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**Living Wide-Awakeness: High School Drama Teachers Creating  
Opportunities for Powerful Encounters with the Arts**

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**Living Wide-Awakeness: High School Drama Teachers Creating  
Opportunities for Powerful Encounters with the Arts**

by

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**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

To Emma, may you have a life filled with powerful encounters.

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**Living Wide-Awakeness: High School Drama Teachers Creating  
Opportunities for Powerful Encounters with the Arts**

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Kathlyn Marie Steedly, Ph.D.  
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Supervisor: Lisa Goldstein

This dissertation investigates the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. Chapter 1 introduces my research question and important terms, such as arts education, aesthetic education, and the aesthetic experience, and relates terms to powerful encounters with the arts. Why powerful encounters with the arts matter at this educational moment is also addressed.

Chapter 2 synthesizes relevant literature in the area of arts education, aesthetic education, and drama education while forwarding the specific conceptual framework for this study. The literature review seeks to highlight the significant attention paid to the instrumental outcomes of arts education, the lack of emphasis given to aesthetic concepts in recent arts education literature, and the breadth of literature addressing drama in education. Within this chapter, the concept of the aesthetic experience, and specifically wide-awakeness, will be explored as the framework for my investigation of powerful encounters with the arts.

Chapter 3 details the methodology that guided this investigation. Data gathering within my study centered on participant observation in two high school

drama classrooms over a period of 16 weeks (8 weeks per teacher), interviews, and a personal reflective journal. Data analysis focused on open coding of data in an effort to identify emergent themes with respect to the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts.

Chapters 4 and 5 are case studies of two high school drama teachers. Each case study articulates the specific ways in which each teacher creates opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. In discussing these methods and moments, I identify themes present in their teaching. In looking at their teaching philosophies and practices, I highlight the variety of ways in which these teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts.

Chapter 6 responds to the original research question. Included in my response is a cross-case analysis of the two teachers involved in the study and a presentation of overarching themes present in the ways in which they create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of implication for various members of the education community, suggestions with respect to future research, and the specific implications of this study.



## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Making sense of a year and a half.....	1
Dissertation Outline.....	3
Guiding Terms.....	7
Arts Education.....	8
Aesthetic Education.....	10
The Aesthetic Experience.....	13
Why Powerful Encounters Matter.....	14
Literature Review.....	18
Instrumental and Inherent Contributions of Arts Education .....	19
Aesthetic Concepts in Education.....	37
Aesthetic Experience.....	44
Maxine Greene and Wide-Awakeness .....	51
Drama and Education Research .....	54
Methodology .....	68
In Search of a Study .....	68
A “Method” of Inquiry.....	70
The Teachers .....	73
Monique .....	73
Tom .....	76
The Context.....	79
The State Learning Standards for Fine Arts.....	79
Lakeside Independent School District.....	80
Adler High School.....	81
Adler Fine Arts Academy .....	82
Royal High School .....	83
Information Gathering.....	84

Data Analysis .....	87
The Daily Grind .....	88
On Seeing Theatre .....	89
A Few Words About Lunch .....	90
Autobiography and Research .....	91
Who Is the Person with the Pen? .....	93
How Do You Just Leave? .....	93
Monique .....	96
Looking Inward .....	100
Looking Outward .....	116
Connecting with the Body .....	129
Theatre's Purpose .....	137
Tom 141	
Engaging with Text .....	146
Contributing to a Meaningful Project .....	163
Finding the Human Within .....	176
A Final Moment .....	186
Responding to the Research Question .....	191
Cross-Case Analysis .....	192
Warm-up Exercises .....	192
Advanced Drama .....	195
The Monologue Unit .....	197
Analysis of Overarching Themes .....	201
Bracketing Lived Experience .....	202
Doing Philosophy .....	206
Extending the Imagination .....	212
Discussion .....	216
Classroom Teachers .....	217
Teacher Education .....	221
Curriculum Theory .....	224

Future Research.....	228
Drama Education Research .....	229
Arts Education Research .....	230
Powerful Encounters with the Arts in Other Disciplinary Areas .....	232
Implications.....	234
References .....	237
Vita ..	247

## **Introduction**

### **MAKING SENSE OF A YEAR AND A HALF**

I left my job teaching high school drama after a year and a half. That is a fact of which I am not particularly proud. My lifelong dream was to be a high school drama teacher. From a young age I knew that is what I wanted to be. As a child, I participated in musicals at the high school where my mother taught English and reading. As a high school student, I immersed myself in my high school theatre department. Through her example of intellect, creativity, commitment, and compassion, my high school drama teacher exemplified what I aspired to be. I prepared myself to be a high school drama teacher and got my drama-teaching job. Being involved with high school drama programs as both student and teacher is a fundamental part of who I am today. This dissertation study investigates the way in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts in an effort to better understand the impact of arts experiences.

The intense passion that guides me to look at the type of experiences we create in classrooms grew out of my desire to make sense of the isolation and disappointment that accompanied my classroom teaching experience and perhaps find a language with which to talk about what I *feel* and *know* happened when I was both teaching and being taught drama. As a first-year teacher, I did not have the words to explain exactly what I did in my classroom. I did not know how to

talk about how what I did was vital to the life of the school. In an atmosphere of criticism and scrutiny, silence is detrimental. I ultimately couldn't clear the bar that my former-basketball-coach principal kept raising. I left angry, questioning why I had not been able to talk about how important the work I did was for my students. In many ways, this dissertation represents my attempt to answer my former principal. It is also my way to explain to other drama teachers the ways in which their work is vital in the lives of their students and their schools. Finally, it represents an effort to explicate the unique role of arts education in creating the possibility for powerful moments within classrooms. Fundamentally, I believe what happened to me is emblematic of larger issues within the world of education that I seek to address within this text.

Perhaps the same silence and inability to talk about the value and merit of the work with which I was involved in my classroom allows the current assault on arts education in this country. As I read the articles from the local paper detailing the slashing of hundreds of teaching jobs, including arts specialists positions, from the school district in which I conducted my study, the arts community's slow bleed of resources is growing into a catastrophic injury that threatens the very life of arts experiences for all children. In finding words to describe how two high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts, I hope to provide theoretical and contextual insight into the value of arts education experiences. I will now offer an outline of my

dissertation, introduce important terms central to my investigation, and conclude with a brief reflection about why powerful encounters with the arts are important.

## **DISSERTATION OUTLINE**

My dissertation investigates the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts.

Chapter 1 introduces my research question: in what ways do high school drama teachers create opportunities for student to have powerful encounters with the arts? Important terms, such as arts education, aesthetic education, and the aesthetic experience will be introduced and related to powerful encounters with the arts. The Introduction will conclude with an explanation of why powerful encounters are important.

Chapter 2 addresses relevant literature in the area of arts education, aesthetic education, and drama education while forwarding the specific conceptual framework for this study. The literature review seeks to highlight the significant attention paid to the instrumental outcomes of arts education, the lack of emphasis given to aesthetic concepts in recent arts education literature, and the breadth of literature addressing drama in education. Within this chapter, the concept of the aesthetic experience, and specifically wide-awakeness, will be explored as the framework for my investigation of powerful encounters with the arts.

Chapter 3 details the methodology that guided this investigation. Data gathering within my study centered on participant observation in two high school

drama classrooms over a period of 16 weeks (8 weeks per teacher), interviews, and a personal reflective journal. Data analysis focused on open coding of data in an effort to identify emergent themes with respect to the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts. Chapter 3 also includes biographical information about the teachers involved in this study, as well as demographic information on the city, school district, and high schools where the teachers work. I conclude the chapter discussing issues that arose as I conducted my study.

Chapters 4 and 5 are case studies of two high school drama teachers. Each case study addresses the ways in which that particular teacher creates the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts for students within their classroom. In discussing these methods, I have identified themes present in their teaching. In looking at their teaching philosophies and practices, I articulate the way in which they create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts for students.

Chapter 6 responds to the original research question. Included in my response is a cross-case analysis of the two teachers involved in the study, a presentation of overarching themes present in the ways in which they create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts, a discussion of what the dissertation offers to various members of the education community, suggestions with respect to future research, and the specific implications of this study. Having introduced my research question and outlined my dissertation, I

will offer statistics that further describe the educational situation in which the drama educators on whom I focus work.

Recent statistics surrounding arts education will help ground my inquiry into the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999-2000* (2002), a report issued by the National Center for Education Statistics, seeks to explicate the current situation of arts education within elementary and secondary schools. The report outlined a statistical picture of art, music, theatre, and dance instruction within primary and secondary education. The research includes surveys of 686 principals at the secondary level. In speaking of the difficulty of gathering data at the secondary level, the authors related that collection “would be constrained by the fact that arts instruction is provided primarily through elective courses and is often taught by multiple specialists in each of the four subject areas” (Carey, et al. 2002). In general:

84% reporting one or more full-time drama/theatre specialists;  
53% provided dedicated theatre space with special equipment;  
69% of regular secondary schools during the 1998-99 school year sponsored field trips to art galleries or museums; 34% of secondary schools sponsored visiting artists; 18% sponsored artists-in-residence; and 73% sponsored after-school activities in the arts during the 1998-99 school year.



In looking at the methodology of the report, it is important to note that secondary teachers were not surveyed (as the educators at the primary level were) and that prevented a more comprehensive picture of secondary drama teaching from being drawn. My study serves to flesh out the gap left in this report.

These statistics inform my investigation from several perspectives. The teachers who are the focus of my study are both full-time drama/theatre specialists. In addition, they both teach in a dedicated theatre space and sponsor after-school activities. As such, they can be understood as “typical” drama teachers. Focusing on typical drama teachers provides a point of departure from which understanding how high school drama teachers, in general, create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts.

In returning to my original argument, schools, as a locus of exposure to the arts for young people, must remain diligent in their commitment to provide arts education. As this study looks at the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts, it is also important to consider the ways in which exposure to drama allows students to exercise skills of perception and live in conscious awareness of their ability to think critically and act within their world. This study is undertaken in the hope of understanding the role of the arts in fostering powerful encounters and the role of arts experiences in meaning making. As stated by arts educators Martin Engel and Jerome Hausman (1981):

Stated as simply as possible, the problem in arts education is not curriculum per se, not teaching, nor evaluation, nor funding. It is the interconnection, the systemic application of theory and accumulated wisdom derived from practice, the weaving together of a sequential and content-based curriculum, teacher competency that will make an appreciable difference (p.3).

Looking at the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts will lend insight into the larger implications of arts education as well. As Engel and Hausman suggest, strengthening the interconnection, “the systemic application of theory and accumulated wisdom derived from practice,” is the key to making the case for arts in schools. Having offered a rationale for studying the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts, it is necessary to introduce several key terms and ideas.

## **GUIDING TERMS**

Several terms guide my inquiry into the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. The historical and theoretical context of my investigation can be situated in a brief discussion of arts education, aesthetic education, and the aesthetic experience. I will now briefly introduce these terms and explain the way in which each will be used within the context of my study.

## **Arts Education**

The term “arts education” unifies learning about the various arts (drama, music, visual, and dance) under an umbrella concept. The document outlining the National Standards for Arts Education defines arts education as, “the totality of all activities in the arts.” Specifically, arts education can be used to refer to students learning to act in a play, dance a ballet, play an instrument, or paint a painting, for example. Arts education has also been used to describe the educational impact of the arts in terms of teaching and learning. It will also be revealed as I detail literature relevant to my study that arts education is often used as an organizational term into which research addressing a variety of arts-related topics are folded.

In an attempt to clarify the specific contributions of the arts and attributes of arts education, the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) movement addresses the issue of what qualities must be basic within arts education. DBAE was championed by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (1985, 1987). DBAE can be understood as the following:

An orientation to art education that presents the broad view of art and emphasizes art in the general education of all students from kindergarten through high school. This approach integrates content from four art disciplines, namely, aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production, through a focus on works of art (Clark, Day & Greer, 1991, p.236).

They extrapolate the larger implications of DBAE saying, “Decisions with respect to topics such as curriculum, instruction, learning and evaluation are based upon the belief that art should be an integral part of general education” (p.236). Eisner (1987) clarifies DBAE saying, “Discipline-based art programs are intended to provide systemic, sequential teaching in four things people do with the arts: they make works of art, they appreciate art, they learn to understand art in relation to cultures, and make judgments about the arts” (p.7). The underlying philosophy of DBAE is that there are specific skills inherent in arts-based education critical to the total education of all students. My study focuses on drama education, and as such, the DBAE position can be used to identify the broad spectrum of arts-related topics that beg attention within literature, for example the position of powerful encounters within the drama classroom.

I will use the terms “arts education” and “drama education” throughout this text as they relate to the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. As evidenced in the DBAE argument, the arts provide an environment to learn a variety of complex skills; by extension, paying attention to the breadth of how the arts connect to the larger educational landscape will situate the arts within the educational conversation. Specifically, contextualizing arts experiences will clearly articulate the specific role the arts experiences can play in classrooms and students’ lives. Folded into and surrounding a discussion of arts education is a discussion of aesthetic education. An inquiry into powerful encounters with the

arts necessarily needs to talk about aesthetic education. I will now address aesthetic education as it relates to my investigation of the ways high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts for students.

### **Aesthetic Education**

The relationship between arts education and aesthetic education is difficult to tease out. At what point does the learning of a particular medium end, and when does what can be learned and understood in the process of learning an art form begin? How can the skills of perception and appreciation be looked at with respect to learning a particular artistic medium? What is the connection between creating art and being able to make sense of messages received through media and popular culture? These are a few questions that drive educators and researchers interested in aesthetic education. Building upon the understanding that learning of an art form involves a complex set of skills, and that the experiences that surround learning art forms are equally important events, my dissertation seeks to contextualize powerful encounters with the arts within a high school drama context.

Several definitions can be helpful in further clarifying aesthetic education within the United States educational landscape. Knieter (1971) defines aesthetic education as “an approach to education in the arts that emphasizes the development of aesthetic potential. It suggests a view of the arts that derives meaning from the organic nature relationship of art and experience” (p.18). Greene (1992) understands aesthetic education as:

The intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what there is to be noticed, and to lend the works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful (p.6).

Simpson (1991) offers four basic categorizations of aesthetic education:

- 1.) The “comprehensive” view which sees an aesthetic element or dimension not only in the arts but in every domain of human life, and so sees “aesthetic education” as a foundational part of *all* education.
- 2.) The “unitary” view which sees the aesthetic as that which gives the arts their distinctive character as *arts*, while not denying the individuality of each particular art form.
- 3.) The “kaleidoscopic” view which does not see the aesthetic as singularly essential but as one of a number of equally important focuses that may be brought to or developed within the arts; and
- 4.) The “peripheral” view which awards the aesthetic only minor significance, subordinate to other aspects of the arts in education (p.176).

These definitions and categorizations are helpful in understanding the nature of aesthetic education from several perspectives. As Kneiter suggests,

aesthetic education allows for the understanding of arts experience to be considered as an organic, natural part of the educational process. Greene's definition highlights the role of aesthetic education in sense making, understanding, and awareness. The categorizations offered by Simpson clearly explicate the various opinions and understandings of aesthetic education. There is an inherent fluidity to Simpson's categorizations, and I assert people who work, think, and write about aesthetic education do not fit into singular categorizations all the time. Rather, people move between and through categories. These definitions and categorizations also point to the complexity, and perhaps impossibility, of coming to unanimous conceptualization of what *is* aesthetic education.

In what ways do these definitions and categorizations inform my investigation of the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts? They situate the concepts of drama teaching and powerful encounters within a larger conversation, the conversation of aesthetic education. In addition, they explicate the difficulty of describing powerful encounters with the arts. Lastly, they each outline the possible role arts experiences play in individual meaning making and awareness. Having looked at arts education and aesthetic education, I will now briefly introduce the concept of the aesthetic experience as fundamental to understanding powerful encounters with the arts.

## **The Aesthetic Experience**

The aesthetic experience is a central concept within the literature of aesthetic education and arts education. Muelder Eaton and More (2002) explain:

Aesthetic experience is not simply a conundrum about which philosophers quarrel independently of consequences in the world of application. It is also, and most importantly, a prominent element in arts education. This concept, more than any other, identifies the objective that arts teachers aim for as they try to turn the attention of their students to what is peculiarly important in the arts (p.12).

In this view, creating opportunities for aesthetic experiences within their classrooms is a primary objective of arts educators, and by extension, engaging with the arts is a primary means by which aesthetic experiences are achieved.

What is the aesthetic experience and how is it related to this investigation of powerful encounters with the arts? The aesthetic experience, simply stated, refers to unique and transcendental moments when something profound or meaningful happens that perhaps allows for a change of consciousness and understanding. These experiences are generally discussed with respect to responding to and being involved with works of art. In addition, the ideas of extreme focus and absorption often characterize aesthetic experiences. (I will offer a more precise definition of the aesthetic experience, drawing from the fields of arts education, educational philosophy, and aesthetic education, in the



subsequent chapter.) For the purpose of this dissertation, I will refer to aesthetic experiences as powerful encounters with the arts.

This dissertation investigates the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. Researching the classroom practice of two high school drama teachers will serve to more clearly articulate the nature of powerful encounters with the arts, and specifically, the ways in which opportunities for powerful encounters can occur within classrooms. Though this study focuses on drama teaching, it is important to note the implications of this study for increased understanding of powerful encounters in a variety of settings. By specifically looking at the way in which the form and content of drama intersects a variety of content areas, and portraying the classrooms of my participant teachers in such a way that they seem familiar to teachers from a wide variety of content areas and age levels, my investigation of powerful encounters with the arts will provide clarity to the concept of the aesthetic experience and focus attention on the types of experiences we create in classrooms.

### **WHY POWERFUL ENCOUNTERS MATTER**

I want to conclude this chapter by introducing poetry that will provide an artistic and philosophical foundation for my inquiry into powerful encounters with the arts. Both Adrienne Rich's "For the Record" and Denise Levertov's "The Altars in the Streets" exemplify what I believe to be the essence of my inquiry—

why powerful encounters matter. As a student in an undergraduate creative writing course, I heard these pieces read aloud by the instructor. I vividly recall hanging on every word, and revisiting the pieces again and again in the years following that class. As works of art that seek to inspire, agitate, move, and depict a vision of how life can be, they exemplify social action born of increased awareness. Powerful encounters with the arts matter because they can provide vision in a world that is often dark, and restore faith in a world devoid of hope.

In the poem “For the Record,” Adrienne Rich depicts a world of boarded-up houses, barbed-wire fences, burning freeways, environmental devastation, and backed-up sewage. Rich calls for actively questioning our circumstances of violence, injustice, oppression that exist in our world. She asserts that we each have a personal responsibility for our situation, one that rises above fear, ignorance, prejudice, and blame. Rich boldly challenges apathetic indifference. The poem ends with this question:

*and ask whose signature  
is stamped on the orders, traced  
in the corner of the building plans  
Ask where the illiterate big-bellied  
women were, the drunks and crazies,  
the ones you fear most of all: ask where you were.*

In that spirit, it is the role of all educators to create opportunities for powerful encounters that stir within students an awareness of and connection with something greater than individual concern and self-centeredness. Within this paradigm, awareness leads to action.

Denise Levertov's poem "The Altars in the Streets" provides a poetic account of a campaign of non-violence during the Vietnam War. In a preface to the poem, Levertov explains, "On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1966, The New York Times reported that, as part of a Buddhist campaign of non-violent resistance, Viet-Nameese children were building altars in the streets of Saigon and Hue effectively jamming traffic." Levertov describes children building altars of wood, sticks, and dreams in their effort to stop the progress of the tanks and machines of war that were effectively destroying their world. Levertov explains:

*The hale and maimed together  
hurry to construct for the Buddha  
a dwelling at each intersection. Each altar*

*made from whatever stones, sticks, dreams are at hand,  
is a facet of one altar; by noon  
the whole city in all its corruption,*

*all its shed blood the monsoon cannot wash away,  
has become a temple,  
fragile, insolent, absolute.*

This poem is particularly important in that it depicts children as powerful entities capable of affecting their existence. At some point, the children and people of Saigon and Hue decided they wanted to peacefully stand against the occupying forces that were terrorizing their communities. Their efforts literally stopped war, if only for a moment. I ask what experiences lead those children to believe the world could be different than the violence they had known? How were their spirits and imaginations cultivated in such a way that they were empowered to change their world? How did they find hope in the midst of injury and

deprivation? Though it is not clear that these children specifically had powerful encounters with the arts, and that those experiences formed the foundation for action, from a broader perspective, I think Levertov uses the medium of poetry to imbue within her audience a sense of possibility and change.

I assert that the potential for powerful encounters with the arts to cultivate hope is real, and our educational system must strive to create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts in order to build the future from the full awareness of the present. The need for experiences that move, incite, and inspire has never been more important. As I focus my gaze on the practice of two high school drama teachers in an effort to discern the ways in which they create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts, the importance of those moments frames my inquiry. In a time where little emphasis is placed on the types of experiences that are provided in classrooms, and little attention is paid to the types of people we hope to cultivate through the process of schooling, focusing on powerful encounters with the arts is the first step toward creating a better world.

## Literature Review

*We are living in a desperate time in arts education. Across the globe, programs are being savagely cut, teachers' work is being undermined, curricula outcomes and targets and directives, rather than their processes, are forever in sight (Philip Taylor, 1996).*

Arts education research attempts to address the desperation alluded to by Philip Taylor. The tension between inherent and instrumental value, systemic validation and individual worth, and “hard data” and soft boundaries, emblematic of larger educational discourse, stratifies the arts education community as well. Specifically within arts education, factional disagreements abound between artists, arts educators, and arts advocates. Competing artistic, philosophical, and educational objectives characterize the situation in which many arts-concerned individuals find themselves. Despite the longstanding and committed efforts of arts-concerned researchers to push boundaries of representation and paradigmatic rigidity, the quest to better understand arts education as central to the educational project continues. Eisner asserts, “Ideas, even good ideas, without tenacious support, both financial and moral, have a hard time surviving when those ideas belong to a field that has historically been regarded as educationally marginal” (1985, p.7). I will demonstrate in this review that current arts education literature places too much emphasis on instrumental value of the arts, pays too little attention to aesthetic issues in arts education, and fails address the unique aspects of drama and theatre within education, in an effort to position this study within

educational discourse, the arts education conversation, and—more specifically—within the literature of drama and theatre education.

### **INSTRUMENTAL AND INHERENT CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARTS EDUCATION**

The question of utility and contribution of arts education, and by extension drama and theatre education, surrounds my investigation of the high school theatre classroom. Attempts to research the usefulness of the arts education in measurable and demonstrable ways constitute a large portion of current arts education literature. Theoretical substantiation for arts education abounds in the work of prominent scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology, and philosophy. “Multiple intelligences,” (Gardner, 1983, 1999), “dispositional capacities,” (Eisner, 1999), and “narrative modes of knowing” (Bruner, 1985) are outlined in brilliant detail in an effort to explicate the unique contribution of the arts. “Aesthetic epistemologies” (Muxworthy Feige, 1999) are championed in an effort to regain a more holistic educative process. Despite this broad foundation from which to look at arts education, the research is replete with a narrow range of studies that look at the instrumental rather than the inherent value of arts education—for example, what the arts do in terms of social development, academic achievement, and community involvement.

Constructing an instrumental/inherent binary is problematic. In reviewing the literature of the arts education field, I do not want to suggest that positive social and academic outcomes of involvement with the arts are not important or in need of further investigation. Indeed, as I look more closely at the

instrumental/inherent idea, I am suspicious of simple categorization and fearful that drawing such a hard boundary may appear to encourage arbitrary distinctions. In taking that risk, I suggest that focusing the researcher's gaze solely on instrumental outcomes robs the educational community of much needed insight into the contribution of the arts to the education of young people. I will now focus attention on several large-scale attempts to synthesize arts education literature in an attempt to illustrate the point that the tide of arts education literature certainly flows in the direction of instrumentally focused research. In an effort to historically situate the current trend toward instrumental investigation, I will begin my investigation by highlighting the *Toward Civilization* (1988) report.

In 1985, the 99<sup>th</sup> Congress called for a "study of the state of arts education" as part of the reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts, which had been signed into law in 1965. *Toward Civilization: A Report on Arts Education* (1988) was written as an answer to their request. It followed in the spirit of *A Nation at Risk* (1982), to speak with caution and foreboding with respect to the cultural literacy of our nation. Much like *A Nation at Risk* sought to make a statement about the ability of United States students to compete academically, and by extension economically, within the global marketplace, *Toward Civilization* championed the assertion that aspects of culture (specifically embodied in the arts) must receive attention within our educational system if we are to provide education equivalent to other nations of the world. The report analyzed available arts education research, such as the 1985 Arts, Education, and

the States survey conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers, “Public School Districts Policies and Practices in Selected Aspects of Arts and Humanities Instruction,” and 3,000 documents published in the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC) in an effort to provide a picture of arts education practice and make recommendations for the future direction of arts education. Report recommendations included providing adequate resources to have beginning, intermediate, and advanced instruction in all arts disciplines; supporting arts training of both specialists and generalist teachers to encourage integration of the arts within curriculum; mandating arts course work for all students; and outlining clear curricular guidelines for sequencing arts instruction and effective methods of evaluation.

*Toward Civilization* (1988) supports the approach to systemization of the arts through the articulation of structured objectives for curriculum and instruction. The difficulty of achieving the desired broad-base implementation of arts education is noted in the conclusion of the document when collaboration between the “governance sector,” “the education sector,” “the arts sector,” and the “business-producer” is cited as the key to the successful realization of the recommendations of the report. The themes of collaboration of a variety of stakeholders and articulation of explicit curricular guidelines are championed as the way in which to situate the arts in schools.

*Toward Civilization* (1988) provides insight into my inquiry into powerful encounters with the arts from several perspectives. As a large-scale attempt to pull



together research that had been conducted in the area of arts education for the purpose of reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts, the available research failed to look at the nature of arts learning experiences. In addition, the recommendations for future areas of arts education on which to focus solely addressed the need to articulate clear curriculum objectives in the arts and establish strong community partnerships in the arts, rather than turn attention to the context and effects of arts experience.

*Schools, Communities, and the Arts: A Research Compendium* (1995) includes a breadth of available arts education research. In acknowledging the variety of locations and interests producing arts education research, the authors explain:

Reports on research in pedagogy, philosophy, history, curriculum, policy, and other topics have been published for decades in scholarly journals and practitioners' periodicals. University faculty (approximately 40,000 in 1991), Ph.D. candidates (nearly 600 in 1989-90), and other experts working in areas as diverse as brain functioning and aesthetic development are continually adding to what is known. In general, however, arts education researchers, past and present, have assumed that arts education is inherently beneficial to students and society and have thus focused on improving discipline-specific teaching and learning. Far fewer resources have been devoted to understanding the content and

results of arts study and the relationship between the arts and other areas (p.5).

The Compendium includes 49 reports, articles, and dissertation studies, and is organized in terms of broad-based, targeted, compilations, attitudes and public opinion, and status studies. These studies include portraits of community art centers; demographic research with respect to where, how, and by whom the arts are being taught; an overview of drama in education literature; research into arts participation patterns; and inquiry focused on evaluation of arts-focused programs. In sum, the studies highlight the role of the arts in learning and provide information from which arts-concerned individuals can argue for systemic inclusion of the arts within society, and specifically education.

My study strives to fill the gap articulated by the authors of the Compendium in that it seeks to understand the content of arts study—the intersection of drama teaching and the aesthetic experience. In addition, my work looks at specific aspects of drama teaching and the role drama teaching and learning through drama can play in creating the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts. Most importantly, my work highlights the unique aspects of powerful encounters with the arts and the interdisciplinary implications of creating these encounters.

*Gaining the Arts Advantage* (1999) explicates the role of community involvement in arts education within public schools. In *Gaining the Arts Advantage* (1999), school districts from across the United States were researched

in an effort to identify factors that lead to sustained support for the arts at the district level. More than 500 school districts were nominated and invited to submit documentation for further review. Some 300 districts responded. In responding, they identified their successful arts education practices. Interviews and site visits were then conducted to gain a deeper understanding of selected districts' arts practices. The study detailed the vital role community support, both fiscal and physical, plays in the full implementation of comprehensive arts program. From collaboration with community arts organizations, to open communication with principals and superintendents, to a fully developed arts curriculum with substantial opportunity for artistic involvement at both the elementary and secondary levels, to taking advantage of a variety of funding opportunities, school districts with effective arts programming enlist the community in support of arts education. In addition, they plan thoughtfully, implement incrementally, and reflect consistently in the process of providing arts programming.

In introducing *Gaining the Arts Advantage* (1999), Ramon Cortines asserts, "In my experience the case for arts is built upon either (1) the intrinsic value of the arts or (2) the value of an arts education's consequences" (p.5). He invokes the need to articulate "real world" benefits:

Indeed the arts stimulate, develop, and refine many cognitive and creative skills; they contribute significantly to the creation of the flexible and adaptable "knowledge workers" so many business

people say will be crucial to the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy; and they draw out the multiple intelligences of students (p.5).

He concludes his argument by drawing a parallel: “The arts, like our health, need no calculus of justification. We engage in the arts, we ought to teach the arts, because it is part of what it means to be human” (p.5). Also in *Gaining the Arts Advantage*, Brent Wilson identifies three ways the arts improve schools: 1.) The arts improve school climate; 2.) The arts’ comprehensive tasks challenge students; and 3.) The arts turn schools into communities (p.16). The above explanations seek to situate the arts with respect to the perceived positive social and economic impact they facilitate, not necessarily by looking at the exploration of the art form itself or experiences that surround engagement with art forms such as theatre.

*Gaining the Arts Advantage* helps provide a comprehensive analysis of communities and school environments that are committed to successful inclusion of the arts. The detailed analysis and programmatic insight provided in the report cannot be underscored enough in terms of its usefulness to school principals, district-level administrators, and community leaders who might want to foster active arts inclusion within their schools. In that way, *Gaining the Arts Advantage* serves as a helpful roadmap for decision makers. However, the work does not attempt to contribute to our understanding of what happens when individual teachers and students, within a classroom, engage in dramatic activity. An investigation into powerful encounters with the arts will necessarily flesh out the broad insights provided in *Gaining the Arts Advantage*.

In *Champions of Change* (1999), seven teams of researchers looked at a variety of arts education programs (both in-school and after-school, and those from a variety of artistic disciplines) in an effort to examine “the impact of the arts on learning.” Their individual research reports form the text of *Champions of Change* (1999). The researchers found that the arts change learning experiences:

[They] reach students who are not otherwise being reached;  
connect students to themselves and each other; transform the  
environment for learning; provide learning opportunities for the  
adults in the lives of people; challenge those students already  
considered successful; and make connections between learning  
experiences to the world of real work (ix-x).

They also found the arts change learning experiences by encouraging a deeper level of involvement with the learning environment by the entire community, both at the level of the artistic process and production.

Two studies included in *Champions of Change* (1999) focus attention on the relationship between theatre and involvement in arts experiences. In “Involvement in the Arts and Human Development: General Involvement and Intensive Involvement in Music and Theatre Arts,” Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga enlist data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88), a panel study that followed more than 25,000 students in American secondary schools for 10 years. The work addresses the development of children and adolescents over the period between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, i.e. late middle

school through high school. Data was used to categorize students as either intensively or generally involved in theatre. “Intensively involved in theatre” in this study is defined as those who attend a drama class once per week or more as of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, participate in drama club as of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, take drama coursework in grade 10, and participate in a school play or musical in grades 10 and 12—or at least most of the above (p14).

The research findings suggest a positive relationship between the theatre instruction and social and academic achievement. The research found that positive academic developments for children engaged in the arts are seen at each step in the research—between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade as well as between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition, comparative gains for arts-involved students become more pronounced over time. These patterns tended to hold true for children from low socio-economic status backgrounds as well. The research also supports the idea that sustained student involvement in theatre arts (acting in plays and musicals, participating in drama clubs, and taking acting lessons) associates with a wide variety of developments for youths: gains in reading proficiency, improved self concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others. In the authors’ assessment of research into the impact of drama on learning they explain:

The strength of evidence for specific impacts of theater and drama ... tends to be weak. Drama and theater are complex events with many possible effects. ... In any event, what we tend most to

benefit from is the accumulation of case studies, and the informed observations of senior scholars who have been attached to TIE or drama in education and who have come to their own understanding through the gradual acquisition of research and professional knowledge (p14).

