

Dramatic Impact: An Arts-Based Study on the Influence of Drama Education on the  
Development of High School Students

by

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### **Abstract**

This arts-based research study is an examination of the influence of drama education on the development of high school students. Five recent graduates were interviewed (including the researcher) about their high school drama experiences. All participants had been selected for this study because they have been impacted as a result of their time in/with drama. Culminating in a script, the research takes the form of an arts-based playwriting inquiry, shaped by A/r/tography and rhizomatic influences, making use of Barone and Eisner's five phase creative process.

Adhering to an Aristotelean story arc outlined by Martini, metaphor in the four-scene play is used to explore and subsequently communicate concepts. In so doing, the researcher offers an expanded audience a renewed perspective on the impact that drama education has on the development of high school learners and invites viewers to consider drama's impact on adolescent learners. Four main concepts were examined in the analysis: initiation, transition, habits of mind and, interdependency and it was found that these are central to all participants' development. It was also found that learning contained within these four concepts, as experienced through drama education, has the potential to impact and equip students for life beyond high school. The process based, holistic learning central to drama education allowed participants to recognize and succinctly denote areas in their lives that were, and continue to be impacted by the dramatic experiences they took part in.

*Keywords:* drama education, arts-based research, A/r/tography, rhizomatic, initiation, transition, habits of mind, interdependency, drama education for at-risk youth, the arts, and reengagement in education.

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## **Chapter I: Reason for the Research**

### **Autobiographical Incident**

Over the last twenty-five years, I have journeyed far as a result of my interaction with the dramatic arts. Recently, I found myself contemplating my own adolescent experience and the impact that drama had on my life. I was a quiet child who had moved from a Catholic school in urban Alberta to a small rural town in southeastern Manitoba. Leaving an established community of friends, whom, as I reflect back, were rooted in families that celebrated education and learning in particular, and relocating to a place where physical strength mattered and school was something most people simply did, was a powerful transition. I was thankful for this early years school experience, as I benefitted greatly from this influence in my younger years. Sadly though, by the time late middle and then high school came around, there was little of that left. I adopted the culture of this new environment, and while I thrived outwardly, I was wilting on the inside. I was fortunate enough to have been exposed to some influential people, both peers and teachers, (further evidence of the value of relationships in the educational setting) though I did not recognize their influence at the time. These influences, paired with a long established love for stories (which is credited to my ‘mom’ who had laid the foundation for this long before I knew what a plot was) were what kept me connected to school and learning until finally in grade 12, I was ‘born again’ through drama. It was a short stand-alone monologue assignment, but it breathed new life into me. From a 17-year-old boy’s viewpoint, I was having fun and was excited about school. Twenty-five years later, as I reflect back on the situation, this time from an educator’s perspective, I see the lesson/assignment as an opportunity for authentic student engagement (I was involved in body, mind, and spirit), strongly based in inquiry that provided

the learner with a wealth of learning potential above and beyond the dramatic presentation. The fact that I remember it to this day speaks volumes to its impact.

### **Significance of the Study**

While my early upbringing included time spent in a large urban center, I had had little exposure to the arts, drama in particular, and what it had to offer. The rural high school that I attended had no designated drama class. My adolescent exposure to drama came only at the end of my grade school experience. If a single and solitary experience could have this kind of a lasting impact on me, what could a similar experience or even further and continued exposure to drama do for other students? As a 17-year-old male, I had little regard for emotions. I knew that personal discomfort (physical or otherwise) was not good, but outside of recognizing this, I was devoid of any greater awareness. Presenting a monologue in front of the class opened my eyes to all of this. Not only did the exercise foster my consideration of the contextual ‘character situation’ within the story and his feelings as a result, but the presentation’s impact on my peers made me recognize that I was a part of a community of learners who valued my creative contributions (teacher’s perspective here). This experience was the genesis moment for my own personal and social developmental journey and subsequent arrival in the world of education. I became readily aware of the power of drama to move people (performer *and* audience), and have sought to do so with it ever since. If this singular dramatic experience could have such a significant impact in my own life as a student, what impact might it have on the lives of others? What would be the experience of students who have the opportunity to take drama classes and/or be part of school based performances and productions? How would being involved in various and sundry dramatic opportunities contribute toward the self-growth of the participants? Over the past nine years of my teaching career, I have observed students take part in a variety of drama

experiences, with a significant number of students coming out at the end noticeably changed. The learning has gone beyond simply content mastery, and has had an impact on them as people. I have noticed that students are more self-confident and have gained a unique perspective on the world. The societal pressures that lead them to choose to behave in a conformed and/or defensive way are forgotten. When students engage in a dramatic experience they engage without reservation. In so doing, they come out of it at the end of the experience frequently a changed person due to what they have undergone as a result of this creative process. Society is searching endlessly for ways to help youth, troubled and otherwise. Perhaps one of the answers is as simple as providing the opportunity to experience drama in their education.

### **Interests and Investments**

I am quite convinced that drama has the potential to transform learners' experience. As such, I have pursued it as a discipline (Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama at the University of Calgary), I have spearheaded a drama program in the rural high school at which I teach, and I currently sit on the board of the Manitoba Drama Educator's Association (MDEA) in the role of President. In each of these instances, the learning that has happened has extended well beyond the situational experiences of the classroom.

Presently the school I teach at has grade nine through 12 drama classes, with some levels having multiple drama course sections. Further to this, I have had opportunity to teach an introductory and an advanced acting class at the college level, five years running. Some students have expressed the opinion that drama classes are 'easy credits'. I disagree; and I would suggest rather that learning that is 'fun' or enjoyable is often undermined, being perceived as less rigorous. Drama has the potential for the learner to learn about him/herself in an authentic way while engaging with a curriculum. 'Play' is redeemed as positive risks are taken, allowing for



some authentic learning experiences to transpire. Ideas and issues that were taboo, suddenly find room to be negotiated as walls crumble and bridges are built.

As a result of this, I am quite interested in employing arts-based research exploring the idea of using drama (or more particularly a dramatic script), for the interpretation as the lens through which to look at the impact of drama upon a learner's experience and the challenges that exist therein.

### **Critical Comment**

Recognizing that I am an arts advocate, I realize full well that I have a strong positionality concerning the value of the dramatic arts. Truth be told, how could I not? This position has the potential to have the work that I am doing be perceived as subjective, which requires that my research be rigorous and well considered. I do not want to rant; I want to offer perspective in a meaningful, creative light. I am interested in looking at the impact that drama has had on me and students that I have worked with through an arts-based research method. As a married, white male, I also realize that my privileged perspective, directly impacted by my socio-economic level, further reinforces my pro-arts stance. My educational experiences, at the college and university levels in particular, have been rich with dramatic opportunities. I have seen firsthand the benefits that drama has on student development. I lived through it and continue to be impacted by it as a result. Because of this, I will need to be diligently objective as I consider my research. Fine's (2006) ideas concerning "strong objectivity" (p. 89) play a key role in allowing me to understand and guide my aim towards objectivity. She suggests that "strong objectivity" is "...achieved when researchers work aggressively through their own positionality, values and predispositions, gathering as much evidence as possible, from many distinct vantage points, all in an effort not to be guided, unwittingly, by predisposition and the pull of biography"

(Fine 2006, p. 89). Her idea concerning objective aims, when enacted, will allow me to pause in my work and consider where I am on the objective-subjective scale, recalibrating accordingly based on my intent.

### **Statement of the Problem/Inquiry Questions**

While I think that there are various and sundry topics that I could tackle that focus on the impact of drama on education, one aspect of drama and education that has continued to be prevalent for me is the impact that drama has had on students and their overall development. I recognize this transformation in my own experience and it continues to be revealed in the lives of students that I work with each year. I marvel at how drama, an art form that is rooted in the world of play and make-believe, can aid in the development of a pubescent youth, transforming him/her into an emotionally aware, brave (if not confident) empathizing member of society. Because of this, the participants will be former students with whom I have worked and taught. Additionally, those chosen to be involved in this research will be selected as a result of their exposure to drama and that have displayed a notable degree of growth as individuals. As such, I have settled on the following inquiry questions to guide and direct my research:

- 1. What impact has drama had on my own development?**
- 2. What impact has drama had on the development of students whom I have worked with and taught who have now graduated from high school?**

These questions resonate deeply for me in that they will enable me to inquire about the impact drama has had and continues to have. Using an arts-based method of research will allow for a unique perspective on the topic (Barone & Eisner, 2012) that I feel will contribute to the research being done in this area on the whole.

## Chapter II: Review of the Literature

### Topic Trends

In reviewing the literature, while no studies were found in which researchers considered the impact that drama has on students' development from the teacher or student's perspective using an arts-based methodology in a southern Manitoban context, there were studies that shared similar aspects with what I am proposing to do. Bates (2016) looked at educational drama and how it supported the social and emotional learning (SEL) in a grade three elementary class in the northern United States. Conrad (2004) used popular theatre to explore the at-risk label with a group of indigenous youth in a north-central Canadian context. Elliot (2008) in her Ph.D. dissertation looked at the impact of arts-based research as a means to explore human health and well-being in the northern United States. Conarro (2011) wrote an article in which he looked at the impact of the arts on students' school experience in a rural Alaskan community. In it he says, "Perhaps part of the answer is not what is taught and learned, but how it's shared by teachers and how it's applied by students" (p.181). In another research work, Garvis (2011) looked at self-efficacy as it applied to teaching the arts (which included drama) in an Australian context. Haberling and White (2004) focused on the benefits of performing the dramatic text *Our Town* as part of their case study in a rural American setting. The findings of the above research encouraged the reader to consider the possibility that drama was having a significant impact on those involved.

### Drama as a Means to Re-infuse and Re-enthuse

Researchers have focused on the dramatic arts to engage a variety of learners. This area of study has seen increasing attention (Boyes, 2004; Corby, 2008; Gallagher, 2000; Panagopulos, 2015). Drama has often been used to instill within those involved a renewed sense of purpose in

self and life. (Gallagher, 2000; Gervais, 2002; Hunt, 2010; Kerr, 2011; Macro, 2011). Whether it be through conflict resolution (Gervais, 2002), critical literacy skills (Harrison, 2012), inter and intra-personal understanding (Catterall, 2007; Hughes & Wilson, 2007), or metacognition (Akron, 2009; Beingessner, 2012) there has been research undertaken about the impact that is being made in the lives of students through their involvement in the dramatic arts.

### **The Benefits of Drama**

Opportunities to further explore the self are invaluable in assuring student development (Catterall, 2007). Drama by its very nature is a means by which learners can further equip themselves in the area of self-discovery (Mohler, 2012; Nelson, 2011; Urban, 2012). In reviewing the literature surrounding drama education, it becomes apparent that learning situations that used the dramatic arts were as much about the learner as they were about the curricular content. Hal Nelson (2009) in his article, "Arts Education and the Whole Child" states, "Success in the arts is strongly predicated on attention to the individual, which is uniquely fostered in creative environments" (p.16). Students who take part in drama are offered opportunities to completely immerse themselves in the experience being offered to them. Boyes (2004) suggests that students are not asked to check their physical selves at the door while their minds are worked for the next hour. They bring themselves in their entirety to the learning situation, holistically. "Learning through drama could be the basis of a curriculum for and of life" (Boyes, 2004, p.49). Boyes explains that there is no room for the compartmental world of separate classrooms and separated learning within the context of a dramatic learning environment. The child needs to come complete, and is engaged in his or her entirety. Hachiya (2002) suggests, "It cannot be denied-the arts and life are inseparable" (p.168). As a result, students are encouraged to consider the learning environment as a whole. Creative engagement

becomes the new norm. Hachiya proceeds to write that, “The arts imbue students with a creative spirit and offer a vital addition to their total development. The arts are a life force for learning. Today, there is a need for a new generation of learned, skilled and talented persons” (2002, p.169). Volmers (2016) cites a University of Calgary study when he says that arts-based teaching methods, the likes of which include drama, “can increase students’ engagement, empathy and entrepreneurial spirit”.

### **Drama and Metacognition**

Another theme evident in the literature is that in most situations students who are actively involved in a dramatic experience have made significant gains in the area of metacognition. Reflective practice is an essential part of the dramatic process (Akrong, 2009; Beingessner, 2012). Boyes (2004) found that courses with an arts leaning linked the cognitive and affective domains in learners, which in turn allowed for experiences that were rich in reflective learning. Catterall (2007) suggests that dramatic experiences are filled with ripe opportunities for learners to engage their own thinking. “Opportunities for productive metacognitive reflection flow repeatedly from creative dramatic work. These include the processes of invention, trying-out, reflecting and reinventing” (p.164). Likewise, Preston (2011) in a UK study using a participatory theatre project involving young women found that the participants recognized and reflected on the impact that the imaginative work had on their actual lives. Mohler (2012) in a qualitative study that examined how drama was being used to impact the lives of transitioning gang members in Los Angeles found that “each participant shares what he or she learned and what their favorite part of the experience was. Although the testimonials cannot easily be translated to hard statistics, the final reflections indicate tremendous growth in the participants” (p. 98). Taking time to journal and debrief about the notable impact of the experience seemingly

allowed the student to check in with himself/herself and recognize the impact that the created situation had. This is a vital piece of any learning situation, and an essential part of the artistic experience in general and the dramatic process in particular.

### **Drama as Catharsis**

The idea of catharsis (purgation of pity and fear) spoken of by Aristotle in his seminal work, *The Poetics* (1994), is recognizable in the experience of students who are being exposed to drama. The opportunity to explore ideas and situations without the penalty of real life consequences, yet to experience the emotional impact of a situation, provides key moments of learning. Studies by both Gallagher (2000) and Gervais (2002) revealed this very notion. Gallagher (2000) found that “the real strength of working through process drama with students is that they can live, however briefly, inside a fiction that engages who they are, where they come from, and how they might like to proceed” (p.95). Gervais (2002) echoes this idea:

Drama provides the opportunity to explore life situations in a non-threatening context through the intermediary of make believe which serves as a buffer between the issue at hand and its personal implication to the student in role. The strong emotional impact of physically creating and re-creating possibilities for one’s own life, even though they are imaginary, cannot be denied. (p. 8)

In their study on youth theatre, Hughes and Wilson (2007) explore this idea further through the lens of performance theorist Victor Turner’s theory of liminal and liminoid. Liminal refers to moments of role-play that allow the performer the chance to take on a character or idea differently from their usual experience. Liminoid refers to activities that occur apart from and outside of the day-to-day routines that a person experiences in life. “Liminal space or liminoid activities provide a place/time outside of normal routines where people (temporarily) shed their

ascribed roles and identities and experiment with a new range of expression in a different social reality” (p.69). In addition to the above, Jones (2014) looked at using process drama as a means to teach English Language Arts, Social Studies, and world languages and noted that there was a significant impact in the area of meaning making based on the experience(s) created. Duffy (2014) conducted a similar study using drama as a means of instruction, noting a significant change in the teaching and learning as a result of using emotion centered, embodied instruction methods.

