elements of design. When we are finished reading the play, student reflections include their appreciation for the multiple, sometimes conflicting voices and views that contribute to its authentic tone and for the capacity of the work to provoke thought and conversation.

My love of *The Laramie Project* led to conversations with Mia Perry, who directed the LLED reading of the play while a PhD candidate in the department. Mia’s research was in the area of devised theatre, and together we attended Forced Entertainment’s *Bloody Mess* in Seattle in December 2005. Later we designed a devised theatre unit for my Drama 9 students (Appendix B) who had had only one semester of Drama 8 before being introduced to this project. I am forever grateful for their trust and commitment to the endeavour, and for their honest feedback throughout the process. In a ten-page year-end drama letter that included her view of this process as well as reflections about what the project had meant to her and her class, one Grade 9 student described our creation and production of *Wunzaponna*, as it was called, as a “large leap.” She made clear what she felt were the problems and rewards of this kind of work, how it had contributed to her growth as a person, and the gratitude she felt she could not clearly express, yet, in a movement piece or tableau.

Since *Wunzaponna*, I have continued to work collectively with professionals and students on the process and performance of original scenes and plays that include elements of research and reflection, as well as elements of design. Our senior performance class participated in *The Edge Project* in 2010, facilitated by Green Thumb Artistic Director, Shawn MacDonald, and we are fortunate to have the opportunity to do so again in 2013-2014; our work will be presented at The PuSh International Performing Arts Festival in 2014. Student class initiated projects (*Inoculation and Twisted*) are in progress; we hope to present these next year as well.

**3.2 Physical Expression in Process and Performance**

My interest in the communicative and transformative power of physical expression connected me with Kathryn Ricketts who was, at the time, finishing her M.A. at the Centre of Cross Faculty Inquiry (CCFI). Kathryn is a choreographer, dancer and teacher with a thirty-year history in dance. At this time, Kathryn’s work focused on broadening one’s understanding and appreciation of physical expression and de-mystifying the physical language of the body. She believed in making dance more “user-friendly” which would, on an experiential level, foster greater understanding and appreciation of the performing arts. I obtained an ArtStarts grant to have Kathryn work with us.

There turned out to be two parts to her residency. Initially, Kathryn worked with our Grade 11/12 Performance class to physically explore and interpret the ideas and relationships in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, the play chosen for our spring production in 2007. Not all students in the class would be part of the production, so we focused on a study of scenes selected by the students after they were introduced to the play as a whole. This would prepare them for a more profound understanding of the play as well as a deeper enjoyment of it.

After establishing a rigorous warm up ritual, Kathryn guided students through their embodiment of characters’ experiences, their relationships with each other — the tensions and reliances, the push and pull, give and take, the hanging on and letting go that make relationships, and therefore scenes and stories, dramatically interesting. Our central concept of a ship at sea and the working of its sails in stormy, calm, and light wind weather remained with us as we explored the way relationships work, the way we learn as teachers and students, the way we manage “all hands on deck” in a collective process and presentation that includes ESL students and students with special needs. In tandem with their physical work, students interpreted their scenes using the original text, composed and performed interpretations in a style or manner of their choice, created movement pieces that expressed their understanding of chosen scenes, and shared music and lyrics to songs they felt elucidated dramatic themes and feelings. In the end they wrote letters to the ghost author about their experiences with the play and shared some memories of their experience on a collective “graffiti” banner. One of my favourite ways Kathryn guided students in the physical work of this voyage was the concentric text analysis. Students articulated the essence of their scenes in just a few words; tableaux and vignettes were created from these, and movement pieces were developed. The point-counterpoint creations were particularly physical and engaging. In pairs students had to find the communication, tension, connection, and balance in their characters’ relationships and share this physically with one another: I can still see and feel the images of Viola’s and Sebastian’s struggle to hold on while being torn apart in a shipwreck, Viola and the Captain’s commitment to Viola’s scheme to protect herself; Antonio’s having to let go of dearly loved Sebastian.