The authors then acknowledge the need for future research into specific arts-related outcomes of arts learning and address future research needs saying, “Productive approaches to additional research may include phenomenological studies that probe the meanings of art experiences to individual children or educators” (p 18).

*Champions of Change* (1999) also includes a monograph entitled “ ‘Stand and Unfold Yourself’: A Monograph on the Shakespeare & Company Research Study.” This study represents a two-year investigation by Harvard’s Project Zero into teaching and learning within the work of Shakespeare & Company, a classical professional theatre company in Lenox, Massachusetts dedicated to producing the plays of William Shakespeare, as well as a repertory of other works including new plays; professionally training actors; and teaching Shakespeare at elementary, secondary, and undergraduate levels.

Research into Shakespeare & Company produced several key findings. The research found performance was a critical way to manifest teaching and learning for understanding. In addition, they found participants engaged in “four realms of learning”: learning about Shakespeare and his language, and ways of

reading his text and his plays; learning about acting; learning about working in creative communities; learning about oneself; and linking self-knowledge to social and intellectual development (Seidel, 1999). The authors then point to particular aspects of producing Shakespeare that can specifically inform teaching: articulating fundamental aspects of human nature and experience; practicing the skill of interpretation; and the central role participating and engaging play in the learning process.

*Champions of Change* (1999) reveals several key ideas with respect to arts education research, and by extension an investigation into powerful encounters with the arts. Whether arts involvement includes specific course-work within a traditional K-12 classroom, or involvement with a community arts organization, the research supports the fact that arts involvement is critical to the educational process. An important part of understanding the nature of why arts involvement is important can be understood through interrogating arts experiences in terms of what happens as the arts are taught and learned. Looking specifically at how teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts will provide insight into the nature of student engagement and the specific way in which the arts allow space for creativity and learning.

In 2000, Harvard's Project Zero published a comprehensive meta-analysis of research on academic achievement outcomes of arts education. The meta-analysis, the culmination of the Reviewing Education and the Arts Project (REAP), entitled The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence



Shows, involved consideration of 188 studies (synthesized from 11,467 articles, books, theses, conference presentations, technical reports, unpublished papers, and unpublished data) prepared between 1950 and 1999 that sought in some way to address the connection between the artistic disciplines (drama, art, music, and dance) and academic achievement (i.e. standardized evaluation of literacy and numeracy). The criteria for inclusion within the meta-analysis involved evaluation of sample size, experimental controls, and significance levels. As critiqued by dance educator Judith Lynne Hanna (2001), “In an effort to be scientifically unchallengeable, REAP used an arcane, stringent, statistical meta-analytic calculation of effect size method not commonly used in research” (p.2). In short, many studies failed to meet the criteria established by REAP.

The controversial findings suggest the causal connection between the arts and academic and social achievement claimed by many arts education advocates must be reexamined. Specifically, three areas where reliable causal links were found include listening to music and spatial-temporal reasoning; learning to play music and spatial reasoning; and classroom drama and verbal skills. Two areas of equivocal support (reliable causal links based on very few studies) include learning to play music and mathematics; and dance and nonverbal reasoning. Five areas where no reliable causal links can be demonstrated include arts-rich education and verbal and mathematics scores/grades; arts-rich education and creative thinking; learning to play music and reading; visual arts and reading; and dance and reading.

In defending their findings, Hetland and Winner (2000), REAP's primary investigators, do not argue against researching the relationship between arts education and academic achievement; rather, they encourage arts education researchers to focus attention on constructing careful studies that articulate the complexity and importance of arts education experiences, including experiences that may lead to improved academic and social achievement. Specifically, Hetland responds to a question as to how she would advocate for the arts in front of a school board that is saying Harvard has just proven that arts education doesn't transfer to improved academic achievement:

Better academically is not what the arts have to be demonstrating success in. What the arts have to be demonstrating success in is the way they improve a human life, the way that they allow people to deal with information. We want people to be able to understand products that are produced in the arts, and we want people to express themselves through those media. That doesn't mean that we expect the arts to raise math scores (Williams, 2000).

The REAP study has definite theoretical implications. If research in the arts education field is forced, in its quest for legitimacy and policy-level potency, to focus on what we can do for "serious subjects," where do we develop knowledge about arts education? Ralph Smith (2000) characterizes this dilemma by asking, "But can progress be achieved in actualizing and utilizing art's instrumental values without prior progress in promoting students' ability to realize art's

inherent values?” (p.12) More directly stated, how can music be used to improve math scores if a student doesn't learn music? Smith purports:

If progress in one kind of endeavor presupposes that advances have been made in another area, but if that other field is such a pastiche of purposes as to defy any definition of progress, what is to be done? (p.12)

Following Smith's (2000) argument, the task before the arts education researcher is one of clarifying the current “pastiche of purposes” that prevent arts education from articulating its specific contribution to the larger educational landscape. I understand clarification of purpose not as complete unanimity and cohesion among all arts-concerned researchers, but rather as thoughtful description that seeks, through the questions asked and the research methodologies chosen, to illuminate the complex, unique, local, and individual role arts education plays within school and society. I will now focus attention on another recent attempt to synthesize a breadth of arts education literature, *Critical Links*.

*Critical Links* (2002) is a compendium of arts education research focused on the academic and social effects of arts learning experiences. The Compendium includes brief synopses of 62 studies addressing music, dance, drama, multi-arts, music, and visual art. The authors effectively document the positive role of arts education in social and academic achievement, particularly in areas such as drop-out prevention and higher SAT scores. These studies provide strong evidence to

support the argument for the arts, based on their ability to transfer into other domains of learning.

In introducing the compendium, Deasy asserts, “All of the essayists urge that future research define with greater depth, richness, and specificity the nature of the arts learning experience itself and its companion, the arts teaching experience.” He continues:

the Compendium studies suggest that well-crafted art experiences produce positive and academic and social effects, but they long for more research that reveals the unique and precise aspects of arts teaching and learning that do so. Curriculum, instruction, and professional development would benefit greatly from such clarifications (Deasy, iii).

Deasy ends his remarks calling for development of a

lexicon of descriptive terms that authentically capture the arts learning experience while at the same time suggesting an array of interactions with other realms of learning and life—a lexicon that may blunt the debate between “intrinsic” and “instrumental” arts learning (Deasy, iv).

I contend that the gap in research pointed to by Deasy is illustrative of the current political conditions within the United States educational system that values “instrumental” outcomes. Solely researching the relationship between arts education and social and academic achievement effectively silences inquiries into

the nature of arts experiences. Building upon Deasy's argument, arts education research must now focus on extending our understanding beyond our current investigation of the arts as a means for academic or social achievement.

Several studies from *Critical Links* (2002) prove particularly pertinent to the investigation of creating opportunities for powerful encounters in secondary drama classrooms. In both the Drama and Multi-Arts sections of the Compendium, studies attempt to address a variety of research topics including the impact of a collaborative script writing project in an urban high school; the relationship between training in fine and performing arts and drop-out prevention and SAT scores; a general snapshot of arts education in secondary schools; and the effects of the A+ program and Arts in Basic Curriculum Project. Specifically, the attention given to the A+ program, a comprehensive school reform model with a substantial arts component, suggests that the project can be an effective school reform initiative. Lastly, a study designed to investigate the correlation between SAT scores and arts involvement found that students who were more involved in arts programs had higher test scores.

In his summative address of drama research included in the compendium, Catterall acknowledges that the majority of the work focuses on the development of verbal skills in young children specifically through the use of creative drama techniques. Studies that did address the use of drama in a secondary setting seemed in some way to focus on the capacity of drama to reach "at risk" students. Catterall characterizes the drama-focused studies as "Professional discourse ...

focused not so much on the ‘whys’ of drama in curriculum but on the ‘hows’” (p.58) and harkens to the work of English Drama educator Dorothy Heathcote, saying that drama:

helps students capture more of what is implicit in any experience. That is, dramatization encourages probing into the meanings of terms, the use of words in the context of action, the nature of human relationships and individual motivations—and more generally encourages reflection on experiences and what one is learning from them (p.62).

As a collection of available research into the use of drama and theatre in education, the studies presented in *Critical Links* (2002) provide a solid foundation of information on which to base future inquiry—both as methodological examples and as insight into the theoretical and practical implications of drama in the classroom.

In their essay “Promising Signs of Positive Effects: Lessons from the Multi-Arts Studies,” Rob Horowitz and Jaci Webb-Dempsey explain:

While researchers may and should debate the merits of particular lines of inquiry, other issues fundamental to both arts learning and arts research loom. First, what is the nature of the arts learning experience, and if we can sufficiently understand it, how are we able to capture or measure it (p.98)?

Continuing, they assert:

Systemic, well-designed qualitative studies can help us understand what the arts learning experience is for children, and what characteristics of that experience are likely to travel across domains of learning.... Exploring the processes of arts learning means looking at both arts teaching and arts learning, simultaneously and separately, as both method and means (p.99).

The above quotes raise several key ideas. They encourage arts education researchers to extend the discussion of what should be researched within arts education, and begin to ask more questions, new questions, better questions that seek to understand the value of arts education. Though the goal of measuring the nature of arts experiences is problematic at best, like using a magnifying glass to investigate the solar system, their advice is relevant to investigations into powerful encounters with the arts. In sum, Horowitz and Webb-Dempsey call for inquiries into the nature of arts learning experiences such as the ways in which drama teachers create conditions for aesthetic experiences in schools.

What does *Critical Links* have to say within an investigation of powerful encounters with the arts? Primarily, *Critical Links* pulls together the recent literature and provides the most descriptive account of arts education, and arts experiences, possible. This review illuminates that the nature of the questions being asked do not investigate powerful encounters. *Critical Links* also attempts to answer some of the questions posed by the REAP study by highlighting research that asks a variety of questions and uses a variety of methodological

strategies. Most importantly, the authors of *Critical Links* call for studies into the nature of arts experiences.

Research addressing the instrumental value of the arts informs my inquiry into the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts from several perspectives. The meta-analyses that I have offered all argue for types of studies that look at the nature of arts experiences and build upon the current explorations of the arts for instrumental means. In looking at arts experiences, both the art form and the context of involvement are as central to the investigation as the outcome of the experience. As such, investigations into arts experiences allow for learning about the art form being explored, and the context of educational experiences is re-inscribed within the learning process. In addition, the relationship between the art form and the teacher can be examined and knowledge can be gained in terms of instructional and curricular implications for teaching and learning. Having looked at how arts education research focuses on instrumental outcomes of arts education, and argued that there has been a lack of attention to the experiences that surround arts education, I will focus my attention on the way in which aesthetic issues have been addressed within educational discourse in the hope of further situating my investigation of powerful encounters with the arts with the relevant literature.

#### **AESTHETIC CONCEPTS IN EDUCATION**

My investigation of the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts necessarily



needs to address the way in which aesthetic issues have been addressed within the educational discourse. Having defined aesthetic education within my Introduction, and briefly discussed the aesthetic experience as it relates to powerful encounters with the arts, I will highlight the research into the aesthetic within education. I will then continue and forward an understanding of the aesthetic experience, and conclude by offering the specific conceptual framework for my investigation of powerful encounters with the arts.

In “Research on Teaching Arts and Aesthetics” (1986), Jones and McFee address the research that had been done in the area of aesthetic education, focusing on the work of the Central Midwestern Educational Laboratory (CEMREL). This chapter explains, “varying value orientations evidenced by those writing about aesthetic education lead to varying research directions and to recurring curricular questions” (p.907). In summarizing the aesthetic education research cited in the chapter, researchers identified the following research questions: who will teach arts courses (artist specialists or arts teachers), how will those courses be taught (as an interdisciplinary and fully integrated subject matter or as a “special” arts-focused classroom), and specifically with respect to the aesthetic experience:

[Do we focus on aesthetic experience] in all aspects including everyday life or only in aesthetic experience in the arts? And further, if the focus is on aesthetic experience in the arts, should emphasis be placed only on exemplars, that is great works of art, or

on the art forms as experienced as aesthetic by students or other cultural or sub cultural groups? That is should the popular arts, folk arts, mass media, industrial design be included as worthy of study (p.907)?

This quote illustrates several questions that must be addressed in a discussion of the aesthetic experience. How should we talk about what experiences are aesthetic? Must criteria be established for the aesthetic experience? Can we consider experiences that occur in response to mass media and popular culture aesthetic experiences? These questions with respect to the aesthetic experience inform an investigation of powerful encounters with the arts in that they serve to articulate issues about which to be mindful as I attempt to create vivid portrayals of the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. For example, in what ways will images from popular culture and media influence powerful encounters with the arts within the classroom context? What is the relationship between average experiences and powerful encounters? And how will I identify experiences as aesthetic or powerful?

In returning to the overarching questions posed by the authors of this review, this most recent review of aesthetic education literature is pertinent to this particular discussion of creating the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts in a high school drama classroom. Specifically, my investigation will provide further insight into the way in which drama specialists create opportunities for

powerful encounters with the arts for students. This insight will inform the way in which teachers from a variety of content levels and subject matter attempt to create powerful encounters within their classroom practice. This investigation of powerful encounters with the arts will highlight the interdisciplinary contexts that can be found within a designated arts environment, in addition to providing insight into the nature of the aesthetic experience.

The most recent *Handbook of Research on Teaching* addresses teaching in the visual arts. In “Classroom Research in the Visual Arts” (2001) Colbert and Taunton attempt to address the role of the teacher within art classrooms by delineating three areas of classroom research: “the social context of art classrooms, portraits of teachers and students, and planned instructional interventions” (p.520). They found that “studies concerned with the context in which art learning takes place have shown the importance of the combined influences of teachers and peers in the standards for arts learning behavior” (p.521). They also discovered that “both the teachers’ and the students’ understandings about art brought into the classroom setting are generated from previous experiences and meet on the classroom stage” (p.522).

Of particular interest to my study are their findings with respect to portraits of effective art teachers. They describe effective art teachers as, “clear, enthusiastic, interested in students, knowledgeable, and committed to their discipline” (p.522). In addition, they detail Alexander’s “educational criticism” of two high school art teachers (p.522). Alexander describes the practice of William,

a high school art history teacher, “performer” and “shaman” alongside that of Mr. Jewel, “a teacher who models enthusiasm and interest in his students and subject and who makes students comfortable in his classroom.” Though focused on the art classroom, the findings presented in this review of art education literature are relevant to an investigation of powerful encounters within drama education in that they investigate the role of the arts in teaching and highlight unique aspects of arts learning experiences.

This review informs my inquiry into powerful encounters with the arts from several perspectives. It further articulates the important role the social context of arts learning experiences has in establishing common ground from which to build future learning—the arts naturally provide a way for teachers and students to bring their life experience to the learning process. It highlights attempts that have been made to investigate individual art teachers and classrooms, thereby laying groundwork for looking at individual drama classrooms. After having looked at these reviews of relevant literature, I will now focus attention on documents in the area of aesthetic education.

*Coming to Our Senses* (1977), a report issued by the Arts, Education, and the Americas Panel, sought to interrogate the value of the arts in learning through a systemic analysis of the arts within schools, universities, and community-based organizations. The report sought to:

demonstrate that direct creative and re-creative experience—  
learning *in* the arts—is of unique educational value. It asserts that

learning about the arts is learning about the rich world of sensation, emotion, and personal expression surrounding us each day (p.8).

The authors of the report claim four purposes of education: “1.) the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and power to reason; 2.) the development of critical faculties and moral judgments; 3.) the cultivation of creative potential; and 4.) the promotion of self knowledge and effective interaction with others” (p.248).

Analyzing the aesthetic properties of learning provided the backdrop for the panel’s final recommendations. The recommendations included the following: the opportunity to make art should be available to all people; teachers of the arts should “recognize the existence of many art forms” and be aware of change in the world of the arts; and the need to learn more about how people learn in the arts (p.249-250).

The relevance of *Coming to Our Senses* (1977) to a discussion of powerful encounters with the arts centers on the reminder it provides that attention needs to be given to the context of arts learning experiences. The historical importance of this document must be noted. More than 25 years ago, this study asked questions about arts learning experiences. In returning to the idea of the educational value of arts experiences, the report asserts the importance of studies, similar to this study, that seek to contextualize arts learning experiences.

In a companion piece to the reissue of *Coming to Our Senses*, *Can We Rescue the Arts for America’s Children?* (1988), Charles Fowler declares that the recommendations originally forwarded in *Coming to Our Senses* have not been

manifest. He describes the need for systemic reform efforts to include the arts in tangible ways. He asserts that more resources need to be given to providing a variety of arts experiences for all children, not just simply to providing the chance for a few students to perform or create. Fowler views meaningful partnerships between schools, community, and governmental resources as key to rescuing the arts for America's children.

This report provides further insight into the repeated calls within the arts education community to advocate for the arts through building relationships and articulating a message of the value of arts learning experiences. This follow-up report also articulates the perennial arts education questions of who should teach the arts (specialists or trained non-arts teachers) and in what context should the arts be taught (as singular subjects or as part of interdisciplinary instruction)? Specifically, both *Coming to Our Senses* and *Can We Rescue the Arts for America's Children?* articulate policy-level concerns, thereby leaving to future research the task of looking at teachers and students in classrooms for insight into the situation of the aesthetic experience in an educational context.

Several key ideas beg further attention when looking at research into aesthetic concepts within education. It can be understood that the aesthetic experience is a central concept within aesthetic education and that the arts education community has given little attention to the aesthetic experience. An integral step in looking at the aesthetic experience is coming to a greater understanding of the way in which aesthetic experience has been discussed within

the literature of philosophy, educational philosophy, and aesthetic education. I will now offer insight into the aesthetic experience and relate this inquiry to the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts.

### **Aesthetic Experience**

The concept of the aesthetic experience is central to understanding “powerful encounters” within a high school drama classroom. Throughout history, scholars, philosophers, and artists have attempted to articulate more clearly moments of critical engagement and the uniquely transcendental and transformative nature of powerful encounters. Though sometimes given different names when discussed in social scientific, philosophic, religious, and popular culture contexts, these moments are often characterized as aesthetic experiences and looked at in reference to engagement with an artistic medium.

Scholars have long debated the definition, composition, and value of aesthetic experience. Higgins (1996) discusses the importance of aesthetic experiences:

One possible explanation—common in the West at least since Plato—has been that aesthetic experience makes a powerful impression that reinforces whatever it accompanies. By presenting art that provokes aesthetic experience in connection with important societal events, a culture educates its citizens in its values and history. On this instrumentalist view, aesthetic experience is

important because it functions to promote other ends that are valuable, such as the development of social cohesiveness or moral education (p.155).

Burnham (1996) views the objective of the aesthetic experience as, “no longer the transfer of information, but the realignment of values whereby visual experience and individual experience count” (p.158). In addition, Burnham maintains that within an aesthetic experience, “the distinction between teacher and student breaks down... the collective experience builds its own truth (p.158). Parsons (2002) speaks of the “tendency in art education to abandon talk about the aesthetic in favor of talk about meaning, as in the ‘meaning’ of artworks” (p.24). Muelder Eaton and Moore (2002) decry:

To many thinkers it seemed that the “the aesthetic experience” had become a catchall term, a wastebasket into which all manner of emotive response could be conveniently and uncritically dumped (p.10).

They contend that in the past many scholars “retreated” from investigation of the aesthetic experience due to its amorphous nature: “If we cannot be sure we are talking about the same thing, or if we keep missing each other’s points altogether, let’s just talk about something else” (p.10). Rather than talk about something else, I will now elaborate several attempts to understand the aesthetic experience.

The work of John Dewey can explicate the position of aesthetic experiences in the educational realm. Writing later in his career, Dewey (1934)



sought to clarify the role the arts can play in providing a context for educational experiences. For Dewey, “Art in its form unites the very same relations of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be *an experience*” (p.48). Dewey (1934) defines *an experience* saying:

We have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an experience* (p.35).

Specifically, Dewey’s notion of “*an experience*” includes completeness, uniqueness, and unifying emotion (Jackson, 1998). Intrator (1999) explains Dewey’s notion of *an experience* by saying that *an experience* is an “enduring memorial” tied to individual growth (p.48). In addition, the creation of new knowledge is central to Dewey’s notion of *an experience* and students function within the aesthetic domain as “aesthetic apprentices” developing aesthetic sensibilities (McLean, 1996). McLean points to Dewey’s belief that aesthetic

experiences result when students learn in an environment where the artistic is completely and seamlessly woven into the curriculum rather than relegated to “an affair for odd moments” when only “scraps of learning” can occur (p.12).

Beardsley (1982) attempts to clarify, and perhaps connect, the divergent understandings of the aesthetic experience:

If we do not insist a priori that the aesthetic character must be a single and simple one but look instead for a set of central criteria, we may find that we can accommodate and reconcile insights and discoveries from several quarters (p.286).

Beardsley’s criteria assert object directedness, which involves attention fixed on, for example, a painting, a theatrical production, or the “inner world” of a novel. Beardsley also talks about felt freedom, the feeling of exultation and release resulting from exposure to artistic environments, and detached effect when artistic involvement “is designed to give some degree of detachment to the affects they produce: giving an air of artifice, of fictionality, of autonomy and reflexiveness, of separation from other things” (p.291). In addition, and echoing Dewey, active discovery and wholeness of the experience also play a role in Beardsley’s criteria.

Similar to Dewey and Beardsley, active discovery is also a cornerstone of Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow concept. Flow is defined as, “a theory of optimal experience in which people are so involved in what they are doing that nothing else seems to matter” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.4). Flow is described as the moment when it is possible to get lost in concentration, exertion, challenge, and

focus. Csikzentmihalyi describes Flow occurring in activities such as engaging with works of art, rock climbing, chess, and dance—areas where people have highly developed skills (cited in Whalen, p.2). He maintains that the Flow experience is similar across disparate activities. Though not specifically focused on the classroom, or arts instruction, his framework is helpful when attempting to clearly speak about the intensity, skill, and focus required of aesthetic experiences—intensity, skill, and focus intrinsic in drama work.

Perhaps the most convincing correlation between Flow and the aesthetic experience can be found in a comparison between Csikzentmihalyi's criteria for the Flow experience and Beardsley's criteria for the aesthetic experience (Csikszentmihalyi, p.28). The link between the concepts is evident specifically as it relates to the focus required to work within or experience an “artkind” moment, freedom for creative exploration, detachment from concerns of past and future, and active engagement with challenges presented in the aesthetic experience.

There have been many attempts to operationalize what occurs during the aesthetic experience and articulate those experiences in clear and concise ways. Wetzel-Fairchild (1991) acknowledges the works of Housen (1983), Parsons (1986), Horner (1988), and Fairchild (1991) as attempts to articulate the aesthetic experience and aesthetic development. Their efforts have primarily focused on evaluating individual responses to works of art. Several scholars have attempted to study the aesthetic experience as it relates to teaching, schools, and educational philosophy (Ling, 1999, Black, 2000, Intrator, 1999, Siegesmund, 2000). None of

these investigations have attempted to connect drama education with the pursuit of aesthetic experiences.

In challenging his own assertions, Beardsley (1982) questions whether it is even possible or worthwhile to distinguish aesthetic experiences from other experiences saying:

The question of a possibility involves the detachability of the claim that there is a common character that is (1) discernible in a wide range of our encounters with the world and (2) justifiably called “aesthetic.” The question of worthwhileness involves the detachability of the further claim that once distinguished, this character is sufficiently substantial and noteworthy to serve as the ground for important theoretical constructions (p.285).

I operate from the position that there is a common, yet fluid and flexible, character to certain experiences, which can be characterized as aesthetic, and that studying those experiences can, as Beardsley suggests, “serve as ground for important theoretical constructions” (p.285). Looking at the criteria for “powerful encounters,” whether discussed directly as aesthetic experiences (Beardsley, 1982), as *an experience* (Dewey, 1934), or as Flow experiences (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990), for example, provides a foundation for understanding what aesthetic experiences in high school drama classrooms may involve.

In acknowledging both the importance and difficulty of understanding the aesthetic experience, Muelder Eaton and Moore (2002) discuss Beardsley’s work

as an early attempt to “rescue” the aesthetic experience and outline the criticisms his theory has received:

Practically no element of his influential formulation has gone unchallenged: Are all aesthetic experiences pleasurable? Must the state of mind reached in aesthetic experience be unified? If so, how much unity is required, and what kind? Is aesthetic experience limited to the forms and qualities of what is presented, or can it take into account undisplayed characteristics of things. And so on. In the wake of sharp and unrelenting criticism, Beardsley’s defense of aesthetic experience has come to seem dated and vulnerable (p.11).

They extrapolate several theories of aesthetic experience in an effort to connect the discussion of aesthetic experience within philosophical scholarship to aesthetic education literature using the important work of Ralph Smith as a conceptual bridge. To summarize Smith’s contribution, he asserts that the aesthetic experience: is central to aesthetic education, is tied to both sensory and cognitive exploration, and is cumulative and culture bound. Having introduced numerous understandings of the aesthetic experience, and discussed the inherent tensions involved with attempting to understand the aesthetic experience, I will now forward the specific conceptualization that forms the framework for my study.

## **Maxine Greene and Wide-Awakeness**

Maxine Greene's concept of wide-awakeness articulates the intersection of perception, consciousness, and action that are integral to talking about the aesthetic experience within schools. She asserts an end goal of education must be to create a wide-awakeness of intellect and spirit within students. Greene (1977) quotes Schutz:

By the term "wide-awakeness" we want to denote a plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements. Only the performing and especially the working self is fully interested in life and, hence, wide-awake. It lives within its acts and its attention is exclusively directed to carrying its project into effect, to executing its plan (p.121).

Far from being an "airy-fairy" excuse to retreat into a world of passive reflection and ambivalent irrelevance, wide-awakeness can be understood as the dialogic relationship between one's lived experience and conscious ability to act in the world. Greene argues that the arts can be a conduit for that relationship and advocates a central position for the arts within school curricula. Greene (1991) explains:

In truth, I do not see how we can educate young persons if we do not enable them on some level to open spaces for themselves—spaces for communicating across boundaries, for choosing, for

becoming different in the midst of intersubjective relationships  
(p.28).

In short, the concept of wide-awakeness is the philosophical foundation of Greene's substantial and important body of work.

In order to fully understand wide-awakeness, it is important to examine the function and purpose of perception and consciousness within existential phenomenological discourse—the acknowledged genesis of Greene's thinking. Morris explicates Greene's connection to the existential phenomenological tradition by discussing Greene's relationship to the general tenets of the tradition which include: the belief that consciousness is intentional, the focus on phenomena as they are experienced, and the desire “to flesh out the absurd manifestations and concrete suffering of the lived world”(p.133). Morris asserts that Greene offers a “phenomenology of the imagination,” which she views as a unique extension of and contribution to the existential phenomenological tradition, saying that, for Greene, it is specifically imagination that releases doors of perception (p.133). Given Greene's phenomenology of the imagination, the educational mandate then becomes to provide an avenue for students to analyze lived experience and use imagination to counter passivity and indifference.

In speaking of the broader application of wide-awakeness, Greene asserts:  
It is out of this kind of thinking, I still believe, that the ground of a critical community can be opened in our teaching and in our schools. It is out of such thinking that public spaces may be

regained. The challenge is to make the ground palpable and visible to our students, to make possible the interplay of multiple voices, of “not quite commensurable visions.” It is to attend to the plurality of consciousness—and their recalcitrances and their resistances, along with their affirmations, their “songs of love.” And, yes, it is to work for responsiveness to principles of equity, principles of equality, and principles of freedom, which can still be named within the contexts of caring and concern (1995, p.197-198).

An ethos of action pervades Greene’s explanation of the types of experiences that must be provided in schools. To reiterate, the desire to celebrate the multiplicity of human experience and interrogate dissonance in pursuit of the educational project is an integral aspect of Greene’s understanding of wide-awakeness. How does this manifest within the culture of schooling that values discrete standards and narrow definitions of achievement? In what ways can the larger notion of wide-awakeness connect with the lived reality of high school drama teaching? These questions persist as I introduce my inquiry into the aesthetic experience within a high school drama context.

As has been revealed, arts education research has failed to focus attention on the aesthetic experience. In addition, I have also argued the concept of the aesthetic experience carries a variety of meanings and identified the concept of wide-awakeness as the particular notion of the aesthetic experience that provides



the conceptual frame for this investigation of the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. I will now address several key ways which drama education literature relates to powerful encounters with the arts in an effort to further ground this inquiry.

### **DRAMA AND EDUCATION RESEARCH**

In an effort to understand powerful encounters with the arts within a high school drama context, it is important to look at the literature in the areas of drama in education, drama and curriculum, and drama and the aesthetic. The question of what experiences surround dramatic involvement is embedded within each of these respective areas of literature. Integral to understanding drama in education is the idea that students learn from both the content and context of drama. Martin Smith understands:

Common to all pioneers throughout the century has been the assumption that when pupils are involved in drama some kind of learning occurs. Some teachers accept as sufficient the claim that drama brings confidence and enhances pupil self-esteem. Others see its social potential for improving the pupil's ability to be a member of a group. For yet others drama is a matter of improving skills, from communication to problem-solving skills and, of course, skill in creating drama. All these are important, but if we are to seek to place drama at the center of the curriculum we have

to turn to what Norman describes as “the core concept of drama in education—making personal meaning and sense of universal, abstract, social, moral, and ethical concepts through the concrete experience of drama” (p.155).

The idea that drama has a direct role in making personal meaning and sense of abstract concepts is central to connecting drama with powerful encounters.

Also it is difficult to talk about the intersection of drama and curriculum without pointing to the interdisciplinary and engaged context of drama.

Engagement is another central aspect of dramas relationship powerful encounters with the arts. Examining the literature that addresses the aesthetic within drama education will provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts by clarifying the way in which the form and content of drama intersects the understanding of the aesthetic experience.

The literature in the area of drama in education is replete with attempts to connect dramatic engagement with the idea of individual development (Slade, 1954, Way, 1967, Courtney, 1989, Heathcote, 1984, and Bolton, 1979, 1992, 1999). Whether understood in the context of the educative value of different forms of play, in the pursuit of creating students who are well-rounded human beings, or in the capacity to make meanings in complex situations, the notion that drama can play an important role in development is well explored and substantiated in the drama and education literature. Specifically, the drama-in-

education literature is relevant to a discussion of powerful encounters with the arts within a high school drama context in that it carefully articulates the way in which drama can be used to create engagement and learning. This is particularly helpful in analyzing the intersection between curriculum and dramatic activity.

Drama-in-education pioneer Dorothy Heathcote offers an understanding of drama that can be used to relate drama with wide-awakeness. Heathcote articulates:

We have to set up a situation in our schools where all the time, every time, we introduce a new element to children it has the effect of cracking all their previous understanding into new awareness, new understanding. This is what growing older is about. This is what being educated is about. The moment whereby all the understanding you had before is sharpened into a new juxtaposition. Drama is about shattering the human experience into new understanding. It uses facts, but, in addition, it fuses the new understanding all the time (p.122).

Within this conceptualization, drama is a way to make personal connections with the curriculum and society. Heathcote speaks of the capacity of drama to allow students to be in real situations with their capacity to understand it being employed in the process of change (p.120). Entering into drama allows students to explore, through the process of exercises and dramatic situations, alternative realities, and space. Though Heathcote's work focuses on specific uses of drama,

some of which may only peripherally correspond to the practice of the teachers on whom my study is focused, the theoretical foundation of her work corresponds to the idea that drama can create the opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts as a foundation for learning through deep engagement with subject matter and classroom context.

Specifically, Heathcote's (1984) *trees of knowledge* exemplifies the drama-in-education attempt to articulate the role of the teacher in dramatic learning and to situate drama within the larger construct of curriculum. Specifically, Heathcote focuses on the way in which drama fuses facts and understanding, Heathcote offers two trees of knowledge. The first tree of knowledge appears like a typical tree with leaves made of up of neatly defined disciplines (of which drama is one leaf alongside other leaves such as biology, computers, and English Literature, for example.) Within this model, the tree has a solid trunk comprised (in descending order) of the school building, the teacher, the family, and the child. The educational environment appears orderly—the people and physical space support the work of the school, the teaching and learning of the disciplines.

Heathcote then offers a second tree of knowledge that is markedly different from the first. Within this second tree, an elaborate root system feeds the tree. The root system includes a consideration of individual attitudes, personal history, and particular skills and abilities to be called upon within the educational process. The trunk is a personal monitoring system within children, the ability to

see many facets of truth, to see the difference between inner forms of things and outer forms of things, to understand time, to have skills of observation and perception, to be responsible and prepared, and the energy to follow through (p.125). The top of the tree reads, “The high quality culture at the top of the tree contains what we *know* illuminated from below by what we *are*” (p125). Within this broader understanding of curriculum and education, drama is intimately tied to the work of education, providing a way for students to learn about themselves and to engage with society on the basis of that understanding.