### **Students’ Personal, Psychological, and Social Well Being**

Researchers found drama to have a notable impact on the learner engaged in the experience. Perhaps then what is notable is the different ways specifically that students have benefitted. Etherton and Prentki (2006) found that confidence was a key area of focused development for students who were part of applied drama programs:

One of the commonest aims and stated outcomes of using a drama process is to increase the confidence of participants who frequently assert that their confidence was indeed boosted by being engaged in a process which enabled them to explore aspects of themselves through the mask of the other. (p.145)

Similarly, Rozenberg (2007) also advocates for the impact that dramatic play has on confidence. In her research, she noted that role-play promoted self-actualization and that students who took part in a theatrical performance made gains in self-esteem and confidence. In a separate study, Kerr (2011) noted that participants let go of the fear of judgment by others, were more emotionally competent and had increased confidence in their own abilities. In Corby’s (2008) study on the impact of an extracurricular drama program she found that students reported growth in their communication, self-confidence and social identity. Burns (2015) used process drama

with a grade three class and found that it supported engagement, higher order thinking, and to a certain extent, differentiated learning. McLennan (2003) who used Boal's forum theatre model found that the use of social drama had a positive influence on student attitude. Having looked at the use of drama to deal with covert bullying by girls, Burton (2010) suggests that his study reveals "confirmatory evidence of the efficacy of drama in enhancing identification, empathy and self-esteem in adolescent girls to enable them to deal more effectively with relational aggression" (p.259). Giambrone (2016) suggests that in social justice classrooms "drama pedagogy may create possibilities for conflicts and tensions to become visible, and to be addressed in productive ways by the teachers and students involved" (p.2). While arguably drama does not contribute to a nation's GDP, the research suggests that it does support the individual engaged in the dramatic activity, in effect benefiting society on the whole (Burton, 2010; Catterall, 2007; McLennan, 2003; Mohler, 2012). The focus by drama teachers on the inter/intrapersonal development paired with the metacognitive thinking certainly seems to suggest this.

In creating critically thinking engaged humans, the dramatic experience is cited as a key contributor. In a study by Akrong (2009), he discovered that drama allowed youth the opportunity to role-play with the idea of identity, an important notion especially in the face of peer pressure concerns. Drama has afforded participants the opportunity to recognize themselves as skilled people who have much to offer. As Douglass (2004) suggests, "Involvement in the creative process helps young people to discover and capitalize on their gifts" (p. 4). An awareness of, and a healthy confidence in oneself allows people to recognize themselves as capable contributors who serve a purpose.



### **Drama's Relationship to Student Development**

Community is significant in dramatic arts pedagogy. The interactive nature of drama assures that few if any participants are the sole benefactors of a dramatic experience. In a study that focused on the dramatic form of improvisation, Gallagher (2010) suggests that “in the best cases, improvisation also validates play and promises a social agenda with emancipatory ideals” (p.46). In Bethany Nelson’s (2011) study, she focused on a playmaking experience to help youth and considered the impact of discrimination on society. In looking at what divides people, the students who participated in the research were able to recognize the damaging effect discrimination can and does have on people all over the world. This new knowledge created a reverse effect for the students in that they were able to recognize the value that each person brings to a group. The establishment of community in and amongst the participants was cited as being important:

All students interviewed identified the community established in the group as a component that they would remember about the project, and identified community as a critical factor in their accomplishment of the finished product. They identified the nature of the community as distinct from their experience in other classes, and the sharing of personal stories of struggle and triumph as key to the establishment of trust in the group.

(p.164)

Furthermore, Radford (2005) suggests that drama be made use of as a teaching tool across the curriculum, especially with regard to interpersonal interactions. The relationships established in the imaginary world allow for the possibility of gains in the real world. Students understand well the idea of financial capital, and drama allows them the opportunity to understand the even more valuable idea of social capital. “The depth and breadth of an individual’s network of

relationships, also known as social capital, is therefore related to an individual's success in life" (Akron, 2009, p.27).

Seeing beyond oneself and recognizing others are other things that drama does. By actively participating in a dramatic experience, learners are presented with the chance to see and interact with others. As Thompson (2006) suggests, drama allows learners to understand the impact of their choices and the subsequent impact upon others. The cause and effect idea that is sometimes lost in other static learning situations becomes front and center in a dramatic experience. Burton (2010), in his study on the impact of drama and adolescent girls, recognized that drama enhanced identity, empathy and self-esteem, which in turn helped them when confronted with relational aggression. In looking out, students not only recognize that there are others out there, but they also realize that these others can offer key support to navigate issues. "Children are united in problem solving real issues that affect their lives, forging better understanding of their selves and each other in the process" (Akron, 2009, p.27). Schechner and Thompson (2004), acting as the editorial team on a special issue of *Research in Drama Education*, commented that social theatre promotes itself as it celebrates community building and can function well even when dealing with a variety of traumatic experiences. As Catterall (2007) suggests, there is ample evidence that drama affords students with life affirming experiences when the learners are themselves recognizing the gains made with regard to group work and problem solving.

### **Teachers' Perspectives on the Benefits of Drama**

With regard to drama in education as a means to benefit students, teachers praise its merits. Akron (2009) and Nelson (2011) found that teachers felt that drama is self-empowering, allowing students to feel good about themselves. Akron (2009) added further that

drama had the potential to slow down the nature of society and allow learners the chance to consider issues that often are overlooked. Another aspect of her findings was that drama offered learners the opportunity of face-to-face contact in a world that is continually becoming more technology oriented. Radford (2005) suggested that for teachers, drama is an effective way to have students build community. Boyes (2004) echoed this and noted that the learning experience fostered through drama was holistic in approach and as such served the student in his/her entirety. Nelson (2011) discovered that teachers felt that drama supported and further developed the emotional side of the learner, while also proving to be an agent of literacy. Brew (2015) in her research that focused on drama and rigid teacher-centered instruction in a Ghanaian classroom, found that select drama games could enhance the teaching and learning.

### **Potential Negative Impacts of Drama Education**

A few researchers did provide caution regarding drama education. Bruyere (2009) in a study that was about drama being used by a drama specialist as well as by a generalist classroom teacher noted that while drama was a powerful learning tool when used well, when it was undervalued, it had a negative effect on the overall learning outcome. Bramford (2006) suggests that if arts programs (drama) are not taught well, they can be destructive to students' development. Etherton and Prentki (2006) in their study on the impact of drama being used by development agencies abroad cautioned about the unintended impact of using drama. Their concern centered on the power of drama to alter emotional states of both participants and spectators.

### **Students' Perspective of Drama Education**

The student response to the impact of drama is often very positive. McLennan (2003) found that students felt that they had developed in the areas of self-expression and confidence,

while also understanding better the social and cultural roots of their own lived experiences. She also found that students recognized a sense of agency in their lives, believing that change was possible and that they had an empowered voice with something to say. Through his study, Cattrall (2007) found that students noted having developed in the area of expressing feelings, self-efficacy, teamwork and cooperation. In the same study, students also noted that they felt more equipped with dealing with emotions. In a study by Hughes and Wilson (2007) students found that drama offered the opportunity to work out issues using imagination, discovering that there was not just one way to problem solve a scenario. Boyes (2004) in his study found that students valued the reflective learning that transpired as a result of their participation in drama, noting as well how drama facilitated friendship building. Gallagher (2000) discovered that students valued drama as a means of artistic expression, providing opportunities to explore the idea of perspective while at the same time developing a sense of empathy. Students in Akrong's (2009) study found that they had a renewed sense of confidence in their own ideas and subsequently were considerably less worried about doing something in a proscribed fashion. This celebration of originality also had students recognizing the value of imagination as they further honed their artistic skills, noting that all of this was equipping them for future relationship building.

### **Dramatic Impact in Film**

There are number of thematic depictions of the impact of drama (and the performing arts in general) on the development of students portrayed in Hollywood films about education. The 1989 film *Dead Poet's Society* includes as part of its narrative the way in which a young man's participation in a play allowed him to discover a part of himself that he had never known. The director of the 1995 film *Mr. Holland's Opus* showcases the growth and development of a

number of music students who each made social and emotional gains, among others, as a result of their exposure to the performing arts. *Fame* (1980, 2009) is a portrayal of the lives of students and their growth and development as a result of their time spent in the fictional New York City High School for the Performing Arts. The first two films from the *Step-Up* (2006, 2008) film franchise featured a variety of story arcs that followed the lives and subsequent development of young dancers at the fictional Maryland School of Arts. Each of these fictional drama films have a focus on the impact that the arts have in the lives of students, noting well the social and emotional gains experienced by the participants.

Examples of fact based films that are documentations of the work being done by teachers with students include *La Classe* (2008), a semi-biographical narrative written by and starring Francois Bégaudeau, a French language instructor, that features his own work as a real teacher with struggling students in Paris. Here is an example where reality is documented by the teacher through his dual role of educator and actor. Another French film is *Être et Avoir* (2009), a documentary movie directed by Nicolas Philibert that took a one-year look at Mr. Lopez and his students in a mixed age class in France. It is these last two films that hint at the type of work that I am aiming to do with the exception that I intend to not use film as the media of expression but drama. In addition, I intend to use storytelling about how drama has impacted the development of students in the form of a script for the theatre.

### Chapter III: Methodology

#### Arts-Based Research

Just what is meant by arts-based research and how and why was it an appropriate fit for this study? Patricia Leavy (2015) defines arts-based research as

a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation. These emerging tools adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address social research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined. (p. ix)

For this study specifically, a dramatic play script was created based on the findings. I chose to employ arts-based research for a number of reasons. As Cahnmann-Taylor argue, “Arts-based methodologies ‘blur the boundaries between the arts and the sciences’ and are proven to be adept at reshaping, eroding, and shifting the scientific foundation on either side of the qualitative-quantitative divide” (2008, p. 3). With an arts-based methodology there is much potential for an unsettling of sorts, which allows for the possibility of fresh perspectives. Barone and Eisner (2012) write that this approach, while aesthetic in nature, aims to unsettle the reader enough to allow him/her to view the phenomena differently. Arts-based research has the capacity to reach a diverse audience, academic and layperson alike. Leavy (2015) points out that using arts-based research allows the work undertaken to be shared with a wider audience. She suggests that the research is more accessible and less jargon laden, in the end doing a greater service to the general public. In aiming to be inclusive, there is a much wider readership available. A text that ‘resonates’ has a much broader appeal, and is likely to have a greater impact. Also, in seeking to explore and uncover, readers are invited to take part in the meaning making that is happening.

“Therefore, arts based research,” as Cahmnamm and Siegesmund claim, “provokes widening and deeper conversations out of the particular. The aesthetic provokes new questions. It does not close down conversation by providing a summative conclusion” (2008, p. 237).

Part of the intrigue is perhaps the aesthetic value of arts-based research. Great pieces of art and literature have an impact on the reader/viewer, so why would not arts-based research achieve the same? Barone and Eisner reason that researchers seek “research that has elegance and subtlety, which promotes meaning not only through its literal or discursive features but because of its metaphorical and qualitative features as well” (2012, p. 48). This idea does not mean that the art will outweigh the research. For the arts-based research to be considered of value, it needs to represent well in both areas:

to be useful, a piece of arts based research must succeed both as a work of art and as a work of research. It must be, that is, of sufficiently high quality to lead members of an audience into a powerful experience, into a researching of social phenomena. (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 145)

My intent in writing this arts-based research was to reach a widespread audience concerning the topic of drama and its impact on the development of high school students. Moreover, I wanted to promote thinking about the content through the use of a dramatic script and invoking an emotional response in the reader/audience as a result, all the while aiming to contribute to the research in this area. I believe that using an arts-based methodology model has enabled me to achieve these goals.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data for this study was collected in three different ways: (1) conversational interviews; (2) the collection of artifacts including videos, student journals, photographs, pamphlets, posters and photographs; and (3) field notes. I will explain the collection techniques more fully below.

One-on-one interviews with participants were undertaken. In order to select participants for the interviews, the sampling type that was used for this study and the method employed was purposeful sampling. According to Emmel (2013), “The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information rich cases that best provide insight into the research questions” (p. 46). Emmel further states that purposeful sampling “is designed before the research starts and may be redesigned as the research progresses. It is not driven forward by theoretical categories, but practical and pragmatic considerations” (p. 48). The sample type then is logical in that it allows the researcher to deal directly with that which he/she is focusing on in the research. Further to this notion, Patton (2005) comments on the value of purposive sampling with regard to small studies in this way. “Small purposeful samples yield in-depth understanding and insights rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 344). Participants that were chosen for this study a) have been involved in a variety of drama opportunities as a result of their time spent in high school, and b) have displayed a degree of developmental growth (socially and/or emotionally) as observed visually, orally/anecdotally or reflectively through the in-class work they did. A small group of five former students who had studied under the researcher during their high school years was chosen; the researcher knew them well as they were former pupils. The researcher had watched them grow and make notable developments over the course of their four years of high school. As mentioned before, the researcher was also included in this group of participants. Participants were part of this study voluntarily, and might have opted out of the research at any



time. No compensation was provided. At the end of each interview session, the researcher created field notes (see Appendix B for template) based on the interactions with the participants during the interviews. These interviews were then transcribed and pseudonyms were used in the data collection as well as with any/all characters created in the play. Interview information was kept for one year and then destroyed, while images, videos, and artifacts were returned to their original owners/locations.