We used this approach in our rehearsal process for a full production of the play. This was the second part of the residency where Kathryn shared her gifts with an even more diverse group of students (ages thirteen through eighteen). We are grateful for the time she was able to spend with us, and how the movement work she did with students influenced the rehearsal process for all of the scenes, not just the “storm” we created together at the opening of the play, though this storm piece was beautiful, the highlight of our production and its central image.

Altogether our voyage had delightful and stormy days: there were times when we were racing with the wind, moving forward with exhilarating ideas, and other times spent in the doldrums. The trust established and built upon as a result of the time we were able to spend together provided the strength, safety, and freedom we needed to move forward, or, sometimes to simply wait and listen.

I was fortunate enough to obtain another ArtStarts grant the following year to have Kathryn work with us on our devised theatre project, *Wunzaponna*. The year after that, we applied what we’d learned and practiced with Kathryn to our production of *The Cagebirds* by David Campton. Furthermore, on this foundation I have continued to expand and deepen my understanding and appreciation for further layering and complexity with regard to the way movement, physical expression, and dance supports and transmediates issues and ideas relevant to youth, their identity, and their community.

Although I had been a dancer when I was young, this work broadened and deepened my understanding and appreciation of corporal expression and helped me develop a creative confidence with which I met dancer and choreographer, Julie Tomaino. We’ve worked with Julie for the last few years now, on full productions (*Little Shop of Horrors, Macbeth*) as well as classroom lessons and projects. We work side by side, in creative conversation and with generous reciprocity.

**3.3 The Use of Technology in Drama/Theatre Education**

Before taking graduate courses in drama and theatre education I was familiar with the basic elements of sound and lighting design and had some practical experience with video editing. I was interested in the expressive opportunities of new technologies not only for the cinematic elements and projections we now use in our productions, but also for how technology might serve our imaginative process, our sense of play and how we approach, conceptualize, and shape our material. I wanted to become more adept in my use of technology so I could further engage students in an understanding of technology’s influence, and wondered if such understanding would come from an adventurous use of technology as part of our creative process. Furthermore, I wanted to explore with students the different ways in which movement and lighting and sound and video can represent and symbolize or stylize their stories and messages, serving to make their work more engaging and memorable.

For these reasons I purchased small hand held projectors (which we used in our contribution to *The Edge Project*) as well as a rear projection screen which we have used in many of our classroom projects and school productions. We have several video cameras students now have the option to use for their explorations and creations, sometimes discovering what matters to them by simply looking back at what they’ve randomly chosen to digitally capture. I’ve learned and now teach students how to use a variety of video editing software (e.g. Final Cut Pro, iMovie) and sound design software (e.g. Soundtrack, Garageband, Audacity) as well as digital layout and design software (Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator). Our image or symbol or soundscape assignments now include the option of using new technology in addition to the lighting and soundscape options we had before, including live-feed video on stage during a live performance.

I explored and practiced what I wanted to take back to my students on graduate course projects. In addition to designing and operating the sound for LLED’s reading of *The Laramie Project*, my contribution to the New Scholars performance at UBC’s Unsettling Conversations Conference in 2006 involved further study and practice with video and sound technology and software for recording, designing, editing and projection. I was interested in using technology to artistically render: the colliding and connection of ideas, images, moments, emotions, stories, and breath; the generative and regenerative power of relationships; the embodiment of “in between”; what we leave out of conversations, presentations, and research; the creative possibilities in the accidental and coincidental; what resonates and why we remember; how what we remember influences what we bring to our and others’ subsequent words and works. Since then, my students have created similar soundscape collages that suggest the inclusion of a variety of voices and views and their intersection or interception/silencing.

As part of a graduate independent study, I added a variety of new technology skills to my repertoire when I designed, developed and published a website for our Drama and Theatre Arts Program (studiozwindsor.com) with the purpose of documenting and sharing student work and connecting students and the artful expression of their ideas with the community. As well, it may be a place we can publish future action research and a/r/tography projects. We haven’t as yet explored the website’s capacity for online drama.