Madeleine Grumet (1976) articulates the intersection of theatre and curriculum from a reconceptualist perspective, a relationship that is essential to positioning wide-awakeness accurately within a discussion of drama teaching. Grumet analyzes educational experience according to how teachers create environments for learning and how students come to knowing. In applying Pinar’s (1978) conceptualization of *carrere* to theatre, Grumet connects the two at the level of individual experience, knowing, and understanding. Grumet introduces the relationship between theatre and education:

In each case the [the educational and the theatrical] form that shapes the content [of both education and theater] is dialogue. The artist, the actor and director interpret their own experience and communicate their metaphors for that experience with dialogue that is dynamic, immediate, and communal. Their forms and

methods suggest perspectives and methods appropriate to the educator's concern with curriculum and instruction (p.31).

The educational experience for Grumet (1976) is a person's dialogue with the world, "a process of synthesis and totalization in which all the participants in the dialectic simultaneously maintain their identities and surpass themselves" (p.35). Grumet points out the integral role reflexivity plays in analysis of experience. She exclaims, "If we must calibrate education, then we might say we are educated to the extent that we are conscious of our experiences and to the degree that we are freed by this knowledge to act through skills required to transform our world (p.38).

Following Grumet's argument, theatre becomes a tool for consciousness and transformation. "Theater offers us a way of working that permits us to realize our freedom, showing us how we may fill the empty forms that we receive with our own experience of them and thus transform them and ourselves" (1978, p.44). By extension, a reconceptualization of curriculum, drawing from the form and practice of theatre "must look to aesthetics not to create perfect wholes but to reveal those cracks on the smooth surface of our conceptual world that may suggest new interpretations of the human experience" (1999, p.29). Powerful encounters with the arts within this understanding can occur as students become aware of and engaged in the process of identification and reflection. It is also important to note that the aesthetic of which Grumet speaks is one that pushes the

boundaries of perception and consciousness in an effort to encourage new understanding and learning.

Helen Nicholson (1999) contextualizes aesthetic experiences within a drama-focused discourse. She defines aesthetics as, “an attempt to explain how and why art matters, to find words to describe the special powers with which the arts can illuminate, move, and excite” (p.81). For Nicholson, aesthetic values focus on the tension between consensus and confusion. Specifically with respect to drama, Nicholson (1999) explains:

As an art form, drama possesses a singularity in that it encourages participants both to identify positively with the feelings of others and to represent views, roles, or dramatic situations which are troubling, unfamiliar or unsympathetic. ... In educational terms, dramatic practice provides a powerful place to expand the creative, emotional, and intellectual horizons of young people by introducing them to new and unfamiliar cultural and artistic narratives (p.86).

Nicholson calls for aesthetic experiences that emphasize

the significance of both the emotions and cognition in aesthetic practice—by placing the aesthetic in cultural context, the role of the interpreter is recognized as integral to aesthetic discourse. As such, the aesthetic experience depends not on disinterested observation but on active participation and involvement in the

drama as an act of identification with, or questioning of, the values and emotions of others (p.86).

Within this construct, a drama teacher, as cultural “interpreter,” provides a central function in the creation of experiences—aesthetic experiences—in which disparate cultural contexts and understandings can be explored through active participation and involvement in drama. Extending the notion of drama teacher as cultural interpreter, the drama teacher plays a central role in creating dramatic experiences that provide for acts of identification with, or questioning of, the values and ideals of others.

The work of theatre practitioner and social activist Augusto Boal exemplifies the way in which theatre can be used to achieve a radical wide-awakeness for a political, social, and revolutionary end. His work is useful to my argument in that he provides a broader context from which to understand the connection between drama and wide-awakeness. Boal’s work *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) focuses on connecting theatre to the end state of higher awareness and cultural revolution. Drawing directly from the writings and work of Paulo Friere, Boal (1979) asserts:

[Theatre is] a very efficient weapon. For this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of theater and utilize it as a tool for domination. In so doing, they change the very concept of what “theater” is. But the theatre



can also be a weapon for liberation. For that, it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms. Change is imperative (ix).

In an effort to develop theater as a consciousness raising entity, as a tool that would allow people to envision things not as they are but as they could be, Boal offers “4 Stages” through which “spectators” move in order to become actors within their worlds. The revolutionary stages include knowing the body, developing the body’s capacity to be expressive through playing “games,” and cultivating the “language” of theatre through use of images. Images are created through dramaturgy, Image Theatre (theatre in which actors use their bodies to develop images/tableaus that describe conditions as they currently are and then to depict images in which oppression and domination have been ended), and creation of spectacles/theatrical events. The progression to action is integral to Boal’s work.

Boal (1992) describes “games” and exercises he has used in his work that prepare the physical foundation from which the spectators can explore images and create theatrical events—the body is the instrument through which all theatrical music is made. For example, Boal describes his work with a Peruvian national literacy campaign, *Operación Alfabetización Integral*, in which theatre was used to both teach reading and to address societal conditions that allowed for illiteracy. The curriculum for his work can be understood to be the social conditions within which he works, and the exercises and events he orchestrates in an effort to gradually scaffold the artistic and social development of the people with whom he works.

What is essential to understand about Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* in connection with Greene's wide-awakeness is that both assert that ability of aesthetic explorations and experiences to create individual and collective change. In Forum Theatre, the "spectactors" identify aspects of their lives that they wish they could change and theatrically present images of the way they wish things were—theatre allows people to envision possibility. In relating Boal's work to the work of the high school drama teachers on whom I will focus, it is important to note that though the context and the stated objective of the work are different, the theatrical form is a constant tool that both Boal and the teachers in this study can use to create the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts.

In more closely relating the notion of the aesthetic to the work of high school drama teaching, high school drama teacher Douglas Everhart (2002) connects the narratives and life stories of his high school drama students with existential philosophy and performance theory. He explains:

I contend that my work with these adolescents in the disciplines of theatre and dance can and does make a difference in their lives, offering choices and possibilities to counter the doubt, dread, and chaos that permeates their lives (p.5).

He describes, "the teaching element of theatre is almost self evident; it is the pathway for me to reach out to these adolescents and for them to be able to reach out for themselves" (p.5). He shares the stories of students to explicate the unique role drama plays in their education, and thus in their lives.

Everhart's work clearly articulates the intimate role of the drama teacher in the educational and personal journeys of her or his students. Everhart tells the individual stories of his students in an effort to describe the way in which drama touches their lives. Drama becomes the way in which the students reflect and analyze their personal experience. Drama is also a mode of expression for emotions, ideas, thoughts, questions, and fears. Wide-awakeness can be understood as the natural extension of reflection, analysis, and discovery pointed to in Everhart's work.

A comprehensive attempt to connect the aesthetic experience specifically to drama pedagogy can be found in the work of Judith McLean (1996). In her aesthetic framework in drama, McLean proposes three criteria of drama pedagogy that are situated at the center of the aesthetic experience. They include dialogue, teacher/students working as co-artists (experiential learning), and critical reflection on the part of the teacher and student (p.14). McLean found in studying the practice of two Australian high school drama teachers that developing trust between teacher and student is essential; that the relationship between objectives, learning experiences, and assessment must be clearly articulated; that time management is crucial; that students need to be offered a research (dramaturgical) approach to drama; that teachers need to be in control of both content and form (meaning that teachers must have a clear understanding of how to communicate about and through drama) for aesthetic experiences to occur; and that students

need to access works outside of their own experience (grounded aesthetic) and be given opportunities to evaluate those works.

McLean's aesthetic framework of drama education relates to an investigation of the way in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for student's powerful encounters with the arts from several perspectives. Her findings spotlight the central role a teacher plays in fostering an environment for aesthetic experiences. In constructing her aesthetic framework, McLean encourages teachers to provide aesthetic experiences that encourage students to become critically aware of cultural forces and their role as cultural producers and consumers; inform students about artistic (dramatic) traditions and practices; and are inextricably linked with the lived realities of students. Specifically, powerful encounters with the arts can result when drama teachers tap into the personal experiences of students and tie those experiences to cultural and historical information.

Upon reviewing the literature that connects drama and the aesthetic experience, several thoughts beg for emphasis. Drama-in-education literature supports the value of involvement with drama from several perspectives. From the developmental perspective, drama supports the development of the human being and the ability to grasp multiple meanings in a given situation. As Martin Smith (1992) explains, the core concept of making personal meaning is a foundational aspect of dramatic involvement.

In revisiting the work of Nicholson, Boal, McLean, and Grumet, one finds that the structure of drama insures certain educational experiences. Borrowing from Nicholson, drama provides space for students to be exposed to “new and unfamiliar cultural and artistic narratives” (p.86). Boal asserts the potential for drama to be a weapon to challenge injustice and oppression; powerful encounters occur as theatre is used as a vehicle for change. Powerful encounters with the arts for McLean involve student awareness of the history and context of drama and tapping into personal experiences. Grumet focuses on the transactional relationship between curriculum, student, and teacher. Within these analyses, it is possible to understand the connection between cultural exploration, personal experience, and powerful encounters with the arts.

In conclusion, I would like to review several key ideas with respect to powerful encounters with the arts that have been revealed in this review of literature. Research that targets the instrumental focus of arts education fails to address the context of arts-related experiences. This lack of attention effectively silences discussion of powerful encounters with the arts and precludes understanding of the unique nature of those experiences.

Examining literature that addresses aesthetic concepts within education reveals that there have been few attempts to understand the nature of the aesthetic experience within recent literature. In addition, it can be understood that no singular understanding of the aesthetic experience exists. The aesthetic experience has been interpreted and defined differently within the scholarship of aesthetic

education and educational philosophy, and as I have previously explained, the literature of arts education has failed to investigate the concept. I specified wide-awakeness as the conceptual framework for my investigation in order to clearly situate this investigation within the conversation of the aesthetic experience.

As the final piece of this review, I connected drama education literature to powerful encounters with the arts. In so doing, I discussed the ways in which drama-in-education literature articulates the developmental value of drama experiences. I then connected drama—both its form and content—to powerful encounters with the arts by discussing literature that focuses on the way student narrative and cultural context are fundamental aspects of the drama process and integral to powerful encounters with the arts.

## **Methodology**

### **IN SEARCH OF A STUDY**

My research question did not come easily. My passion for theatre education and belief in my work and scholarship lived in an unbridled state of emotion and energy for quite a while before manifesting in the form of my dissertation inquiry. I came to my doctoral work having completed a Master's thesis in which I explored the application of Anne Bogart's *Viewpoints* performance theory within a learning-theory and curriculum-standards context. I quickly learned that responsible pursuit of that inquiry would center on studying with Anne Bogart—an opportunity that is impossible to achieve without a far more substantial performance résumé than I possess. I then tried on the actor-teacher hat, looking to research the role of the actor-teacher within Theatre in Education. Simultaneously performing the role of actor-teacher and researcher proved too difficult to pursue. I then became involved in a project that trained teachers from all content-areas and age-levels to use drama-focused strategies within their classrooms. We were asked by the district to compare the standardized test scores of the students who had been taught by teachers who had been involved in the project with the scores of students taught by non-drama-trained teachers. I questioned our capacity to make a serious judgment about the role our work played with respect to student test scores from several perspectives. Because we never conducted any systematic observation of the teachers with

whom we had worked, how did we know the degree to which they used drama in their classrooms? There were several academic initiatives being implemented at the same time (for example, Accelerated Schools and the New Jersey Writing Project); how could we know the extent to which these efforts, not ours, were responsible for increases in student performance on standardized tests? Causality is slippery at best. As I have previously argued, I question attaching the arts to outcomes that have nothing to do with the arts. This line of inquiry also did not develop into my dissertation topic.

I arrived at the point of my doctoral exams given the opportunity and responsibility to present a conceptual piece that many times forms the foundation of a dissertation journey without a clear idea of what my dissertation would involve. I wrote a paper that detailed my interest in arts education and lamented a lack of research into aspects of the theatre education experience that I found most compelling and important. My exam basically spoke about a general gap in the literature, but set out no clear plan for filling that gap. Elaborating the specifics of my dissertation journey provides the context for both my personal perspective and methodological approach to my research question.

I sought to define my research question through informal conversation and preliminary unstructured interviews. Having started to percolate around the notion of drama's role in educational experience, I called several drama teacher friends and asked their opinions about the aesthetic experience within education today. I was greeted with a variety of responses to my question. Responses varied from



enthusiastic cheers of support to polite, “Isn’t that nice,” to “Well, I think you will be fine talking to teachers if you lose the aesthetics part of your question.” In speaking with a variety of people from inside and outside the world of education, there seemed to be a mixed response. A shroud of irrelevance and lack of interest seemed to pervade many discussions of my research at various dinner parties and coffee klatches. Despite the varied responses, I continued my line of questioning by reading literature, talking with people, and writing germs of thoughts that would hopefully develop into a cogent question that could be investigated. The process of writing and refining my dissertation proposal proved to be the defining part of coming to my dissertation question and deciding on a specific method of inquiry.

#### **A “METHOD” OF INQUIRY**

In light of the many calls for contextualized accounts of arts education experiences highlighted in my review of arts education literature, I have chosen to utilize a case study (Stake, 2000) approach to investigating the aesthetic experience in high school drama classrooms. Extending Stake’s definition of a case as a bounded system, Merriam (1998) explains, “The decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (p.28-29). Stake (2000) characterizes case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, and collective: an intrinsic case study being when a particular/specific case is the focus of investigation, an instrumental case study

when the study involves a particular case, “being examined to mainly to provide insight into an issue or redraw a generalization,” and a collective case study, “which is instrumental study extended to several cases...because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing” (p.437). Using Stake’s case study construct, my dissertation study focuses on two cases to provide insight into the larger concept of creating conditions for aesthetic experiences.

Building on Stake’s case study concept, Lightfoot’s (1983, 1994) portraiture methodology is also useful as I investigate how drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts through providing descriptive, layered, and reflexive accounts of the aesthetic experience.

Lightfoot (1994) describes development of her portraiture methodology:

I was searching for a form of inquiry that might capture the complexity of the human experience...I wanted the written pieces to convey the authority, wisdom, and perspective of the subjects, but I wanted them to feel—as I had felt—that the portrait did not look like them, but somehow managed to reveal their essence

(p.4).

Lightfoot insists that portraiture springs from a desire to research the health and resilience of people, organizations, and concepts rather than pathology and disease of failing schools and nations at risk. In Respect (2001), Lightfoot set out to render the concept of respect a tangible idea that could be vividly seen and

understood in her portraits of people who embody and act on respect in their daily lives. In a similar vein, my study seeks to understand the complexity of the aesthetic experience as it manifests in high school classrooms through observing high school theatre teachers. I desire to lay a foundation from which to understand the intimate and unique relationship between the arts and larger educational endeavors.

In addition, I draw on Eisner's (1998) notion of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism. Eisner asserts, "Educational connoisseurship gives access to the complex and subtle aspects of educational phenomena, and it is through such access that educational critics secure the content they need to function as critics" (p.86). My status as a former high school drama teacher uniquely positions me to view the inner workings of a high school drama classroom with particular insight. Having been a drama teacher, been taught drama, and watched a great deal of drama teaching, I feel comfortable claiming the title "connoisseur of drama teaching." However, I want to acknowledge the way in which my status as connoisseur both mitigates and complicates my inquiry. Because I have "been there," I have to make explicit the fact that I view drama teaching from a very situated and personal space. What I see, hear, and choose to write about will be constructed through that lens.

The methodological concepts explicated above provide the framework through which I conducted my inquiry, the specifics of which I will provide below. I will now detail the specific context of my study and describe the context

of the city, district, schools, and teachers on whom my investigation will focus. Pseudonyms will be used to mask the names of the teachers, schools, and geographic location where I conducted my research. I will then outline the specific data gathering and analysis process, and conclude with a description of issues that arose during my investigation.

## **THE TEACHERS**

### **Monique**

I have known Monique for several years. She is a 30 year-old White woman. We became acquainted as graduate students studying Drama and Theatre for Youth. Though we never had the opportunity to work directly together, I have long admired the enthusiasm and determination with which she tirelessly approaches her work. She completed her MFA in Drama and Theatre for Young Audiences in 2000. Monique took advantage of every opportunity to develop her skills as both an artist and educator. Monique's professional notebook, a 4-inch binder of pictures, letters of support for various awards, lesson plans, curriculum guides, and other various artifacts, testifies to her longstanding commitment to young people.

Her thesis project focused on the work she had done as Education Director, and eventually Artistic Director, with a local Latino theatre organization, *Teatro de la Paz*. She developed an after-school cultural program designed to support the academic success of participating students while also

exposing them to the power of creating theatre. Her thesis articulated the impact of her work not only on the students involved in the program, but also on the community at large. I was fortunate to attend her thesis defense. As she contextualized the way in which the program had developed through stories and images of the specific theatrical work they had done, I remember being truly touched by the love and support of the people in the room.

Monique grew up in a rural New Hampshire town. As the daughter of a single mother who was a musician, she was always surrounded by music and theatre of some sort. She was involved in every theatrical opportunity that presented itself within her small, rural high school. She campaigned for Jesse Jackson in his 1988 campaign for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States and speaks about meeting him while he was campaigning in New Hampshire. Quoting Jesse Jackson, she says “It is your attitude, not your aptitude, that determines your altitude.” That ethos pervades her life as an artist and teacher. During the same time, she coauthored a chapter in a book addressing the AIDS crisis.

While in high school, she also became active in the Upward Bound program. This involvement included summer programs at a liberal arts college in New Hampshire intensely focused on academic tutoring and providing cultural exploration as well. Monique attributes her work ethic and goal-driven nature to her Upward Bound experience: “At Upward Bound I learned the power of education and persistence. I learned to believe in myself and view limitation as

choice, and now I have a great need to share this insight with young people.” The impact of those experiences on Monique cannot be underscored enough. She often talks about the responsibility each person has to create the life they want to lead and the capacity we all have to manifest our potential through hard work and commitment.

Monique’s teaching career began in Laredo, Texas. Newly graduated from Emerson College in Boston Massachusetts, Monique took a job far from removed from her East Coast life: teaching drama in West Texas. She packed up and moved to Laredo (she could not yet speak Spanish) to build a drama program. She stayed in Laredo for three years and developed a program that included developing and producing collaborative scripts, teaching two levels of drama courses, and competing in the University Interscholastic League (UIL) state theatre contest. Monique explains:

Yet, although everything was foreign to me, I immediately felt comfortable in this school and in this culture. I began to realize and identify a deep need felt by so many of these young people, a need to be strengthened and heard. I recalled my experience as an Upward Bound student, and how my four years in the program had offered me hope that a young person from a poor, single-parent family, with no higher education successes in the past, such as myself, could attend college. As a thinker, educator, and believer

in self-constructed fate, I felt impelled to assist (Monique, 2002, p. 22).

She left Laredo to attend graduate school in Drama and Theatre for Youth.

Following graduate school, Monique accepted her current position at Adler High School teaching drama at the Adler Fine Arts Academy. Monique now teaches beginning, intermediate, and advanced drama classes. She also produces four “mainstage” productions a year. Though she does not direct every show, she is responsible for assembling and managing the production teams which design and build each show. Her responsibilities include budgeting, hiring directors (when she is not directing) and designers from the community, handling logistical concerns such as publicity and communication between the design team members, and teaching the students to work with community artists on the productions. These responsibilities coincide with auditioning students for the Fine Arts Academy and communicating with Adler and Fine Arts Academy administration and community stakeholders. In addition to her Adler responsibilities, she is on the ASSITEJ (an international theatre education association) board, she is active in the Texas Educational Theatre Association, and she continues to perform in various community productions when the opportunity arises.

## **Tom**

I met Tom in the process of talking to drama teachers about the nature of my study. I spoke with Tom several times via phone in order to set up a time to

meet in person, as I had done with other local drama teachers. I attended the winter show he directed in January of 2002, “The Secret Rapture,” and was compelled by the ambitious nature of the script he chose to do with high school students, and the level of performance he was able to get from the actors involved. Following several conversations in which he shared a little of his educational philosophy and artistic commitment, I decided I would ask him if he would want to be involved in my dissertation research. He was both curious about my inquiry and willing to let me study his program.

Tom is a White man in his early 40s. He was born in rural Southeast Texas town. He is the youngest of three sons. He attended The University of Texas at Austin. He received his MA in Theatre from The University of London where his thesis work focused on representations of the Holocaust in dramatic literature. One morning when speaking to his students about the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the topic arose as to what role the arts play in working through tragedy. Tom reflected on his knowledge of Holocaust literature and spoke about the different ideological camps that exist. He explained that some people believe that art can be a cultural healing force and others feel that exploring such a horrendous topic on the stage does not honor the people who died. This discussion exemplifies Tom’s knowledge and love of literature. I assert that his strong connection to literature, which includes his formal education, provides a foundation for his work as artist and teacher.



Tom points to his mentor teacher as a formative force behind his teaching identity. Tom had to receive special permission from the student teaching coordinator in order to move Corsicana, Texas and study with this particular teacher. Tom remembers that he worked with his mentor for 3 or 4 months and never saw him make a lesson plan. The man was probably between 50 and 55 years old when Tom student-taught under him, and Tom explains that he would sit on a stool and lead the most amazing discussions. “He had an air about him and students hung on every word he said.” He had a political science degree but had a love of theatre. He took shows to the State level of the University Interscholastic League (UIL) Competition 28 times in 31 years. He won State 3 times and was a finalist 2 times. Within the context of drama teaching in Texas, UIL holds a great deal of weight in terms of status within the arts community and is viewed by many educators as a major source of attention and funding at the school, district and state level. Tom describes, “He was able to take these big, burly cowboys, the kind of guys that were like, ‘Hey mama, could you get in the truck?’ and get them involved in theatre.”

Tom taught for two years before coming to his current position at Royal High School in 1993; he has taught high school drama for 14 years. He has directed 46 shows, some of which include “And They Dance Real Slow in Jackson” by Jim Leonard, Jr. (which placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in the State Finals of the University Interscholastic League Competition), and “Black Angel” by Michael Cristofer (which placed in the top eight at the State Finals of the University

Interscholastic League Competition). Tom considers his work as a director, and the cultivation of artistic discipline and pride in his students, his strengths as a drama teacher.

## **THE CONTEXT**

### **The State Learning Standards for Fine Arts**

Both Monique and Tom teach under the guidance of state learning standards for Fine Arts. Though standards exist for all artistic disciplines, and address all primary and secondary age levels. A discussion of the high school theatre state learning standards frames the curricular context of this study in an important way—it allows us to understand the broader, state-level expectations for student learning in high school theatre and drama. Specifically, students develop knowledge and skills in the areas of perception, creative expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and response and evaluation. At each instructional level there is a specific set of appropriate knowledge and skills that students are expected to accomplish as a result of theatre instruction.

The knowledge and skills are theoretically designed to build in complexity and scaffold one another as proficiency in theatre-related skills is attained. For example, perception within Theatre, Level I includes “develop[ing] concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment, using elements of drama and conventions of theatre.” Perception is further detailed by asking students to

improvise, develop and practice theatre warm-up techniques, employ stage movement and pantomime, develop and practice effective voice and diction, define and give examples of theatrical conventions, and analyze and describe the interdependence of all theatrical elements. Each strand (perception, creative expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and response and evaluation) is detailed in a similar fashion—broadly defined and carefully explicated for particular instructional levels and Monique and Tom are expected to cover the scope and sequence of each instructional level in their work

### **Lakeside Independent School District**

Lakeside sits nestled in the central region of a large southwestern state. Lakeside is a small city that includes a university and government seat. Like many cities in the United States today, Lakeside is challenged by issues of racial segregation, rising unemployment, and environmental concerns. Lakeside Independent School District (LISD) is the largest entity given charge of educating the children of this metropolitan area of 656,562 people. Lakeside ISD has a student population of 78,490 students. 20,526 students attend the 12 high school campuses within the district. Lakeside ISD boasts a student/teacher ratio at the secondary level of 1 teacher per 28 students between grades 7 and 9, and 1 teacher per 32 students in grades 11 and 12. Demographically, 47% of the student population of LISD is Hispanic, 33% is White, and 15.7 % is African American. With respect to the teachers in the district, 78.1% are female and 69.1% are White. The average teacher has 11 years of teaching experience and has spent 7.9

years teaching in LISD. Through the 2002-2003 school year, every LISD high school has a full-time drama teacher. It is within this larger system that the teachers whom I studied work.

### **Adler High School**

Adler High School is located in North Central Lakeside in the heart of a residential area with old trees and comfortable homes. A business district surrounds the residential property adjacent to the school. A McDonald's, a vacuum repair store, and a Chevron are a few of the businesses through which students walk as they make their way to Adler. 1,657 students attend Adler. The student population is comprised of 56.2% White, 24.7% Hispanic, and 17.3% African American students. Built in 1953, the school consists of long hallways that intersect at the main office and additions are merged with portable classrooms, a gymnasium, and auditorium. The main office is a friendly and busy place. In attempting to walk through the hallway during a passing period, I learned very quickly, with Monique's guidance, that the quickest way to traverse the space was to walk outside and around the perimeter of the building.

A large breezeway connects the main campus with the performing arts facility in which the band, orchestra, and theatre courses are offered and performances staged. Entire dissertation studies could be crafted on explicating the campus life that occurs in the breezeway, and on the relationship between the Fine Arts Academy and Adler at-large. Monique teaches her classes in an auditorium that seats roughly 400 people. A 27 ft proscenium arch frames the

stage, which also has a completely equipped rigging system (batons, cables, and weights that allow scenery to be utilized during a production.) Comfortable blue seats have been kept in good condition by the efforts of teachers and staff to keep food and drink out of the space. This is an important detail because Monique talks about how frustrating it is to be the “Frito and Coke police.”

### **Adler Fine Arts Academy**

The Fine Arts Academy was established in 1995 to offer LISD students an opportunity to participate in advanced, arts-focused instruction. Currently more than 400 students (22% of the entire student population) attend the Fine Arts Academy. Within Lakeside Independent School District, an Academy differs from a Magnet school in that it does not function as a school within a school. Meaning, in Magnet schools within the district, Magnet students take all courses with Magnet students; at Adler, Academy students take core courses with Non-Academy students. In addition, Academy students have additional courses and requirements to complete to receive Academy distinction. The Fine Arts Academy website explains:

The Fine Arts Academy for Theatre offers 4 years of Acting classes; one year of Technical Theatre class. Drama majors are required to participate in one play production their freshman year and two productions every other year (participation is either as an actor on stage or behind the scenes in a technical capacity).

Academy students take a core of classes within the general curriculum in addition to courses within their arts “major.” It is important to note that many of the Academy students are also enrolled in Advanced Placement and Honors courses. Monique, along with another teacher focused on technical theatre, comprise the Fine Arts Academy Theatre faculty. Monique replaced the man who had taught theatre and directed all productions at the Academy from its inception in 1995 through 2001. He had taught theatre at the school prior to the Academy as well. He now teaches History at Adler and is very supportive of Monique’s work.

### **Royal High School**

Royal High School sits nestled between an expressway, a large intra-urban trail, and downtown Lakeside. Built in 1975, and since renovated in order to accommodate the 2,026 students that now attend the school, Royal has a spacious and bright feel. Skylights illuminate hallways, the library, and common spaces of the building. Photocopiers can be found on every floor. The smell of candles wafts into the hallways from the main office. The student body is comprised of 61.4% White, 31.1% Hispanic, and 5.8% African American students.

Similar to Adler, the performing arts facilities are connected to the main building by a large breezeway. There are two stages at Royal High. Tom teaches and directs his productions in a small “black box” theatre (a flexible theatre space designed to accommodate a variety of audience arrangements, i.e. thrust, arena, or proscenium). The theatre seats 174 people in small blue seats equipped with folding arms for use by students in the classes that are also taught in the space.

The black box also has an exposed grid from which to hang lights. Tom has created elaborate ships, houses, battlegrounds, and many other theatrical worlds as sets within this space. Royal also has a large auditorium space that is shared between the other arts programs of the school and the larger school community as well. The beige space is immaculately kept. The auditorium was built in 1997 as a result of a large bond issue LISD had received. Tom was involved in the design process of the auditorium when the funds were allocated. The auditorium is most commonly used for choir, orchestra, and band concerts. Having provided a brief description of the people and places where my research took place, I will now provide insight into how my research unfolded.

### **INFORMATION GATHERING**

My strategies for information gathering focused on participant-observation, interviews, and a reflective journal. Observation and interviewing are foundational aspects of qualitative research investigation (Glesne, 1999). Observation included fieldwork within both the traditional school day as well as extra curricular and theatrical production-related responsibilities as well.

Interviewing within the context of my study primarily consisted of informal conversation that occurred while I was sharing time with my participant teachers in which extensive notes were taken. In addition, 3 hours of follow up interviews were conducted with Monique and Tom following my time in their classrooms. Interviews were taped and transcribed. I personally transcribed half

of the interview tapes and received help transcribing the final few tapes.

Fontana and Fry (2000) speak of interviews as a negotiated text:

Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place (p.663).

I found it difficult to have focused conversations in which we could address the issues and challenges that arose during the research process within the context of my inquiry. There was little time when Monique and Tom were at school in which they were not surrounded by throngs of students asking questions nor knee deep in administrative tasks. I learned early on that finding space and time to interview would be challenging.

Another critical area of data gathering was my personal/reflexive research journal. Janesick (2000) states, “The act of journal writing is a rigorous documentary tool” (p.392). Janesick offers journal writing in her effort to broaden the ways in which qualitative data is gathered and interpreted. As a study focused on the arts, incorporation of a variety of techniques, including those reflexive and self exploratory in nature, was critical to making sense of the information I witnessed and experienced in the classrooms of my participant teachers. My journal worked in unison with my fieldnotes and interview data as a location of



sense making for the enormous amount of information I was exposed to on a daily basis.

In the process of classroom observation, I wrote down thoughts, reactions, and things that happened during the day. In general, I would jot things down in my notebook while in school each day and turn my jottings into fieldnotes on my computer at the earliest opportunity. This helped to construct a foundational account of what I experienced in the classrooms of my participant teachers. My fieldnotes, and the analytic memos which grew out of fleshing out the fieldnotes, provided a first step in data analysis, as they recorded my initial attempts to find themes within the data. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) discuss interpretive and analytic forms of writing, different from the characteristically descriptive forms more widely found in fieldnotes. They further state, “in-process memos, however, are products of a more concentrated effort to identify and develop analytic themes while still actively in the field writing field notes” (p.100). I used fieldnotes, and the analytic memos which sprang from them, to “address practical, methodological questions that include: Where should I observe next? What questions should I ask to follow up on this event?” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, p.103). My fieldnotes served as a foundation for making personal meaning of what I witnessed in the classrooms and for formulating themes and finding connections with the theory that underpinned my work.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis within my study focused on looking at the data I collected in the classrooms through the lens of my conceptual framework, using analytic tools that formed the foundation of the coding process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). It is important to note that data gathering and analysis did not occur as two discrete processes within my study. Analysis began to occur as I sat in Monique's and Tom's classrooms; I recorded questions that came to mind alongside my observations, for example. Further drawing on Strauss and Corbin, the process of open coding began as I read and re-read my data in an effort to identify emergent concepts and categories in the work of Monique and Tom. I opted not to use qualitative analysis software, preferring to hand code and work with "hard copies" of my data.

After reading my data as a whole, I cut the transcripts and notes and placed chunks of data onto 4x6 note cards. I then wrote my initial thoughts ("code notes") about the themes in a particular chunk of data on the back of each card. Early in the coding process, in an attempt to get a grasp on the large amounts of data I needed to organize, I used color-coded markers to denote specific themes. I stacked my cards in piles according to color and read the cards again to better understand the nuance of the data on the card and to see if I still agreed with the color I had given the card and where I had placed it. I moved many cards as I reorganized my data. Then I began the writing process.

The writing process for me also served as another level of data analysis. As I attempted to organize data into a coherent narrative, bird by bird (Lamott, 1994), I continued to analyze the information I had gathered. The writing process and the feedback I received on draft chapters challenged me to make sure the themes I was asserting were present in the data. To reiterate, data analysis was an ongoing and intimate process folded into information gathering and writing.