Given the sensitive nature of stories and desiring to create an environment that would allow participants to share freely, conversational interviews were used. “Conversational interviewing is an approach used by research interviewers to generate verbal data... in an informal and conversational way” (Roulston, 2008). Formal interviews can often lead to a constrained and awkward experience. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) point out that interviews can at times be an awkward setting for participants in that “interviews have constrained participants’ texts of their experience” (p. 422). The intent was that the conversational interview method would alleviate the constrain, whereby more complete stories would be shared due to the level of comfort felt by those sharing. “In emphasizing features of mundane conversation, conversational interviewers strive to facilitate a research environment in which participants feel free to participate in extended discussion of research topics” (Roulston, 2008). Conversational interviewing facilitated the creation of a space in which participants could be present in and reflect, in turn allowing them to revisit with a deep level of consideration the impact of the dramatic experiences they were a part of and their subsequent contributions towards their overall development. An iPhone using the Voice Record Pro app was used to assure that the information shared by the participants was gathered in detail. The interview questions posed were on a piece of paper and present in the room, but were consulted sparingly in a further effort

to create a non-threatening environment. To further facilitate the interview process and to allow those participating the chance to consider in detail the questions being asked, the interview questions were given to the participants one week prior to their scheduled interview.

Pseudonyms were used in an effort to protect the identities of the participants.

For this study, the researcher proceeded with meeting participants twice. Each time the conversational interview method was used. A set of questions that had been prepared in advance (see Appendix A) were used, along with probe questions (Creswell, 2008) depending on where the discussion proceeded. “Probes are subquestions [sic] under each question that the researcher asks to elicit more information” (Creswell, 2008, p. 229). If it was deemed that additional interview time was needed, it was scheduled accordingly. The drama room at the students’ former high school was the main location for the interviews (though day and schedule pending, this was deviated from at times). This room was chosen purposefully to further aid participants to recollect memories of their dramatic experiences. As mentioned, all transcribed information was destroyed one year after the completion of the study and photographs, show posters, journals, and video were returned to their original owners.

To supplement the latter form of data collection, photos and images, and journals from past drama class experiences/school productions as well as video of interviewees’ past performances were gathered and shared with/used by the participants during the interviews. The researcher gathered and shared photos, images, and video artifacts with participants, though participants were asked to bring and share their past journal work. If participants mentioned other personal artifacts during the initial interview time, they were asked to bring these to the second scheduled interview and to share their insights concerning those artifacts at that time. As such, the artifacts acted to augment as well as elicit ideas and information from memories of the

various participants. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggest that “Many of us collect a variety of materials as we compose our lives... All of these items become triggers to our memories... and around which we tell and retell stories” (p.422).

Still images are important data. Not only do pictures offer the viewing audience their own look at what is being studied, but they act as a means by which participants can better reflect on what has happened, allowing for a more accurate recall of experiences lived. Gannon (2006) writes, “Photographs are provocations for traces of embodied sensory memories” (p. 482). They evoke within the viewer a deep-seated emotional response. Leavy (2015) furthers this when she says that images evoke “emotional and visceral responses from their perceivers; they are typically filed in the subconscious” (p. 225). Images have the power to move viewers. Kuhn (2007) suggests that viewers place themselves in the image when recollecting in an effort to “bring out the feelings associated with the photograph” (p. 284). In so doing, viewers are brought back in full force to moments from yesteryear, deeply living and reliving. “A photograph represents a moment divorced from the present and yet is able to hold onto or provoke in the viewer a longing or desire for the *that-has-been*” (Moore, 2015, p. 39). These photos were used as part of the interview process to further aid the participants in collecting their thoughts and sharing information.

Other data triggered participants’ memories. With regard to journals and their usage, participants were asked ahead of time to bring and share past journals that they had kept during their time in class/school. Video that was recorded by the researcher (and currently in his possession) of past dramatic work taken on by participants was shown in given instances to add to the memory recollection already being done by the photographs and images. Jewitt (2012) suggests that, “Video can support... extended data-discovery” (p. 8). He proceeds to state that,

“Participants can use the camera to extend the researcher access to their life worlds... Video enables researchers to re-visit a moment ‘not as past but formerly present’” (Jewitt, 2012, p. 8). Given the personal focus that this researcher aimed to explore for this study, video acted as another memory door for participants.

Participants’ memories enrich the storied memories that they share. Springgay (2004) described the work she took on for her Master’s thesis, mentioning that, “The artworks exist as souvenirs of knowing and as objects that serve as traces of authentic experiences” (p. 62). The performances created by the students, while ephemeral in form, are nonetheless captured in these gathered artifacts, becoming an extension of their work (as without their work none of these would exist), and an archive for “body memories, a container of processes” (Springgay, 2004, p. 62) from which to reflect on and draw inspiration.

Field notes (Creswell 2008) were also gathered from the interviews. The physical nuanced response on the part of the participant who is sharing during an interview offers further insight into the information being gathered, in turn supplementing the data being collected. As such, descriptive field notes (Creswell 2008) of the interview were used as well as reflective field notes (Creswell 2008) that recorded my responses to what was being seen and heard.

“Descriptive field notes record a description of the events, activities and people [sic]. Reflective field notes record personal thoughts that researchers have that relate to their insights, hunches, or broad ideas or themes that emerge during the observation” (Creswell, 2008, p. 225). Both of these types of field notes were recorded post interview in an effort to capture as accurately as possible what had been observed during the interviews and my subsequent responses thereto (see Appendix D for field note templates).

As the intent was to have myself, the researcher, assuming the shared role of participant, the same questions were asked of me, with photographs and artifacts that I have collected with regard to my own dramatic experiences being used to act as a catalyst for my own memories to be unlocked and ideas shared. I used the same initial interview questions to dig into my own dramatic experiences and their subsequent impact, though once having done this, I then documented my own story in narrative form, recounting in detail my ‘dramatic journey’. Narrative research “begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). Susan Chase’s (2011) comment with regard to narrative study resonates deeply with me. She writes,

“Some researchers treat *their* (emphasis hers) stories about life experience... as a significant and necessary focus... Sometimes their aim is to create a more equitable relationship between the researcher and those she or he studies by subjecting the researched *and* (emphasis hers) the researcher to an analytic lens. And sometimes researchers’ aim is to explore a topic or research question more fully by including the researcher’s experience of it.” (Chase, 2011, p. 423)

Both of Chase’s descriptors about narrative research fit well with my intention for using a narrative approach with this part of the research. My desire though was to move beyond this recording of my own development at the hands of drama to include the voices of others and to employ an arts-based methodology that would see the creation of a script.

## Chapter IV: Data

### Interpretation

Data interpretation is different from data analysis. The former is meaning making with regard to the information that has been amassed. Chase (2011) cites Polkinghorne when she writes that, “The researchers’ primary aim is not to discover whether narrators’ accounts are accurate reflections of actual events, but to understand the meanings people attach to those events” (p. 424). In conducting data interpretation an understanding is made by the researcher about the issue at hand. In this arts-based approach to understanding, it “is not a literal description of a state of affairs; it is an evocative and emotionally drenched expression that makes it possible to know how others feel” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 9). This process is different from data analysis because during the analysis portion of the study, the goal is to develop “a general sense of the data, and then coding description and themes about the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008, p. 244). In short, analysis is the *taking apart and finding stage* while interpretation is the *sense making stage*. Barone and Eisner (2012) proceed to discuss arts-based research as a “project that effectively employs aesthetic dimensions in both its inquiry and representational phases” (p. 13). Recognizing this and desiring to be true to this understanding of what arts-based research entails, I borrowed for this study data interpretation from the established world of qualitative research (Chase, 2011; Tedlock, 2011) and blended it with an arts-based one, which was enacted in a number of separate phases for the data interpretation.

As Barone and Eisner (2012) suggest, “qualitative research essentially makes use of nonquantitative forms of representation to describe, interpret, and appraise the features of some process, situation, or individual...” (p. 11). After the data was collected, during **Phase One I** transcribed the interviews and field notes (Creswell, 2008). As already mentioned, the Voice

Record Pro ‘app’ on my iPhone was used. This ‘app’ was chosen in particular due to its playback speed options as well as for its variety of recording storage options and the ease of access in saving the recordings to a given location (Google Doc, Drop Box, et cetera). I had initially considered a voice to text ‘app’ as a means to expedite the transcription process, but felt that I would miss a significant opportunity to interact with the data in a detailed and immersed way. The process of listening and re-listening and then recording, I had presupposed, would be the first of many opportunities to interact with the data/text, and I was not interested in losing this (or any) opportunity to immerse myself in the data. I equate this first part of the work to a mountain bike racer, who in an effort to prepare for the race that is yet to come, spends a copious amount of time training on the very same course on which he will race. As a result of the multiple rides being done on the course, the racer is gaining the physical stamina needed to perform come race day. In addition, he is exploring the nuanced features of the course, and subsequently delving into and reading the course as if it were a text itself, until he is at a point where he knows in detail just what he is dealing with in preparation for the race. The fact that the information being dealt with was the very material that I would interpret and then create a script out of, meant that I was gaining capacity as a writer and in my awareness of the material being considered both at the same time.

In keeping with the arts-based approach during this inquiry stage of the process, the transcribed data was arranged in what Lymburner (2004) delineates as a ‘journal of journals’ which was **Phase Two**. For her the journal of journals is just that, a combined collection of various collected journals arranged in one. Considering this from a dramatic perspective and through a theatre lens, the combined text for this research appeared as a stage manager’s prompt book (“The Stage Manager’s Job”, 2015), a book that contains the transcribed pages arranged

therein with a considerable degree of margin surrounding for notes, reflections and any other pertinent gleanings drawn out of the data. I purchased an oversized sketchbook, then printed off each of the transcribed interviews and affixed each page of each interview on a separate page in the sketchbook, allowing for an abundance of room for notations all around the margins of the written text (see Appendix E). The goal with this choice of text was twofold. It would allow me the opportunity to arrange the data in an easy to carry format, thus permitting me to bring the research with me when I decided to read and work outside of my home. It also helped to transition my thinking from transactional to aesthetic text creation. Here in particular I felt Irwin's (2004) A/r/tography considerations at play, as I lived in the world of both researcher and artist. Never one or the other wholly, but each one completely.

As I began the intentional iterative stages of reading and re-reading the data, notations were made throughout text. These took the form of underlined text, arrows and anecdotal information all throughout the body of the text proper and in the margins (see Appendix F). Even at this second phase of the writing process, character voices were starting to be noted. Ideas embodied in the transcribed data were beginning to take shape and the action of reading and re-reading began to feel more like visiting and re-visiting with actual people. An obscure notion perhaps, but I found after I had read a section from one of the interviews, that I needed to sit with it and ponder it some more, letting it speak to me further before I made any notations in the text regarding it. There were times even when I would read a section of data, and instead of simply leaving a note in the margin regarding it, I would question (in some instances creating an extended list of questions) all of the thoughts which stemmed from the idea that was just shared by the text. It should be noted that the questions were not for the interview participant, rather for the idea, or the character whom I was beginning to get to know who embodied the idea.



Lymburner describes this process: “As I sifted and sorted through my visual journal entries, the rereading and reviewing illuminated certain elements tangled amidst the complex whole” (2004, p. 83). **Phase Three** was where interpretation and concept discovery (Creswell, 2008) took place as the prompt book was created and reviewed. Once I had read through and interacted with each of the interviews and field notes, I sifted through the data again, this time looking purposefully for dominant concepts in the text. My intended purpose this time was to look at those sections of the data that stood out for me as researcher and to consider them this time in light of each other, comparing and contrasting the findings and noting similarities as a result. Retyping sections of the transcribed data individually, I then arranged these on my basement wall (Appendix G), grouping and regrouping the findings as I interacted with the data in a truly kinesthetic way. Individual sections were colour-coded corresponding to the participant it was collected from, and then letter coded based on their particular concept (and to safeguard against misplacing sections if they were to fall off of the wall). In a number of instances, sections of data lived well in multiple groups, and so a number of them overlapped. This saw me transitioning into **Phase Four**, providing much opportunity for multiple readings, returning again and again to shed light on (Barone & Eisner 2012) and provide perspective with the collected data. Beliveau (2006) suggests that it is through these readings and re-readings that reoccurring ideas are discovered. As Creswell (2008) suggests, the phases of collection and analysis (or in my case interpretation) are iterative, and as such are ongoing. With each additional reading, the aim was to interact and grapple with the content, aiming for a considered interpretational understanding of the collected information gathered from the participants. Stringer (2007) describes this stage of the interpretative process as reading for “key experiences or transformational moments” (p. 98). Having the information gathered in the form of a prompt

book and then arranged on the wall allowed me as the researcher to lend my thoughts and creative leanings to the notion of script creation, prompting me to shift my thinking to consider the data gathered from an aesthetic lens, well before the play writing even began.

The formal script creation took place during **Phase Five**. The final work aimed for a script with a 45 minute to one hour running time. As much as there were creative aspects at play all during the first four phases, it was at this point when the collected information had been considered and reconsidered, that the formal playwriting commenced. Martini's (2013) playwriting approach was implemented and explored readily as this interpretative part of the research took shape.

At the outset of the writing, I thought that the script would take the form of a story that centered on one given character. I recall initially reviewing Martini's eight parts of a story arc and preplanning two possible formulaic story settings, into which I was certain the data could be amassed. Looking back now, that in and of itself was the most arduous time in the creative writing process. I thought that having a story structure established ahead of time would facilitate the work overall and allow me to make good progress. I was wrong. As a writer I was transitioning from thesis creator to script creator. This creative opportunity worried me in that I was not sure what the script would look like in the end. In consultation with my advisor, she reminded me of what Barone and Eisner (2012) suggested about any and every arts-based research project; it should live well as both a piece of research and as a piece of art. As such, I felt that I needed a strong hold on this part of the work, needing to keep ahead of it to be sure that it did not get away from me or end up becoming something that would be unacceptable. I began with the dramatic story structure as an attempt to reign in the ideas before they became unruly. This approach was short-lived. I found that I was setting myself up in a 'square peg,

round hole' debacle. Forcing the data into a story was not going to happen. Despite how unnerving it was for me, not knowing exactly what the script would look like, I had to let the story evolve and 'speak' on its own. I will discuss this process further in the sections, 'Representation' and 'Script Writing as a Methodology'.

**Phase Six** saw the creation of a reflective concluding chapter. I focused on the process and subsequent learning. This phase allowed the Artist/Researcher/Teacher perspectives spoken of by Irwin (2004) to be further explored and made manifest. In addition, the play was performed as a staged reading for an invited audience (and video recorded) to have them further the interpretive work. This contributes to the generativity notion spoken of by Barone and Eisner (2012).

### **Representation**

With regard to the playwriting itself, Clem Martini's (2013) *The Blunt Playwright* was used to shape the writing. He suggests organizing the writing of a play by considering it in eight parts: The Beginning, Inciting Incident, Rising/Driving Action, Opposing Forces, Crisis, Climax, and Resolution.