**3.4 Drama/Theatre as a Means/Expression of Social Engagement and Learning**

Possibly because the intrinsic value of making art is not always immediately measurable, some still consider drama and theatre education to be a frill that we should offer only if there is extra time and money. Proponents of drama and theatre education and advocates of drama across the curriculum understand the power of drama and theatre to assist youth development and social consciousness as well as its capacity to build communities and facilitate needed change by providing opportunities for students to observe and examine the nature of social living and human endeavour. I continue to look for ways in which the work we do in our drama and theatre arts program reaches out to the larger community so we may include them in our process of connection and conflict, resolution and transformation.

When I first began my graduate work at UBC I assisted with a drama consultation for teachers wishing to incorporate drama and collective play-creation in their elementary classrooms. I was introduced to and helped to implement the structured guidance provided in *Theatre for Conflict, Community and Dialogue* by Michael Rohd. It was the beginning of a shift in focus for my own drama program where we continue to emphasize the importance of dialogue in our examination and expression of social conflict and connection. The approach and activities in this little red book also guided our first ArtsCamp for elementary school students and, along with what we have learned from the collective play-building in our high school classes, will undoubtedly continue to influence our future ArtsCamp projects.

Students and I have also talked about working with the people living in the seniors’ residence close by the school on an intergenerational drama project. We are looking forward to exploring this possibility next year.

Before *Wunzaponna*, we had not included a talk-back session after our shows. After witnessing talkbacks in the PuSh Festival plays we attended, we included them after *Wunzaponna*. Students in the cast as well as in the audience appeared to value this kind of connection—the cast because they believed it “heightened the message of the play” and the audience because it provided an opportunity to ask questions about a type of theatre with which they were unfamiliar. We have now included talk-backs in other performances and intend to have talk-backs for shows to which elementary students are specially invited.

This kind of connection and reflection about what we are doing in our drama and theatre arts program and how it contributes to youth identity and social development can also be fostered in the written conversations we have in the drama letters we write to one another. In the past the written correspondence I've had with students shows how they're feeling about what they're learning/experiencing as well as what they think they're learning/have learned. It reveals when they're struggling, when they don't understand something, when they finally understand something, when they want to know more about something, etc., and these things are not always addressed otherwise, either because students are not comfortable doing this in class time, or because they don't agree with other students and do not want to seem either too critical or too enthusiastic. These letters are particularly helpful when introducing 'new' or 'unusual' material and/or methods or when working with guests. They also help me to understand students' processes in a learning environment where sometimes only some voices are heard.

Perhaps it would be interesting to learn through more focused research if students think letter writing is a helpful means of communication and connection, if it is valuable to them as learners, and if I as a teacher find it so, and how so. Reading correspondence from the past has shown how students' views of the work we're doing *and their views of themselves* have changed/evolved throughout the process of the work. I'd like to focus on my end of the correspondence, how to refine my letters, ask helpful questions that don't sound like testing or teacher questions, how to keep up with such a large task when time is limited.

Given that class sizes are large, I participate in letter writing with students to maintain a connection with individual students, to hear every voice and design/redesign lessons to meet the needs and interests of students as revealed in their correspondence with one another and with me. This simple social interaction provides opportunities for what might need addressing with the whole group as well as what learning can be enhanced for an individual student given that the student may be at a 'different place' than some others in preparedness and skill. It provides an opportunity to individualize instruction, to set individual goals and tasks, to 'see' individual students as they 'come into being'.