### **The Daily Grind**

I spent 8 weeks observing Monique. I was with her through lunch every day. In general, we would often spend the time in the morning in the main office taking care of things that had to be addressed before the school day began such as making copies, meeting with parents, picking up costumes, or checking on logistics for whatever production was in the works. Morning time was an opportunity for us to talk about things that had transpired at rehearsal the night before or other things of interest.

Monique was “on” once the school day began. First period she taught 20 students Advanced Acting. Second period, she taught 25 “non-academy students” Beginning Acting. Third period was her Academy Beginning Acting class of 25 students. She did not have the opportunity to stop from 9:00, when school started, until 12:00, when her lunch began. Often at 12:00 she would spend time on the apron of the stage organizing the work students had turned in and returning calls that had been received while she was teaching. Monique taught Intermediate Acting and Theatre Production after lunch.

I observed Tom all day every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for a period of 8 weeks. Tom taught 12 students Advanced Acting during 1<sup>st</sup> period. Second period was Tom's Beginning Acting class of 25 students, 3<sup>rd</sup> was a preparation period, and 4<sup>th</sup> was Technical Theatre class of 15 students. Fifth and 6<sup>th</sup> periods were also Beginning Acting classes of 25 or more students. Seventh period, and into the evening, was Theatre Production time.

Immediately following 6<sup>th</sup> period, similar to the time I had with Monique before school, I spent time with Tom making copies, talking about issues that arose during the day, going to the school accountant to balance the Theatre Arts account, or running to the post office or Home Depot, for example. In both the case of Monique and of Tom, it was during that time that I truly became familiar with them as teachers, artists, and people.

### **On Seeing Theatre**

One of the unique gifts of my dissertation study was the opportunity to see theatre. Monique routinely takes her students to performances in Lakeside. I accompanied Monique and her students to 5 productions while I was observing her classroom. We were invited to a student performance of "Bee Luther Hatchee," a play that explores the question of who owns history and who has the right to tell someone's story. As part of this experience, the playwright visited Adler the day following the performance and discussed the process of playwriting and themes found within the play. We saw "Copenhagen," a play about the race to develop the atomic bomb during World War II told through the relationship

between the physicists Bohr and Heisenberg. We also attended several pieces of experimental theatre that exposed students to a broader understanding of performance and a different definition of theatre.

I saw one community production with Tom and his students while at Royal High. We saw “Smokey Joe’s Café” which is a musical review of 50’s and 60’s standards such as “Jailhouse Rock,” “Stand by Me,” “Hound Dog,” and “Love Potion #9.” The stage was decorated as the Playboy club of the 1960’s, complete with combo band and bunny waitresses. Sharing the experience of seeing theatre with a group of young people and drama teachers provided an opportunity for the unique experience of entertainment, critique, and artistic development. Attending performances alongside Monique, Tom, and their students allowed me to further understand the variety of opportunities for powerful encounters that exist for high school drama students. The conversation and insight that occurred around the productions we saw are important pieces of my investigation into powerful encounters within a high school drama context; I got to hear what the students thought about the experience of viewing theatre—did they think each experience was valuable?

### **A Few Words About Lunch**

Eating lunch with my teachers became an important part of my study. At lunch, we would talk about the challenges each found with Drama teaching. Monique and I debated the issue of pornography over lunch. While we were eating our usual Thundercloud subs, Tom asked me how long I had been a drama

teacher and why I wasn't still teaching. One day after eating, Monique confronted me about how the questions I ask sometimes made her feel like I was challenging her. Over lunch, which we sometimes shared with the Royal English Department around a big table in what was once a textbook storage room, I got a sense of how Tom fit with the Royal High School community. While eating pizza and lime Jello with pears in the cafeteria, Monique shared the fact she is a cancer survivor. Tom and I listened to Jim Rome on the radio and talked about our mutual love of sports while driving to lunch. The importance of lunch to my research can be understood in several ways. Lunch became a time for humor, intimacy, and genuine affection. During those times, I learned about the ways in which our common experiences as artists, teachers, and human beings allowed for a greater understanding of their respective teaching philosophies. The insight that I gained during our lunch conversations allowed me to observe their teaching from a more informed perspective.

### **Autobiography and Research**

As a former drama teacher researching drama teaching, I had to continually be mindful of the fact I was viewing teaching through the lens of my experience of drama teacher. Madeline Grumet (1985) speaks of the politics of personal knowledge:

There is an inevitable alienation to story telling as I seize some of the perceptions, memories and fantasies that constitute my subjectivity and weld them into a form that is derived from but

other than me. Its otherness makes it accessible to other people, and to my own reflection as well. This process is recapitulated in the politics of educational research when curriculum theorists and teacher educators work with the narratives of teachers. For we too have been teachers, and our fascination with the life of schools where we no longer teach, with the challenges and burdens we no longer bear, is suspect. Whose story are we studying? Whose experiences are we interpreting (p.323)?

Though not directly studying teacher narrative, my investigation into the aesthetic is intimately connected with the story of the teachers I observed as well as with my own personal life history. The decisions I made when confronted with circumstances similar to those in front of Monique or Tom inevitably came to mind as I attempted to understand their teaching. The way I was trained to direct would come into my mind while watching either Monique or Tom direct. The same qualifications that prepared me in a unique way to observe the practice of Monique and Tom made it easy to often sit in judgment of their work—which was not why I was in their classroom. As I alluded to in speaking about educational criticism, my personal and professional history played a role in the sense and meaning I have made of the way in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts.

### **Who Is the Person with the Pen?**

One of the interesting things that happened as I sat in classrooms with a notebook and pen is that the students asked questions. To most students, I was a student teacher. To others I was Tom's girlfriend. Many students gave me direct quotes, "to include in the book." They asked, "You got that? Right?" Others remarked, "Don't put that in the book." A few asked, "Why would you want to be a drama teacher?" Some students wanted to know everything about my work while others did not really care. Despite my inquiry that focused on the teachers, I grew connected to the lives of the students in the classroom—the energy, the openness, the extremes, and bravery.

### **How Do You Just Leave?**

I found it difficult to leave both schools. It is hard to share, learn, and take from the experience and wisdom of the teachers on a Friday and then wake up the next morning knowing that you will not be back, pen in hand, again. On my last day at Adler, the students gave me a going-away party. We sat in a circle and they shared what they learned in their theatre class that semester and Monique shared how important she felt my work was to the field of theatre education. Each class ended that day with a group hug.

My last day at Royal was a bit different. A guest artist, a poet, was visiting and the 1<sup>st</sup> period Advanced Drama class was performing for her. So, Tom was focused on her presence and getting the students prepared to perform for her before school, and they had a performance that evening so it was especially



difficult to have a sense of closure there. My last time with the 6<sup>th</sup> period Beginning Drama class, a student jokingly remarked, “I see how you are. Come, and steal our knowledge, and leave.” In one sentence she captured the essence of the dilemma I was having. How had I cultivated reciprocity in my work? What had they gained from my presence in their classroom or school? That question remains.

The passion that had once driven me to be a high school drama teacher was definitely tapped as I found myself in the familiar space of the high school drama classroom. I experienced both extreme joy and profound sadness as I watched them work. Many times my thoughts went to what students I had taught were doing now. As I heard the low hum of the stage lights, smelled the paint and wood of the set being constructed, ran lines with students, heard gym shoes hit a stage floor, and watched Monique and Tom experience the daily triumphs and failures that are a part of high school drama teaching, I was definitely reminded of my high school drama teaching experience.

Now that I have detailed my specific methodological approach to my study, and the context for my work, several key ideas need further attention. In order to better understand the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts, I have chosen to explore two high school drama classroom contexts. Constructing two case studies detailing the way in which teachers provide space for powerful encounters with the arts for students will necessarily provide qualitative, contextual information from which

to better understand the nature of powerful experiences in a variety of educational contexts.

## **Monique**

I arrived to research Monique on the first day of school. I drove up to Adler, parked in the loading zone behind the auditorium, and threw my empty Styrofoam coffee cup in the trashcan outside the auditorium door. I immediately noticed action around the main building and the fine arts center. On the stairs next to the auditorium, a student in a “Got Water?” t-shirt sat eating McDonalds and talking with another student. A group of guys with baggy cargo pants that had been cut into shorts, oversized black t-shirts, and long asymmetrical bangs played hacky sack by a big leafy tree. Other guys in jogging suits and the latest Nikes listened to music and “free styled” while being admired by young women moving to the beat in the breezeway that connected the main building to the newer fine-arts facility. Band students were returning from morning practice. Teachers were arriving and parking in the faculty lot next to the school. Other students were milling around making their way into the building. Adler appeared to be a typical urban high school with the normal traffic patterns of kids flirting, teachers working, and life happening.

I met Monique at her car. She was wearing a soft, mustard yellow pant outfit. We walked quickly through the groups of students to the office in the main building. She had a list of things to get done before first period. We spoke about Tartuffe auditions, the Dance teacher asked about the new lunch schedule, and she made copies of the Adler theatre calendar, a parent letter detailing classroom

expectations to pass out to students, and copies of the Tartuffe scene that would be used at callbacks. She busily copied as she greeted other teachers, students, and administrators who were scampering about the office trying to prepare for school as well.

The bell was about to ring, so we walked through the hall at a brisk pace in order to unlock the theatre before 1<sup>st</sup> period. Though time was fleeting, Monique still acknowledged students along the way, often asking whether they were going to audition for the next show or take her class. The halls were crowded and my thoughts of personal space and distance gave way to the hurried rush of “excuse me” and “pardon me.” There seemed to be a rhythm and routine to the first day of school as students and teachers alike asked what seemed to be requisite questions, “How was your summer?” “What is your schedule?” “Did you hear about...[fill in the blank with any relevant news or gossip].” Students found their lockers and teachers organized their classrooms and waited for students to arrive, everyone seemed to know the drill. We walked to the other side of the building and Monique showed me a bruise on her arm that the students had given her when she was thrown into a swimming pool at an Academy orientation party the weekend prior. Finally, we arrived in the auditorium and the day began.

Monique’s classroom is the Adler high school auditorium. The stage itself is roughly 30 feet wide. It is lined with black curtains that are pulled to the side of the space when not in use. General set props, such as the black cubes and benches students use when rehearsing or doing acting exercises, line the perimeter of the

space. The actual “stuff” on the stage changes depending on the activities that are occurring at Adler at that particular time. Assignment sheets, Monique’s grade book, and theatre-related articles line the edge of the stage that serves as her quasi-office. Monique uses the stage as her classroom space. She is at home under the heat of the stage lights.

Monique herself is small in stature but maintains a powerful presence. Her energy and enthusiasm are infectious and inspiring. It is not uncommon for Monique to greet students with an enveloping hug or for class to start with a chorus of a Joni Mitchell song. She also frequently shares her thoughts on a play or concert she attended the night before. I recorded this in my field notes:

Monique asks them [students] to sit in a circle and attempts to diffuse their anxiety through proximity and taking time as assignment sheets and information are being handed out to acknowledge each student individually and that response seems almost instinctual. She even takes more time with attendance to say things like “Do you hang out with [...]?” and “Is your brother John?” (Fieldnotes, August 19, 2002).

She listens intently, affording full attention and focus, and responds with her entire body. Monique’s classroom routine typically involves a few minutes of discussion about local theatre activity. As an actor, director, and producer she is uniquely in tune with the Lakeside theatre community.

Encouraging students to contemplate and experience the power of theatre is the heart of Monique's teaching philosophy. In talking about powerful encounters with theatre she tells this story:

When I was in high school, I was in a production of "Godspell" with the Springfield Community Players and I was at the feet of this man. ...He was sitting with his son.... It was a small black box theatre, so I was at the feet of these two audience members and I was crying. I was wailing with everyone and I looked up and this man had tears... very silently... just tears... drip... onto his suit and I just went "Oh...." It just made me feel so empowered that I could bring someone such emotion and help them to empathize with someone else so readily. I believe in that. I believe in the power of the theatre to do that. Whether he went off and acted any differently? I don't know, but I can't imagine you can so easily just go "okay, that is fine and I will just move on" (Interview, February 8, 2003).

Monique tries to create opportunities for students to engage with theatre in ways that make powerful experiences a reality for her students. She explains, "I am hoping that there is an impact and whatever field they go into they have built some skills at empathy and understanding, and considering other people's lifestyles, cultural background, needs, and fears" (Interview, February 8, 2003). What does Monique do to create these experiences in her work? How does

Monique use the power of theatre to allow students to look at the world and more clearly understand their position in it?

In shining a light on Monique's teaching, three themes emerge with respect to the ways in which she creates the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts. I assert that by affording students the opportunity to look inward and learn about themselves, look outward and relate with each other, and connect with their bodies, Monique creates the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts. This list of themes is not exhaustive. Monique's practice, of course, includes many facets that will not be specifically unpacked and analyzed within the space of my argument. In addition, these themes do not exist in isolation within the complex world of Monique's classroom. These themes converge and diverge as the moments unfold. I have chosen these themes to stand as windows to Monique's practice, and as such, provide insight into the elusive nature of powerful encounters with the arts in a high school drama context.

### **LOOKING INWARD**

A focal point of Monique's teaching is providing the opportunity for students to look inward and reflect upon their thoughts and beliefs. Monique explained:

I think that the educational system says that we are in the schools and the teacher is teaching and the children are learning from the teacher. That's how it's supposed to work. But what's amazing is these are teenagers, especially right now, I walked in yesterday

and, into first period, and they are talking about war and “Why not,” and “Well my father said this,” and “My sister said that....” We can repeat what people say but we all have our own feelings and opinions and fears, and those young people certainly do. It’s just amazing that you get out of school and suddenly you’re supposed to know what you believe, and how do you get to know what you believe if you don’t get to explore it? (Interview, February 8, 2003).

A first step in exploring beliefs and self within Monique’s classroom involves looking inward. Monique often begins an exercise with an introspective, internal portion of a larger unit that moves to a more collective meaning-making experience—looking inward flows into looking outward and back again. Monique scaffolds exercises and activities in a way that gradually and consistently strengthen skills of introspection while also preparing students to look outward.

Monique often discusses looking inward in terms of reflection. In explaining the role of reflection in her work as a theatre teacher, Monique explains,

In order to be vulnerable and to put yourself out there you have to understand yourself, so another part of it is really reflecting.

Asking yourself, why do I do things? (Interview, September 23, 2002).



Monique consistently uses reflection to process classroom exercises and activities. The students quickly learn the routine of forming a circle following an activity in order to discuss what they have just participated in, thereby connecting the exercise with Monique's larger educational objectives. Monique views reflection as a space in which to make connections:

It's a big leap and that's one of the reasons that we have to consciously look at something so that they can see how an activity that they find really fun is work in disguise. I don't think they realize that. I think it's like, okay this is a game, this is fun, oh—this is *work*, and they're different. By having a good time, my belief is, you have a good time, you enjoy something and then you look at it and say what was the work I just accomplished? That's really important to me. That's why I don't call them games, but I call them activities. And that's why I ask students to reflect upon it (Interview, September 23, 2002).

In extending the role of reflection, Monique asks students to think about the larger implications of the exercises they do in class and as students of theatre:

I like to ask students these skills that they're building for the theatre, how can they use them otherwise? How are they going to fit into their lives as a parent, or as a student, and a child, and how can they use some of these things that they are learning about communication and collaboration in their world other than just in

the theatre? Because I think that's crucial, and I really believe that the work that we do is much more than teaching students about theatre; we're teaching students about life, and empathy, and collaboration, and communication. I hope that students will realize the power of what they are engaged in (Interview, February 8, 2003).

Looking inward provides Monique's students the opportunity to become aware of themselves as people, of what opinions they hold, and of what beliefs they maintain. This is especially important in that, as high school students, they are approaching adulthood and attempting to understand their identities within the context of the adult world.

The monologue unit exemplifies the journey from looking inward to looking outward within Monique's work. Before sharing their work with each other in rehearsal and performance, students engaged in several activities focused on looking inward. Specifically, the character biography and act of memorization are inward-focused activities integral to the monologue unit. Monique explains character biographies:

They do the character biography and that is the beginning of thinking about what would it be like to live in someone else's life, of being able to empathize with them and really able to explore these other characters (Interview, February 8, 2003).

The monologue unit gradually unfolded as students went through the process of choosing a monologue and learning about unit expectations. The unit began when Monique stood in the front of the group and enthusiastically announced the monologue unit and explained that monologues are often used in auditioning process. In her Beginning Non-Academy class, the room buzzed with questions like, “What is a monologue?” “Will we have to memorize it?” “How long does it have to be?” An upperclassman asked, “Can we do Shakespeare, because we had to memorize something from Julius Caesar in English?” Monique patiently fielded questions, attempting to both assuage fear and build interest. The Beginning Academy students had questions of a different ilk: “Can we use a monologue we have already prepared?” “Does it matter if we do comedy or drama?” and “Do we have a time limit?” With this group she took her announcement a step further and explained that one should always have two monologues “in your pocket,” a comedy and a drama, ready to perform at a moment’s notice, “because you never know when you are going to read an audition notice and need to dust one off.” Monique then performed a monologue to give students an idea of exactly what a monologue performance should include.

The journey to finding a monologue included research. Students rummaged through plays in the library and combed the monologue file Monique had developed during her years in teaching. They had been asked to find monologues 2 minutes in length, from plays written within the last hundred years, and which portray characters within 10-15 years of their age. At the Adler library,

Monique circulated through the groups of students who were standing, laying, sitting, and leaning throughout the theatre section, and gently redirected those who appeared to be more concerned with the cute guy in the next section or their plans for the weekend than finding the perfect piece to perform. She had only reserved two days of library time for them to complete the task of finding a monologue and the students “needed to make the best use of their time.”

Both academy and non-academy students alike appeared to suffer from the paralysis of analysis in that they did not know where to start with respect to finding a play. Monique would steer them in the right direction by saying “Why don’t you try. . .?” or “Take a look at . . . ,” always keenly in tune and focusing the attention of the group. I got the feeling the students felt secure knowing she was right there to pull a play from the shelf and make a suggestion. The clock was ticking as time for memorization and performance drew near.

Following script selection, Monique asked students to read the entire text and complete character biographies that included such questions as “What experiences has your character had or not had that have deeply affected your life?” “What deep-seated attitudes about things—in life and therefore in the scene—does your character have and express?” “How are these attitudes expressed,” and “What points of similarity are there between you—the actor—and the character you are playing?” Students turned in written responses to the questions describing their monologue characters based upon information they had gleaned from their play scripts. Writing the character biography provides an

opportunity for students to individually look inward, reflect, find personal meaning, and learn about their monologue character before turning their focus outward to the performance-based aspect of their work.

During the time in which the students were writing their character biographies and preparing to perform, Monique walked students through the process of memorization. Monique talked about a different kind of knowing that happens after you have memorized and internalized a monologue: “it is something deeper,” she said. Several days before their first memorization test, Monique asked that students share their memorization tips. One student said she put her monologue on a tape. Another student offered that she writes it over and over again. Yet another said she says her monologue to her niece, so often that her niece knows it better than she does.

The memorization tests proved to be nerve-racking for the students despite Monique’s efforts to calm their fears. Students were allotted 5 minutes to write their monologues during the test. Monique asked the students to put everything away except a writing utensil and a piece of paper. She demanded that the students not talk during the test. The students extended the arms on the auditorium seats that acted as miniature desks and prepared for the signal to start. They were told to begin and their 5 minutes started. Tick. Tock. While the students were writing, Monique moved around the space offering words of encouragement. Tick. Tock. A student asked, “Do we have to know this word for word?” Tick. Tock. They were being evaluated upon accurately writing the words

of their piece, but this particular student wanted to know how many points he would lose if he substituted an “an” for a “the.” Tick. Tock. Their time was up, and Monique asked them to turn in their papers.

Monique gave several memorization tests in the process of the monologue unit. Following one memorization test, she lead a discussion about how the true work begins after the memorization is done:

It is like baking a cake. Lines are the ingredients for the cake. You have to know the words you are going to speak before you can mix them all together and create the finished cake, the well-developed and engaging character. The work is difficult, and it just begins when you have it memorized (Monique’s words recorded in my fieldnotes, September 11, 2002).

Thus memorization is a way in which students look inward and develop a greater understanding of their characters and of themselves in relation to their character.

Memorization becomes a gateway for personal meaning and significance.

Monique speaks of internalization saying,

I think a lot of people think that theatre’s about being out there and just rattling without listening, without ingesting. I think ingesting is such a big part of it. Thinking about who’s your audience, what are you trying to say to them, and why? We don’t just talk. We have to understand why, and what we’re trying to say, to what end,

and why. If we're screaming and we don't know why we're screaming, then we have to (Interview, February 8, 2003).

As Monique implies when she refers to memorization as a beginning of a student's work, looking inward, through the process of character biographies and memorization, provides the foundation for students to "ingest" their characters through rehearsing and performing their monologues.

Looking inward is also intimately connected to imagination and creativity within Monique's work. In grounding a discussion of Monique's connection with imagination, it is important to discuss Greene's understanding of imagination. Imagination is central to the educational project as Greene views it. Greene asserts that imagination makes empathy possible:

The extent to which we grasp another's world depends on our existing ability to make poetic use of our imagination, to bring into being the "as if" worlds created by writers, painters, sculptors, filmmakers, choreographers, and composers, and to be in some manner a participant in artists' worlds (1995, p.5).

Looking to Sartre, Greene develops the notion of a social imagination:

I am reminded of Jean Paul Sartre's declaration that "it is on the day when we conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our sufferings and that we decide that these are unbearable" (1956, pp.434-435). That is we acknowledge

another state of affairs only when we have in mind another state of affairs in which things would be better (1995, p.5).

Thus imagination becomes a tool by which to explore alternative realities and create new worlds. By extension, imagination can be understood as a way in which students can find their voices and discover what they have to say to the world. Social imagination then becomes the way in which individual voice connects with social consciousness. This directly relates to Monique's assertion that theatre creates opportunity for empathy and perhaps acting differently within the world. Monique explains:

I think it's asking young people to really look at themselves, honestly, and the world around them. I believe in the power of theatre to ask people to look at the world, and possibly think differently, I believe that through the work that we do, they act differently (Interview, February 8, 2003).

One way Monique provides for students to look inward and strengthen their imaginations is through guided imagery exercises.

One morning she led a guided imagery activity with her students. After having warmed-up, Monique asked students to find a spot and lay on the wooden stage floor. "Lay on your back and let your focus fall to your feet." She quietly encouraged students to spread out so they could have their own individual space. She stood on the edge of the stage and then gradually started to move around the space as she got farther into the exercise. Students closed their eyes and became



aware of their breathing. “Tense and release. Feel what the floor feels like against your back. Tense and release.” Once the students were situated and centered she asked them to “think about the color red... feel the color red throughout your body... Is it hot? Warm? Comforting? Threatening? Feel the color yellow. How is it different from red? Is it safe? Warm? Bright? Heavy? Hopeful?” She reminded them to stay connected with their breathing and then continued:

See the color green... Is it light? Fresh? Springtime? Are you seeing dark green or light green? See the color light blue. Is it like the sky? Do you feel possibility? Flight? Allow the colors to make you think of a person. Red. White. Hot Pink. Dark Blue. Orange. Black. You are walking in a meadow. Grass under foot. There is a path into some woods that leads upwards into a hut. You see a cabin. See someone with a box. Who is that person? That person says “take it with you.” You take the box and leave. You return to the meadow and open the box. What is in the box? Is it big or little? Is it hot or cold? Is it soft or hard? Why were you chosen to receive that box? Play around with the object in the box, wear it, smell it. Do whatever is appropriate to do with the object in the box. Now prepare to move back to this space. Feel your toes, feet, legs, fingers, arms, and bodies (Monique’s words as recorded in Fieldnotes, October 3, 2002).

Monique gently brought the group back to alert cohesion by moving nearer to students who might have fallen asleep. As students became re-aware of their bodies on the hard stage floor, some appeared to be waking from deep sleep and could not move to the next part of the exercise, which was to share with a person next to you what your meadow looked like, who gave you your box, and what was in your box. Other students popped right up and excitedly began to relate their who, what, when, and where, loud enough for the entire group to appreciate their creativity.

In looking at this exercise, Monique begins by asking the students to imagine a separate space beginning with basic physical grounding: “feel your feet,” “feel your back.” She extends the exercise by inviting students to think about specific attributes of the separate space they have imagined, thereby allowing students to create a meadow, a cabin, and a gift in their minds’ eyes. This exercise asks students to look inward and make individual meaning of an imaginary context. Guided imagery exercises also provide a context in which students look inward, center, and find focus.

Monique views finding voice as a desired result of looking inward and reflection. Monique explains the importance of finding voice:

I think every young person is aching for the need to be heard, everyone in the world is. The hardest thing is that sometimes we don’t know how to say what we need to say. We don’t know what we have to say and no one in the world is telling us that we have

anything to say when we're young. I really want to give students the tools, and the space, and the recognition that they have something to say and the space in which to say it. . . . I have a lot of adolescents who haven't developed that, and truly, all day long they're hearing "be quiet, be quiet, be quiet" because some adult wants to talk to them, at them. So how are they expected to develop a strong voice if they're being told to be quiet? (Interview, February 7, 2002).

The act of looking inward becomes a way in which Monique challenges students to become aware of what they have to say. Thus heightened awareness of self and voice are the precursors to wide-awakeness; students must be grounded in their understanding of themselves before they can look out into the world and analyze events in the larger context.

Looking inward to find voice is most evident in the writing exercises Monique leads as part of the self-written monologue unit. Monique draws upon her experience as a playwright (she has had two plays professionally produced) in order to guide her students in writing their monologues. Building upon her belief in reflection, Monique states, "In the monologue that they write [as opposed to the one they find in contemporary dramatic literature] I want them to think about what they have to say to the world and to consider that" (Fieldnotes, September 29, 2002). The process of looking inward within the self-written monologue unit involves tapping into personal experience through structured writing activities.

As we began the writing process Monique asked us to get comfortable in our seats. (I participated in this activity alongside the students.) She moved to the front of the auditorium and explained that she would be asking us questions and that we should “allow our thoughts to flow and turn off the inner critic.” We began the writing process with a word-association activity in which we were instructed, “do not to let your hands come off the page.” Monique said, “Write about yellow” and gave us 5 minutes. While we were writing, Monique moved around the space saying things like, “there are no wrong answers,” and “write the first thing that comes to your mind.” Five minutes seemed like an eternity.

In constant motion around the space, Monique gave us our next prompt: “hope.” This one was tougher, and it appeared to take us longer before we were able to gather our thoughts and continue writing. She said “fear” and we all seemed to immediately know what to write. The sound of pencils hitting paper seemed louder with this prompt. We were then asked to write for 5 minutes on “love,” and one student exclaimed, “I am going to write about my baby.” Monique moved around the auditorium offering words of encouragement and caring responses to grimaces and sighs of frustration. Monique supported our work, saying, “Really activate your writing through taking chances.” The writing exercises that particular day ended in writing about “I believe in...” and “a memorable experience.”

One particularly powerful moment occurred when Monique asked us to write about “something we wish we could tell someone.” Before starting the 5-

minute clock, Monique spontaneously told a personal story of something she would like to be able to tell her mother. We sat transfixed as she shared what it was like to grow up around bands, music, and singing. She explained that she wanted to thank her mother for the love and appreciation for music and the arts that she had instilled in her. Her story continued and then she stopped abruptly and said, “You get the idea,” and we all exhaled and turned our attention to our papers knowing we were about to be asked the same question.

As the writing process continued, we knew we would eventually be asked to choose something we had written and develop it further into a more polished piece to be performed. In an effort to prepare for that eventuality, Monique asked us if we wanted to share any of the material we had written in response to the prompts. Several students offered to share their work. One student shared the story of a car accident he had narrowly escaped the week before. He wanted to apologize to the person who had been driving the car he had pulled out in front of and almost collided with. His hands shook and his voice quivered as he described the horror he felt as he slammed on the brakes of his parents’ Lincoln Town Car. He isolated the moment when he locked eyes with the driver of the other car and knew the fear in his heart. He explained that he wanted to apologize for his recklessness and any pain he might have caused. This was an incredibly powerful moment and the class erupted into applause following the reading of the piece. Monique offered consistent, warm feedback when students shared their work. The

forum to share drafts was integral to honing a final monologue that would be performed.

The process of looking inward within Monique's classroom centers on several key points. Looking inward involves having the space for introspection and creation. As in guided imagery, students were encouraged to imagine a meadow, a house, and a gift. In writing monologues, students were guided through a series of writing prompts that they would develop into a polished monologue. Looking inward also allows for personal meaning to be attached to objects and situations. For example, the character biography assignment and memorization process made it possible for students to assign personal relevance and significance to their monologues. In addition, looking inward and connecting with self provides the foundation for looking outward, when individual thoughts and understandings are expressed and opened up to collective discussion and meaning-making. Following the guided imagery exercise, students were asked to find a partner and describe their meadow and their gift. Within the self-written monologue unit, after having drafted responses to the prompts, individuals shared their drafts and receive feedback from the class. Having glanced at the process of looking inward within the context of Monique's work, I will now relate looking inward with looking outward, the next step in the journey toward powerful encounters with the arts.

## **LOOKING OUTWARD**

Another central aspect of Monique's teaching is facilitating moments when students can look outward and learn from watching, listening, and connecting with one another. Monique speaks of the importance of watching and listening:

[People] that know how to listen know how to learn from other people. They know how to watch someone, and not mimic, and see the difference, too. The boys who play women, or women who play men, it's always a stereotype. They're not watching their world carefully enough. They're not really listening. Those who can really listen, and see gray, and see levels of gray, and see the world, and people in it, they're wonderful actors. They're also wonderful people who take things in, who really take things in. To be a passionate person and to be able to really take in someone else's wholeness and understand them and empathize, truly empathize, with them, that's what I love to try to do (Interview, February 8, 2002).

The importance of looking outward within Monique's teaching centers on the capacity to "take things in." Through continually listening and watching, students can learn to perceive wholeness in people and gray in life. "Taking things in" clearly relates to Greene's concept of wide-awakeness in that it speaks to the

ability to be awake to the world and striving to fully understand your position in it.

Monique connects looking outward, watching, and listening to the art of acting:

Acting is primarily about listening and responding. It is about absorbing what someone gives and responding to that. A huge part of what happens is learning how to handle the physical with the verbal. Learning how to both give and receive. Talk and listen (Fieldnotes, September 15, 2002).

In applying this understanding of acting, the relationship among actors, acting training becomes about developing listening skills integral to connecting students to one another within the class.

Looking outward becomes a way in which ensemble is created within.

Monique's classroom. Monique describes the importance of ensemble:

I think ensemble is about teamwork... the idea that everyone is important. The circle defines the ensemble. I consider myself part of the ensemble, that we all have something to contribute, and that we feel that we're in a safe place where we can explore different things and question things and be a little vulnerable with each other, and still safe. . . . In the theatre we're going to ask people to be creative and vulnerable and available. When I talk about the purpose of ensemble with my students, I try to explain to them



how we can ready ourselves for development, performance, or improvisation by creating an ensemble together (Interview September 23, 2002).

The complex relationship between looking outward, feeling safe, developing ensemble, and connecting with one another is a central piece of Monique's teaching and cannot be underscored enough. Connecting with society begins with connecting with one another within a classroom context.

Monique speaks of the small victories she experiences in her quest to imbue students with a respect for one another and the ensemble she seeks to develop:

I like moments when students notice each other growing. That's really cool. It's still really early. I mean, three weeks, we're building. I realize that students might get better and better at projecting and all of those things, but ensemble, it doesn't matter how good you are at ensemble, you still have to build it with every group. And I knew that, but I think I'm surprised by how much I've had to try, how hard it has been in that first period class. And I don't think there's an ensemble in third period either. I think there is an ensemble in second period. I think they are taking care of each other. I think they are aware of each other. I think they think that they are all important. I think that they might get annoyed by someone but are trying to pull them back in. I think they are going

to get stronger at that. I don't know, I just feel like there have been real moments in that class where I've gone "Yeah, this is why I do this" (Interview, September 23, 2003).

Within this quote Monique discusses the specific things that are integral to ensemble: everyone in the group is important; they take care of one another; and the entire ensemble is responsible for the individual success of every group member. Monique also points to the fact ensemble is difficult to achieve in some instances, but that she finds the moments when it occurs central to her being a drama teacher.