With the data now arranged into particular common groupings, I adopted the practice I had instituted before of reading, sitting, and listening to the information once more. This second time around of interacting with the data in such a way, was where I found myself experiencing what Csikszentmihalyi (2008) describes as flow, as the ideas contained within the body of the data shifted from independent pieces of information that had been grouped and placed on my wall, into the voices and subsequent stories. There were particular moments during this phase of the writing that I recall distinctly. I spent a morning, early on in the beginning stage of the script creation in my basement, reading and thinking and further organizing the writing on the wall.

After two hours of steeping in the data, I went back upstairs. I was teeming with ideas, so I simply wrote. The critical voice, that too often stifles me before the work of writing even begins, was not present. It was as if my body was simply the vessel through which the story was being released, and so there was no room for my inner critic to even be present. In another instance, I remember I was in the middle of typing one section of the script, when I was drawn out of the writing by a different thought about a subsequent idea. I looked up from my computer and stared out my window, consumed in my own thoughts about it. Forty-five minutes passed before I typed or moved at all, at which point I opened a new document and began to layout in detail the script-specific information for the concept on which I had been dwelling. These moments are significant and impactful for me as a writer, because in my ten years spent in post-secondary studies, I can honestly say that I have never experienced this in any of the written work that I undertook. Yet it happened here, and multiple times. I have no doubt that the time spent with the research, my level of interest in it, and the weightiness of the work all attest to why it took place: the experience did happen. I need to make mention and highlight the fact that the state of flow that I was in was not just with the writing, but also with the writing thought processes. I was building the puzzle of the script in my head and instead of having the usual fight with which piece is placed where, the pieces were aligning with relative ease and the picture was taking vivid shape, sometimes quicker than I could write it out of me. As such, I tackled the common ideas that emerged in the following sequence: Initiation, Transition, Habits of Mind, and Interdependency. After having spent time reading and rereading the data, the stories themselves took shape on their own; I only needed to be there to listen and record them. Once each was penned, I was able to refine the structure based on Martini's eight-part story arc structure. Using this as a guide after was much more useful than starting with it. Given my experience with

dramatic texts, there was always an awareness of the essential structure, but in trying to look first for each of these parts, the story was stifled and could not be released. I needed to allow it first to take shape on the page and then aim to shape it further by considering it through Martini's story arc lens.

### **Script Writing as a Methodology**

Script writing is a form of methodology that has seen frequent use. Johnny Saldana (2003), a researcher who himself uses script writing in his arts-based research, suggests that the researcher consider well the form with which the research will be shared with a given audience. I believe that a dramatic script was well suited for both the content (the stories, including my own, and of those participating who have been impacted by drama) and the intended audience (teachers and other stakeholders) of my research. A dramatic script was chosen because it was a dramatic experience that began the journey of this researcher. My intent was to continue and give back in a similar fashion. As such, I aimed to provide the potential for a similar opportunity for someone else who may encounter the play that I created. Further to this, as mentioned, arts-based research has the potential to renew perspective, encouraging readers/listeners/viewers to make their own sense out of what they are reading/watching, as they vicariously journey with the characters (Aristotle, 1994; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahmnamm & Siegesmund, 2008). The potential for a deeper connection to be made, and subsequently a more profound consideration, through the use of a dramatic script allows those who have read it to hopefully be impacted by it. Researchers of note across various fields of study (including education) who have made use of a dramatic script as a tool for arts-based research include Saldana (1999), Beliveau (2006), and Campana (2005). McLaren (2014), in a paper on arts-based research, looked at an arts-based project that used a play to convey a young boy's experiences of the Second World War. Klinger

(1993) looked at two different playwriting models/methodologies and compared and contrasted the two whereas Wright (2001) considered a script adaptation process/model as constituting a methodology for his research. Of those noted, Beliveau (2006) and Campana (2005) both offer models that allow the researcher to use the data collected as part of their studies to inform their script creations. These two latter models were well suited to my own desire and interest for the research and subsequent study that I pursued. In addition to this, I followed the playwriting guideline outlined by Clem Martini (2013) in his text *The Blunt Playwright*.

As both an academic (professor at the University of Calgary) and professional in the field (graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada in Montreal, past president of the Playwrights' Union of Canada and Governor General's Award nominee in Drama) Martini's insight guided my work, allowing me to consider that what I created served not only a pragmatic purpose as a body of research but an aesthetic purpose as a dramatic script.

Martini (2013) as discussed, breaks down the structure of the play into eight parts: The Beginning, Inciting Incident, Rising/Driving Action, Opposing Forces, Crisis, Climax, Resolution, and The End (see chart in Appendix A). This structure itself is strongly influenced by the one that Aristotle (1994) first outlined in his work *The Poetics*, and continues to be the basis of most if not all narrative forms of writing that follow an Aristotelian story arc. Martini's model was chosen because he is an academic at a recognized university, while also being a published and award winning current Canadian playwright.

In considering the beginning of the play, what Martini (2013) is suggesting is the following, that the writer discover: Where is it that the story begins? Who is involved? What information is needed to establish the world of the story (who, what, where, when, why) for the reader/audience?

The inciting incident then is where the stakes are raised. It marks the point in the storytelling where a significant shift occurs. This marks the beginning of the subsequent action to come. “The play climbs - that is, the motion of the action is one which continues to escalate throughout. This is often referred to as rising action” (Martini, 2013, p. 30). Conflict and struggle are essential to this part of the play as the main character or protagonist (also known as first/main struggler), is confronted with a problem and needs to surmount it. All of this happens in a give and take exchange with the antagonist (or second struggler). The antagonist does not need to be the villain, rather he/she serves the role of opposing the action. As such, this situation results in the opposing force that acts against the protagonist, creating the tension that drives the story. It should be noted that the antagonist is not always necessarily a person (in some instances it could be fate, or a societal force against which the protagonist is struggling).

When all other options have been exhausted in terms of solving the problem, the crisis is reached. This is the part when the protagonist has exhausted his/her possibilities and is faced with making a final choice. The reader/audience becomes aware that something paramount is about to take place. When this moment transpires the climax has been reached. Martini (2013) states “This is the moment of greatest intensity and most complete revelation and it is towards this moment that the play inexorably moves. The climax is the last of a long series of interconnected struggles” (p. 30). The crisis and climax work hand in hand, with the former proving to be the moment of realization and the latter being the moment of actualization.

Resolution takes place when the ensuing action has come to an end. The story has been completed. The resulting impact of the action and its subsequent significance are revealed. A new status quo has been established, thus prompting the completion or end.

While the created piece adheres to a story structure, it should be noted that the act of writing a play is a creative work, in which the researcher/playwright may use literary practices such as metaphor as used by playwrights Ayad Akhtar, Henrik Ibsen, Samuel Beckett, and Vern Thiessen, just to name a few. While these and many other writers employ a variety of possible story structures, the aim was to follow Aristotle's classic rising action structure. It denotes a progression or journey marked by a moment of challenge, that culminates with both protagonist and reader/viewer ending up in a new place as a result of the experience(s). Further still, it is a structure that is well known to readers/viewers, allowing from the outset for a degree of comfortable accessibility for those who partake of it. It still has the potential to move and unsettle the audience/readership throughout the story without the structure being unfamiliar and possibly distancing. Again, the desire was for the work to serve the practical purpose of conveying an interpretation of the data, while also standing strong as a play. The work needed to serve a dual purpose, each as important as the other. To lean too heavily on either side (metaphorically abstract and cryptic on the aesthetic side, didactic and prescriptive on the pragmatic one) would be a disservice to the intent of the research and subsequent reader/audience. As such, both sets of criteria, Barone and Eisner's (2012) and Martini's (2013) served to guide the writing to help assure that the writer achieved his intended purpose.

As mentioned already, I found that when I sought to force my findings into a pre-established form, I was at odds with my work and myself. The interpreted research needed the chance and opportunity to go where it needed, and I needed to explore it more fully to find out how to give it room to do so. As common ideas emerged and the script was created, the various concepts discovered shared equally the impact that drama education had on the development of high school students in this study. As the writer of the script, I sought to layout each scene to



support and explore a metaphorical interpretation for the reader/viewer. In re-reading the play as a whole, it becomes recognizable that the various scenes have the potential to stand on their own. In so doing, there is the potential for the characters, their stories and the subsequent concepts in each to be further explored on their own and delved into further (the likes of which could be explored more in future research efforts).

### **Metaphor, Rhizomes and A/r/tography**

Three writing techniques were utilized in my interpretative text. Firstly, I used the practice of metaphor in my scriptwriting. I am reminded of what Pente (2004) suggests about metaphor, “A carefully selected metaphor can elicit knowledge about one’s deeply held beliefs” (p. 94). The choice then of appropriate metaphors served the interpretation portion of my research in a significant way. I intentionally used them to reach out to my audience/reader and engage them in the play. Secondly, I employed a rhizomatic perspective. Irwin and de Cosson (2004) and Clarke and Parsons (2013) each describe rhizome researchers as individuals who see things less in terms of binary opposites, but rather allow themselves to be nomadic in approach, venturing where the research will take them. This rhizomatic perspective, as suggested by Clarke and Parsons (2013) offered the potential of a different way of doing, where research was seen in multiplicities and where synthesis can never truly be complete. Thirdly, I utilized my position as teacher/researcher/artist. Irwin (2004) writes that the ideas of *theoria* (theory/research), *praxis* (teaching/learning) and *poesis* (art/making) are key elements in her arts-based A/r/tography methodology metaphor. Calling it a *Métissage* (Irwin 2004), she suggests that those who experience the work have potential to be moved greatly by this triad approach.

A/r/t not only recognizes the roles individuals must play, it also affords all of us an imaginative turn as we come to understand and appreciate that the processes and products

involved in creating works of art... are the most exemplary forms of integrating knowing, doing, and making. (Irwin, 2004, p. 30)

I feel that the research that I have pursued did indeed live in the realm of “Métissage.” During the interpretative process, I looked to further uncover (and discover anew) the impact that drama has on the development of learners, offering the chance to see this issue again from a different perspective with a different lens. While I had a sense of where I was going, I was open, and in some instances needed to learn to be more open, to explore and venture where my findings would take me in terms of ideas that were both old and new.

### **Dual Role: Researcher/Participant**

The role of researcher and participant is one in which there is the potential for much gain and much strife. As a co-participant, “the opportunity to tell [my] own story and give an insider perspective to the process of being the object or subject of research” (Boylorn, 2008) positioned me at the heart of the research that I undertook. Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) suggest that “Social scientists concerned with the expansion of what count as social data rely increasingly on the experiential, the embodied, the emotive qualities of human experience, which contribute the narrative quality to a life” (p. 120). The uniqueness of perspective allowed me to dig into the realm of dramatic experiences and their subsequent impact on the social and emotional growth of individuals who have partaken in them, and to offer insight from within. In addition to this, my own active participation had the potential to facilitate and encourage other participants in responding as authentically as possible with their own storied journey (Boylorn, 2008). The effort took the form of a lead by example comparison, empowering those participating to offer themselves as completely as possible to the process of learning and discovery because the researcher himself was engaged in the self-same activity.

Bias has the potential to be alive and well when the researcher is the participant, yet in including other participants in the study there was a varied voice of individual contributions other than that of the researcher's alone. Altheide and Johnson (2011) reference Ladkin in suggesting that participatory action research (PAR) includes "accounts showing how the research considers a number of different ways of knowing" (p. 583) as validating criteria. While this study did not follow a participatory action research model, it did make use of the idea of researcher as participant, further still making use of a variety of data sources and participants.

Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) write about two veins of validity, "The first... argues for a kind of rigor in the application of method" (p. 120). In framing my work within the boundaries of Barone and Eisner's (2012) arts-based methodology and furthering this by following Martini's (2013) prescribed approach to crafting a play, I feel that my research adheres well to this first criteria point. The detailed explication of how these two criteria shape and impact my research attest to this. The second point

argues for both a community consent and a form of rigor-defensible reasoning, plausible alongside some other reality that is known to author and reader in ascribing salience to one interpretation over another and in framing and bounding the interpretive study itself. (Lincoln, Lynham, Guba, 2011, p. 120)

Including a number of participants in my study gives it defensible credibility in that it is not my voice alone.

In considering one voice against the next, those ideas that reoccurred formed the interpretation. The creative process acted as a refiner's fire of sorts. Ideas were considered and reconsidered one against the other, in the end leaving room for only those that revealed themselves as most salient as a result of the work and writing done by this researcher.

### **Criteria for Ensuring Quality**

For this study specifically, the culmination of the research saw a dramatic play script being created based on the research analysis. To guide me in the work and help me to assure that the arts-based methodology attained an adequate level of rigor, Barone and Eisner (2012) identify six criteria to strive for: incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, social significance, evocation and illumination.

The first criterion on Barone and Eisner's (2012) list is incisiveness. The writers suggest that the researcher deal directly with an issue without any extraneous inclusions. They explain, "By incisiveness, we mean that the research gets to the heart of a social issue. It goes to its core. It does not get swamped with details that have no inherent significance and do little to increase the cogency of the research itself" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p.148). An essential guideline in any writing, perhaps even more so with an aesthetic text, this first criterion was used as the dramatic text for this research study was being created, and while the researcher/writer visited and revisited the work. Caution was paid though, in assuring that the work was a substantial piece of research while maintaining its aesthetic appeal. It was key to pose the simple question, 'How does this help; how does what I have written support and not detract from the focus of the study?' repeatedly through the creation of the script in order to develop an incisive perspective throughout the research. As such, this approach supported both the pragmatic and artistic purpose of the script.

The second criterion, concision, requires a focused topic or theme that governs the research.