I intend to revisit already existing correspondence to 'see what I can see' and how to organize the letter writing process next year to discover how I might go about it in the future, consider if it's worthwhile and why it is (according to students and to me). The letters could address devised and scripted works, and the rewards/trials of collective art making, as well as theatre literacy in both the light and shadow sides of theatre arts. I've also noticed that 'journal' entries and letter writing are sometimes quite different in their organization and readability, that letters may provide a more natural opportunity and purpose for student reflection because of this 'social' milieu in which students understand they're 'heard' and 'seen', and that their writing as well as their performances improve because they appreciate having an 'audience'. Some of these correspondences are especially rich, and together we could artfully represent and bring to life these letters and conversations.

**SECTION 4: UNFOLDING EXPRESSION OF MY JOURNEY**

This leg of what I have come to see as a larger a/r/tographic journey has provided many opportunities for me to collaborate with and learn from other professionals to design projects and programs that foster positive emotional and social experiences for students while developing their abilities to express themselves artistically and imaginatively. With new understanding I have completed the prototype of an artful expression of my ongoing journey; my students are assisting with the rendering of the finished work which will be performative as well as visual. While working on this piece with me, they expressed an interest in doing similar projects of their own. We’ve talked about how we could include work like this in their play-creating and devised works; for them, as for me, it may have the power to act as a guide in attending to and understanding themselves and the world, or act as an inspiration that makes their art and their lives more meaningful.

This work in progress is an 8 ft. x 8 ft. six log R/A/F/T which, although one of the simplest of boat designs, allows for drifting and waiting as well as travelling a charted course. The Researcher, Artist, Family/Friend, Teacher logs are contiguously strapped together with unnamed outside logs that represent other important elements and aspects of an ongoing journey. Accompanying the R/A/F/T is an origami gooney with a nine foot wingspan. A gooney is a laysan albatross, a large seabird with the greatest wingspan of any bird; it is known for its ungainly take offs and clumsy landings. In the sky, however, it is powerful and graceful and can spend months flying enormous distances over the sea. Even in windless conditions this bird can soar hours without flapping its wings, and its navigational powers are impressive.

Before being folded, this gooney serves as a commonplace for scraps of every kind: research and reading notes, quotes, reflections, excerpts, paintings, drawings, photos, proverbs and prayers, letters, sketches, prints, poetry, reflections, my own and others’ responses to my work, and more. The other side is white. When the gooney is folded the scraps meet contiguously, accidentally, coincidentally, fortuitously. These foldings and meetings provide temporary connections or places of meaning making, much like the stumbling tumbling rumbling of poetry pieces in a fertile void before they make a poem. When folding the gooney, perhaps photographs from our production of *Twelfth Night* will touch research data, or lines of poetry, or reflections about a/r/tography. Any of these shared borders could provide a place for further thought and meaning making about, say, the nature of love and relation/ships, or about how we might look at poetry as qualitative research. In anyone’s unfolding of such a bird, the connections attended to will be influenced and shaped by one’s positionings, one’s stances, one’s linguistic and non-linguistic eternal dialogue with oneself, with others, with the world. When folded and in flight, we see only some of the scraps that colour the bird.

Upon the raft is a performed choreographed movement piece between two people who are complementary in some way and who poetically embody concepts of relation, tension, contradiction and connection. The work is layered with vocal chorus, conversation, soundscape, and music. It is a living inquiry that moves in/securely. A makeshift sail provides a projection surface where images, memories, reflections, connections can emerge and vanish. In a treasure chest under a seat on the raft is correspondence with students, family and friends, colleagues, teachers and mentors.

**SECTION 5: CONCLUSION**

I began this project with the intention of examining ways of creating collective drama and theatre works that express the issues and ideas students are passionate about sharing, as well as ways of looking at the implications of their artwork. I wanted to look at how multiple literacies might extend and enhance the development of these artworks while fostering positive emotional and social experiences for the people creating them. I was eager to extend the ways I collaborate with and learn from other professionals to design these projects and programs for youth.

After an extensive literature review of drama and theatre education (and arts education in general) which consists of multiple lenses to inform my various areas of interest, I have shown a glimpse of how I have brought that thinking and reading into practice as well as shed light on the different approaches I’ve explored. I have discovered that as an educator I have given my heart to collaboration, connection, community and inquiry in an ongoing search for what can be the most rewarding aesthetic and learning experience for the students.