To reiterate, creating ensemble in the classroom and developing the students' ability to look outward and learn from one another is not an easy task for Monique. Students come into theatre class and are asked to function differently than they do in other parts of their lives as students, employees, and sons and daughters. Monique explains:

They can't possibly walk out of a theatre class where they are being vulnerable and sharing and collaborating and thinking about the world, and transform as they walk out the door and re-harden. I don't think we ask our students to think a lot. So not being asked to think and then suddenly they come in and you have to strip away defenses and all those things... and you strip that away, and that takes time and then they are stripped and then it is time and you

have ten minutes before it is time to leave and they need time to put their defenses back on (Interview, February 8, 2003).

The notion of ensemble seems to go against the flow of individual achievement and self-determination celebrated by both the educational system and society at large.

A specific example of tension around Monique's effort to build ensemble occurred one day when a student challenged a trust exercise Monique had been leading. Monique asked her Advanced Drama students to form a large circle. Once the circle had been formed, she asked students to move together very close to one another. She then explained they were going to do a trust activity in which one student stands in the middle and allows the weight of his or her body to fall either forward or backward allowing the group to support their weight, and thus not allow them to fall. They waited for someone to move to the center. Monique stated that she did not understand the difficulty with participation in this group. "Participation points should not be necessary with advanced students." Everyone continued to look around and wait. Finally, a student stepped forward and half-heartedly leaned forward toward Monique. Monique and the students at her sides caught the trusting student. Another student then volunteered and the exercise continued. This student fell backward very quickly and the group almost did not catch him. This continued for several rounds until Monique asked the students to sit and discuss, "Why would we do a trust activity in a drama class?" Monique explains:

Jennifer said that there was no worth. The only reason that we would do such an activity is to waste time, which she has absolutely a right to say and Emily has a right to respond to that. And they did it in an okay way. It was a little disrespectful to each other, but Emily said I think we need to do this kind of thing because we need to be working together and we need to be listening to each other, which we are having problems with. And it was pretty poignant what she was saying (September 23, 2002).

Jennifer took issue with the trust exercise and Emily defended the exercise on the grounds that the class did need to improve on working together and listening to one another. This exercise and the discussion that followed it are important to highlight for several reasons: they exemplify the way in which Monique attempts to build ensemble in her classes through both leading exercises and helping her students to process those exercises, and they also represent the atmosphere of honesty Monique strives to create and work within in her classroom.

There is an important connection between teaching students to look outward and experience ensemble and the ability to relate that experience with how they live in the world. Monique explains this relationship:

I ask students to be vulnerable and share themselves and be raw and that is a lot to ask, but I do think that what we are doing is asking them to change their action in relation to other people, in

relation to what is going on in the world (Interview, February 8, 2002).

To reiterate, Monique views the connection she builds between students in her classroom as a central part of her work in that by learning how to connect with each other they are also learning how to connect with the world and perhaps act differently. After discussing looking outward and then unpacking the connection between looking outward and ensemble, it is now important to offer several examples of looking outward in Monique's work.

"*Ma see lo eh*" is one example of an activity Monique used to help students look outward and become comfortable with one another. Monique learned this traditional African greeting song when she took a group of students to Switzerland two years prior. *Ma see lo eh* is similar to "patty cake" or "see, see, my playmate" in that there are specific hand movements that correspond to the words of a song. In teaching the song, Monique asked a student to volunteer and model the song for the group. She showed the student the movements while signing the song. Monique stood facing the student and began to teach her the song. We watched and waited to try and learn it ourselves. *Ma see lo eh*. (Hands tap thighs, clap, and then clap the hands of your partner.) *Eh la ma see lo*. (Arms cross and clap your partners hands.) *Eh la ma see lo eh*. (Hands tap thighs again, clap, clap the hands of your partner.) *Eh la ma see lo*. (Arms cross and clap your partner's hands and begin the exercise again.) Monique's demonstration ended and we prepared to begin to try *ma see lo eh*. Monique asked us to stand and form

an inner and outer circle. We stood facing our partner and the exercise began: *Ma see lo eh*. (We started really fast and it was hard to do the right movements.) *Eh la ma see lo*. (I still could not do the right motions on the right beat. Luckily, my partner had the same problem.) Monique did the exercise along with the group, being careful to allow the group to dictate the speed and rhythm. *Eh la ma see lo eh*. (As long as the group kept a consistent, slow, beat, I was able to keep up.) *Eh la ma see lo*. After we completed the song, the outer circle rotated and we began again with new partners. We repeated *ma see lo eh* several times and each time the song got a little faster. *Ma see lo eh* became a kind of frenetic exercise that was more difficult to follow with each repetition. We laughed as we messed up and tried to get on the right beat again.

After several rounds, Monique asked us to sit and discuss the exercise. We decided that the slower and more deliberate our actions, the easier it was to do the exercise. One student even said, “If one person starts it going to fast it messes up the whole group.” *Ma see lo eh* provides the opportunity for a group to look outward, have fun, become comfortable with each other, and learn about the role of the individual within a group context.

The “hero” activity is another example of an exercise focused on looking outward. One morning, Monique asked her Advanced Theatre students to find a spot on the stage floor and visualize one of their personal heroes in their mind’s eye. She wove her way through the students as she explained the exercise. She

asked that they really think about the essence of their hero—voice, walk, posture, and cadence of speech.

Then she asked that they move around the space as their heroes. Students moved silently around the space. Some moved with their chests and noses in the air. Others students looked concerned with a furrowed brow and heavy heart. Monique then asked that they begin to interact with one another without talking. Monique tapped certain students on the shoulder as they moved around the space. Monique asked the students to “freeze.” She asked the group of students who had been tapped to sit down while the other students remained frozen as their heroes.

Monique then began to process the activity. One group sat down and described what they saw when looking at the body positions of the other half of the group. The group that had commented first was then asked to freeze and the first group spoke about what they saw in the heroes of the other group. In each instance, Monique asked the students observing to describe the heroes that were being presented with vivid adjectives. The adjectives that students came up included “strong,” “fluid,” “graceful,” and “sexy.” At a basic level, this activity provided an opportunity for students to explore both creating character and identifying the role physical specificity, such as posture, stride, and facial expression, plays in character development. Upon deeper analysis, the exercise provided students the opportunity to look outward, watch, and define the concept of hero for himself or herself. This exercise also stood as an act of collective

meaning-making and connection as students watched their peers and created a common understanding of the concept of hero based upon their conversation.

The exercise of “mirroring” stands as another example of looking outward. Monique explains mirroring saying, “Mirroring is about listening with the eyes and body” (As quoted in field notes, August 31, 2002). Mirroring, at its most basic level, involves two actors facing one another and responding to one another in unison, as if looking at each other in a mirror. The activity can be made more complex by involving more people (for example, more than one actor following the lead actor), “sculpting” the body positions of the actors while they are following one another, and switching lead actors during the activity.

One day while leading a mirroring activity, Monique asked students to find a partner and spread out on the stage floor. She asked them to determine which person would be the leader. Following that instruction, she asked the students to begin. She moved around the space, offering simple corrections and instructions when needed, refocusing students that seemed to have difficulty centering on the activity. She then asked that students switch leaders. The shift was to occur effortlessly and without conversation; “I should not be able to see when it happens.” Monique continued to circulate throughout the space. The students switched leads and continued the exercise.

After a few minutes, Monique began to move student pairs together into larger groups. She sculpted the student actors’ bodies by carefully moving between pairs of students and slowly raising her hands like a puppeteer gently



pulling strings, causing the actors to respond to the movements of her hands.

Upon observing this exercise, I recorded this in my fieldnotes:

The students then did a mirroring activity. Today the focus was truly amazing. It is incredible to watch groups begin to work together and learn the principals of focus and control. Today Monique moved groups together and made possible, through positioning, for one group to be affected by another. She sculpted groups together and encouraged changes in levels and positioning and relationship (As quoted in fieldnotes, August 27, 2002).

After allowing students to mirror in groups for several minutes, she asked that they sit in a circle and discuss the experience. Students talked about the need to “move slowly.” Monique asked, “How did you do with your partner?” One student answered, “After a while we did not know who was who.” One student exclaimed, “Betsy was a horrible partner!” Monique responded, “What do you mean?” The student replied, “We never really connected and there was no eye contact.” Monique listened to each comment and asked students to speak specifically when she had a question. Monique guided group mirroring after students had been doing paired mirroring for several weeks. In so doing, she was extending the basic exercise to a more advanced place.

Often students would challenge the validity of mirrors, requesting to work instead specifically on production-related things like monologues and scenes. The apparent ease of the exercise was deceptive. Mirroring poorly requires little skill;

however, the ability to be in tune with another person to such a degree that you move as one, as a reflection of someone else's impulses, ideas, and energy, is difficult. As Monique pointed out, mirroring is about listening with the body and mind. Mirroring involves looking outward, and being able to watch and respond to the movement of your partner or group members.

The monologue performance also represents an important context for looking outward within Monique's classroom. As described in reference to looking inward, students were asked to participate in a monologue unit. As part of warming up on the first day of monologue performances, Monique asked students to move around the stage:

Use your imagination to fully commit to choices... move think and talk as characters... move, think, and talk as characters... visualize yourself offering a brilliant monologue... feel what success feels like... hear the applause (As recorded in fieldnotes, September 19, 2002).

After the warm up, Monique had the students sit in the auditorium so that the performances could begin.

One solitary pool of light fell on the stage of a darkened auditorium. In the usual classroom formation, students sit in the first three rows in the center section of the auditorium. On monologue performance day this detail was particularly important because it meant that students would be able to see the faces of classmates over the glow of the lights. Monique moved to the back of the

auditorium with pen and paper in hand, prepared to call the first performer to the stage. The tension was palpable as the performances began. Monique asked for volunteers, waited, waited, and if no one stepped forward, exclaimed, “save yourselves your participation points!” (Five participation points are added to a student’s monologue score if they volunteer.) The group began to volunteer each other—“Jeremy wants to go,” “Crystal is ready”—and applauded when a student actor stepped forward thus taking the others off the proverbial hook.

Eventually, a student actor stepped onto the stage. Often blinking and swaying, the student actor introduced herself and her piece. “Hello, I am Sarah and I will be performing the role of Laura from Tennessee Williams’ *Glass Menagerie*,” for example. Students applauded and cheered in support of one another. After the applause subsided, Monique asked the next student to come forward. Student after student came to the stage, announced their name and the title of their monologue, performed their piece, said thank-you, and exited the stage in exuberant relief.

The monologue performance represented an act of looking outward in that students were sharing themselves and their characters with an audience of their peers. In addition, they were connecting with the audience and responding to the energy of the event embodied in the applause and feedback they received following their performance.

When considering looking outward within the larger context of Monique’s teaching, several ideas come to mind. The repeated process of looking outward

allows student actors to sharpen skills of perception and discernment. For example, mirroring provides students the opportunity to watch and become aware of their movements and those of their partners. Looking outward also fosters the ability to communicate ideas within an ensemble and to an audience. The hero activity strengthens communication skills; the discussion that followed the activity allowed students to process the images as a group and build ensemble. Students learned to communicate a character through performing their monologue.

### **CONNECTING WITH THE BODY**

The body plays an integral role in Monique's teaching. Monique's fundamental philosophy of drama teaching is informed by the idea that the body, mind, and voice are the tools an actor uses to explore their experience, create character, and bring characters to life on stage. Monique repeated this mantra so frequently that students knew it by heart, and very quickly learned to repeat it when asked. More than just repeating these words, it was evident the students had internalized the message in the way they would intuitively and enthusiastically go to the stage following class announcements and warm up, fully engaging in physical exercises facilitated by Monique. By connecting the body, mind, and voice together in the classroom, Monique clearly situated the body as a primary aspect of the students' work.

Connecting with the body facilitates the body's capacity to free thoughts and allow students to see things differently. Monique explains:

Sometimes you have to censor because you have to edit your own work and other times you just have to let it flow and that is a moment you know physicality. You have just got to do it and lots of times you are sitting there and you are trying to figure it out and is like just do it... if you do it you will know. If you sit and try to figure [it] out, you know, any of those things would work, but when you do it and it feels right then it is right; it is that simple. So that is why I like to be on our feet a lot, because [otherwise] we try to think of something clever. So, that is why I think teenagers have a lot of trouble with improvisation. We're trying to think of something clever and instead we *are* clever—and if we just let that out it will *be* clever—so that is why I think getting on your feet is so important (Interview, February 8, 2003).

The idea that “if you do it you will know” clearly articulates the body’s role in sense making within Monique’s classroom. By extension, it is possible to understand the relationship between connecting with the body and wide-awakeness by looking at the role of the body in becoming present with experience. Quoting Merleau Ponty, Greene describes the connection between perception and physical experience: “It is through the body that I become present ... The experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, and values are constituted for us” (1964, p.25). From connecting with the body at basic level in warming up, to more advanced physical exercises,

Monique's classroom is a place in which the body is continually explored and where connections are made. Focusing on several exercises in which the body plays a central role will provide a thorough picture of ways in which Monique facilitates connecting with the body.

Students are guided through warm-up activities every day. Students filter into the auditorium, find their seats, the bell rings, and Monique asks the students to quickly go to the stage and find "neutral."

The idea of "neutral" is so important to me. It's that ability to really be one hundred percent present and aware, and sometimes the kids don't understand. They'll stand still and think that's neutral, but that's not neutral, and it takes a long time, and Junior year and they'll go, "Oh, alright, you don't have to tell me, I just see it!" (Interview, February 8, 2003).

Neutral is a state of relaxed, yet alert, stillness from which actors begin their work. In neutral, the actors' hands are placed loosely at their sides, their feet are solidly planted, and their eyes are focused forward in a state of introspection and preparedness.

One morning after having asked the students to spread out on the stage and find neutral, Monique led them through a breathing exercise. She stood in front and asked the group of focused students to picture themselves in a little bubble:

Be aware of your mouth and bottom. How are you feeling today?  
How does my body feel today? Reach into the air, stretching, then  
hang down to the ground, allowing your body to fully relax and  
hang. Breathe as you hang and slowly come up (Fieldnotes, August  
22, 2002).

She then asked them to reach and stretch again. She stretched along with the group, encouraging them to extend both arms, one arm slightly higher each time, and really feel the stretch from the tips of their fingers to the their toenails. She asked students to raise their hands in the air and gradually bend their fingers, “down,” wrists, “down,” arms, “down,” and elbows, “down,” and waist, “all the way down.” Students would often say “down” along with Monique, echoing her as she led the exercise. After reaching and bending, students would stand up and prepare for the next part of the warm up. Students’ shoulders would relax as their breathing slowed. Their hands would soften as they become comfortable. The muscles in their faces would reflect relief as they became present in the theatre space. Grounding the students in the classroom space through this exercise is a first step in connecting them with their bodies.

Following centering, Monique led what I describe as “right-center-left-center.” In right-center-left-center, students step to the right with their right foot, then to the left with their left foot. They repeat the step at a quick pace and make a quarter-turn to the right. Following four quarter-turns, they face front again and

the activity ends. One of the first times I witnessed this activity, I recorded the following in my fieldnotes:

The stage picture is beautiful as 30-plus students move in unison; it is as if they are performing a grand musical dance number. The students learn steps quickly. The sound of their feet hitting the wood floor and the rhythm of their motion is contagious and truly inspiring. It makes my pulse quicken. The energy of the group when bodies are moving together is inspiring (Fieldnotes, August 22, 2002).

As students got increasingly comfortable with right-center-left-center, Monique would encourage students to “do it with attitude,” bringing their individual flair to the exercise. Some students performed right-center-left-center as cheerleaders, break dancers, and 70’s funk idols. Right-center-left-center was an outward and collective manifestation of community, whereas finding neutral, stretching, and releasing are inward and individual explorations of centeredness. Monique asked, “Why is warming up useful?” And the students replied, “It makes us awake,” “It teaches us how be aware of others,” “organization,” “patience,” and “being prepared.” All of these responses point to the important role warming up plays in connecting students with their bodies and making them aware of the body’s role in organization and patience (attributes not commonly associated with physical activity).



Body leading provides another example of the way in which Monique allows students to connect with their bodies. A “body lead” is the idea that different characters have uniquely characteristic body parts and postures, and an actor can identify and explore those unique attributes, through a particular walk, for example. Monique describes body lead:

I can't remember why I am so attracted to body lead and why it just seems to work. You know you try something and it just seems to work. I see them, the kids... I see them becoming characters when they do that. It seems to make sense. Physically walking around in someone else's person seems to be the thing that gets them (Interview, February 8, 2003).

Monique explained the idea to her Beginning Academy students:

A character that is intensely cerebral could lead with his head, or the cowboy that leads with his hip moving deliberately from left to right... The way you move says a great deal about who you are as a person (Fieldnotes, September 5, 2002).

One example of Monique exploring the concept of a body lead occurred when she had her students move around the stage using different parts of their bodies. She guided this activity by moving through the space, encouraging her students to engage with their bodies. They started the activity by doing a “toe walk.” Some students moved around the space like teenagers coming home after curfew or like great ballerinas preparing for a *tour jete*. Monique offered

suggestions and encouragement: “Really commit to the movement.” “Who are you?” “Make bold choices.” Monique wove her way through the space offering specific advice and pointers. One student, in reflecting on the activity, stated that the toe walk, “made me feel elfish.” A stomach walk made a student “feel like Santa.” At one point a male student said, “Moving with hips is a womanly type thing.” Monique understands the body lead as “one way into a character.” Through body leading it is possible for students to try on different ways of being in the world; to literally walk differently, stand differently, and perhaps feel differently than they would navigating the world as they normally do.

One particular exercise tied together the physical process of warming up and developing characters to the monologue unit. Following a typical warm up, she asked them to “move around the space at 3.” She explained that moving around the space at 3 meant that they would move around at a medium tempo—1 being the slowest and 5 being the fastest possible speed. Once they were in motion, she asked them to move as their monologue character:

Close your eyes and see your character in front of you... step into that character... how does the character feel... double that feeling... really commit to the feeling... what kind of voice does the character have? (Fieldnotes, September 10, 2002).

The students began to move through space as their characters, tilting their heads, folding their arms, their faces taking on a different air. Once the movement was flowing smoothly, Monique asked the students to say their lines and a chorus of

voices rose over the hum of their footsteps. Occasionally, it was possible to hear individual words and lines as students performed the exercise.

Monique processed the activity by asking students what they discovered while moving. She asked students what they had found and was told, “My character was shy and curious about the world and science.” “My character is a women’s-rights activist, but she wants to be everything to her husband.” “My character is deformed, but she wants to be normal.” “My character wants to be an equal.” “My character is confident but everything she does is a cover.” Couched within the textually focused monologue unit, in which students were asked to explore dramatic literature and commit to memory the words spoken by those characters, Monique encouraged a deep level of analysis by connecting their intellectual investigation of character with physical exploration.

Grumet’s concept of body reading can be helpful in understanding both the importance of specific exercises such as body leading, and the larger value connecting with the body plays within Monique’s teaching. Grumet (1988) creates “the persona of the body reader to bring to reading what Merleau-Ponty’s figure of the body-subject brings to epistemology, the sense that reading is an act that is oriented toward what the subject can do in the world” (p.130). Within this construct,

The body of the actor, like the body of the text stumbles into ambiguity, insinuating more than words can say with gesture, movement, and intonation. Mimesis tumbles into transformation,

and meaning, taken from the text, rescued from the underworld of negotiation, becomes the very ground of action (Grumet, 1988, p.149).

Understanding the importance of connecting with the body involves, as Grumet suggests, looking at gesture and movement as meaning-making enterprises. Further, connecting the body to the act of listening and responding, as Monique does in her approach to acting training, situates it too within the realm of sense making and transformation. As such, connecting with the body is an integral piece of how students learn within Monique's classroom.

Connecting with the body within the context of Monique's classroom centers on the notion that the body is a vehicle for meaning making, and that the body provides students the opportunity to fully explore experience. Warming up prepares students to be fully present in, and aware of, their bodies. Drawing on body reading, through the exercises Monique leads that focus on the body, the body becomes a vehicle by which a student actor becomes aware of and responds to his or her physical presence and the presence of others. Powerful encounters enter in at the point of perception and awareness.

### **THEATRE'S PURPOSE**

Monique asks students to grapple with the larger questions, "Who are they as artists?" and "What is the role of theatre in society?" In one particular exercise, she asked her students to write an essay in which they could choose to

respond to the question “What is the purpose of theatre?” via one of three approaches:

- 1.) An historical approach: What has theatre done in the past?
- 2.) A personal/reflective approach: What has theatre “done” to, or for, you or others you know?

or

- 3.) A look into the future: How might theatre grow to affect the world and you?

Building upon the written assignment, Monique explored their ideas by asking them to create images, tableau pictures with their bodies, which attempted to tease out what purpose theatre plays in society. The students made images in groups of four or five. Eventually, students began to explore the ways in which their bodies could come together to visually respond to the question Monique had posed. They climbed on one another, talked with one another, and established relationships to depict within their images.

Following a period of reflection and rehearsal, students watched each other perform their images. Some students took the assignment literally, and created traditional representational stage pictures as people depicting “real” situations, whereas others took a more figurative approach including personification and communication through movement. At no point did the groups explain what their images meant; they allowed the audience to respond to what they saw in the images, making their own meaning of the images. Some of

the discussion involved issues such as the censorship of creativity; that men tend to make rules in theatre; that theatre is about bodies moving. One image depicted what students saw as mother theatre and her rebellious child that she tries to cover and protect. Challenging the students to grapple with the purpose and aim of theatre, while being involved in the creative process as actors and authors of images, creates a dialogic relationship between the process of creating and the products that were created, giving both pride of place within the artist's purview. It is the active pursuit of understanding, of asking what is or what could be one's purpose as an artist, which is both unique and powerful within Monique's work.

Greene often uses the Wallace Stevens poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar" when discussing the arts' capacity to cultivate different ways of understanding the world. In the poem, the man with the blue guitar can play only songs that speak of experiences not bound by reality, of experiences that occur within the fullness of the imagination. The man with the blue guitar sings songs of how life could be. At the end of the poem, Stevens paints the picture of someone new trying to learn how to play the blue guitar:

*I know that timid breathing. Where*

*Do I begin and end? And where,  
As I strum the thing, do I pick up  
That which momentarily declares*

*Itself not to be I and yet  
Must be. It could be nothing else.*

The new artist is frustrated as he seeks to understand how to play the songs of the blue guitar. His struggle is not a result of lack of technical skill, of not knowing how to strum, but rather a struggle of imagination. I assert that by providing students the opportunity to look inward and learn about themselves; look outward and relate with each other; and connect with their bodies, Monique seeks to develop within her students the ability to both be awake to the world as it is and also envision a better world; in essence to solve the struggle of the imagination.

## Tom

My time with Tom at Royal High began by watching a rehearsal. After searching for the right theatre and an unlocked door, I walked through two sets of doors and down a long aisle-like passage that was dimly lit with light spilling over from the adjacent theatre space I was headed for. I would later learn that this black-box theatre, with 174 faded blue auditorium seats and a large grid from which to hang lights and scenery, served as Tom's classroom.

I immediately noticed the brightly colored set. The students were rehearsing for a production of "Brighton Beach Memoirs." The set depicted a two-story house in Brooklyn in 1937. Colorfully painted in blue, green, and yellow, the vibrant frame provided an appropriate context for the complex family relationships that unfold within the play. Despite the fact the lights were down and students were running a scene, Tom saw me enter and acknowledged me with a smile and a nod. I quietly sat on the edge of the stairs so as not to disrupt the rehearsal. The actors on stage noticed me, fumbled a little, and continued with the scene:

*KATE. Go out, Jack. Talk to her.*

*BLANCHE. I'll take care of it. Nora is right. It is my decision.*

*KATE. What are you going to tell her? That she can leave school? That she can throw her future away? Is that what you want to do?*

*BLANCHE. What if I am wrong? What if she's got talent? What is it I am supposed to say?*

*JACK. She can't talk to me? It's all the same family, isn't it? I'm her uncle for God's sake.*

*KATE. She doesn't need an uncle tonight. She needs a father. ... Go on. She'll tell you.*



The scene ended, and a group of seven actors, clad in a range of styles, including hip-hugger jeans, vintage t-shirts, and off-the-shoulder sundresses, sat in the middle of the set in a wide pool of bright hot light, separated from the rest of the theatre by two-foot walls designed to denote the periphery of the house. The actors waited anxiously to hear notes critiquing their scene.

Tom walked to the edge of the stage, just outside the “wall” of the house and said, “This has potential to be the worst show I have directed at this school.” He then showed them his notepad with a caricature of a person vomiting—lines spewed forth from the mouth of the Bart Simpson look-a-like he had doodled. He moved back to his seat in the house, referred to the notebook again, and began to critique the way the family interacted by saying, “I really don’t believe there are relationships there. It is bad because there is no love.” Taking a deep breath, he asked, “Do we know the lines?” An actor defended herself by explaining she just forgot and that she was sorry. Tom quipped back, “You have to know the lines to forget them.”

Tom walked a fine line between tough love, humor, sarcasm, coaching, warmth, expectation, and exhaustion. He explained, “I am not working with novices. We are the Texas Longhorns of drama and we are about to get our asses kicked by the Oklahoma Sooners” (Fieldnotes, Oct, 17, 2002). Following 45 minutes of addressing specific aspects of the performance, Tom proclaimed, “Let’s run the vomit scene again” and the actors got back on their feet and began to work.

Tom brings this intensity and sense of humor to his classroom on a daily basis. Whether it be in making sure the wood floor of his set is perfectly stained or in sharing a story of why he did not participate in a standing ovation at a community theatre because he thought it was good, but that standing ovations should be reserved for amazing events like seeing Anthony Hopkins perform at the Royal Shakespeare Company, students know Tom both gives and expects a great deal from them. Tom explains:

I always have a quote of the day and many of them are in the same vein of, you know, being human, being a good person, reaching your potential. One of them though is something like “the greatest difference in the world is the difference between what you are and what you could be” and we talk a lot about that. I mean that, in a nutshell, is education, you know (Interview, February 7, 2003).

In unpacking this quote, education becomes a vehicle for potential. This is particularly useful when looking at Tom’s role as an arts educator; Tom uses theatre as a conduit for providing students the opportunity to become what they could be. By extension, powerful encounters with the arts become moments when students connect with potential.

When asked to recall a powerful moment from his classroom, he recalls a story that occurred when he was directing “The Crucible” in 1999. This story permits us to see the way Tom understands powerful moments within his experience as an educator, and it provides a specific example of something Tom

has done as a teacher that he feels led to a powerful encounter with the arts. He asked students to lie on their backs on the set, which was a huge ship, while he turned off the lights and played soft music over the sound system:

And I told them, “Here’s what we’re going to do.” All I wanted them to do was, whenever they were ready, in any order, they didn’t have to say their name, but I just wanted them to say what they wanted to be or “where do you see yourself ten years from now?” And so, it was quiet for a while and then out of the dark you just started hearing these voices, you know? ”I’m going to get a masters degree in psychology”; “I’m going to be married and have two kids.” And it really... the range of occupations and dreams was amazing. And I heard... like some of the boys said things that I know they probably never would have said in another class, and maybe not even in my own class if it hadn’t been dark. I’m not sure. The darkness must have had something to do with it. But years later, two or three years later, one of the girls came back, in fact her younger sister is in my class now, this year, Cheryl. And her older sister, we were talking and she said, “You know Tom, the best single class I ever remember from three different high schools was that day in your class when we were laying down on that set and we were talking about our future, because I knew... well, for me it was very empowering, but I knew that for some of those

other kids, my classmates, it was the first time they had ever really thought about the power they have to build their own dream.” And when she told me that, I mean I almost started crying, you know? I knew when it was happening that day that it was really cool, but I didn’t think that it was that powerful. But if another kid—and now Amanda was incredibly perceptive—but still, if she felt that, then I know it’s true (Interview, February 6, 2003).

Several points can be gleaned from Tom’s recollection of that experience with students on the “Crucible” set. Tom afforded students the opportunity to imagine their potential that day. In addition, he created an atmosphere wherein students could explore their thoughts and aspirations. Tom’s approach to drama teaching is truly complex and multi-faceted. On one hand, as seen in the “Brighton Beach Memoirs” rehearsal, he is the coach-like motivator; on the other, he is the mentor/friend asking students to lie on the floor and contemplate life’s questions, as in the “Crucible” example. Within the fabric of interpersonal relationships, powerful encounters with the arts occur in Tom’s classroom.

In assessing the breadth of my experience in Tom’s classroom, several key ideas surface with respect to the way in which he encourages powerful encounters with the arts. Students have powerful encounters in Tom’s classroom through engaging with texts, working on meaningful projects, and finding the human within themselves. A close examination of the way in which each of these themes is present in Tom’s teaching will serve as an important step in understanding the

range of ways in which powerful encounters with the arts occur in drama classrooms.

### **ENGAGING WITH TEXT**

Engaging with text, which I understand within this context as the written word, plays a central role in Tom's work. Text is used as a foundation for performance, a starting point for conversation, and a frame for an instructional unit. Text provides a point of departure for Tom's teaching. Tom explains:

You saw we use a lot of text that is not from plays, and a lot of it is based on the notion that that if I am to be a benign influence upon them then I have to nourish more that their mind in my class. I have to nourish their heart (Interview, February 7, 2002).

Whether quotes containing pearls of wisdom, poetry affording students the chance to work with language condensed to metaphoric and symbolic form, fiction providing a narrative experience, or dramatic literature offering students the chance to hear dialogue crafted in pursuit of plot and character, Tom relies on text in his day-to-day teaching. The above quote also articulates Tom's rationale for employing text in such a central manner: he uses the written word as a vehicle for self-awareness and personal growth. By looking at the ways in which Tom allows students to engage with text within his classroom, we can better understand the role of text in creating powerful encounters with the arts.

Reading *The Lovely Bones* to his students was one way in which Tom used text within his classroom. Tom has an established tradition within his

classroom of reading to his beginning students on Fridays. He reads a variety of texts, everything from *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (motivational/inspirational writing) to *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (popular fiction with characters and situations that may appeal to the teenage audience). *The Lovely Bones* falls into the later category. Tom explains the unit:

It took us 9 or 10 weeks reading on Fridays because it is like 300 pages long, but you know, there is something about being read to, and I have talked to the English teachers about this. They know that I read on Fridays and they agree with me that kids, too many kids, don't read at all. But whether they read or not, they almost all love being read to, and I don't know why it is, but kids tell me "you read it so well." So I use that to talk about acting. I am putting an effort into it. It is not just saying the words, it is feeling what is happening. It is more than that. I think it is not just my ability to act it or whatever. I think it is some sort of communion with humanity (Interview, February 6, 2003).

Extending and explaining the value of reading to students as a group, Tom offers the following thoughts:

I think that's why they like being read to, because ultimately, it's the same reason you go to a movie with someone you know. You want to take someone else to see it, or you take someone to the Elephant Room. There is something about sharing emotions that is,

and has always been, important. I mean going back to the Greeks, the catharsis... I mean, that's what it is. It's catharsis. It's knowing these people on this wall in these pictures [he gestures toward the pictures of past Royal High School productions] were kids just like you, just like me, and that guy in that red shirt there, that's just a memory now, but that guy, when we took that picture, he had just had a fight with his girlfriend, or he had just been told that he was loved, or you know, this has happened before, and we're on some grand continuum and we matter (Interview, February 7, 2002).

Tom's belief in the value of reading aloud to his students frames the context for his Friday reading days. One Friday reading day, students entered the theatre and took their normal seats in the audience of the black-box theatre (Tom has them sit in assigned seats in one section of the theatre). As the students found their seats, many threw down their backpacks and settled into comfortable positions. Some reclined as if preparing to eat popcorn and watch a movie, while others extended the arm of their seat (generally used during writing assignments) so as to lay their head down and sleep. Tom allowed them to sleep, under the rationale that as long as they were sleeping they were not bothering the students who did want to listen. Most students sat eagerly anticipating the story Tom was about to share.

Tom summarized the point in the story where they had ended the previous week, saying they had stopped where Ruth and Ray agreed to kiss. (A 14-year-old

girl, Susie, looking down from heaven after being viciously raped and murdered, is telling the story.)

*What no one understood—and they could not begin to tell anyone—was that it had been an experiment between them. Ray had kissed only me, and Ruth had never kissed anyone, so united, they agreed to kiss each other and see.*

Tom stopped as he read and took a dramatic pause as if visualizing the conversation and kiss in his mind. Several kids were literally sitting in the edges of their seat to see what else would happen between Ray and Ruth in this scene.