What allows for concision is the presence of a controlling insight - some would call it a theme [and perhaps subthemes] - that serves as a guide for the artist or researcher in making judgments about which material to include and which to exclude. (p.150)

The reading and re-reading of the data allowed for the discovery of a number of reoccurring concepts that guided the creation of the script. The concepts discovered were initiation, transition, habits of mind and interdependency and each will be further elaborated upon in the following chapter. With a variety of voices and many different stories being shared, Saldana (2003) offers the idea of using character types to help sort and govern the material. Character composites were created and used based on the information gathered in the interviews. These composites served to represent character types. This offering was a simple strategy, but one that aided in being to the point. As with any piece of writing, there needs to be a sense of direction that guides and provides focus. A conscious intent to create a terse script helped to do this. Coherence is the third guiding point. Barone and Eisner (2012) explain that, "By coherence, we mean the creation of a work of arts-based research whose features hang together as a strong form" (p.151). The aesthetic form is as much a concern as the rest of the research, and should be. For the work to be credible, it needs to be informed and to present well as an original piece of writing. Source texts that have governed dramatic script writing throughout time (Aristotle's *The Poetics* [1994] being one of them in addition to Martini's *The Blunt Playwright* [2013]) proved indispensable once the script writing process began to assure that the structure essentials of the form were there and were being used and explored to their utmost.

The fourth guiding criteria, generativity, assures that aesthetic work allows for renewed perspectives to be had, while maintaining a broad-based appeal. Barone and Eisner (2012) elucidate upon this idea further:

The arts typically project an image that reshapes our conception of some aspect of the world or that sheds light on aspects of the world we had not seen before. Good arts-based research generalizes in such a fashion. It has ‘legs,’ allowing you to go someplace. It does not simply reside in its own backyard forever but rather possesses the capacity to invite you into an experience that reminds you of people and places that bear familial resemblances to the settings, events, and characters within the work. (p.152)

The variety of scenes in the script, in addition to the array of characters included, were chosen purposefully to make real the concepts that were discovered to a diverse audience.

As with most if not all good literature, the capacity for the story in general and characters in particular to impact and resonate with various readers/audience members speaks to the writer’s ability to achieve mass appeal. Finley (2011) echoes what Barone and Eisner suggest about generativity when she writes, “arts-based research makes use of affective experiences, senses and emotions. Its practitioners explore the bounds of space and place where the human body is a tool for gathering and exploring meaning in experience” (p. 444).

Any work of research needs to have a specific purpose. Ideally, as Barone and Eisner (2012) suggest, educational researchers should seek to improve the way that students are being taught; there needs to be some social significance to the work. “What makes a work significant is its thematic importance, its focus on the issues that make a sizable difference in the lives of people within a society” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p.153). There is relevance in examining the impact that drama has had on the overall development of a group of students. How are students being impacted by their direct involvement with drama? How has their involvement with drama impacted their development on the whole? It was up to the researcher in the writing of this thesis to make this evident to readers at a time when the arts are continuing to be challenged as

necessary or viable, resulting in cut backs to available funding. The Canadian Arts Coalition on their website have an article from January 2015 titled “Federal Budget, Culture and the Arts: Still Smarting from Budget 2012 Cuts but Better Times on the Horizon?” In the fourth paragraph they say, “Although funding to the Canada Council for the Arts was protected, on a per capita basis, funding to the Council has declined” (Canadian Arts Coalition). Addley (2015) from the UK online news source *The Guardian* quotes author Philip Pullman who decries that children’s education in the arts is in a terrible state. The concern in general is certainly not a new one even, as there are a variety of examples from over the last number of years (Anne, 2010; Beveridge, 2010; Bushouse, 2010; McGinnis, 2009; Shaw, 2009; Yeghishian, 2010).

Barone and Eisner (2012) group the final two criteria, evocation and illumination, together. They state that these are significant because “it is through evocation and illumination that one begins to feel the meanings that the work is to help its reader grasp” (p.153). Here the arts are ideally being used to their fullest, assuring that the ideas being explored move those who are reading/viewing the work to consider the content on an emotional level.

Evocation pertains to feeling. It may signify an aesthetic experience. Its contrast is the anesthetic, a process that dulls pain or that suppresses feeling. The arts traffic in feeling, and they are often anesthetic to those who have not yet learned to ‘read’ them. (p.154)

This is perhaps what sets a qualitative arts-based methodology apart from other methodologies. In reaching in and engaging the heart as well as the mind of the reader/viewer, a new level of interaction and understanding can be had. This purpose in particular is why a dramatic script was chosen and an arts-based methodology was selected for this research. As revealed in the introduction, it was a dramatic experience that first spoke to this researcher, and it is through this

very same means that the researcher intended to contribute to the literature in the hope of impacting others.

Illumination deals specifically with the notion of revealing anew. With regard to this research project, the aim was to shed new light on the topic of the impact of drama on the overall development of students through an arts-based methodology in an attempt to provide the reader/audience with a different vantage point from which to consider the issue (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Here the arts are ideally being used to their fullest, assuring that the ideas being explored moved those reading/viewing the work to consider the content on an emotional level.

### **Authentic Representation**

Given the relative newness of arts-based research, it certainly is not as established a form of research as compared to other methods. Further still, there is lingering doubt in that arts-based methodologies focus on the aesthetic (Barone & Eisner 2012), as it through this lens particularly that the research is being considered. Yet aesthetic does not mean less rigor nor does it mean less considered. “The arts in general teach us to see, to feel, and indeed to know. What we are proposing is that the means through which the arts function as illuminating vehicles may find expression and utility in research activities” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 6). Siegesmund (2014) further suggests that with regards to arts-based research, it is less about the sheer amount of research and more about the unique focus for which it allows. As such, an arts-based research project offers a different perspective on the content being studied as it enables researchers to consider an issue from within, aiming to engage on an emotional level and as a result allowing those who partake in the research a way of knowing that is personal and their own. Arts-based research seeks to provide the audience/participant with a visceral experience that has them engaging the content with not only their head, but with their heart. This plurality of view



(Barone & Eisner, 2012) offers a way of knowing that is very different from that of the usual world of research. It is because of this no doubt that questions concerning truth and knowledge arise. Simply put, arts-based research is not about a final destination with regards to the research. It aims to step away from the notion of a final understanding (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Finley, 2011; Leavy, 2015), looking rather at ways that the work being done can be experienced anew and made available to as many as possible. In aiming to provide a productive heuristic (Barone & Eisner, 2012) that in turn will allow for a better understanding, arts-based research is the lens through which an onlooker can consider on his/her own and engage in an unconventional yet very personal way, with a topic of study. What happens is that arts-based research is “persuading others to look again at the empirical world - the world of practical experience - out of which human judgments are formed and to experience facets of it in an astonishingly new way” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 19). Siegesmund (2014) further suggests that “Oftentimes, what is unique, what lies outside any concept of norm is the focus. Validity in arts-based research begins with considering the overlooked case” (p.2). In summary, arts-based research offers an aesthetic rendering that is a unique representation of those that have been researched.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

I recognize that given the sample size of my research study, the findings may be deemed limited. This is similar to other smaller studies. In saying this, I also recognize the meaningful impact that each of the smaller studies has had with regard to those who took part (researcher and participant) as well as the sizable contribution that they have made toward the research being done in the area of drama in education on the whole (Siegesmund, 2014). In focusing on the development of students who have had drama as part of their educational experience and

considering it through an aesthetic form, my intent was to provide perspective on the topic while making the findings as accessible to as many stakeholders as possible. No work has been done thus far on drama education as it applies to learners and their development in a southern Manitoba context. Further still, there has been nothing done to my knowledge using an arts-based playwriting methodology to explore this same topic in my research context. My intent was to have the research contribute to the literature, furthering the overall work being done in this area.

## Chapter V: Artistic Interpretation and Representation

### *Why the Drama?*

Stage location legend:

*USL*- upstage left

*USC*- upstage centre

*USR* – upstage right

*SL*- stage left

*CC*- centre centre

*SR*- stage right

*DSL*- downstage left

*DSC*- downstage centre

*DSR*- downstage right

*(Stage lights come up and The Maestro of the Drama is standing CC, with top hat and cane at the ready. He is a magician, jester and carnival barker all rolled into one. He moves DSC as he begins.)*

### **The Maestro of the Drama-**

Ladies

And gentlemen

Let it begin

I give to you

The maestro

Of the drama

A jester

A joker

A tease

The eye

The nose

The ear

That sees the stink

That smells the sound

That hears the sight

Whether right

Or wrong

The thinker

Who knows

Who thinks he knows

The riddle

And rhyme

The symbol

And line

The vision  
That chases  
To the heart of the reason  
Of what  
Where  
And how  
A company of strangers  
Will gather  
And share  
And then be strangers no more.

Yes,  
It is magic  
Divine.

Ladies  
And gentlemen  
I give to you  
Four stories  
That stand alone  
But live together  
Each its own  
But not on its own  
Parts  
Of a whole  
That make us whole  
When  
When  
When  
We take the time  
My time  
Your time  
To sit and listen and hear  
And hear and see  
And see and think  
Like we used to  
When candy  
Was the currency  
Of our world  
Bicycles chariots  
Everything was possible  
And we still believed it was

Ladies  
And gentlemen  
I give to you

First  
 A story  
 Of birth and new  
 A point of beginning  
 The start  
 When  
 A breath  
 Is first taken  
 A taste  
 Is first tasted  
 A feeling  
 Is first felt  
 And the world  
 Is never  
 The same  
 Colour  
 Of grey  
 Ever again.

A defining moment  
 Shaped  
 To be one thing  
 And when played out  
 Is another;  
 The beginning  
 Of the drama

Ladies  
 And gentlemen  
 I give to you  
 To be  
 Or not...

*(During the last stanza of the Maestro's monologue, the actor playing 'Joe' comes on and sets up on a mime box CC, staying frozen until after the Maestro has exited the stage.)*

**Joe-** *(Sitting to start.)* When Mr. Roflo announced that the final assignment for the Hamlet unit would require us to memorize one of Hamlet's many monologues, I thought the class would revolt. You could cut the rage and indifference with a knife. I didn't care though. This, this would be the best thing since that time that Charlotte Parante sat next to me in Chemistry. I mean, equally cool, just a different kind of cool. I don't think I was ever this excited about a

class assignment before. I sat with the play open on my lap on the bus ride home after school that day, reading and re-reading the lines. “To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows...” The meaning was all gobbledygook, I mean I did consult the notes page in the play to see what some of the words meant, but to me, it all boiled down to that opening line, ‘to be or not to be...’ and I interpreted that as, to be an actor playing the role or not. Kind of like that Yoda quote, ‘do or do not,’ you know? I don’t know how we were getting away with being able to act out a part of the play as an assignment in a grade 11 English class, but I was bound and determined to nail this thing, and if for some reason Roflo thought he was going to pull a fast one and zoink the assignment from us the next day, saying that he was just yanking our chain, he was in for a fight! This was the first time ever that I was actually thinking about schoolwork three minutes after the end of class, never mind making time for it at home.

We weren’t allowed to have books on the table at supper in my house. I had lost a few already in my attempt to read at dinner and I wasn’t about to lose my copy of the play, so I had copied out the first 10 lines of the text on a piece of paper and kept it on my lap, consulting when I needed to, as I scoffed down the meatloaf and scalloped potatoes at dinner that night. Neither were my favourite, but I think it was my drive to get back to my room and speak the lines aloud that motivated me to choke down the meal in record time, much to my mom’s surprise. I remember Mr. Roflo saying in class that professional Shakespearean actors would speak the lines out loud when they were memorizing as that helped them to retain them better. Done! If it was good for the pros, it was sure as heck good enough for me. I was also pretty good at an English or British accent, or I figured I was at least. I thought that it would be good to practice speaking the lines with the accent, so I began to overlay it into the words as I spoke them. “Of outrageous

fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them. To die to sleep no more..." No more is right! Bellowed out my brother as he stormed into our shared room. What is that crap that you are saying, and why are you saying it so weird like?! My first impromptu audience! He slugged me in the arm as he walked past, and I told him that it was an assignment for Roflo's class. Yep, told you you'd end up liking his class. He always has his students doing all sorts of weird things. We're playing ball at the French school. Come if you want. Argh! Baseball! Ball had always been my first love, the thing that got me out of bed in the morning, my *raison d'être*, well, apart from Charlotte of course but don't tell anyone. Memorizing these lines, playing and mucking about with this old fashioned, or antiquated language as Roflo would say, it was consuming me and I, I was, I was in love. "And by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. To die to sleep, to sleep perchance to dream."

We had an old grey woolen blanket at home that I knew would make a perfect cape. Add that to a length of 1x4 that I had carved to a dull point and then electrical taped a handle onto to act as a dagger and I was set. I mean the words were already getting me there in terms of feeling like Hamlet, but the addition of the cape and sword made it feel even more real. I was empowered the way a five-year-old kid is when he gets a pitcher of water to play mud cakes with! Two days into the assignment and I already had half of the monologue memorized! "Ay there's the rub. For in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil. There is the pause that makes calamity of long life. For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pangs of despised love, the law's delay, The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of th' unworthy takes, When he himself might his quietus make With a bare bodkin?" Bodkin means sword, see?

Some of the words were stirring up emotion in me when I read them, almost bringing me to tears at times. Where was this coming from?! And I didn't even have an audience yet! I was waxing poetic for my Star Wars and Lord of the Rings Lego figures for Pete's sake! As a young sixteen year old boy, I had worked hard to bottle up those emotions so as to be the pillar of strength that the adult males in my life were, but this monologue, this assignment, was taking me to a whole new world of experience. If it didn't feel so good and so right (assuming that a sixteen-year-old boy has even an inkling of what is good and right), I would have long since abandoned it, but I knew that I couldn't. I knew that I had found something momentous and while I didn't quite get what was going on, or how pivotal this experience would be for me, it was something that I wanted really bad, so I kept at it. Like I said, I didn't have a clue what the body of the text meant. Hamlet was a troubled soul feigning madness, while dealing with the turmoil of his situation. That alone was more than enough motivation for the words, because what I was feeling was real and empowering and boy did I have much to share with my classmates come performance on Friday!

By Monday, I was getting a bit anxious as I wasn't quite as far as I had wanted to be with the memorizing work. When I got to class I asked some of the other students how far along they were, and to my surprise (well not really) no one had started! Misery loves company, but anxiety loves it when other people are even further behind in their work than you are! That is awful to think, I know, but in the same kind of way that the addition of the cape and sword breathed life into my sense of play, hearing that others were having their own challenges with the work gave me perspective and a renewed sense of inspiration that, while I was marching a hard road, my one step at a time approach was allowing for progress to be made. "Who would fardels bear to grunt and sweat a weary life, but that the dread of something after death, the



undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns puzzles the will and makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others we know not of. Thus conscious doth make cowards of us all.” Cowards, when I finally had this line memorized I paused in the work. I had a moment of introspection, where I realized that to memorize something and offer it out to others in a creative, playful way, was perhaps one of the bravest things that I had done to date in my life. I mean when my brother told my mom and dad what I was doing, they both said that they had never done such a thing in their time, and when pressed a bit, mom said that it was way too daunting a task for her to consider. I thought about this for a bit, and I had to agree that it was a scary prospect, standing in front of an audience alone on stage. I did the math and figured out that if everyone was in class on the day that I presented, there would be 56 eyeballs staring at me as I performed. Yikes that felt like a lot! But this bit of anxiety didn’t hold a candle to how much fun it was going to be to get up there and perform for them. “And thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought and enterprises of great pitch and moment, with this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action.”