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**APPENDIX A**

Dear

I have enjoyed reading your Drama Journal entries so far this term. Thank you for taking the time to write thoughtful and inspiring notes. Some of your reflections and insights have been particularly helpful in shaping our lessons and helping me understand your experiences and points of view.

If you have found this activity difficult, thank you for trying your best. I think if you keep trying you will enjoy looking over what you have written at the end of the course, and you will learn from your own reflections.

In addition to showing my appreciation for your thoughtful work, this letter gives an example of how we will write in letter form for the next few months.

In your drama letters, reflect on what you are doing and learning in class. Notice the kinds of activities you enjoy most, and which you struggle with, and why. Talk about your successes and your daily goals. Ask questions, make suggestions. Explain in what ways you are challenging yourself. Make a note of how others find success. Discuss how you solve problems, and how you are involved as an individual and as a group member.

Feel free to talk about how the work we do in class reflects or does not reflect the world in which we live, and what you think and feel about the issues that arise and how they are creatively expressed.

Over the next few months, try to write to a variety of people in the class, and they will write back to you. Be sure to write at least one letter per week to me.

I would like to thank you in advance for the letters you write with conscientious effort. They will be a pleasure to read.

Sincerely,

Ms. Dunn

**APPENDIX B**

**Devised Theatre Unit**

By discovering and representing issues meaningful to them, students will be engaged in researching and expressing the role of youth as constructive critics and members of society in general, and of their community in particular.

Over the course of six months students will

• explore the literacies of the performing arts (dance/movement; gesture; dramatic text; sound; lighting; image projection, etc.)

• watch a selection of professional devised and traditional theatre productions and engage in critical analysis and transmediation activities

• create devised performances that explore/express issues of social critique and youth identity

**Part One**: “Thrice is nice.”

October, November, December

We will use student selected scenes from plays and stories to explore three ways of interpreting and presenting ‘the same’ scene. This will involve reintepretation through movement studies and dance and explore the use of new creative technologies. An invited audience will attend a presentation of this project.

**Part Two**: “What are you watching?”

January, February

This is about youth spectatorship and the development of young people’s critical abilities. We will go to see a play, and explore how we understand and enjoy (or don’t enjoy) what we see in a performance.

**Part Three**: “Can You See What I’m Saying?”

March, April

This is a creation process that includes forming, rehearsing and presenting a performance piece. This work will be based on ideas and feelings students have about what matters to them. These will be presented in one or more of the following ways:

• a presentation/demonstration to other classes (at elementary and/or secondary level) highlighting the process of our creative/critical explorations

• a presentation at a professional development conference highlighting the process of our creative/critical explorations

The process and presentation will be researched and shared using a variety of media with a particular focus on physical expression/movement/dance — an embodiment of the exploration and representation of images and issues that emerge.

Non-arts links:

Social intelligence, social responsibility and social justice: Students will be collaborating to work in small and large groups and will develop multiple skills and literacies in the areas of leadership, communication, and artistic expression. These skills will be used to constructively and creatively critique/express their ideas, identities, and communities.

Many of our students are involved with projects that promote social awareness and responsibility — Carnivals that raise money for the North Shore Youth Safe House; Book Drives for residents of the Downtown Eastside; Fashion Shows that raise money for Covenant House Youth Projects.

Looking at the languages of performance media, particularly the embodiment of our explorations and movement/dance representations of issues that emerge, this programengages students in the artistic exploration and expression of issues that concern them, some of which correspond with these projects.

Social Studies: Students will be exploring the context of their identities and communities by examining them within a historical/political context.

Phys. Ed: Using rhythm and movement students will explore how their bodies speak.

English: Students will analyze/develop their reading and writing skills, including an understanding of poetry, to explore/express/develop their understanding of and skills in non-verbal communication.