*“I don’t feel anything,” Ruth had said afterward, as they lay in the maple leaves under a tree behind the teachers’ parking lot.*

*“I don’t either,” Ray admitted.*

*“Did you feel something when you kissed Susie?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“What?”*

*“That I wanted more. That night I dreamed of kissing her again and wondered if she was thinking the same thing.”*

As Tom read, he used different accents and shifted body position to denote the flow of the conversation between characters in the text. Ray was an Indian teenager, so Tom read his lines with an Indian accent. Tom portrayed Ruth as a confident, self-assured, sharp-tongued young woman.

*“And sex?”*

*“I hadn’t really gotten that far yet,” Ray said. “Now I kiss you and it’s not the same.”*

*“We could keep trying,” Ruth said. “I am game if you don’t tell anyone.”*



*“I thought you liked girls,” Ray said.*

*“I’ll make you a deal,” Ruth said. “You can pretend I’m Susie and I will too.”*

Tom read this section and smiled as he delivered Ray’s lines. He also continued to change the direction of his body to denote different characters. As he paused, he gauged how students were responding and allowed the story to build with anticipation. Several female students nervously giggled. Tom continued reading:

*“You are so entirely screwed up,” Ray said, smiling.*

*“Are you saying you don’t want to?” Ruth teased.*

*“Show me your drawings again.”*

*“I may be screwed up,” Ruth said, dragging out her sketchbook from her book bag—it was now full of nudes she’d copied out of Playboy, scaling various parts up or down and adding hair or wrinkles where they had been airbrushed out—“but at least I’m not a perv for charcoal.”*

That scene ended and Tom stopped reading. He slowly closed the book, took a dramatic breath, and began a general conversation about what had happened in the text that day. The story is written in such a way that it jumps from scene to scene and often Tom recapped events at the end of the each section. The class collaboratively discussed the twists and turns of the text, and checked each other for comprehension. “Now what happened to Mr. Harvey?” asked one student (Mr. Harvey was the murderer in the story, and when Tom read his lines, he moved his glasses to the end of his nose). Tom replied, “I think he was in his house and that nothing happened.”

The class continued to ask questions: “Now what happened in the corn field?” “Is Ruth bi?” Tom would often turn the questions back onto them, saying, “Well what do you think?” After a brief recap, Tom told the class, “I heard one of the Olsen twins is going to be playing Susie in the movie.” A flood of criticism followed that remark. One student interjected, “Natalie Portman would better fit the role.” Yet another exclaimed, “I would choose Claire Danes.” The male students in the room seemed a bit less opinionated on the topic. Tom told the class he thought the production should find someone new who was actually Susie’s age.

Debates and discussion were common during the reading of *The Lovely Bones*. Students would often engage with the characters and situations, contemplating the ways in which the vividly written scenes could perhaps be dramatized. Tom reflected on reading *The Lovely Bones*:

It was a great experience, and they enjoyed it, and it led to some really good discussions about human behavior. I found it to be much more of a segue into acting than I thought it would be because they would say, “Ooh, don’t look over the top of your glasses like that. That’s creepy.” And then I would say, “Okay, look,” and I just did that on a whim... Of course it led to some great discussions about beliefs and the afterlife. If there is a heaven what does it look like? What would it be like? (Interview, February 6, 2003).

As Tom points out, reading *The Lovely Bones* provided an opportunity to delve into questions about both artistic and philosophical issues. Though students are not up on their feet acting during *The Lovely Bones* exercise, they are thinking about character, plot, and dialogue much like they would be if exploring a character on stage. Though only creating it in their minds' eyes, they are nonetheless creating. Beyond "How would this be staged in a movie?" or "Who would play this role?" students were given the opportunity to contemplate their understanding of heaven, death, afterlife, friendship, and family through hearing this text and identifying with the characters and situations it contained. This experience can be considered a powerful encounter with the arts in that students are engaged with text as they discuss character and plot and address questions that arise in the reading process.

Another way students engaged with text in Tom's classroom was through a monologue unit. Tom began the monologue unit by explaining that they would each be responsible for performing a memorized monologue approximately 60 to 90 seconds in length. Tom frames the monologue unit:

In the monologue unit, I stressed to them at the beginning that some of you are going to be very good at this, and some of you won't be so good, but that doesn't mean you will fail. Okay. I want to see growth. If you come in and you are the shyest person in the whole class and you get up and in the first couple of exercises we can barely hear you and maybe your monologue eight weeks later

isn't so great, but I could really hear you and you are standing with more poise and more confidence... well, that is a victory and that may deserve an A, you know, so it is not about the acting (Interview, February 6, 2003).

The idea that the monologue unit is not solely about acting is important for several reasons. It points to the fact that Tom has broad objectives for the monologue unit, including developing not only acting-related skill, but also cultivating a variety of capacities such as confidence and poise. In addition, this quote articulates Tom's intention to look at each student individually and decide what is success for that particular person depending upon her or his skill base and personal desires.

Tom explained that the monologue unit consisted of the students finding a duet scene from a play of their choice and synthesizing the scene into a monologue. The play could be from any time period. They then proceeded to practice the synthesis activity using scenes from Arthur Miller's "All My Sons" and Timberlake Wertenbaker's "Our Country's Good." Tom began the synthesis exercise by reading the scene from "All My Sons," carefully acting the different characters.

Tom then asked the students to try to write monologues based on the scenes saying, "You can work in groups, but I want you to each have a monologue." Students moved from their assigned seats and began to work on their monologues. Tom moved through the groups, answering questions. Several

students appeared to be struggling and asked each other and Tom for clarification, while others seemed to be more concerned with lipstick or the CD playing in their Walkman.

After about 20 minutes, Tom asked if anyone wanted to share their monologues. Several students read what they had written. One student said, “I am not sure if I did it right.” Another student chose to write her monologue from the perspective of the male character in the scene. This exercise proved to be difficult from the standpoint that students were asked to take a playwright’s words, identify primary action and information, and pull the words into a cohesive whole.

Tom and his students then took the second script, “Our Country’s Good,” and practiced synthesizing another duet scene. Tom’s hope was that through his modeling of the synthesis exercise twice in class, students would feel amply prepared for writing their own monologue from a scene of their choice. After having completed the in-class exercises, Tom took the students to the library to choose scripts with duet scenes from which they could begin to write the monologues they would later perform.

While in the library, students proceeded to find and synthesize their monologues. Royal’s library has large windows and trophies, a circa-1970 architectural triumph. Students can see into the library from where the majority of the lockers are located, a commons area in the middle of the school. The exterior windows provide natural light from outside and trees limbs cast a shadow over the students as they alternated between working on their monologues and flirting with

the other people seated at the large wooden tables. At the end of each aisle of books, a poster of a famous person hangs. Oprah, Denzel Washington, Tim Allen, Elvis, and Michelle Kwan all remind us that “Reading Is Fun.” A stained-glass window depicting a rainbow forms a focal point over the entire space. After the students selected their scenes from scripts on the well-stocked Royal shelves, they began crafting their monologues. Some students worked alone, sitting with pen and notebook, struggling to figure what was the essential action of the scene that needed to be expressed in monologue. Others read a section of the scene and asked if it made sense to the group at their table, helping each other construct their pieces.

Tom challenged his students to work within the text, to build a monologue from the playwright’s words. Crafting the monologues required students to engage with texts in a way different than if they had just found a monologue in a play or monologue book. This exercise asked students to closely analyze the playwrights’ words and characters, and the situations in which the characters found themselves, and then capture those elements in a concise and artful way; engagement at the level of the word preceded performance.

Monologue performances within Tom’s classroom were dramatic moments. Students entered, complaining of laryngitis, begging each other to take their turn, saying things like “I’ll give you money....” Tom took attendance and the performances began. All the lights in the small theatre were off except for two bright lights shining down from stage right and stage left, forming an intense

circle of light on the black stage floor. Tom moved up the angled auditorium seats, sat on a tall stool near the light booth, and guided the monologue performances from atop the audience. He had assigned students numbers before taking down the lights, so students knew when their number was up. If they were absent on the day their number was called, they would have to perform the day they returned.

There was a general flow to monologue performances. Tom called a number and a student stepped forward. After an introduction, the actor performed his or her piece. The audience clapped. Tom took a few seconds to write feedback on an evaluation sheet and then shared his initial thoughts with the student. The monologue unit exemplifies engaging with text in Tom's classroom from several perspectives: it provides students the opportunity to synthesize the language of the script as they construct their monologue; it allows students to develop a relationship with the text as they write, rehearse, and perform; and it is possible for students to interact with Tom and their class through rehearsal and performance of their monologue.

Perhaps the most compelling way in which students engage with text happens during the ritual of vocal warm-ups. Tom explains, "I think vocals mean something to our kids; they get irritated if I don't do certain ones." Before every performance, casts recite pieces of poetry and literature in an effort to prepare their voices. Over a period of years, Tom has chosen the texts and the students have memorized the pieces as they participate in activities within the drama

department. I watched vocal warm-ups before several performances of “Brighton Beach Memoirs.”

One particular night the cast took the stage in full costume and make-up and began to stretch. A senior in the cast led the exercise. The group formed a circle center stage. They raised their arms overhead and extended their stretch from one side to the other. Then they rotated their arms and wrists. Returning their arms to their sides, they began vocal warm-ups.

Starting with a text by John Donne, the cast spoke the words “No man is an island, entire of itself,” and continued stretching and adjusting their costumes. One student’s shoes did not seem to fit; she mouthed to the stage manager that her shoes were too small. Trying to achieve a state of focus, the cast repeated the words of the leader in perfect unison: “Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” As the poem continued, the circle in which the students stood tightened. They appeared to be sharing each other’s energy and easing each other’s nerves by standing together, and their initial fidgeting and fluttering subsided as the poem continued. “If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less....” As they spoke the words of the piece, the underclassman in the group looked to the seniors to guide them through the text, yet no actor spoke their words tentatively. Students stood in a tight circle quietly focused on themselves, each other, and the words they were saying.

They spoke the final portion of this piece: “Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for



whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” A quiet calm pervaded the small circle. Nervousness seemed to cease as they appeared to remember the trust and confidence they felt for one another. Comfort was being found in their sense of belonging together. There was solemnity to the moment when they spoke the words “any man’s death diminishes me” and tears welled in my eyes.

Following the Donne piece, they acted out the Lewis Carroll poem “Jabberwocky” with both physical and vocal characterization. The students recited this text together. (The “Brighton Beach” cast included veteran actors who had learned the poem during previous productions.) Each actor found a way to manifest the piece differently. In a manner like Vincent Price, one cast member sinisterly clasped his hands, looked around the room in a crazed fashion, and described, “Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe.” Yet another took a Puckish approach. She giggled, smiled, pranced, and spoke in an elf-like manner: “All mimsy were the borogoves and the mome raths outgrabe.” One male student spoke like Arnold Schwarzenegger. He appeared to grow several inches, gain 50 pounds, and dropped his voice two octaves before he exclaimed, “He took his vorpel sword in hand; Long time the manxome foe he sought.” Students attempted to maintain their character, energy, and focus throughout the exercise, building upon the commitment each was making to fully engage in the vocal warm-up.

The exercise increased in energy and intensity up to the slaying of the Jabberwock. Students spontaneously paired up, permitting each other to play

either the Jabberwock or the killer of the beast, and began to battle saying, “One, two! One, two!” With imaginary daggers and swords, combat ensued. “And through and through,” the students forcefully responded to one another. The battle continued as the bodies of the warring students reacted and responded to fierce blows. “The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!” The students articulated the words “snicker-snack” clearly and distinctly, with special emphasis on the final “k” sound.

The battling pairs instinctively knew how to end the conflict. The fatal blow was successfully delivered and the slain beast fell to the floor. “He left it dead, and with his head he went galumphing back.” The students found exceptionally dramatic ways both to die and to be dead; some stumbled and moaned, while others realistically watched the dagger enter their chests and exclaimed tortuous gasps that trailed off as they appeared to take their final breaths. Following the death scenes, the victorious students gathered over their fallen foes and celebrated with high fives and joyous exclamations.

Following “Jabberwocky,” the cast recited Whitman’s “Oh Captain, My Captain,” and the “To Be or Not to Be” soliloquy from Shakespeare’s “Hamlet.” Having stopped helping the crew prepare for the show, Tom joined the exercise and led the last vocal warm-up, “The Secret Dream,” by J.B. Priestly. When the students heard Tom start to speak, they moved from their “Jabberwocky” positions and spontaneously formed a loose circle, accommodating the furniture and plants on the set. Tom stood downstage of the circle, inside the walled

perimeter of the stage, and then moved around the space, as if punctuating the end of his phrases. As students recited, “The hunger that can never be fulfilled,” they gradually regained the focus they had before the physical departure provided by “Jabberwocky.” They spoke the poem in unison; however, it was possible to hear Tom’s voice above the voices of the students. He seemed to be just a bit louder and more deliberate. “To come out of a late rehearsal and smell the lilacs. To have a play done as it can be done. By dear friends and tired colleagues And not indifferently produced on the stages of the world. Ah!” The students’ words were careful and articulate. When they said “Ah!” many students exchange glances and smiles as if performing in a Maxwell House coffee commercial. “Some of my friends will come on it before you can say ‘knife,’” they spoke, hitting the word “knife” with a noticeable intensity. The loose circle shifted and morphed as Tom nervously paced while speaking the poem. One student moved to the stairs and began speaking from there, peering out from behind staircase when she felt like she wanted to see the group. “To tell me such a place cannot exist outside a daydream! But some of us, as we go, hold to a notion quite different.” As the last words of the poem were spoken, a feeling of anticipation spread through the group and Tom started to clap, initiating the group in singing the school song, the next piece of the pre-performance routine.

The vocal warm-ups exemplify the way in which students engage with text from several perspectives. Primarily, students engage with text in the process of learning the pieces through involvement with Tom’s program over a period of

years. Tom reflects, “I think one of the things I have been successful at with the kids is making them understand those quotes and what it means to be part of something larger than yourself; and that is really what it means to leave your thumbprint on the world” (Interview, February 8, 2003). As students speak the words of each piece, they internalize the words of great poets, playwrights, and authors. Perhaps, by extension, students begin to question, as in the “To Be or Not to Be” soliloquy, or in some way feel connected to humanity in greater depth through learning “no man is an island.” Through acting, sharing, and using the words as a vehicle for transformation, the text becomes a means for powerful encounters with the arts.

In understanding the connection between engaging with text and wide-awakeness Greene (1995) explores the idea of texts and margins. Borrowing from critic Denis Donoghue, Greene develops the idea that there is a text and margin to life: the text being the day-to-day responsibility of job, family, etc., and the margins, “being the place for those feelings and intuitions which daily life doesn’t seem to have a place for and mostly seems to suppress” (Donoghue, 1983, p.129, as quoted in Greene, p.134). She asserts that the arts have been relegated to the margins of life, and that exploring the margins of life is where meaning and wide-awakeness can be found. Greene argues that through engaging with a variety of texts, including works of art, music, theatre, and fiction,

Pluralities of persons can be helped to go in search of their own images, of their own visions of things through carving, painting,

dancing, singing or writing. They can be enabled to realize that one way of finding out what they are seeing, feeling, imagining is to transmute it into some kind of content and give that content form. Doing so, they may experience all sorts of sensuous openings. They may unexpectedly perceive patterns and structures that they never knew existed in the surrounding world. They may discover all sorts of new perspectives as the curtains of inattentiveness pull apart. They may recognize some of the ways in which consciousnesses touch and refract and engage with one another, the ways in which particular consciousnesses reach out to grasp the appearances of things” (p.137).

In connecting Greene’s understanding of text and margin with the textually focused work Tom does in his classroom, both *The Lovely Bones* reading and the monologue unit exemplify the way in which Tom attempts to move text from the margin of students’ experiences into a position of relevance and importance. Tom alludes to this when he speaks of catharsis in reference to the value of reading *The Lovely Bones*. Reading aloud to the students allows them to perhaps find comfort in a communal margin, meaning that they make sense of the text and explore the margin as individuals and as a group. In analyzing the way in which students crafted their monologues from scenes, we see that they are taking artistic content and giving that content an alternative form. In so doing, they are also “searching for their own vision” and “carving their own image” from

the text they have chosen. Wide-awakeness occurs within and around the margin they explore when they engage with text.

Several key ideas emerge when looking at the ways in which engaging with text leads to powerful encounters with the arts in Tom's classroom. Tom uses a variety of content and pedagogical approaches to engage students with text. Texts are used as a springboard to discussion of philosophical, personal, and relevant issues and ideas. Tom also connects analysis and synthesis directly with performance, providing another avenue (in addition to discussion) for students to engage with text. Having looked at the way in which Tom encourages powerful encounters with the arts through engaging students with text, I will turn my attention to addressing the way in which students may have powerful encounters with the arts through contributing to a meaningful project.

### **CONTRIBUTING TO A MEANINGFUL PROJECT**

The idea that theatre education offers students the opportunity to participate in and contribute to meaningful projects is a central aspect of Tom's teaching. Tom describes it this way:

Arthur Miller said, and I always use this quote too, that ultimately what everybody wants is to leave a thumbprint on the world, and that is what I think drama does so well; whether they are running the light board or carrying a suitcase on in the dark in blackout, they can feel like they made a difference. You know, and they can look at the product and say "I was a part of that," you know. It is

not unlike, I suppose, a construction worker being able to take his kid and say, “you see that building? I built that one.” There is a sense of ownership that we are part of something greater than us (Interview, February 6, 2003).

Having a role in the creation of a work of art, a play or performance, is a point of pride for students; in essence, it is one way they leave their thumbprints on the world. Tom provides opportunities both during and after school for students to participate in creative projects. By producing a script or staging poetry, for example, students have the opportunity to work together and experience the creative process through to fruition.

In support of such occasions, Greene (1995) explains, “In my view, the classroom situation most provocative of thoughtfulness and critical consciousness is the one in which teachers and learners find themselves conducting a collaborative search, each from her or his lived situation” (p.23). The production process within Tom’s classroom can be understood as a collaborative search that Tom and his students conduct from their individual lived situations in pursuit of creating a meaningful project. In addition, contributing to a meaningful project can lead to powerful encounters with the arts by affording students the opportunity to tie their lived experiences to a creative process. Focusing attention on several examples of students contributing to meaningful projects within Tom’s classroom will perhaps provide greater understanding of powerful encounters within his work.

Tom's students staged several pieces of Billy Collins's poetry. As a project in his Advanced Drama class, Tom asked his students to develop performance pieces using the poetry of Billy Collins, United States Poet Laureate, 2001-2002. Tom brought in several books of Collins's work and students chose poems they wanted to explore.

We went to the library and collected images [primarily photos], which we ended up only using two of them, but I think that is good research for the kids. . . . That is what poetry is, you know, dense thought that conjures up particular images that are different to everybody. So I approached it from that avenue, "Hey this means something to you, don't try to figure out what Billy Collins meant, try to use it in a performance piece to tell how you feel about it" (Interview, February 6, 2003).

After selecting poems and images, students cast their classmates in their specific performance pieces. Because of rehearsal and performance time constraints (they would be putting this together during their 50-minute class period over a few weeks), students decided to choose several poems to produce in full. The students whose pieces were chosen would direct their classmates. Directing included casting and making technical decisions such as whether music would be used; what type of lighting would be used; would they speak their poem, would their cast members, or would they use a voice over? Student directors were tasked with both conceptualizing their piece and creating the



project on stage. Ownership of the production was a key part of the learning process during this unit.

Relinquishing control of the process, handing it over to the student directors, was difficult for Tom. He explains:

It is hard for me, because I guess it is probably fair to say I am a control freak with regards to production because when your name is on it you want it to be quality. But I also knew that this was the classroom, and I think the way you approach a classroom performance is different than the way you approach an after-school performance. Because they don't have the experience that I have, or any director who is my age and has been teaching as long as I have [has], and therefore they don't know how to polish a piece the way that an experienced person does. But that was okay. I did not really want it to be polished because I really think that in this Billy Collins thing, the process was more important than the product. I don't want it to be horrible, but I think the process is what was important and ultimately I think that is what they took away from it (February 7, 2003).

Tom articulates key points that can be used to better understand the connection between contributing to a meaningful project and powerful encounters with the arts as he emphasizes personal growth and process over production or acting quality. This is particularly difficult for him as he navigates the tension between

director and teacher. Tom knows the vital role that individual ownership and personal contribution play in creating powerful encounters with the arts, yet still finds it difficult to step back and allow the process to unfold. This tension is not resolved within Tom's work. Student engagement is critical for success: powerful encounters may occur as the result of the tremendous effort that accompanies the creative processes of dedicated individuals.

The Billy Collins unit involved students finding poetry of personal relevance and taking leadership roles in support of one another as actors and directors. In essence, working together to conceptualize and realize their poems provided students the chance to become involved in a project greater than the individualistic concerns that are generally the focus of schooling. They experienced being part of a greater whole. The collaborative creative process, filled as it was with successes and challenges, played an important role in making the Billy Collins project a successful artistic experience and one in which powerful encounters occurred.

The way in which one student conceptualized and led one rehearsal of the poem "Walking Across the Atlantic" exemplified the process of the project. The actor/director, Jenny, who would be narrating the piece, started the rehearsal by asking the class to get in groups of three or four and spread out across the stage. She then quietly asked them to do things like they would do on a beach. Tom clarified her instructions from his seat in the audience. After a few minutes of discussion in their groups, various stage pictures formed, scenes were set, and the

story of being on a beach was beginning to be told. Jenny explained that they were setting the scene for the poem and asked to see their actions.

The actors did their beach movements. One group played volleyball stage right. One family built a sand castle upstage center. Two girls sunbathed center stage, and two guys moved across stage and attempted to get the sunbathers' attention. Tom chimed in, "I would rather watch paint dry," and moved to the carpeted area between the first row of seats and the stage where he asked, "What are you doing?" The volleyball group responded, "Playing volleyball." Tom followed up, "How big is your volleyball? I am not seeing it." He then turned to the sand-castle builders, "What are you doing?" and one student responded, "Building a sand castle." Another actor in the group interjected, "We are a family." Tom said, "Then let me see that. There is no sense of performance." Tom returned to his seat in the front row and Jenny asked to see the movements again.

Jenny then explained to her cast how she wanted the entrances to occur. She was very soft spoken and was not entirely comfortable, giving direction like, "Enter on a 10 count and move there on the stage." She tried several times to have the entrances of the group flow naturally into the beginning of the poem. Eventually, she moved to specific groups and told them when she wanted them to enter. After several attempts, the family knew when and where to start building their sand castle, the volleyball players knew where to play their game, the flirts knew when to enter and pursue the sunbathers, and the poem began with Jenny's entrance and narration:

*I wait for the holiday crowd to clear the beach  
Before stepping onto the first wave.*

Jenny moved between the volleyball game and the sand castle group. The student actors playing volleyball carefully dodged the narrator as she walked, and gradually the family began building a sand castle. Tom sat in the front row observing the scene.

*Soon I am walking across the Atlantic  
Thinking about Spain,  
Checking for whales, waterspouts.*

The beach activities continued in a somewhat haphazard fashion. The flirts started to flirt and the family continued building the sand castle. Jenny moved and stopped upstage right of the sunbathers, center stage, and delivered the rest of the poem. It was difficult to hear her soft voice over the noise of the cast members doing their stage business.

*I feel the water holding up my shifting weight.  
Tonight I will sleep on its rocking surface.  
But for now I try to imagine what  
This must look like to the fish below,  
The bottoms of my feet appearing, disappearing*

The poem ended. Though it had not been specifically blocked, the beach activity ended. Everyone, including Jenny, had a seat on the stage. Tom walked up to the foot of the stage and a discussion commenced. A particularly vocal senior girl started the discussion. “I think it think it would work better if the sunbathers move upstage.” Another young lady chimed in, “Should Jenny speak from here?” and one male student added, “I could not hear her from here” (he was right next to her). One of the sunbathers looked at one of the family members and

pointed out, “You all were late.” The collaborative energy in support of Jenny’s poem, in both performance and discussion, exemplifies the vested nature of the Billy Collins unit. Tom reflects:

When you get a group of people together who really want to do something and accomplish something they don’t even need a teacher they just need guidance, and that’s when I’m best as a teacher because I’m learning with them, you know that Billy Collins thing, it’s like, I don’t know... I have no idea what’s happening here, but I know something incredible is happening here and I’m glad to be a part of it (Interview, February 7, 2003).

As discussed earlier, Tom struggled to find a delicate balance between allowing students to own the process of crafting their pieces and coming in with a heavy directorial hand and shaping their work, and the tension between Tom’s role as director and teacher was never truly resolved. I assert that, though difficult, that balance was found and students created and supported the creative process of others throughout the rehearsal process. Wide-awakeness entered in as students became conscious of their roles as directors, actors, and technicians. The possibility for powerful encounters with the arts increased as students grew in their capacity to guide and support one another, contributed their individual skills and talent, and created a work of art.

Another example of the value of students contributing to a meaningful project occurs in the process of “taking circle” within Tom’s work. Following the

vocal warm-ups, immediately before a production, Tom asks students to “take circle.” In commenting on the importance of taking circle, Tom describes it:

Someone once said something like, “I doubt there has ever been a greater bond, with the exception of maybe going off to war, than between people who are about to put on a play....” There is that sense of urgency that we have been through something together and we are about to show it to the public and I may not like you so much in the hallway or you may have stolen my boyfriend, but that is unimportant right now. What is important is this play, and I am going to be mature enough to put that aside and give my all

(Interview, February 7, 2003).

This quote addresses the essence of what Tom believes occurs during the process of taking circle. The bonding experience of working together as cast and crew culminates in sharing the moment before the production. The performance about to occur becomes the primary objective of a project they have built together.

One particular night, a dramatic pause followed the final poem of vocal warm-ups, and Tom shouted, “Count off” and began to clap. The cast started to jump around and everyone appeared from wherever they had been preparing. Everyone, cast and crew alike, clapped and began to loudly sing the Royal school song. The school song ended and the entire cast and crew, approximately 20 people, stood in a circle.

Tom attempted to focus the entire group by telling the story of Sir Lawrence Olivier who, legend has it, stepped onto the stage of an empty theatre where he was about to perform and proclaimed, “I am Sir Lawrence Olivier and I am going to give a fucking good show.” Following in the footsteps of Sir Lawrence Olivier, students then individually stepped forward one after the other and proclaimed their commitment to giving a good show. One cast member explained how much she had learned from everyone during the show. A freshman crewmember said simply, “thanks.” Another expressed her gratitude to everyone involved in the production, sharing how great everyone had been to work with. One senior actor choked up as he expressed his sadness that this could be the last time he was on the Royal stage. Tom is always the final person to express thoughts in the circle. Taking circle ends with everyone clasping hands then slowly turning and releasing while saying, “Excellencia” which are the first two words of the motto of the Royal Theatre Department, *excellencia consuetudo est*, which is Latin for “excellence is habit.”

Taking circle relates to contributing to a meaningful project, and thus to powerful encounters with the arts, in several ways. Taking circle provides the opportunity for the entire group involved to affirm the value of the project in which they are all involved. In addition, the individual contribution made by every group member is acknowledged as student after student speaks. As a culminating ritual, taking circle provides another level of meaning for the students. In taking circle, students come together as a group after successfully

completing a rehearsal process and dedicate themselves to performing at the highest level.

The “Brighton Beach Memoirs” production also stands as an example of students contributing to a meaningful project. The process of blocking Nora’s entrance was one specific moment that had to be worked through in order for the larger project—the production—to succeed. Nora is a high spirited, 16-year-old woman who runs home to tell her family she has been asked to audition for a Broadway show. She is extremely excited and attempts to get her family to share her enthusiasm. She bounds into the living room, bursting with excitement and exclaims,

Okay! Here goes! I’m going to be in a Broadway show! (*They looked at her in stunned silence*) It’s a musical called “Abracadabra.” This man, Mr. Beckman, he is a producer, came to our dancing class this afternoon and picked out three girls. We have to be at Hudson Theater on Monday morning at ten o’clock to audition for the dance director. But on the way out he took me aside and said the job was a good as mine. I have to call him tomorrow. I may have to go in to town to talk with him about it. They start rehearsing a week from Monday and then it goes to Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Washington... and then it comes to New York the second week in December. There are nine big musical numbers and there’s going to be a big tank on the stage that you can see through and the big finale all takes place with entire cast all under water...I mean, can you believe it? I’m going to be in Broadway show, Momma (Simon, 1984)!

In rehearsing this monologue, the actor portraying Nora had difficulty making her entrance and delivering her line. In addition, the family did not know how to respond to Nora and to one another upon hearing the news. Tom characterized this moment as Nora looking for approval from her family, and the



family meeting her announcement with perhaps skepticism or disapproval. Specifically, Nora is pitching the opportunity to her family in an effort to receive their blessing.

Tom saw the key to this scene as being Nora's ability to make contact with each person in the room. Tom ran the scene several times and Nora rushed through the line and forgot to touch every person. Tom then divided the speech and assigned sections of the speech to be directed to specific family members. For example, "say 'It's a musical called Abracadabra' to Laurie." When Nora tried this approach, she forgot the order and the line. He then gave her a penny with the instruction, "exchange the penny with everyone on stage during your speech without me seeing it." Nora then attempted to pass the penny to each family member, but struggled to both remember the penny and say her line.

Everyone in the scene grew tense as they worked through the same moment again and again. Blanche, Nora's mother, had tried the scene standing up, sitting down, by the window, and behind the chair in an effort to make it easier for Nora to find her. She finally planted herself between the overstuffed chair and a coffee table; often sighing between takes. After several attempts, Laurie laid down on the couch, detaching from the monotony of the moment. Even Eugene, the central character in the play, seemed to tire of hugging his cousin, an action he purports to enjoy. Finally, after 45 minutes, the scene worked well, with Nora saying the line correctly and the family responding with the appropriate skepticism. This scene represents a glimpse of the piece-by-piece effort that goes

into blocking a script. Moment by moment, meaning is established. Actors are asked to become increasingly aware of and engaged in the creation of the production.

Looking at this particular moment from the breadth of moments that composed the “Brighton Beach Memoirs” production process is useful within a discussion of contributing to a meaningful project, and by extension, powerful encounters with the arts, for several reasons. This moment exemplifies the level of attention, care, and effort that go into producing a script. In looking at one character’s struggle to learn her role, we see that this was a moment in which she became more awake to her specific role within the whole production. From a broader perspective, meaning and commitment build as the cast and crew work on, define, and learn their roles. Powerful encounters may result when meaning is attached to the process.

Several thoughts come to mind when the value of contributing to a meaningful project is examined under the lens of Greene’s concept of wide-awakeness. Wide-awakeness speaks principally of the individual quest to achieve a greater awareness of life, the ability to rise above natural attitude, bracket moments of lived experience, and attend to life in its fullness. It can be understood that working on a meaningful project allows individual journeys towards wide-awakeness to intersect. Specifically, students are establishing meaning together through contributing as cast members and fellow students. One can easily employ the construct of wide-awakeness to the work of student actors.

As directors, cast members, technicians, or in other roles in production development—in becoming aware of and engaged in their specific job—they are in fact inscribing meaning on the process and practicing wide-awakeness as it relates to the script and the specific project at hand.

In Tom’s classroom, contributing to a meaningful project leads to powerful encounters with the arts from several perspectives. Something powerful happens when young people engage in the creative process together. When students worked together to create poetry performances and to produce “Brighton Beach Memoirs,” they became awake to their specific roles in the projects and learned that they played a vital part in the creation of the whole. In addition, students learned to approach a project with attentiveness and care. For example, when students directed Billy Collins’s poems, they were afforded the opportunity to develop an artistic concept and then to guide a group to manifest that concept. Finally, contributing to a meaningful project allows students to experience interdependence and collective responsibility, so crucial to understanding the connection between our actions as individuals and the role we can play in affecting change in the world.

### **FINDING THE HUMAN WITHIN**

Perhaps the heart of the way in which Tom encourages powerful encounters with the arts is in his effort to help students find the human within themselves. Finding the human within centers on the idea that students become more self-aware and realize that they are part of a larger world that has similar

hopes, desires, and fears. This ethos pervades decisions Tom makes at both a pedagogical and theoretical level. He speaks specifically about how he does what he does:

In class, one thing I do [is] I try to seek out the kids that I think are passionate about it and try to get them involved after school, that is the first thing. Secondly, I have never thought that theatre arts I should be solely about acting or how to be a good actor or even all the different aspects of theatre. I really teach it more like it's...I always tell them it is How to Be a Good Human 101 (Interview, February 7, 2003).