It took until Wednesday to get the entire text memorized and I learned on that day also that Mr. Roflo had shortened the required amount of lines we needed to memorize, because people were complaining that an entire monologue was too long. Too long! I didn’t agree, but I didn’t say anything when my classmates asked me how the work was going other than I felt that I was ready for Friday’s performance. For the next two days, whatever I did I was running the lines of text in my head. Playing five hundred at lunch? Running lines. Sitting in church and listening to the homily? Running lines. Doing a Chem lab? Running lines. Thankfully we were partnered up for that lab, because I was having a hard time remembering which beaker contained what amidst all the Shakespeare in my brain!

Thursday when I got up, I was flying. I felt really good. I don't just mean about the monologue work or anything. I, on the whole, felt really good. I was finding my niche where I was actually good at something, and I liked doing it, and it was having an all-encompassing impact on me as a person. The funniest part though, is that at that exact same moment, the moment where I most felt on top of my world, my critic voice started chirping. What do you think you are doing acting? You can't do this! It isn't good enough. Your accent sounds ridiculous! Sure you can speak these lines to an empty room, but what'll happen in front of a real audience? You know what I'm talking about right? That little voice of self-doubt, that knows you so well, that it can and does shatter a person's confidence to the point of inaction or worse for fear of appearing, I don't know, stupid? Like I'm almost certain that we would have already found the cure for cancer, but for that voice that completely shut down the scientist who was thinking sideways, then caved into the voice, and never came back to his or her work again. That voice takes every single moment of doubt that you've ever experienced, your own concerns, what others have said, quirky looks that others have given you, any and every societal pressure, it takes all of these and sends them at you, a regular onslaught of I can't, I won't, I shouldn't. The worst is when it takes the tone of seeming to care for you, telling you that you are only going to get hurt if you keep up with your pursuit. I knew this voice oh so well from the world of baseball; it was such a dominant presence in my head on game days, that if I had time to think before I threw a ball, I could not do it. Why and how does this voice have so much power? I mean, it is after all our own voice, you'd figure that a person would be able to shut it down, right?

When I got up Friday morning, I was in a state of turmoil. Everything that I had done, or planned to do, I was doubtful about. EVERYTHING! I was coming undone at the seams. My

mom could see that something was up, when after she had asked if I was ready for today's performance, all I could muster was ah, ah, aasha, ah... Moms are pretty smart cookies, you know? I just don't think we realize it. I mean I didn't. She sat at the other end of the kitchen table eating breakfast with me saying nothing until finally, after a long sip of coffee she started. I'd let it go. Don't think about anything to do with the performance until class time. You've got a busy morning, get on with what needs your attention at the time. Do what you can, when you can. And remember that in the end, you are still my kid, and I still love you. I HATE when moms get gushy! It's too bad though, that the power of these words don't get realized until much later in life.

The afternoon buzzer rang and the class was filling up. I was surprised to see so many students there as I had thought that most would skip, given that they had said in earlier conversations that day that they were not ready to present. Roflo told us that he was open to volunteers, and if no one was volunteering, he would then choose names lottery style. I knew that if I didn't raise my hand and go up, that I would fester in my own thinking. But just as I was about to volunteer, Kristin Cornier, a girl from across the room bellowed out, "I'll go. Might as well get it over with." Argh! I wasn't first! Which meant I had to spend at least the duration of her performance in my own thoughts! I quickly spoke up before anyone else did, volunteering to go second. I was in heightened panic mode; I had worked hard to apply the words my mom spoke at breakfast, and managed to take care of what needed taking care of all morning without fretting about what was to come. Well now I was in class, and what needed taking care of was the monologue, but I couldn't do it yet and the self-talk that I had been doing all morning was now losing a valiant fight as my inner critic voice was forcing its way in demanding that it was time now to think about the performance and all the possible things that could go wrong! I took

three deep breaths, told that voice to go to hell, and watched Kristin's performance. She had the text that she had chosen memorized, but wasn't moving with it. Wasn't letting the words move her. It was weird, because somehow it felt like the critic voice had shifted from me to her, and was busily preoccupied getting in her way, in turn leaving me alone. She stood and delivered and before I knew it she was sitting down as we all applauded. "Joe Wesley," bellowed Roflo. "You're up." I grabbed my blanket that had my makeshift dagger wrapped in it and walked to the front. I unrolled it, placed the dagger on a chair and tied the blanket around my neck. There was a murmur or two from the back as I heard someone say that they didn't know we could bring a costume. At that moment I realized that I hadn't asked if we could use costumes or props, but there was no turning back now. I tied the blanket around my neck, held the dagger in a faux scabbard, looked at Roflo who gave me a nod, then turned to face upstage for two beats, before turning and delivering. Now I've never heli-skied, only watched videos, but I'm imagining that what I was feeling in that moment where I turned, is the same feeling that the skier has when he or she jumps out of the carefully perched helicopter and lands on the powdery slope of the waiting mountain below. What happened next? I really don't know and can't remember. What I do remember was a feeling of complete elation as I spoke the final lines of the monologue, "the fair Ophelia, nymph in thy orisons, be all my sins remembered," while looking longingly at the back wall of the class and causing every head to turn, even Roflo's, to see who I was speaking to, then hearing the entire class erupt in a deafening roar of applause punctuated by whoops and hollers. Years later I would look back at this moment and realize that what I had experienced was something that a researcher named Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls flow; a moment where you are so into what you are doing, that everything, and I mean everything, is working for you and you are just in the zone. There is no critic voice, there is no nothing, just you and the task

you are about. As I sat down after the performance, I was beaming and grinning ear to ear. It felt so good, you know, to have created something that others thought was good and liked. This must be what it feels like to summit Everest I thought. To be or not to be indeed... Do you think Shakespeare really thought how impacting and far reaching those words would actually be?

*(Lights fade, then are up again on the Maestro.)*

### **The Maestro of the Drama-**

Culture  
The way we live  
And give  
Or not  
What we say  
The way we play  
Or not  
Defines  
Outlines  
Shapes  
And is shaped  
By the way we live

What  
Is essential then  
If we had to choose  
Short list even  
What  
We deem  
The most  
indispensable  
the most important  
the most basic  
of cultural inclusions  
on the  
top  
5  
list?  
Who would we be?

Recess all day,  
Or gone maybe?  
Pink smiling ninjas,  
Or power suits?

Free love,  
Or free hate?

In the end  
You decide  
The brush  
Is yours  
The canvass  
Is yours  
Be careful though  
Not to  
Paint yourself  
Into the corner

*(The Maestro of the Drama exits DS into the audience as Mitch comes in SR.)*

*(Summer. Outside a residential home. Mitch is setting up a drop cloth and getting a can of paint ready before ascending a ladder (mime box) to get at the upper trim on the windows of the home. He is older, though not old. Crusty might best define him. As he arranges the drop cloth, it isn't spreading the way he wants and so his short temper begins to flare up. Things are further exacerbated when he notices paint on the window from yesterday, resulting in a definite 'shit' being uttered as he heads over and works at scratching it off with his fingernail.)*

**Mitch-** Seven o'clock, that was the start time. What the hell. *(He finally ascends the ladder, but can hear two members of his crew working around the corner on the other side of the house laughing.)* Hey! What did I tell you two about goofing off?! It isn't recess and this isn't a playground for shitsake! Knock off the antics or you two can both head home. *(A sorry is bellowed from off stage.)* Sorry is right. *(He continues painting as Drew enters from SL. Drew is light on his feet and bubbly. Youthful might best describe him. He is whistling, the likes of which alerts Mitch of his presence.)* Didn't hear the alarm clock?

**Drew-** Sorry?

**Mitch-** *(Tenser, though notably not as savage with Drew as he was with the two other painters on his crew just moments before.)* Did you not hear the alarm clock on your phone this morning?

**Drew-** Loud and clear. I changed it to that UFO sounding one that I had you listen to on Friday at the end of the day, remember? The one that went, dodododo, dodododo.

**Mitch-** *(Stopping his painting and turning to speak to Drew directly.)* I mean it's eight thirty. Where've you been for the last hour and a half?

**Drew-** *(Getting a paint can prepped and a brush ready to go.)* I had that meeting at the university. Remember I told you about that on Friday?

**Mitch-** *(Mitch turns sharply and gets back to his work, gritting his teeth hard as he remembers being told. His attitude is notably different, though he is still gruff.)* Oh, right, right, right.

**Drew-** *(Cautiously.)* Yeah... *(Knowing they need to talk, but just not yet.)* Hey, where is the tape ball?

**Mitch-** *(Quickly covering.)* Huh, what? Don't know. I think I saw it in the dumpster this morning. The guys must have thrown it out.

**Drew-** *(Not believing his story.)* Oh yeah? *(Visibly doing the 'math' about the morning.)* I think you threw it out because you thought I was legitimately late for work.

**Mitch-** No!

**Drew-** Tell me I'm wrong.

**Mitch-** You're wrong.

**Drew-** Tell me I'm wrong to my face. (*Mitch avoids gazing at Drew, as he playfully makes a game of trying to get Mitch to look at him. Mitch avoids for a duration, but finally falls for the classic tap on the shoulder shtick.*) That is one of the oldest tricks in the book and you fell for it!

On top of that, you got busted. You threw the tape ball in the dumpster.

**Mitch-** It doesn't matter, I'll, I'll fish it out later.

**Drew-** No worries. I'll start another one with the tape from the ground level windows we are painting today.

**Mitch-** (*Grunts/Huffs a laugh.*)

**Drew-** (*Getting his paint can prepped.*) I love the colour of the trim this client chose: caramel brown. When I stir a fresh can of paint I imagine what it would be like to work in a chocolate factory.

**Mitch-** (*Still busy on the ladder painting the upper trim of the window he is working on.*) Do you now? A regular Willy Wonka you are. (*Drew laughs and breaks into an Oompa Loompa character with song and dance and all. This causes Mitch's hard veneer to finally crack and fall away and for an authentic laugh and smile to shine through.*)

**Drew-** For sure. Or, or the very least an ice cream shop, where they have all those toppings for sundaes and stuff. (*Aside from the Oompa Loompa antics, Drew hasn't lost a step in terms of staying busy at work. Finally ready to paint, he joins Mitch on another ladder and begins painting.*) If it wasn't for the smell, I'd be tempted to drink this stuff. (*Mitch give him an awkward look.*) I wouldn't of course.

**Mitch-** Good. (*The two continue their work for a bit.*)

**Drew-** (*Drew looks at Mitch, but still isn't ready to talk to him just yet.*) What do you think it was like for Michelangelo to be perched up that high on the scaffolding, painting the Sistine Chapel?

**Mitch-** What?

**Drew-** I mean, ladders are precarious enough as it is and we're only working a few feet off of the ground, never mind rickety wood scaffolding. Can you imagine being perched way up there?

And he even painted on his back. Can you imagine?

**Mitch-** (*Still at work, but noticeably enjoying Drew's imaginative ramblings.*) Nope.

**Drew-** Want to try something? Do you? Let's give ourselves the creative challenge of standing on one leg to do the upper section of the trims we are working on. Not quite a true Michelangelo, but something just to try, K?

**Mitch-** That's no challenge. I'm on one leg most of time anyway reaching and leaning. See. (*He does so as he gets the corner section of the trim, all in an effort to avoid having to move the ladder unnecessarily.*)

**Drew-** Look at you go there Michelangelo! A month in and you never taught me that trick.

**Mitch-** Can't tell you everything I know. Then you'll be as smart as me.

**Drew-** (*Chuckling as he dips his brush.*) Ok then, how about this creative challenge. We need to do a section of trim we are currently working on with our left hand.

**Mitch-** (*Sarcastically.*) There's a challenge. (*Mitch motions to Drew reminding him that he is left handed.*)

**Drew-** I mean non-dominant hand. Your right and my left. The one who does a poorer job has to buy the other coffee at break.

**Mitch-** *(Stops painting and looks at him for a spell.)* Alright. *(The two begin painting, Mitch slow and steady, Drew struggling with trying to get his left and right all configured. Drew is able to get painting, but it isn't long before he blurts out an 'Argh'.)* Did you get paint on the glass?

**Drew-** No, it just dribbled on the tape a bit.

**Mitch-** *(Finishing up his length of trim that he is working on then switching his brush from one hand to the other without missing a beat as he continues.)* Don't forget, mine is a double-double.

**Drew-** *(Accepting defeat.)* You took that bet a bit too quick, what did I miss? I know you've been painting since I was a kid, but you really keep sharp with both hands?

**Mitch-** I told you, if I told you everything, then you'd be as smart as me.

**Drew-** No seriously.

**Mitch-** *(Still busy at work, but in a playful tone.)* Watched a lot of Karate Kid when I was younger. Wax on, wax off.

**Drew-** Come on Mitch, just tell me.

**Mitch-** *(He looks at Drew and chuckles before delivering.)* Ambidextrous.

**Drew-** *(Again doing 'the math' while contriving a scheme of his own.)* Ah, so you cheated!

**Mitch-** What?

**Drew-** *(Ribbing Mitch in a straight faced manner.)* I said with your non-dominant hand, but you really don't have a non-dominant hand. Looks like you cheated, looks like the bet is null and void.

**Mitch-** *(Now it is Mitch who has paused from painting as Drew continues.)* No I never did! My left hand is still dominant for me.

**Drew-** Not believing it Mr. Miyagi. To make this contest fair, it looks like you'll have to kick off one of your shoes and make the attempt with your foot!

**Mitch-** I will not.

**Drew-** Fine. *(Baiting Mitch because he knows he will be unable to resist.)* Some people have a more relaxed conscience. It doesn't matter to them when they get caught at something, and they certainly aren't interested in making things right when offered the chance. Guess you're one of those people.