This quote points out the larger purpose Tom has for his classroom. Tom's notion of theatre education is not limited to producing good actors and technicians. He hopes that he is cultivating thinking, feeling, and caring people through the work he does.

In relating the way in which the humanities-oriented work he does relates to skills outside of traditionally artistic contexts, Tom explains,

I do know that I'm teaching them skills that will serve them well in whatever profession they choose. I mean, my gosh: time management, communication skills, teamwork skills, how to be a leader, how to get along with others. I mean, very general things but that are crucial and vital to being a success in other fields. I've got no telling how many ex-students who are whatever—lawyers,

doctors, everything—and I know part of their success is my training as well as the other teachers here who are really instrumental in developing young kids. I don't see drama as being that different, really, except that it's that human thing though. It's that... I can't explain it. If I were more articulate, I'd write books instead of being a teacher. But it's that sense of humanity (Interview, February 6, 2003).

In connecting the value of the work he does within his classroom to vital skills such as communication, leadership, and group skills, he characterizes drama as a bit different by alluding to, “that sense of humanity” that perhaps makes drama different from other courses students take during their high school careers.

Elaborating on his understanding of humanity, Tom explains the basic needs he feels kids bring to his classroom:

At the core kids want to know that they are okay and that there is nothing wrong with them, that “I am not different.” So the one thing we all have in common obviously is being a human being, whether you are gay, straight, black, white, or whatever”

(Interview, February 7, 2003).

For Tom, humanity is not a fixed state into which we are born with rigid rules of acceptance and predetermined social hierarchies, but rather something that we are striving to create and improve upon through the dialogic relationship between self-knowledge and understanding of our position in the world.

Tom understands the essence of theatre education as being an expansive experience meant to make students more comfortable with themselves and others.

Specifically, Tom believes that theatre teaches students

...to be more open minded, and I am not trying to sway them to my way of thinking whether its politics or sexuality or whatever, but I think theatre teaches tolerance, you know, which god knows in this world, especially at their age, we need. It teaches them to be comfortable with being themselves, and I think drama, more so than any other art form, does that because it is all encompassing.

That is what I tell them all the time. Theatre touches every part of life, every part. It is everywhere... we are innately dramatic people

(Interview, February 6, 2002).

When Tom says that we are innately dramatic people, he is acknowledging the fact that drama attempts to express the essence of what it means to be human; to feel, think, hope, grieve. By extension, being educated in theatre becomes an education in what it means to be human, a thought which ties back to Tom's original categorization of his Theatre 1 class as How to Be a Good Human 101.

Several key understandings can be gleaned from the ways in which Tom encourages students to find the human within themselves, and in so doing have powerful encounters with the arts. Tom views cultivating self-awareness among his students as a primary objective of his classroom. In addition, Tom attempts to connect self-knowledge to larger ideas such as tolerance. To reiterate, Tom's

objective of drama teaching does not primarily focus on creating the best actors or best shows. He holds a greater vision; creating aware and caring young people. Looking at examples of the ways in which Tom provides the opportunity for students to find the human within themselves will allow for a clearer understanding of the way in which Tom creates the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts.

The process of rehearsing the poem “On Turning Ten,” a poem from the Billy Collins unit, was one example of the way in which Tom provided space for a student to become more in touch with himself, and to explore the idea that he is part of a larger world that has grown up having similar experiences. The rehearsal began and a young-looking male student, Eric, stood in the middle of the stage preparing to narrate, act, and direct his poem. Shifting from one leg to the other, nervously tugging on the edge of his t-shirt and long shorts and batting his eyelashes, he tried to remember the lines of his poem. Getting out only a line, he grimaced and asked to start over.

Besides memorization, it was obviously hard for Eric to give his classmates direction, which was a central part of the assignment. He gingerly suggested places where the students in his piece could stand and actions they could perhaps do. Tom sat in the front row of the large auditorium, looked over at me, and mouthed the words, “Can you hear him?” I responded, “Not really.”

*The whole idea of it makes me feel  
like I'm coming down with something,*

*something worse than any stomach ache  
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light—  
a kind of measles of the spirit,  
a mumps of the psyche,  
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.*

Eric was barely audible as he attempted to get the words of the poem out of his mouth. Tom gently, but pointedly, asserted, “Hey, you’re a mush mouth. I can’t hear you.” Eric responded with his head pointed down, “I know. You always tell me that.” Tom took a breath and asked, “Are you doing a voice-over or saying it out loud?” Eric said he would be saying it and continued:

*You tell me it is too early to be looking back,  
that you have forgotten  
the perfect simplicity of being one  
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.  
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.  
At four I was an Arabian wizard.  
I could make myself invisible  
By drinking a glass of milk a certain way.  
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.*

Tom asked, “What did you like to do when you were a kid? Did you play Cowboys and Indians? Soldier?” Eric responded, “I played video games,” to



which Tom mused, “Video games are the death of the imagination. Kids don’t play anymore.”

Walking closer to the stage, he continued, “You need to come up with specific actions. Generality is the death of all art.” He then helped Eric determine what actions and sounds a 10 year old might make by modeling a sword-fighting stance and making gun-shooting noises. Eric awkwardly followed Tom’s lead. Tom explained, “You need to use your hands more for specific action.” The other students involved in the scene began to add how they thought a soldier would act and mimed jousting, “You know, like this.” Following Tom’s lead, and the example provided by some of the other students, Eric then rolled on the stage as if he had just been shot a during a war. He practiced being a soldier.

*But now I am mostly at the window  
watching the late afternoon light.  
Back then it never fell so solemnly  
against the side of my tree house,  
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage  
as it does today,  
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.  
This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,  
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers.  
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,  
time to turn the first big number.*

Eric finished the poem and Tom asked, “What would it look like if you sat against the proscenium? That could show solitude.” Tom continued and explained, “I am worried about the acting,” he takes a breath, “walk around and go to the wizard and [make contact with] the soldier...” The male students portraying the wizard and the soldier sat up immediately (one had been lying on the floor looking at the grid of the theatre, and another had been talking to a female cast member), and began to pay attention to Tom and the student director.

The conversation shifted from a functional one to one that appeared to get to the heart of the work. The other students on the stage faded from focus as I zeroed in on the conversation occurring between Tom and Eric. Still standing at the edge of the stage, Tom asked, “Why did you choose this poem?” Eric sat on the stage floor with his legs bent at the knees, and after a few seconds responded, “when I was 10 I guess I felt the same way.” Tom followed, loosely referencing The New Testament (1 Corinthians 13:11), “Do you think this is about a loss of innocence? Like ‘when I was a child I spoke like a child... gave away childish things?’” He added, “It is like now, when you skin your knee, you cry.” Eric appeared to really think about what Tom had said and quietly nodded in response. In producing his poem, perhaps this student tapped into the little boy within himself who was sad to say goodbye to childhood and to play.

It can be argued that the student connected with, to borrow a phrase from drama scholar Dorothy Heathcote, “the brotherhood” of all who grieve. Heathcote

(1984) asserts that there are in fact “universal” feeling, thoughts, and emotions with which we all can identify:

The universals bring the thematic experience into conscious use of concepts; into the head as well as the heart type of experience. . . .

Drama ideas usually begin with a general area of interest, narrowed to a particular, then, if the experience is to be related to the person’s own experience, universalized to draw in the unique experience of the group at work on the idea. This dropping of the particular into the universal is the digestion process of the arts, which creates the opportunity for reflection which is what education is all about (pg.35).

Within Heathcote’s concept of the universal, engaging in drama becomes a way in which student actors achieve a deeper understanding of their own existence, and of the interconnected nature of humanity. Drama facilitates reflection that is the “digestion process of the arts.” Heathcote’s concept of the universal has been challenged under the lens of a post-modern critique that troubles the notion of a universal (Grady, 1992, Dobson, 1996). In addition, it has also been categorized as an unreasoned theory that produces neither sound education or quality theatrical experience (Hornbrook, 1998). However, I assert that Heathcote’s notion of the universal, as it relates to Tom’s relationship with powerful encounters with the arts, informs our discussion by giving us a concept

from which to analyze the role drama plays in connecting individual experience with a larger community.

Heatchcote speaks of “conscious use of concepts,” and as such, universalism and wide-awakeness can be connected by the idea that both center on increased awareness of one’s experience, and how that experience relates with the human experience past and present. Returning to the poetry of Billy Collins, specifically the rehearsal of “On Turning Ten”: Eric chose the text from the breadth of Collins’s poetry based on a personal connection. Through increased awareness cultivated in rehearsal and conversation, he tapped into Collins’s sadness and the sadness of all who have lost “the dark blue speed” of their childhood bikes. The process of rehearsal and performance provided Eric the opportunity to find the human within himself, and he may have experienced a powerful encounter with the arts.

To summarize the way in which Tom provides opportunities for students to find the human within, and as such creates opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts: Tom encourages a “consciousness of concepts” that centers on awareness of one’s experience and how that experience relates with human experience past and present. In addition, the process of finding the human within is intertwined with engaging with text and contributing to a meaningful project. Oftentimes, finding the human within happens while students are working on a play, rehearsing a scene, or hearing a book read aloud. Powerful encounters

with the arts can occur when students become self-aware and extend self-awareness to their understanding of their position within the society.

### **A FINAL MOMENT**

My final day at Royal High School was performance day for the Billy Collins poems. A poet was visiting Royal to read poems from her newly published book. She had agreed to watch the performance while she was in town. Tom built this event up to be the culmination of the unit. His students had rehearsed in the large auditorium, but would be performing in the black box due to scheduling conflicts with the choir. They had not had a chance to adjust the staging nor rehearse with lights and music, so the anxiety was palpable. The audience was expected to arrive at 8:00 pm but did not come through the doors of the classroom theatre until 8:15. The students immediately stopped making last minute adjustments and ran to places to begin performing.

The students presented their work. The final poem to be performed, “Names,” was written in memoriam to the lives lost on September 11, 2001 in the attack on the World Trade Center. Eerie blue and green lights rose to illuminate two women standing blindfolded center stage, representing the Trade Center towers. Heavy techno music underscored the “flight” of two students, portraying the terrorist pilots, who circled the towers as if animals stalking prey. After a period of predatory pursuit, the towers were destroyed in a highly stylized and deliberate series of movements. As contact was made between the pilots and the buildings, streams of red ribbon were released from the hands of the terrorists to

symbolize the destruction and pain caused by the attack. After the towers fell, the cast entered the stage picture and formed a circle around the fallen building. In unison, cast members reached down and symbolically raised the towers in an act of collective action. This entire sequence took two or three minutes. When the towers were raised, the actors dispersed evenly around the stage, moving fluidly to their positions, and the poem began.

*Yesterday, I lay awake in the palm of the night.*

*A soft rain stole in, unhelped by any breeze,*

*And when I saw the silver glaze on the windows,*

The narrators of the poem, including the student director, stood downstage, left, center, and right, five feet from the first row of audience seats. The rest of the cast was evenly spaced across the entire stage. The actors stood with their arms by their sides and their eyes fixed forward. There were only four people in the audience that morning, but the students' focus showed that they gave the performance a great deal of weight.

*I started with A, with Ackerman, as it happened,*

*Then Baxter and Calabro,*

*Davis and Eberling, names falling into place,*

Every student had been given names to say. During rehearsal, knowing when and how to say the names was a problem for students; however, during the performance the names flowed smoothly from every student's mouth. The narrators guided the poem and the students spoke when their names were supposed to be shared. Students held flashlights and shined them upward towards

their faces as they spoke the names. The somber and reflective mood that had been set by the powerful prologue continued.

*As droplets fell through the dark.  
Names printed on the ceiling of the night.  
Names slipping around a watery bend.*

The visiting poet wrapped herself in her vibrant shawl and crouched tightly in her seat as we all sat mesmerized by the language and the performance. Our gazes fixed onto the stage. The students continued and clearly spoke the words of the poem. There were no extraneous movements on stage; rather, students appeared to find calmness in the words they were saying.

*Twenty-six willows on the banks of a stream.  
In the morning, I walked out barefoot  
Among thousands of flowers  
Heavy with dew like the eyes of tears,  
And each had a name—  
Fiori inscribed on a yellow petal  
Then Gonzalez and Han, Ishikawa and Jenkins.*

The poem continued through Z with a chorus of actors sharing the names of the dead. The performance of these names, spoken one by one, interspersed with the vivid imagery of dew-like tears, captured the profound grief of the attack and Collins's desire to not let the names of those who died be forgotten.

*A blue name needled into the skin.  
Names of citizens, workers, mothers and fathers,  
The bright-eyed daughter, the quick son.  
Alphabet of names in a green field.  
Names in the small tracks of birds.  
Names lifted from a hat  
Or balanced on the tip of the tongue.  
Names wheeled into the dim warehouse of memory.*

*So many names, there is barely room on the walls of the heart.*

Following the poem, the audience was too moved to respond immediately. I noticed tears dripping from their eyes. After a minute, Tom turned around and thanked the audience for coming. The poet said how beautiful she felt the pieces were and asked if Tom had contacted Billy Collins, who she was sure would be very interested in their work.

Tom then asked if they wanted to respond to the work. The poet and the teacher in the audience briefly respond to the poems piece by piece. The student actors were sitting on the stage floor, the stage lights still on, hanging on every word of feedback. When the poet focused on a student's work, the attention of the group shifted to that person. Tom was obviously pleased at the way in which the performance had come together. He smiled at the students and said in a self-deprecating fashion, "that is not bad for something that we never really had time to polish." The students knew he was proud of them and they had done an excellent job. The bell was about to ring and the poet had to prepare for her reading, so her comments were cut short, but the impact of the role her presence and feedback played in validating the effort of the students can not be overlooked.

This vignette exemplifies the ways in which Tom provides opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts in his work as a high school drama teacher. The students engaged with the text of the poem in the process of rehearsal and performance, bringing Collins's piece to life in spoken words, music, and movement. The director worked with actors, a choreographer, and technicians,



thereby allowing individual contributions to manifest in an artistic and meaningful whole. The poem became meaningful to the students on both a personal and community level as they learned the movements and words, and shared their personal recollections during the process of rehearsal. Producing “The Names” afforded students the opportunity to find the human within themselves in the process of rehearsal and performance as they constructed meaning and built the piece together.

The words of Maxine Greene are helpful in providing a final analysis of Tom’s work in general:

Art can work to stimulate questions about the social world, with its lacks, its deficiencies, its possibilities. As individuals experience the work through and by means of their own lived worlds, the realities they discover may well provide new vantage points on the intersubjective world, the world they share with others; the enrichment of the “I” may become an overcoming of silence and a quest for tomorrow for what is not yet (1978, p.181).

In Tom’s practice, opportunities to engage with texts, contribute to meaningful projects, and find the human within clearly push the boundaries of consciousness and understanding for his students. Through providing opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts, he is perhaps beginning his students on a quest for what is not yet.

## **Responding to the Research Question**

My dissertation studied the ways in which high school drama teachers created the possibility for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. In presenting my research, I introduced my study, providing a clear description of arts education, aesthetic education, the aesthetic experience, and related the above to high school drama teaching. After having discussed my research question and the terms that inform my investigation, I included an overview of arts education literature in which I noted the lack of attention given to the experiences that surround arts education, specifically experiences in the high school drama classroom. I then outlined the specific methodology for my study of powerful encounters with the arts. Two examples of high school drama teaching were then offered in an effort to contextualize the way in which high school drama teachers create the possibility for their students to have powerful encounters with the arts.

In this chapter, I will forward a comparative analysis of the ways in which Monique and Tom create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts within their teaching. An examination of their respective warm-up exercises, examples from their Advanced Drama classes, and their monologue units will form an analytic foundation from which to respond to the research question that directed this study: in what ways do high school drama teachers create the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts? Following a comparative analysis of their work, I will look at several overarching themes that

emerged with respect to the way in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts: bracketing lived experience; “doing philosophy”; and extending the imagination. I will end the chapter, and dissertation, by suggesting areas for future research and offering a discussion of the implications of this study of powerful encounters with the arts.

### **CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS**

Monique and Tom ran their classrooms very differently. Focusing on the way in which they conducted several similar activities will provide understanding into how different teaching styles and practices may provide opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts. Their routes may be different, but they are headed in the same direction. At base, looking at their work together side by side will offer the opportunity to deepen our understanding of the ways in which their work as drama teachers creates opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts.

### **Warm-up Exercises**

Within Monique’s teaching, the warm-up was a daily classroom exercise that served to ground the students in the classroom and prepare them to successfully perform the day’s acting exercises. Warming-up became an instinctive exercise students grew to anticipate. Specifically, students committed physically and mentally to participating in the warm-up. From the physical energy of “right-center-left-center” and tongue twisters, to the quiet centering provided

by finding neutral, Monique used warm-ups as a way to strengthen students' abilities to be present and participate. (It is important to note that Monique did not direct a production during my time with her; therefore I am unable to comment on her use of warming-up as it directly relates to staging a production.) The connection between Monique's use of warm-ups and powerful encounters with the arts is exemplified in the way in which warming-up provides students a daily opportunity to explore their physical selves and connect to with another—perhaps laying a foundation for powerful encounters to occur.

Warm-ups within Tom's work serve a different function. Tom's students warm-up before performances. The act of warming-up is directly related to preparing the body, mind, and voice for performing. With respect to vocal warm-ups, students use the text they are reciting as a way in which to engage with each other and create a sense of unity while focusing on their roles. Physical preparedness is cultivated through stretching, and as in the "Jabberwocky" example, in the process of performing the text.

Warming-up carries a special significance for Tom's students. The older students lead many of the texts they recite, thus passing on a department tradition. By extension, "taking circle" is another example of imbuing the warm-up process with meaning. As has been articulated earlier, when taking circle, Tom's students clap and sing the school song and form a circle. From within the circle they share their commitment to giving a good show. Warming-up provides the opportunity for powerful encounters to occur; students connect with themselves and each

other within the process of preparing for a performance. This directly relates to the way in which Tom creates the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts for his students in that the text becomes a point of departure for the powerful encounter.

Several key differences exist in the way in which Monique and Tom use warming-up in their classroom. Specifically, warming-up is infused in Monique's daily practice; therefore it can be understood that the powerful part of warming-up for Monique's students centers on the repeated process of learning through physically connecting with self and others. Within Tom's teaching, the warm-up holds a special significance. The warm-up process is intimately connected to one of the most powerful undertakings of a high school drama student—a performance.

The warm-up exercise within the work of both Monique and Tom create the opportunity for powerful encounters for students in that they connect students to themselves and one another. When Monique imbues the daily classroom routine with the opportunity for students to become centered and present in the theatre space through the warm-up process, she is creating the opportunity for her students to become awake and aware of themselves and one another. The warm up process within Tom's work creates the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts for students in that, while preparing for performance, they are focusing, thinking, connecting, and responding to the text and one another.

## **Advanced Drama**

Another area of comparison can be found in the way in which Tom and Monique work with their Advanced Drama students. I will not investigate the breadth of their instructional strategies with their advanced students during this investigation of powerful encounters with the arts; however, focusing on the examples of the hero activity in Monique's practice and the rehearsal of the poem "On Turning Ten" in Tom's class will provide a way to address their different approaches to creating the possibility for powerful encounters with advanced students. This distinction is important in that it further develops our understanding of their unique and individual approaches to creating the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts for students in a broader context.

The hero activity exemplifies Monique's commitment to exercises within her practice with advanced students. Monique includes exercises in work with both her beginning and advanced students, increasing the difficulty and involvement for her more advanced contexts. In the hero exercise, students were asked to think of their heroes and manifest their understanding of what "hero" means through physical work and group discussion. Specifically, as students identified who they considered to be heroes, and moved around the space as those heroes, they gained experience in developing character and communicating character within the context of the class. In addition, they learned about themselves and their peers as they discussed the hero images. Monique's belief in the process of honing skills and tying skills directly to personal narrative is central

to the creation of the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts in her classroom. Whether working with beginning or advanced students, her commitment to process did not waiver.

The production process of “On Turning Ten” exemplifies the way in which Tom challenges his advanced students and creates the opportunity for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. Moreover, it captures Tom’s common practice of providing students with text and a variety of performance opportunities. As previously detailed, students chose poems and performed text. The pieces of poetry the students had to choose from were often metaphorically laden and symbolically rich. The possibility for a powerful connection between artist and text was cultivated as students found images that represented central themes of the work and cast friends in roles they had constructed from their directorial concept. Tom expected students to find success because they were advanced theatre students familiar with directing as a result of having been directed in the past. Engagement could happen as students took the words of the poem, found personal meaning in the text, and created their concept on stage. Powerful encounters with the arts were facilitated as students engaged, reflected, and built their performance pieces.

Both Monique and Tom asked high-level questions of their advanced students. The questions simply take a different form within their respective practices. Exercises form the foundation of Monique’s work. She gradually increases the level of difficulty as students grow in their capacity to focus, move,

and create character. As exemplified in the hero exercise, the concepts and ideas she asks her advanced students to explore through movement and images can be abstract and complex. By repeatedly providing physical exercises, Monique acknowledged the inherent difficulty in cultivating control over the body. Whereas in Tom's work with his advanced students, complexity was a direct result of the text with which the students were working and the production tasks they were asked to accomplish. Visioning, directing, and acting (in a fully produced forum with lights, sound, visual images) were difficult for his students. In sum, both Tom and Monique sought to create the possibility for powerful encounters with their arts by asking their advanced students to engage with the complex ideas and tasks; however, the tasks they were asked to perform varied greatly.

### **The Monologue Unit**

The monologue unit offers the most useful example from which the different pedagogical approaches of Monique and Tom can be examined. They both asked their beginning students to memorize monologues. In taking a closer look at the monologue units of both teachers, many important distinctions can be found. Addressing the specific differences in their respective monologue units will provide further insight into the specific teaching styles of Monique and Tom, and thus shine more light onto the ways in which high school drama teachers create possibilities for students to have powerful encounters in their work.



Monologues, within Monique’s work, represent a combination of physical and intellectual exploration. After choosing a monologue from a contemporary play, students work on character biographies, body leading, and memorization activities in order to understand, internalize, and eventually manifest character in performance. The “tools of acting” (the body, mind, and voice) are called upon as exercises build the students’ comfort with both the language and the act of performing. Also, memorization is a process in which students share techniques, take tests, and say their lines as they walk around the theatre in character. The students started with the given words of the playwright and created characters through the process of physical and textual exploration. The monologue unit within Monique’s work built to performance of their pieces.

Tom’s monologue unit centered on synthesis and analysis of written text, and like Monique, culminated in performance of the monologues the students had constructed. Students were asked to create a monologue from a duet scene. Before asking students to choose a text, he guided them in synthesizing two example scenes. Students learned how to identify the main ideas of the plot and elements of character in a text. They manifest that understanding in creating a coherent monologue capturing the playwright’s intent and providing a compelling story for the audience. Their performances grew out of the understanding they cultivated through textual analysis—textual analysis that occurred at the level of the page rather than physical exploration on the stage. The fundamental interaction between text and character, and the performance which was the focal moment of

that experience, created the possibility for students to have powerful encounters with the arts.

Looking at the respective monologue units of Monique and Tom, several ideas need further attention. Both Monique and Tom structured the performance of the monologue as the first performance opportunity for their Beginning Acting students. This was the first time they had been asked to perform for their peers, and as such nerves and anxiety were involved in the powerful encounters possibly experienced by the students. Textual analysis took different forms in the two monologue units. Monique used a process of physicalization and characterization experiences, whereas Tom focused student attention on the words on the page and the text itself. Though guided differently within the practices of Monique and Tom, the monologue unit was a potentially powerful encounter with the arts in that students were connecting with themselves and each other through learning and performing the text.

In summarizing the cross-case analysis, several key thoughts emerge. To reiterate, both Tom and Monique created the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts within their teaching. Their respective warm-up practices reflect their differing pedagogical emphases: Monique's propensity to have students warm-up daily and routinely connect with their bodies; and Tom's desire to tap into text as a primary way for students to connect with each other and prepare for performance. In addition, they challenged their advanced students in very different ways. Monique's challenges focused on physical and conceptual

exercises, whereas Tom challenged his students by providing opportunities to jump into production. Finally, the monologue unit further illustrates the way in which they created opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts via different means: Monique uses a highly physical, exercise intensive process, and Tom creates textually focused, product-oriented experiences.

Though they have markedly different approaches to teaching drama, Tom and Monique both create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts within their classrooms. In looking at their work side by side, I have attempted to articulate precisely the way in which their different teaching styles aim for the same destination. In so doing, I have sought to provide further depth to the discussion of the teaching practices of Monique and Tom, and to provide clarity to my analysis of the way in which high school drama teachers provide opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. In addition, my discussion of their work also provides an understanding of the variety of ways in which drama teachers approach creating the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts. Building upon my discussion of the different ways in which Monique and Tom create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts, it will be helpful to pull together the specific ways in which their practices intersect and detail their commonalities in creating opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. I will now offer an analysis of overarching themes gleaned from my experience in the classrooms. I aim to provide more insight into opportunities for powerful

encounters within a high school drama context and to further articulate the specific ways in which Monique and Tom create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts.

### **ANALYSIS OF OVERARCHING THEMES**

The data suggests that Monique and Tom create the possibility for powerful encounters with arts by encouraging students to bracket lived experience, “do philosophy,” and extend their imaginations. In an effort to understand the fundamental way in which powerful encounters may occur, it is necessary to fully explicate each theme and directly relate that theme to the classroom context. As previously discussed, my inquiry into the ways in which Monique and Tom created for students opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts is grounded in the idea of wide-awakeness, the guiding conceptual framework for my study. I have directly built upon several key aspects of Greene’s understanding of wide-awakeness in identifying my overarching themes. As such, it is important to reiterate the relationship between powerful encounters with the arts and exploration of consciousness and creative acts of informed awareness. Extrapolating the overarching themes, and examples of those themes in the work of Monique and Tom will further articulate the ways in which the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts manifests in a high school drama classroom. These themes can be understood as central aspects of creating opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts within a high school drama context. Looking at the way in which creating opportunities for powerful

encounters with the arts manifests within the practices of Monique and Tom can also further our understanding of powerful encounters within a wide variety of other disciplinary contexts.

### **Bracketing Lived Experience**

As a fundamental precept of wide-awakeness, bracketing can be considered an integral part of powerful encounters with the arts. Simply stated, both Monique and Tom provide opportunities for students to look closely at experience and (as a result of introspection and analysis) to find meaning and attach significance to events and phenomena. Through interacting with scripts, acting exercises, rehearsal, and performance, Monique and Tom's students are given the opportunity to bracket lived experience. Bracketing lived experience allows students to attend, notice, reflect, and learn about themselves and others in deeply personal ways. Looking at the ways in which Tom and Monique provide opportunities for students to bracket lived experience will illuminate the nature of bracketing and its relationship to powerful encounters with the arts.

Greene explains her understanding of bracketing by saying, "The questions raised by those concerned with the work of art in its autonomy may involve us with recognition that the natural world (and the natural standpoint) must be bracketed out if we are to enter the province of meaning we associate with the arts" (1978, p.182). In articulating the essence of bracketing, Greene explains, "There must be attending; there must be noticing; at once, there must be reflective turning back to the stream of consciousness—the stream that contains

our perceptions, our reflections, yes, and our ideas” (1978, p.182). Thus, through bracketing, students cultivate wide-awakeness. To connect bracketing with powerful encounters with the arts, specifically with drama within a context, drama can provide young people the opportunity to break from the taken-for-granted and explore the new provinces of meaning suggested by Greene. Drama education affords students the opportunity to create roles, enliven texts, and engage in performance. Creating roles allows for further exploration into one’s self and identity—who they are and who they choose to be.

Within Monique’s teaching, bracketing was intimately woven into theatre exercises. Monique encouraged students to use both their bodies and minds in order to attempt to step outside of the everyday reality that confronted them outside of the theatre walls. Throughout the breadth of her work, Monique stressed the concept of active listening, asking students to fully attend to one another. By encouraging students to carefully listen and respond to one another, Monique provided opportunities for students to bracket lived experience.

The mirroring exercise stands as an example of a way in which students were afforded the opportunity to bracket lived experience. Students focused on the specific movements of their partners and responded to one another as the exercise progressed. As students worked together, as both leaders and followers of movement, they were cultivating the capacity to look at and be aware of their experience. It is important to note that in this particular exercise, the act of “looking back” and reflecting over experience occurred throughout as students

moved with constant awareness of their spatial and physical relationships; that heightened awareness is critical to powerful encounters with the arts.

The way in which Monique fused physical and written exercises within her monologue unit also exemplifies an opportunity for students to bracket lived experience. In order to explore the physical nature of their characters, students navigated the stage using different parts of their bodies—leading with their hips, shoulders, and toes. During this exercise, they answered questions as their character from their monologue. In leading this exercise, Monique offered the students an opportunity to step into a different way of thinking—thinking as their characters. Active reflection is a key aspect of bracketing within Monique’s practice. I argue that bracketing lived experience possibly occurred as students were reflecting, engaging, negotiating, and creating their monologue characters and that through bracketing lived experiences, students were given the opportunity to experience powerful encounters with the arts

Bracketing, for Tom, centered on rehearsal strategies and textual analysis. The way in which Tom facilitated the rehearsal process provided students the opportunity to escape the natural attitude—the attitude in which one simply performs life’s duties and pays little attention to things. It was possible for students to reach a state of acute awareness as they became engaged in working scenes and fully involved in the rehearsal process. As Tom used strategy after strategy to block and fine-tune scenes, he was providing students the opportunity to become wide-awake and to learn about themselves (the way they approach

tasks, their learning styles, and the way they work in groups, for example) and the characters they were preparing to portray. Drawing from method acting technique, students tried numerous tactics to reach their particular objective. Actors were required to step out of a more rigid mindset that might dictate there is one way to achieve an objective and instead envision several approaches to solving a problem in a scene. For example, Nora tried several tactics in order to achieve the objective of winning her family's approval for her Broadway audition.

Another example of bracketing lived experience occurred in the process of vocal warm-up before performances. The students become so familiar with the texts they recited that the words could almost be considered a mantra, a pathway to focus and centeredness, that allowed students to be intensely present while working on aspects of vocalization, such as articulation and projection. Thus, as students embodied the characters of the "Jabberwocky," for example, they had the opportunity to step outside of the everyday and interrogate experience from a different perspective. I assert that the possibility for students to bracket lived experience, and as such have powerful encounters with the arts, occurred within Tom's classroom as he provided text, direction, and space from which to specifically participate and examine the art form of drama.

In summarizing the role bracketing lived experience plays in the teaching practices of Monique and Tom, several thoughts come to mind. Within both contexts, students were given the opportunity to bracket lived experience as they physically and intellectually engaged with text. For example, as they physically



stepped into their monologue characters and performed, they were possibly being moved to a different way of seeing, a new understanding, as a result of having walked the world as their character. The role the body played in bracketing lived experience must be highlighted as well. In exercises, rehearsals, and performances, students used their bodies to build meaning and establish relationships with one another, and as such, the body allowed students to explore consciousness and see things anew. Powerful encounters with the arts can occur as students are given the opportunity to push boundaries of reality and explore new spaces with their bodies and minds.

In drama, students operate from a heightened affect, high stakes, and tension—one must be elevated in order to experience a tragic fall in the Aristotelian sense. Tension often builds through grave and dire circumstance and characters seem larger than life. This heightened place demands students fully attend, contemplate the complexity of the moment with which they are confronted, and explore situations from a state of full awareness. Thus, the form of drama intrinsically provides the opportunity for students to bracket lived experience, and bracketing can lead to powerful encounters with the arts.

### **Doing Philosophy**

The idea of “doing philosophy” is central to the way in which the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts occurs within a drama classroom context. Though they would probably not identify themselves as philosophers, or even look at the work they do as being connected to philosophy, I assert that by

encouraging questioning, reflection, conversation, connection, and identification with larger societal issues, Monique and Tom create the possibility for students to “do philosophy,” and “doing philosophy” can be understood as central to powerful encounters with the arts.