**Mitch-** *(Not catching that Drew is laying down a trap.)* Alright smarty pants, I will. *(He descends from his ladder, sits and removes his shoe then his sock. He places the brush on the lower rung of the ladder, then stands up and attempts to pick it up with his foot. He manages to get it aloft with his foot, but loses his balance and falls. All the while Drew is watching from the other ladder playfully enjoying the scene, in partial disbelief that Mitch took the bait. He has been stifling a laugh all the while, but when Mitch falls, he finally blurts out. Mitch hears the laugh and is indignant at first but only for a moment, as a smile and then a chuckle soon find their way out. From off stage one of the other workers blurts out, "Hey Mitch, why do you only have one shoe on?" Mitch responds vehemently with 'Shut your face and get back to work. I don't remember telling you it was break time yet'. He turns back to Drew and regains his smile while shaking his head. Getting up now.)* Can't believe I took the bait.

**Drew-** I can't believe that you did either, but that was awesome! *(He comes over and helps Mitch up off of the ground.)*

**Mitch-** This is all you, you know?

**Drew-** What?

**Mitch-** All you. *(Drew looks uncertainly at him prompting him to continue.)* The tape ball, the brush contest today, the antics with the hose yesterday, you're always playing around.



**Drew-** (*Cautious that he has unsettled Mitch again.*) You think that is a bad thing?

**Mitch-** (*Stares at him for a bit, recognizing well that Drew gives him something that he doesn't have anymore and has been missing.*) Nope.

**Drew-** Good. Because I don't think I could change it if I could! (*Pauses from painting, takes a moment, turns as if going to talk, but Mitch starts before he can begin.*)

**Mitch-** You must have been quite the handful for your parents and your teachers.

**Drew-** (*Recognizing that this discussion will lead him to the discussion that he knows that he needs to have with Mitch.*) My parents were the nature part of the mix and my teachers were the nurturers. Well my parents nurtured too, but you get what I'm saying.

**Mitch-** Your teachers would let you go off like this in school? I call bullshit.

**Drew-** Ha, ha! They helped me learn boundaries, to always be who I was and (*With emphasis.*) to use my 'gift for the forces of good.'

**Mitch-** I thought school was about Math, Science, reading and writing. You miss the boat?

**Drew-** (*Does a 'tug boat' sound, while miming swimming.*) Yep, fell right in the water and had to swim like a madman to catch it. (*Mitch gives him a look.*) No, it is about that stuff, but let me ask you something. Do remember any of the classroom lessons from school?

**Mitch-** Nope.

**Drew-** Ok, what do you remember?

**Mitch-** I remember that my teachers were a bunch of assholes.

**Drew-** (*Laughing.*) Ouch. Sorry to hear. And that's it?

**Mitch-** And I remember when Jeff McDonald slipped two pieces of ex-lax bar into Mrs. Pare's coffee. The woman didn't know what hit her.

**Drew-** (*Big eyed and smiling.*) You have to really dislike a person to do that to them!

**Mitch-** You have no idea.

**Drew-** Well, your example still fits with what I believe about school; it's the moments of heightened emotion whether good or bad, that make the most lasting impression on us. (*Mitch has a moment of notable introspection as does Drew, each in their own worlds. The two continue to paint in silence for a duration, Mitch in a focused way, Drew noticeably distracted, before Mitch begins anew.*)

**Mitch-** I wanted to be a cop.

**Drew-** Say again?

**Mitch-** A cop. I always wanted to be a cop. Loved playing cops and robbers when I was little with my friends. Never once did I ever play a robber. Was always the police.

**Drew-** Serious? That's cool. What happened? Did you ever pursue it?

**Mitch-** Life happened. Grew up, got married had kids. No time anymore to chase dreams when the world is pressing in. (*There is a noticeable moment had by Drew with these words as he recognizes that it is time to talk. Mitch continues his work, as Drew builds up for what comes next.*)

**Drew-** (*The most unsettled he has been all scene.*) You never asked me how my meeting at the university went this morning.

**Mitch-** You didn't want to share; I wasn't about to ask.

**Drew-** I would have told you if you did, you know.

**Mitch-** (*Grunts.*) Well then, how did it go?

**Drew-** It's a big place. I got lost twice on campus, but there are people everywhere so I just asked.

**Mitch-** (*Grunts.*)

**Drew-** Anyway, the meeting was actually an audition with the Fine Arts performance panel.

**Mitch-** An audition for university?

**Drew-** It's a special program. They only take eight students a year.

**Mitch-** How did it go?

**Drew-** Well, you know auditions, the nerves, the jitters...

**Mitch-** You're killing me with suspense here kid.

**Drew-** Yeah, it went... (*Realizing that he simply needs to share*), it went wonderful. (*Mitch gives him a screwed up look.*) I mean I was nervous at first, waiting outside in the hall. They must do that on purpose. It's pretty daunting to wait alone in such a large space. I'm sure that's part of the audition and that they've had students 'book it' before the audition has even begun.

When the door opened and I was invited in, I walked across the room to where the panel was sitting, shook their hands and then just let loose.

**Mitch-** (*Kiddingly but hurt.*) And they liked it?

**Drew-** (*Apologetically as he has caught Mitch's tone.*) They offered me a spot right there and then.

**Mitch-** (*Stops painting for the first time in this scene, and stands on his ladder, looking at his paint can. Drew recognizes that Mitch is upset. Mitch responds in a similar tone to the one he had at the outset of the scene.*) So what happens now? With work and all? You sticking around or what?

**Drew-** I'll be here this week and the next, but then I need to start getting things ready...

**Mitch-** Don't bother. You're done today.

**Drew-** What?

**Mitch-** You didn't hear me.

**Drew-** No, it's just, I, I want to give two weeks and...

**Mitch-** (*Returns to painting.*) You're done today.

**Drew-** But you're short a guy on your crew, and two weeks would...

**Mitch-** Pack up your shit and get going.

**Drew-** Mitch, I don't want to leave like this. I've seen you can other guys like this. (*Boldly*) It isn't you.

**Mitch-** Oh yeah?! Don't pretend to know me, because you don't. And it's not your decision. Now go.

**Drew-** Really, I can stick around for a bit and help. I'd even be willing to come back and work over study breaks.

**Mitch-** (*Getting down off of his ladder and confronting Drew.*) I said go! You sticking around any longer isn't going to help anything. I don't want someone around here whose head is in two places. Too distracting for you and for the rest of the crew. There's too much work to do and no time for daydreaming. Go.

**Drew-** (*Stands looking at Mitch, not wanting to believe it.*) Ouch. I... Alright. (*Takes his paint can and places it on his ladder. Grabs the backpack that he came on with initially. Turns around to face Mitch and playfully tries one last time.*) I thought my leaving would see us duel it out sword fight style like d'Artagnan and company. (*A faint smile crosses his face, but Mitch is unmoved.*) Take care of yourself Mitch. (*Drew leaves.*)

**Mitch-** (*Watches him go, then turns down stage for a moment. He looks back across to where Drew's brush and paint can sit then walks over to them. He takes out the brush, holds it for a moment like a brush, and then takes a few strokes through air as if it were a sword. This action*

*topples him emotionally, as he finally implodes.) Dammit... (He crumples on the ladder as lights fade.)*

*(Lights up on The Maestro of the Drama CC.)*

### **The Maestro of the Drama-**

The learn  
It happens  
Earlier on  
It is so natural  
So true  
That  
To see it in action  
In an other  
Is life giving  
An act of creation  
That is un-stifled  
Until that moment  
When they  
We  
Have to  
And don't want to  
Anymore

Some  
Are resilient  
Though.  
Dragon slaying  
Free soloists  
Who  
Make their  
Own rules  
And play  
Their  
Own games.  
Are these  
Real people  
or  
pajama wearing  
comic book  
characters?

Perhaps it is  
Real moments  
That draw some  
While erasing

Others

Perhaps it is  
In the deep end  
Sans water wings  
Kicking  
Spitting  
Failing  
Because you have to  
Or else

Perhaps it is  
A  
God given design  
If not you  
Then who  
To be it  
To take it  
To give it  
And then give it some more

Perhaps it is  
The chance  
To return  
To the you you lost  
But found again  
Were forced out of  
But how could you ever be  
Because you  
Taste what you see  
And hear what you feel  
And see what you think

Perhaps it is  
Because the world  
Needs you  
Now  
More than it ever  
Has in its history

Perhaps it is...

*(The Maestro of the Drama exits SL as Phil and Catherine enter SR. Phil and Catherine are busy arranging the set-up in preparation for the scene. She is busy with the cushions and such, while he is focused on the iPad and getting it to sit properly at the right angle to capture the*

*video. When things are mostly ready, Phil approaches Catherine, holds her hands, and kisses her head, then takes position behind the device, while she sits.)*

**Phil-** Ready?

**Catherine-** Nodding.

**Phil-** Here we go. *(He presses record.)*

**Catherine-** It is me again, Catherine Miriam. Names can be so easily forgotten, so that is why each video has me speaking it. Catherine, Miriam. I, I wanted to talk to you this time about school and learning, more specifically, my learning because I think that might be a question that you will have. I know I had questions about it, or a series of questions rather when I was busy with it.

You see, my parents, Miriam and William, were, they were the best. It, they, they were always there, and I never had to worry about stuff, they always had my back. I mean, I could be myself and I didn't have to be concerned. I was introverted, and I remember the first time they told me this I thought I had a fatal disease or something *(laughing.)* Catherine you are introverted, my dad said. I ran to my room, locked myself in and cried for hours! I wrote in my diary about it, this one here *(Shows it.)* I kept it, and to read it now, is absolutely hilarious!

When I had finally settled down, and it took a while, my parents told me that it just meant that I was extremely comfortable being by myself. Extremely comfortable being by myself. I had thought that all people were like that, but when my mom told me otherwise, I started to cry again, because now I felt bad for those people who weren't comfortable by themselves!

I was a curious and inquisitive child though, and I really liked exploring. We lived by a forest when I was growing up, so I was always in there, at first with my parents, then as I got older and braver, on my own, climbing, and collecting, and smelling everything under the sun. It became my playground. It taught me early on that learning for me happened most naturally in a setting where I was fully immersed. More on that in a bit. My brain, my hands, my feet, my

nose, my eyes and even my heart were a part of each discovery experience. I don't know where you'll end up, but each time you chance to be by a park venture in. A person's age or busy schedule should never restrict them from doing what they love.

I initially, I loved going to school as a kid. My early years' teachers felt like extensions of my mom and dad; they were kind and caring and made time and space for a quiet little girl to grow into the adolescent that she was becoming. And we did things! I still remember Mr. Barrow telling us one Friday in grade 5 that all we would need for Science for the next week would be a pair of galoshes, a magnifying glass and a box of Ziploc bags. I was coming down with a cold that weekend, but there was no way that I was going to miss whatever we would be doing! Oh my gosh! I remember it was a fight to get to go, but I finally convinced mom and dad. That week we ended up having extended Science classes because we were out in the marsh in the field next to the school exploring its ecosystem. It was almost like going and doing was a prescription for what was ailing me.

By the middle years' grades, there were less of these kinds of learning experiences in school, though they did still happen, but usually they were hit and miss or they played out in an after school context. The problem for me was that the experiences were happening less and less frequently, and when that is what gives a person life, the chance to explore, to touch the learning, that isn't good. It is almost like there is an unwritten rule that as you get into older grades, the learning happens less in your hands and more in your head. But what happens when you need to do more with what you are learning than just think about it? It was like I was being allowed less and less oxygen but was being asked to run faster and faster. I started making poor choices about how I would spend my time and with whom. We will save those stories for another video, but you have to understand, it was not because I was interested in trouble. And it was not really

trouble that I was getting into at first. I needed opportunities to be doing, and if they were not being made available to me, I would create them myself. But influences started to take hold and before I knew it, I was a person that I hardly recognized anymore. I want you to recognize the difference between choices that are life giving and those that squelch life as you grow and learn. Risk taking is an essential part of the learning process. By now you've heard the familiar cliché: 'nothing ventured, nothing gained.' And it is true, it is just that you have to realize that when your individual wellbeing is at risk, that is not a good thing. Easy for me to be able to identify this and say this, I know, but I hope you can internalize these words and mark them in some way so that you can learn from my experience.

The burning question that you probably have about all of this, is what stopped my downward spiral? What was it that gave me pause and allowed me to understand and reconsider how I was doing life? Brace yourself because you'll be quite surprised; It was Mrs. Campbell's grade 10 Drama class. I know, you can hardly believe that your introverted, science focused mother would ever have taken a drama class but it did happen, and I am fairly certain as I look back, that is what ended up saving me. Of all the classes that I took in my bid to become a doctor, I would have to argue that this class had the most impact. If you can gather yourself together for a moment, here is the story. I was walking down the hall at school one afternoon, feeling really bummed out in general, when I saw a poster for the school drama going up that Spring. I was like, hmmm, that sounds interesting, in a cool, but I am way too busy and there is no way I would actually do that stuff kind of way. Then serendipity hit as I heard this roaring cacophony coming from the class at the end of the hall. I'm sure that you have already experienced something like this, where there is a notable buzz in the air, and you just have to check out what it is that is going on. That was me then. The noise happened to be coming from

the drama class, which was filled to capacity, and all the kids in there were up and moving and laughing and doing. I stood in the hall smiling as I watched for a moment, before the teacher of the class, who I would learn was Mrs. Campbell came to the door and asked if I wanted to come in. I said no, that I had to get to another class, and hurried away. I remember going home that night and mumbling to my parents at the dinner table that I was going to change my schedule at school for the following semester and take drama. You can ask grandma about it, because I remember her telling me years after that she was worried that this was another of my less than responsible choices, but that because it was a school related activity, she bit her lip and hoped that it would end up being a good thing.