Looking closely at the way in which Greene understands philosophy, and specifically living the philosophically examined life, several key ideas emerge that can help frame a discussion of doing philosophy and powerful encounters with the arts within the classrooms of Monique and Tom. Greene understands philosophy as this:

Philosophy may be regarded as a way of approaching (or looking at or taking a stance with respect to) the knowledge gained by the natural and human sciences, the awareness made possible by the arts, and the personal insights into existence each human being accumulates as he lives. To do philosophy, as Jean Paul Sartre says, is to develop a fundamental project, to go beyond the situation one confronts and refuse reality as given in the name of a reality to be produced (1973, p.7).

For Greene, philosophy is enmeshed in questioning, framing, and valuing. The ability and process of bracketing the life world is perhaps the method by which the functions of philosophy (the phenomenological ideas of examination, contemplation, constituting meanings) occur. Wide-awakeness can happen throughout and as a result of doing philosophy.

A central piece of doing philosophy is identifying an existential project. Greene explains, “The richness, the complexity of the selves people create are functions of their commitment to projects of action they recognize as their own (1988, pp.21-2).” Defining one’s project is intimately tied to doing philosophy. As Greene suggests, doing philosophy involves the refusal of the given conditions of society and actively working to create a more just world. An existential project, then, is the specific contribution a person can make toward freedom in the world. Salvio (1999) asserts that wide-awakeness can result through engaging with a project and that a primary objective of arts educators must be creating the opportunities for students to define projects and work toward understanding their ideals and selves through engaging with projects (p.118).

How do students do philosophy within the context of Monique’s classroom? Monique continually asks her students to look deeply at themselves as students of theatre and question themselves with respect to the role of the arts in society thus pushing their understanding of theatre beyond the realm of applause seeking into the deeper space of introspection, connection, and social action. “The theatre’s purpose” activity exemplifies Monique’s desire to encourage students to do philosophy. As students responded to the question of what is theatre’s purpose, in both written form and as group images, Monique provided an opportunity for students to look at the larger goals of theatre not only of their lives as artists, but also of their position as human beings. In asking her students to think about theatre’s purpose and define a larger vision, Monique is providing them the

opportunity to move toward greater self-awareness and being able to define their personal existential projects—what is their work to do in the world.

Monique also facilitated the opportunity for students to do philosophy through guiding them in the process of writing personal monologues. Greene explains:

Philosophy is a way of framing distinctive sorts of questions having to do with what is presupposed, perceived, intuited, believed, and known. It is a way of contemplating, examining, or thinking about what is to be significant valuable beautiful worthy of commitment. It is a way of becoming self-aware, of constituting meanings in one's life-world (1973, p.7).

As students wrote personal monologues, they were given the opportunity to constitute meanings of their own life-worlds, to make sense of relationships, grief, anger, love, and disappointment—the things that seem amplified within the realm of teenage life. As described in my examination of Monique's practice, in workshopping the monologues, students actively engaged in identifying shared experiences. One student spoke about the need to seek to understand others rather than judge people on the basis of appearances or the crowd they hang out with. Another talked about standing up for what you believe even when it may not be popular. It is possible that by affording students the opportunity to share their stories and questions, to look back upon their experience, and to explore the way in which their individual experiences connect with others in their class, Monique

creates an atmosphere where students do philosophy and have powerful encounters with the arts.

Tom also created the opportunity for students to do philosophy. Within Tom's work, doing philosophy can be understood as an act of textual analysis and exploration. Text provided a frame from which students developed their capacity to ask questions and discuss social issues. In many cases, the words on the page stood as possible points of departure for philosophical exploration.

In the Billy Collins poetry unit, students chose personally relevant pieces from the breadth of Collins's work and actively sought to make individual and collective sense of the language and imagery of the poems. Students were given the opportunity to grapple with the themes of grief, anger, and love (much like what students in Monique's class explored while writing monologues) in the process of conceptualizing and manifesting their pieces. In presenting the pieces of poetry they had chosen, they were participating in the act of asking questions of themselves and others. Meanings were being made as they directed their friends in the performance pieces, as they acted in a variety of poems, and watched one another's work. Consciousness was being explored, especially in the piece "The Names," when the actors metaphorically raised the World Trade Center towers and performed an act of symbolic unity by rebuilding the towers together.

Tom also afforded students the opportunity to do philosophy by bringing in dramatic literature into the classroom and through the way in which he

presented it. Specifically, in order to prepare students to synthesize their duet scenes into monologue, Tom walked students through scenes from “Our Country’s Good” and “All My Sons.” As the texts were outlined and major themes discussed, students were confronted with stories of war, morality, ethics, greed, and truth. The possibility for students to form questions and explore characters and situations presented itself as students discussed and worked on writing monologues together. It was possible for students to do philosophy as they engaged with texts and participated in discussion and experiences around those texts.

Articulating the relationship between powerful encounters with the arts, Tom and Monique’s teaching, and the way in which they encouraged students to do philosophy illustrates several key connections. Creating the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts for students directly connects with doing philosophy: through analysis and creation of works of art, students were physically and intellectually afforded the opportunity to both do philosophy and have powerful encounters with the arts. Whether by looking closely at texts or participating in acting exercises, students were using the form of theatre, as Greene suggests, in the act of framing questions, making clear, and probing what might be. By providing space for these opportunities to occur, Monique and Tom created the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts.

## **Extending the Imagination**

Extending the imagination also plays a central role in the way in which Monique and Tom create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts. At the level of the individual, imagination provides an internal avenue for questioning, problematizing, making the familiar strange, and seeing differently. With respect to society, imagination makes it possible to look at the world through a lens of understanding and empathy, and perhaps to envision alternatives to separation and loneliness. Maxine Green talks about the centrality of imagination with respect to wide-awakeness saying, “None of our encounters can happen, however, without the release of the imagination, the capacity to look *through* the windows of the actual, to as-ifs into being in experience” (1995, p.139). By providing opportunities for students to extend their imagination, Monique and Tom are creating opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts.

Monique continually sought to create experiences in her classroom where students actively engaged their imaginations. In guided imagery exercises, Monique directly attempted to cultivate imagination within her students. As students journeyed in their minds’ eyes to imaginary locales, as different characters, in different situations, Monique provided the opportunity for students to exercise their minds, to practice visioning, and to rehearse creativity and awareness. Specifically, students were guided to create specific contexts, such as a cabin in the woods, within their mind’s eye, and to visualize a gift they would

receive. By giving students the opportunity to think in different ways and create real and imagined characters and contexts—to extend the imagination—Monique provides opportunities for powerful encounters.

Exercises of the imagination are peppered throughout Monique’s practice. As students built their monologue characters, they were asked to imagine aspects and attributes of the role. Physically and intellectually, they explored the particulars they had constructed in their minds through imagining—the characters become what the actor envisions and creates. As students wrote character biographies in the monologue unit, they were given the chance to intellectually muse about what it would be like to walk the world as their monologue character. How would their characters respond to the questions presented? In what ways would those answers be different if they were responding as themselves? Answering questions from a different perspective gave students the opportunity to extend their imaginations. In the midst of guided imagery and the character work of the monologue unit, Monique created opportunities for students to think, reflect, conceptualize, imagine, and dream, and in so doing, have powerful encounters with the arts.

Students also had the opportunity to extend their imaginations within Tom’s work. Tom provided the opportunity for students to use their imaginations as they conceptualized their pieces within the Billy Collins poetry unit. Students devised pieces that often placed themselves as the central characters in the stories of the poems. As such, the lines between narrator, character, and actor were often



blurred and shifted from moment to moment. As they thought about blocking, casting, lighting, sound, etc., each student was given charge of envisioning and creating a concept—of extending their imagination in order to manifest their poem. The rehearsal process for the poems can be considered a continuous exercise of the imagination.

In watching the rehearsal process for “Brighton Beach Memoirs,” I observed that the students’ imaginations played a crucial role in the creation and evolution of their characters within that context as well. Individual cast members brought their thoughts and ideas to the characters they were portraying. For example, the actor portraying Nora saw her character as energetic and bubbly, therefore she created an effervescent persona that warmly moved about the stage. Her acting choice made the shift that occurs in the character (as Nora struggles to receive direction and guidance from her mother) a more dramatic evolution. In another example, the actor portraying Stanley created an edgy persona with a very deliberate speech pattern; every line he delivered was spoken in a very serious tone. In each instance, the imagination of the student allowed them to create a character and explore the alternative reality of his or her role. Whether imagining characters from a poem or creating a character from the words of a script, Tom’s students were given the opportunity to tap into their imaginations, make a leap from the reality of their everyday lives, and explore a different place.

In returning to the central role imagination plays in creating the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts, several key ideas come to mind.

Imagination, as conceived by Greene, is the foundation from which awareness and action evolve. By affording students the opportunity to tap into their imaginations, Tom and Monique created the conditions for powerful encounters with the arts to occur within their classrooms. Imagination was the vehicle by which students participated in exercises, created characters from words on a page, and perhaps envisioned alternative realities. Through extending their imaginations, students can push boundaries and become wide-awake within the world.

Several main ideas are helpful in summarizing the over-arching themes that form the foundation of understanding how opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts are created within a high school drama context. By allowing students to explore consciousness and view the world from different perspectives through different roles and contexts, teachers provide them the opportunity to bracket lived experience. Physically relating with text and engaging with self in the pursuit of creating character and exploring drama creates the context for doing philosophy. In addition, extending the imagination allows students to make important connections between consciousness and perception, and as such, possibly experience powerful encounters with the arts. This chapter has sought to clearly articulate specific ways in which high school drama teachers create the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts. I will discuss the way in which the efforts of high school drama teachers create opportunities for

students to have powerful encounters with the arts inform larger educational discourse.

## **DISCUSSION**

My dissertation examined the nature of powerful encounters with the arts within a high school drama classroom. Living at this time when the arts are being challenged and questioned, the 8-year-old, curly haired child inside of me that belted show tunes from the depths of her soul at an elementary school choir concert wants to shake the earth beneath the feet of the people who question the profound impact early experiences in the arts have on children. The high school student inside of me that found refuge and solace within the walls of a theatre in a high school in Clarksville, Indiana, cries out to explain that my life would be remarkably different had those moments of connection, and opportunities for laughter, joy, and beautiful creation, been denied. The high school drama teacher inside of me wants to share cherished moments when I saw students learn to think, grow, question, and care with the people who dare allow schools to function without arts programs. This study sought to describe the ways in which high school drama teachers create powerful encounters with the arts to both celebrate the potential of arts education and answer the detractors that seek to diminish or destroy the possibility for all students to have access to the creative, contentious, and wonderful space of the high school drama classroom.

In seeking to describe the nature of powerful encounters with the arts, I have participated in the chorus of concerned people that questions the types of

experiences we provide our students. In addition, I have sought to provide an example of an educational situation that seeks to inspire humanity, value critique, and challenge the very nature of knowledge within the process of teaching and learning. In choosing wide-awakeness as my conceptual framework, as the benchmark for powerful encounters with the arts, I attempted to move the concepts of meaning-making and awareness to the forefront of a discussion of high school drama. By looking closely at the classrooms of Monique and Tom, I have sought to fully contextualize the way in which they create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts in the hope that powerful encounters, whether a result of artistic engagement or not, will become part of the fabric of the educational experience we work to create for all students. Having offered a brief summary of the overall aims and objectives of this dissertation, I will now provide summative thoughts for several key constituencies whose work may be informed by my investigation.

### **Classroom Teachers**

In looking at the philosophical underpinnings of the ways in which high school drama teachers provide opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts, several key ideas have implications for classroom teachers. The current educational climate of narrowly defined notions of achievement systematically devalues the individual skills and abilities of both teachers and students. In addition, manic calls for accountability that are made without any real sense of being accountable to whom and for what purpose undermine the creativity and

professionalism that must be the hallmark of effective classrooms and schools. Thinking about powerful encounters with the arts at this moment may appear quaint, at best, and pointless, at worst. It is with full knowledge of the reality of the educational system I find the work of Monique and Tom both timely and vitally important. Classroom teachers can take specific insight from Monique and Tom by looking at the way in which they create space for students to engage in self-exploration, co-create curriculum, and explore student experience in the context of the classroom.

Though I think they would both express that it is a difficult task, Monique and Tom exemplify teachers who embrace the responsibility they have to provide opportunities for students to engage in the process of self-exploration and awareness. Despite the constraints placed on them by larger educational mandates, both Tom and Monique share a pedagogical commitment to providing powerful opportunities for students. The fact they teach “non-tested,” artistic subject matter must be noted, for it might seem that fact may add to the ease with which they can explore more creative teaching practices. To some degree that may be true; however, I want to argue that the way in which they create opportunities for powerful encounters with arts can speak to teachers of all age levels and content areas. Bracketing lived experiences, doing philosophy, and extending the imagination are goals not limited to the border of the curriculum where the arts may dwell. In fact, all classrooms can be locations of imagination and inspiration. The ability to create opportunities for powerful encounters is

firmly situated within the grasp of all classroom teachers that are willing to return to the innate impulse that guides a person to teach, to the sense of hope that looks at individual students and sees potential and possibility in smiles and questions.

Another key consideration for classroom teachers with respect to creating conditions for powerful encounters is the openness to co-creating curriculum with students. To return to the overarching themes offered in the last portion of my argument, embedded within the concept of bracketing lived experience, doing philosophy, and tapping into the imagination is the idea that students have an active role in charting their own courses. Though Monique and Tom provided the structure of the exercises with which students were to engage, the way in which they made space for students to find personal relevance deserves to be noted as integral to the possibility for powerful encounters. For example, within Monique's classroom, students were afforded the opportunity to respond to the question of theatre's purpose by writing about theatre from a historical perspective, its role in current society, or the role it will play in the future. They manifested images from the ideas they had expressed in written form. Students co-created curriculum within Tom's classroom in the way they chose scenes, for example, and synthesized the scenes into monologues. Creating the opportunity for students to take ownership of their involvement in exercises was the first step to insuring student engagement. Being mindful of the way in which student choice is part of classroom life is a step in the direction toward wide-awakeness for teachers.

Classroom teachers can also glean understanding from Monique and Tom in that powerful encounters with the arts within their practice involved a willingness to explore student personal experience. Both Tom and Monique built moments into their work where students were allowed to draw from their personal stories and explore them in the form of theatre. Attaching personal meaning occurred as students chose monologues, created images, and rehearsed, seamlessly moving between imagination and performance. The act of reflection and sharing personal narrative can be valued and incorporated into the work done by students in a variety of classrooms at a variety of age-levels. The possibility for powerful encounters results when students are given the opportunity to make personal connections and frame content with relevance and meaning. Wide-awakeness can occur at the conscious intersection of self and experience as students practice attaching meaning and making connections

As articulated above, as classroom teachers themselves, the classroom practices of Monique and Tom have a great deal to say to classroom teachers from a variety of content areas and age levels who seek to create opportunities for powerful encounters for their students. Allowing students to engage in self-exploration and reflection is central to creating the opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts. In addition, creating space for students to co-create curriculum is central to eliciting engagement. Most importantly, tying student personal experience directly into classroom practice is the cornerstone of creating opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts. Classroom teachers can

encourage students to bracket lived experience, do philosophy, and extend their imaginations in ways similar to Monique and Tom. In so doing, they can create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts.

### **Teacher Education**

The teacher education community can play a central role in creating the possibility for powerful encounters with the arts for students. As a primary conduit for teaching prospective educators particular methods to use within their classrooms, teacher education can equip teachers with a variety of approaches to teaching. In addition, as a space for prospective educators to learn about philosophical perspectives on teaching and learning, teacher education can be a place for prospective teachers to form a solid foundation of theory from which to draw as they enter the classroom. With respect to powerful encounters with the arts, teacher education can provide the skills and understanding necessary for prospective teachers to create opportunities for powerful encounters within their work. Specifically, by providing new teachers with a broad array of strategies from which to draw, creating space to learn about themselves as teachers, and encouraging prospective teachers to consider the types of experiences they create within the walls of their classrooms, teacher education can become a location where powerful encounters are valued and cultivated.

The possibility for powerful encounters with the arts for students also resulted from the variety of arts-related activities and lessons from which Monique and Tom drew during their daily teaching. As teachers are equipped



with diverse methodological toolboxes, the possibility that the resulting experiences of their classrooms will be powerful and engaging increases. Teacher educators must provide opportunities for students in teacher education programs to have access to a variety of teaching methods during their certification process. In nodding to the power of the arts, it is essential to include the arts-related strategies in the methodological choices being offered to prospective teachers. With respect to drama teaching, Grady, (2000), Neelands, (1990), O'Neil & Lambert, (1982), Rohd (1998), and Tarlington & Verriour (1991) offer drama-specific strategies that can be used in a variety of educational contexts. Exposing prospective teachers to a breadth of instructional strategies and allowing them to find and define what works best for them within the particular content area and age-level creates conditions for powerful encounters within their classrooms.

Part of the success found by Monique and Tom in creating opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts in their classroom came from their clear sense of who they are as teachers, and teacher educators can play a central role in creating opportunities for prospective teachers to learn about themselves. Monique and Tom teach what they love in the way that works for them within their respective classroom contexts with their particular students. To reiterate, teacher educators need to provide space for students to identify and explore themselves as teachers, and encourage students to teach from an authentic place. Guiding students to a deeper understanding of their teacher-selves and the ways in which a teacher-self influences and is influenced by other aspects of their

personhood is a critical connection to make if the possibility for powerful encounters is to exist within their classroom. Wide-awakeness in students begins with wide-awakeness in teachers.

Teacher educators must also prepare their students to consider the types of educational experiences they are affording students within their classrooms. Included in this is the idea that they are capable change agents, in full control of the curriculum and environment. This is a highly problematic notion given the reality of teaching in schools today. Though paying attention to experience is difficult, being mindful of the types of experiences that form classroom life is a central piece of creating powerful encounters. Within the context of Monique and Tom's work, considering the types of experiences their students were having formed the cornerstone of teaching. In extending the notion of the types of experiences that were occurring, they also found it important to reflect upon where the cumulative experiences being offered their students would lead. What type of people were they creating in their classrooms? Embedded in the notion of paying attention to experience is valuing reflection as a tool for assessing what is happening and then moving forward with that knowledge toward a state of awareness. Teacher educators are uniquely positioned to model attention to experience and reflection in their work with prospective teachers. In addition, teacher educators can provide, for lack of a better phrase, coping mechanisms that provide new teachers with a strong foundation on which to stand as they confront

what can be an unfriendly environment that shows little compassion or interest in the types of experiences young people have in schools.

Teacher educators play a pivotal role in equipping prospective teachers with knowledge and understanding with respect to the ways in which teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. Providing students with the ability to draw from a variety of strategies and methodologies is central to creating the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts for students. In addition, teacher education must encourage students to learn about themselves as teachers and fully explore the relationship between themselves as teachers, learners, and people. Finally, teacher education must situate experience at the center of the educational endeavor if new teachers are to enter the classroom thinking about the types of experiences they create for children within their classrooms.

### **Curriculum Theory**

The work of Grumet, Pinar, MacDonald, and Huebner exemplifies the reconceptualist quest to envision a curriculum that places experience and awareness at the center of the educational project. They each seek to expand our understanding of teaching and learning beyond the tidy expectations of Tylerian objectives through acknowledging and celebrating students' unique and individual skills. A curriculum valuing powerful encounters necessarily champions the reconceptualist view of educational process as *currere*, which views personal context and individual understanding as primary concerns of educators. As

Sumara and Davis (1998) suggest, “unskinning” the curriculum would allow for creation and appreciation of the spontaneous moments of learning that occur within a classroom context. The possibility for powerful encounters exists when classroom discourse is broadened to expose students to a variety of learning experiences that provide space for personal connection. With respect to powerful encounters with the arts, the artistic medium becomes the conduit for infusing student narrative into the learning process. Looking at the way in which a curriculum for powerful encounters with the arts challenges disciplinary distinctions, reframes the discussion of standards and assessment, and situates personal experience at the center of the educational project will provide greater insight into creating powerful encounters with the arts for students.

A curriculum that creates opportunity for powerful encounters necessarily questions the hard boundaries of fixed disciplines. As antithetical to powerful encounters, rigid outlines of scope and sequence are refused in pursuit of a curriculum that does not pretend students fall into a cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all framework. That is an especially important point within the context of classrooms that truly reflect a society comprised of people from varying cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic contexts. Powerful encounters can result when inroads are made between disciplines: when history is brought into the literature classroom; when the science of engineering is explored within a theatre class that has been given the task of designing a set. Just as Tom introduced the poetry of Billy Collins to his Advanced Drama classroom, and Monique used creative writing

exercises when asking students to create monologues, the interdisciplinary potential of the arts increases the possibility for powerful encounters to occur.

Within the construct of a curriculum for powerful encounters, assessment and evaluation are authentic tools for reflection and learning, rather than narrowly conceived and sterilely administered snapshots of student understanding tied to high stakes. In harkening the notion of assessment championed by Torff (1997) and others interested in performance-based assessment, student learning would be evaluated in a context in which a fair judgment could be made as to a student's ability to synthesize and apply knowledge. The evaluation process would be intimately tied to a student's own ability to identify and strengthen areas of weakness. Specifically, knowledge and skills would be discussed with respect to the meaning that acquiring those knowledge and skills had within the life of the student—relevance would be of primary importance as it relates to the student's ability to be awake and aware of choices with which they are confronted in life.

At the heart of a curriculum designed to encourage powerful encounters with the arts is the belief that education must reflect a person's individual journey of self-awareness and consciousness. From this perspective, curriculum becomes focused on individual meaning-making with the desired end state being a greater understanding of the world and her or his individual position in it. Knowledge and skills are acquired in the learning process, but not viewed as the sole educational goal void of personal meaning. Wide-awakeness can result as intentional moments of engagement are created and explored. The arts (both creating and

exploring) can be the logical starting point of a curriculum for self-awareness and reflection.

A curriculum for powerful encounters requires a shift in conceptualization of the educational process. Powerful encounters can result when teachers and others in the position to make curricular decisions intentionally attempt to create moments of engagement using a variety of strategies, acknowledging the flexibility required to fully respond to student needs and classroom situations as they arise. Students must be considered active participants in the curriculum making process. As I pointed out in the classroom teacher portion of the discussion section, students must be actively involved in co-creating a curriculum that guides classroom activity.

My discussion of the way in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts reveals several key ideas. In reviewing the ways in which Monique and Tom create the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts, classroom teachers from a variety of disciplines can provide similar opportunities for students to engage in the process of self-exploration and awareness, create space for students to co-create curriculum, and tie student personal experience into the content being explored. With respect to teacher education, prospective teachers need to be exposed to a variety of instructional strategies that enable them to create the possibility for powerful encounters in their work. In addition, teacher educators must work to build mindfulness of the types of experiences that are created within

their classrooms. Finally, curriculum-makers must seek to provide the foundation for engaging educational experiences that situate student personal narrative at the center of the educational project. Having discussed several implications for my inquiry into powerful encounters with the arts, I will now discuss directions for future research that can be taken in an effort to continue building knowledge of powerful encounters with the arts.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study exemplifies a small-scale attempt to examine the nature of arts experience in schools. As revealed in the review of current arts education research offered early in my argument, little or no attention has been given to the nature of arts experiences in schools. Specifically, this study focused attention on the types of experiences present in the high school drama classroom in an attempt to connect literature from the field of philosophy, specifically educational philosophy, with the work of classroom teachers. I examined the philosophical investigation (doing philosophy) enabled by engagement with the arts as it relates consciousness, perception, and wide-awakeness. In so doing, I am looking at the nature of why we need arts education in schools from the perspective of valuing the intrinsic value of involvement with the arts. Next, I will address specific areas where emphasis must be placed in future attempts at powerful encounters within the larger educational landscape.

## **Drama Education Research**

Future research into powerful encounters within a drama classroom context must look at the nature of the difference between viewing and being exposed to drama as an audience member (an appreciation-focused drama experience) versus an experience where students are asked to create art through acting, directing, writing, set design, etc. Those experiences are inherently different, but it would be interesting to study the nature of each experience in terms of an individual's ability to construct personal meaning, increase self-awareness, and develop skills of perception and understanding. Studies would necessarily have to address the value of being involved in the creative process, while also clearly looking at what a person gains through connoisseurship. By extension, research must focus attention on the value of involvement in the creative process, rather than judge the quality of the work being produced.

Research into drama teaching must also look at the ways in which techniques and strategies intrinsic to the process of drama can be used within the practice of teachers of other content areas as well. One application of this is the strategy of "teacher in role," in which a teacher creates a scenario and assumes a character in order to present a lesson presents a creative possibility for a non-arts teacher. For example, a social studies teacher is constructing a unit on Egypt and wants to create a lesson in which her students assume the role of archeologists, theoretically and dramatically "exploring" the tombs of ancient Egypt. She or he



may assume the role of a government official sent to prepare the group of renowned archeologists (students in the class) for their important exploration.

In another example, teachers can build a performance component into their work. For instance, asking students in a business writing class to conduct mock interviews; or asking student inventors in a science course to present their inventions to the class. This activity could be extended by asking the class to take the role of a corporate board of directors who would have to decide if they were willing to invest in the product. In each of these examples, a teacher could use the medium of drama to infuse the content being presented with relevance and tension. Research into the ways in which drama strategies could inform work in other areas would necessarily have to investigate the ways in which teachers from a wide variety of contexts tap into drama in their work.

### **Arts Education Research**

As Eisner (2002) suggests, developing an organized research agenda needs to be at the forefront of arts education research. Doing small-scale studies in isolation, individually investigating a variety of claims, makes it difficult to have impact on the larger educational landscape. If we are to stand as a community of researchers committed to improving the position of the arts in schools we must actively seek to communicate across disciplines, educational settings, personal and academic interests to forward the position of the arts and argue for the inherent value of arts involvement. The arts education community must continue to extend our knowledge of arts education beyond our understanding of

relationship to “real” subjects and “core curriculum.” Energy spent on that endeavor robs the arts of legitimacy from the standpoint of overstating claims of “transfer” and draining time and resources from research that seeks to richly and vividly describe the nature of arts-related enterprises.

Future attempts to research powerful encounters with the arts need to directly address the perspective of the student. Just as this study sought to look at the way high school drama teachers encourage powerful encounters with the arts, work must be done investigating the student perspective of powerful encounters with the arts. What would students consider as powerful within the context of their arts classroom? Would they say they experience powerful moments? Would their understanding necessarily match that of their teacher? In what ways would powerful encounters with the arts look different with students of different age-levels, cultural backgrounds, or genders? Getting the student perspective is a critical next step in furthering our understanding of powerful encounters with the arts.

Future investigations of powerful encounters with the arts need to be undertaken within visual arts, music, and dance classrooms, looking specifically at the intrinsic nature of each form. In what ways is a student painter refining skills of perception and wide-awakeness when learning to paint a still life? What role does the body play in sense-making for a student of dance? What are the possible connections between learning to play an instrument and reflection? These are all questions that could be interrogated through looking at how powerful

encounters with the arts manifest in a variety of arts contexts. To reiterate, an important thing to note would be the attention paid to the individual aspects of each form. Just as this study attempted to highlight the form of drama and its connection to wide-awakeness, different art forms would necessarily provide different insights into powerful encounters with the arts.

### **Powerful Encounters with the Arts in Other Disciplinary Areas**

Research would necessarily have to investigate the nature of powerful encounters with the arts in a variety of contexts. Researchers could look the aspects of the arts that are present throughout a variety of disciplines and examine the way in which powerful encounters with the arts are manifest outside of an arts context. Within an English classroom, in what way is fiction taught that could be considered to encourage powerful encounters with the arts? If students read *Catcher in the Rye*, in what ways could Holden's journey be explored through dramatizing certain scenes, or through using the text as a springboard for related writing activities? Within a world history course, major movements within the arts could be used to illustrate the socio-political context of the time period. For example, studying works of Realist fiction and drama could highlight the cultural trend away from Romanticism that characterized the 19th century. This would provide context from which to understand history from a deeper perspective than simply studying dates and a small number of important people. Another example of the presence of the arts in other content areas is a connection that could be

made between math and science and music. For example, being able to understand meter and key requires a certain understanding of mathematical principals, and technological skills are definitely required in the music creation process (i.e. mixing and recording) and a math or science teacher could construct units that highlight the relationship between math, science, and music.

As I introduced in my discussion of curriculum theory, the interdisciplinary nature of the arts begs further attention. For example, in what ways do the arts provide an authentic context from which to understand connections among disciplines? In what ways can the arts be used as a point of departure for investigation in a variety of content areas? Describing the way in which the arts bring historically separated disciplines together necessarily initiates further discussion into the nature of powerful encounters with the arts in that insight into the nature of student engagement, reflection, and personal narrative are embedded with that inquiry.

Future research into powerful encounters with the arts will necessarily need to be conducted in order to continue to build our knowledge of the impact of the arts on teaching and learning. As I have suggested, the arts education community must continue to investigate the specific ways in which different artistic media influence student engagement and understanding. In addition, future study must situate students at the center of inquiry. How would students characterize artistic involvement? Research must also build our knowledge of the interdisciplinary implications of arts involvement. Most importantly, further

research into powerful encounters with the arts must build upon this example and more fully describe the nature of arts experiences in schools and society.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

In closing, I will offer specific contributions made by my examination of the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts. My study connects theoretical explorations of powerful encounters with the arts to the high school drama classroom; contextualizes the practice of two high school drama teachers thereby more clearly articulating the role of drama within the teaching and learning process; and offers specific ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts. I will now explore each of those implications in greater depth.

Looking at the ways in which high school drama teachers created opportunities for powerful encounters within a classroom context is important for several reasons. Primarily, it provides evidence to support the claim that there are classrooms in which the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts exists. My hope is that by being able to talk about these opportunities, they will become more commonplace. This will occur as teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and the larger educational community work together to build knowledge around arts-based teaching strategies and work to implement those strategies in classroom practice. This classroom exploration also provides for the possibility that the sometimes-abstruse ideas of consciousness, perception, and understanding can be understood in terms of what they looked like as Monique

and Tom created opportunities for powerful encounters in their work. Lastly, conducting my study within a classroom allowed me to look at where powerful encounters happen within a common context. By common context I mean that public schools are the location of a great deal of arts exposure for young people. If young people are going to learn about music, theatre, visual arts, and dance, and expand their understanding of various art forms, I argue learning will need to happen in the classroom. That being the case, by conducting a study of the ways in which two drama teachers create the opportunity for powerful encounters with the arts in two public high schools, I attempted to look directly at the location of arts experiences to find out what those experiences involve.

Focusing attention on the ways in which high school drama teachers create opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts also provides an example of the use of drama in teaching and learning. The classroom practices of Monique and Tom exemplify a variety of drama-focused teaching strategies. Whether by using text in innovative ways or by leading exercises that required students to use their bodies and minds to create character, the ways in which Monique and Tom created the opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts can be helpful to teachers from a variety of age-levels and content areas—their practice can inform the practice of other teachers.

Perhaps the most important information gleaned from this investigation is an understanding of the specific attributes of powerful encounters with the arts. As Monique and Tom provide space for students to bracket lived experience, do

philosophy, and extend their imaginations, they create opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts. By identifying the specific attributes of creating opportunities for students to have powerful encounters with the arts, and the context in which they are present, I am contributing to knowledge about arts-learning experiences.

We are at an important moment in the educational project of our country. Creating the opportunities for powerful encounters with the arts must be something we work at as a community of educators committed to creating thinking, caring, engaged young people. In striving toward wide-awakeness, we can work, in the words of Maxine Greene, “to make a world.”

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## **Vita**

Kathlyn Marie Steedly was born in Louisville, Kentucky on October 1, 1971, the daughter of Judith B. Steedly and Gary F. Steedly. Kathlyn attended Providence High School in Clarksville, Indiana, where she was active in Theatre Department activities. She graduated from Providence High School in 1990. Kathlyn then began her course of study at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. In August of 1994, Kathlyn graduated from Indiana University with a Bachelors of Arts in English and Theatre. She also received her secondary teaching credential in English and Theatre/Speech Communications. Kathlyn then spent two years with AmeriCorps programs in Indianapolis, Indiana. Following her AmeriCorps experience, Kathlyn taught high school drama at Decatur Central High School in Indianapolis. Kathlyn left the high school drama classroom to pursue a Masters of Arts in Theatre at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. While at Western Washington University, Kathlyn assisted in teaching a Theatre Appreciation course and taught Acting courses. She received her Master of Arts in Theatre from Western Washington University in August 1999. In September of 1999, Kathlyn entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin. Kathlyn has assisted courses in the Departments of Curriculum and Instruction, Theatre and Dance, and Management, and worked at the University of Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts while a student at the University of Texas at Austin.

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