What initially captured my attention was the sense of fun that seemed to emanate from that room. I only stood there in the hallway listening for a moment, but the laughter I heard made me long to be part of whatever was going on. The most laughing I was doing in school was with my friends in the hallway, about really stupid and inappropriate things. Remember that life-giving versus life-squelching comment I made earlier? Hard to believe that laughter could live in both of these worlds but it did, and I was longing for laughter that would sustain me again. I think that most of those kids were in drama because of the fun factor. And can you blame them? Kids in my time were hurriedly being told to grow up, but so many did so at their own peril. As kids, we are so focused and intent on becoming an adult: get a job, do away with all the frivolities that we associate with childhood. I'm not sure that being an adult is all about forgetting everything that you were as a child. There is a study in psychology called neoteny, in a nutshell it's the idea of adults retaining childlike qualities. It is usually seen pejoratively or negatively, but I've always wondered if there isn't some good in it. I mean it even says in the Bible, unless you come to me as a child, or something like that, you know? Now before you



think your mother was a lunatic, think about it for a moment within the context of learning, more specifically, in light of my learning journey that I have been recounting. I was in my prime as a youth, when I could live in my learning experiences holistically. As I got older, I still needed these experiences, but I didn't realize how vital they were to my very existence until that drama class. Everything we did in there hit multiple senses. And I know what you are saying, mother, really? OK then, how did smell play out in your drama class? Was it the locker room smell that would emanate from a class filled with 30 grade 10 students? Or maybe the flatulence as a result of all the up and moving? And there were both of these, but think about trying to capture the essence of a character using a smell as the stimulus. Right? We were always up and doing and moving. Seeing and being seen. Sometimes we were in class, sometimes we were in any one of a number of locations throughout the school. Mrs. Campbell trusted us, and in turn we started to trust ourselves. She made me see the value of recording ideas to reflect on and take my learning deeper. I have never lost that, case in point this video.

You are probably wondering about the whole introverted thing and how that fit with drama. I have often wondered about that myself. I think, like I said, that the chance to be in my learning outweighed anything else. Not to say that I was not uncomfortable at times, ok, most times, but I adopted her mantra of becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable. That and I think that because we were doing with a purpose that it gave me permission to offer myself to others, you know? Kind of like when you are attempting small talk and it is awkward beyond compare, but if or when your discussion stumbles on a topic of interest to you, you find a groove and forget about the awkwardness if only for a moment and just live in the topic being discussed. Ask your dad about what I am getting at here. He has seen me do this time and again.

Now here is the thing that most people did not get about drama as it played out in Mrs. Campbell's class and I suspect countless other drama classes across the country: you didn't really learn about acting. Well you did, I guess, but that is not what it was all about. Acting was the macguffin. What the class was really about, was you. You learned about yourself and you got to do it in an up and moving and creative way. This is what I had been longing for since grade five. A regularly scheduled class where I could *do* my learning instead of just theorize about it. The clincher was the learning that I got to do just happened to be about me at a time when I needed it most. Heaven knows I never went on to become a Broadway star, but I don't think that was ever the goal of the class. I mean I guess Mrs. Campbell would have loved it if she had an alumnus who made it big on the stage or screen, but I don't think that was ever really her intent. The class was really a creative learning course where students got the chance to learn in a full on and immersed way. If they called it that, no one would sign up, so I think they decided to just call it drama instead.

Last bit of psych talk here, then I promise I am done. Functional fixedness is a cognitive bias, which means that a person is locked into only one way of thinking about how an object is used, or one way of thinking about their perspective on a topic or issue. What drama did for me was it broke me out of my fixed mindset about life and how I was living and so many other things. Who knew that a silly game of transform the object would have had such a profound impact. This I think was my biggest take away from the class, and I am reminded about its impact daily in my work and the day to day bits of living.

I always said that it would be a scientist with an artsy bent that would one day cure cancer. Someone with a sideways manner of thinking that would provide the insight needed to finally kick this disease's ass. I thought it was going to be me! Never happened. I am not sure

how many times you will watch this or the other videos, but I... my dream and wish is that you will visit and revisit them throughout your life, or at least as long as the technology used to make this recording lasts! (*Focusing on the iPad as she delivers the following.*) Ah, Steve Jobs, if you, if I, if we could have all started this creative thinking and living and doing 50 years earlier, we would all have had 30 additional years to live, to give... I wouldn't have to be making this video, I could tell you this in person... (*Catherine's emotions get the better of her.*) Turn it off. (*Phil does and puts the iPad down and comes and holds her as the scene fades to black.*)

(*Lights up on The Maestro of the Drama DSC.*)

### **The Maestro of the Drama-**

Circle up  
Circle up  
Circle up  
Chuck!

That O  
No start  
Or finish  
Constant and true  
Of me and you  
Is clunky at times  
Well most

And I sit  
And you sit  
And we sit  
And stand  
And band  
And do  
Together  
At least on the outside

See  
What I see  
Isn't always  
What you see  
Though together  
Not together

Without the  
Storm of circumstance  
That allows us  
To be  
Who we really are

And it is awkward  
And weird  
And we hate it  
And we  
JUST  
WANT IT  
TO END  
And in the moment  
'We die a thousand deaths'

But then a battle  
Is won  
Inches are miles  
The drama is upon us  
And all that is left  
Is us.  
Not always  
And maybe only for now,  
But it  
Is us  
Rampant frustration  
meets  
Enigmatic pathways  
Meets  
Celebration.  
Give me more.

What remains  
Is the memory  
Yours, mine, ours  
Of getting  
Comfortable with the uncomfortable  
and  
Of traveling the journey

*(Lights fade to black. Voiceover of crowded room and hustling and bustling as the stage lights begin to come up.)*

**Announcer-** All right, now it's time for round three of the Improvaganza! This is the round where individuals from the various teams are mixed and matched, working now in pairings of

two as they put their quick thinking mettle to the true test. Let's have a loud round of applause for our first team! (*Actor 1 and Actor 2 take the stage at the same time, one from SR and the other from SL. Each bounds up on the stage, filled with high energy that quickly dwindles as each becomes cautious as they eye each other.*) All right team, what is your ask for, for this scene?

**Actor 2-** (*Actor 1 is about to take the lead and respond to the announcer when Actor 2 steps forward and blurts out.*) We would like a theme.

**Announcer-** Such as?

**Actor 2-** Such as love or war. (*Turns to Actor 1.*) Like that, right?

**Actor 1-** (*Actor 1 is dumbfounded and wide eyed, angry and shocked that another person, this person, would take the lead, but on some level also a bit impressed.*) Right. (*Sarcastically.*) A theme. Like love or war.

**Announcer-** All right team, you've asked for a theme and the theme that you have received is... journey. (*At the delivery of the theme, Actor 1 rolls her eyes, while Actor 2 goes inward, furrowing his brow while puckering his mouth in deep thought.*) We'll see scenes that focus on the theme of journey in 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Improv!

**Actor 1-** (*Heads downstage right away and begins playing a really hoity toity character. She mimes looking around the space, touching the back of a chair, looking in a mirror, and glancing around as if searching for someone. She finally arrives at a mimed desk and again looks around before ringing the bell.*) Ding, ding. (*Waits a moment and then temperamentally rings the bell again.*) Ding, ding, ding, ding!

**Actor 2-** (*Initially caught up in the story being created by Actor 1, finally takes his cue.*) Yes? How may I help you?

**Actor 1-** (*Biting.*) And I was beginning to think that I was the only person here.

**Actor 2-** (*Taken at the rude comment, but moving things forward.*) Apologies madam, the rest of the staff is off for the night.

**Actor 1-** I need my luggage taken in. I trust that you can make that happen?

**Actor 2-** (*In a slightly sarcastic tone.*) Oh yes! Oh yes! Right away, right away! (*Heads out to the car, tries the trunk [pounding on it] but realizes that it is locked. Tries the car door to see if it is open [wrenches on it repeatedly] but it is locked too. Returning inside.*) Excuse me, but your trunk is locked.

**Actor 1-** (*Who has been grooming herself all the while, takes out her electronic car key and presses it over her shoulder without looking at Actor 2.*) Bee boop.

**Actor 2-** Ah, much thanks! (*Returns outside grumbling. He opens the trunk and starts to pile up all of the luggage on a mimed rolling cart. There are four to five bags, most large in size. When all are loaded, he returns inside.*) My, you have a lot of baggage. (*Moving to assume position behind the desk again.*) How long will you be staying with us?

**Actor 1-** (*Slightly perturbed.*) If you check my reservation, you'll see that I'll be here for two nights.

**Actor 2-** Ah! Two nights, (*Under his breath.*) that'll be fun. Name please?

**Actor 1-** Anastasia.

**Actor 2-** Like the ugly stepsister?

**Actor 1-** I beg your pardon?!

**Actor 2-** (*Completely enjoying the moment while checking on the computer.*) My kids have the book, *Cinderella*. It's their favourite. I read it to them all the time. (*Changing the subject*

*without a beat.*) I'm sorry madam, we don't appear to have any reservations made under that name.

**Actor 1-** Check again.

**Actor 2-** All right. (*Looks quickly at the computer screen then back at Actor 1.*) Like I said, no reservation. And that's too bad, because we are all booked up. Santa Claus convention in town this weekend or something.

**Actor 1-** (*Changes her tack a little.*) I remember a story from my youth about a young family from Galilee who also came upon an Inn that had no room.

**Actor 2-** Galilee? Is that near Detroit?

**Actor 1-** (*Tersely.*) No, it is in the Middle East.

**Actor 2-** Yikes! Brave people traveling there. I don't know, I mean people can do what they want, but if it was me, I wouldn't be travelling there. Not right now. Too risky.

**Actor 1-** You are missing the point of my story.

**Actor 2-** And you are missing mine. We are booked solid.

**Announcer-** Next scene! (*Actor 1 and 2 drop their characters, and head US eyes locked the entire way. Once they've arrived USC, Actor 1 immediately steps DS again and starts a new scene.*)

**Actor 1-** (*Curled up into a ball and lies in a tight fetal position on the stage DSC. She moves around for a bit, adjusting her arms and legs, then rolls into a kneeling position. Actor 2 stays US, noticeably unsure about what Actor 1 is doing. Actor 1 stares into the audience then begins.*) What a scary world it is out there!

**Actor 2-** (*Figuring that he knows where Actor 1 is going with this scene, Actor 2 comes in. Walking like a 'dude' and with a Bronx accent.*) Hey kid, you lost or something? Where are your parents?

**Actor 1-** (*Forcing the scene to go in the direction that she had initially intended. As a young seed, I'm forever removed, yet eternally connected with my caregivers, needing the nurturing love that only rich soil, warm sunshine and clean water can bring.*)

**Actor 2-** (*Still playing his interpretation of the scene.*) Listen, you sound really, really messed up. Why don't you come with me and I'll get you some help.

**Actor 1-** I can't. I'm in the ground.

**Actor 2-** Doesn't look like it to me.

**Actor 1-** I'm a seed moron.

**Actor 2-** Fine. I'll pick you up.

**Actor 1-** NO! (*Actor 2 bends down to attempt to pick up Actor 1. A small tussle ensues. The scene doesn't go anywhere. Actor 1 in a huff finally ends the scene by getting up and heading back US for the next scene. Actor 2 follows. Actor 1 stares down Actor 2 and chides him when he gets back US. Actor 2 replies with, "What!? I didn't know what you were doing!" They settle quickly, stand for a beat US, then Actor 2 gets the next scene going.*)

**Actor 2-** (*Taking one of the chairs/mime boxes and sits on it.*) Honk, honk! Come on honey! The car is packed, we're ready to go!

**Actor 1-** (*From US location but doesn't move.*) Be right there!

**Actor 2-** (*Drumming fingers on the steering wheel while waiting. It becomes a tad bit awkward sitting there waiting, so he begins finding things to do: turns the radio on, adjusts the seat, adjusts the mirrors, ideally finding something scene appropriate that gets a laugh from the audience. This prompts Actor 1 to finally enter the scene. She grabs a mime box and sits beside Actor 2.*) Finally!

**Actor 1-** I can't just fall out bed and be ready to go!

**Actor 2-** (*Miming backing the car out of the drive.*) I get that, but two and a half hours?!

**Actor 1-** These things take time.

**Actor 2-** (*Heavy sigh.*) Alright, alright. We have four hours to spend in the car together. Let's not start off fighting.

**Actor 1-** I wasn't. You were the one being contentious.

**Actor 2-** I was just stating my frustration with this situation! Remember what the pastor said during the premarital class; communicate and be open and honest with one another.

**Actor 1-** (*Sarcastic.*) I'm so glad that you are being open and honest because I wanted to ask you, (*Quickly messes up her own hair.*) how is my hair?

**Actor 2-** What?

**Actor 1-** I said how does my hair look? Do you like it?

**Actor 2-** (*Glances over.*) It's ah...

**Actor 1-** You don't like it.

**Actor 2-** No, I never said that.

**Actor 1-** You don't have to; I can tell by your tone. (*Begins to tear up.*)

**Actor 2-** I like it alright! I like it! I think the spiky poufs make your eyes come out.

**Actor 1-** Do you really? And the purple and pink dye colours? They don't clash do they?

**Actor 2-** Not at all.

**Actor 1-** Good, because I want to make a good first impression with your mother. She was rather curt with me on the phone the other day.

**Actor 2-** She wasn't being curt with you, that is just how she is.

**Actor 1-** Your mother doesn't have any manners?

**Actor 2-** Did you just say that my mother doesn't have any manners?

**Actor 1-** It wasn't a factual statement, rather it was a question.

**Actor 2-** No, no, you implied, through a question, that my mother has no manners.

**Actor 1-** I asked if your mother was curt.

**Actor 2-** You said that she doesn't have any manners.

**Actor 1-** I never said that.

**Actor 2-** Yes you did.

**Actor 1-** No I didn't.

**Actor 2-** What does curt really mean anyway?

**Actor 1-** Rudely brief.

**Actor 2-** Ah, ha! See!

**Actor 1-** You were the one who said that she was always like that. I simply put a descriptor on what you suggested was her regular behaviour.

**Actor 2-** So you are saying that I said that my mother has no manners?

**Actor 1-** Never mind. (*They drive on in silence for a duration.*) Ok, to make the next 3 hours and 57 minutes work, I think we need to stop being at each other's throats and start being, you know, nicer to each other.

**Actor 2-** You don't think I'm nice to you?

**Actor 1-** Barking at me before I even get into the car!

**Actor 2-** Honey, I know you know that I think that being punctual is next in line to cleanliness, which is only superseded by Godliness.

**Actor 1-** So?

**Actor 2-** Well I think you took your time a little to spite me.

**Actor 1-** I told you that these things...

**Actor 2-** I know, I know, these things take time. But two and a half hours?

**Actor 1-** I just wanted to look beautiful for you.

**Actor 2-** And you do. Just as yourself. (*Actor 1 leans her head on Actor 2's shoulder. They drive in bliss for a couple of beats.*) We should stop at A&W for a burger before we get out on the number 1.

**Actor 1-** Oh? (*Takes her head off of Actor 2's shoulder.*) I was thinking that we would wait until at least we were out of the province and then we could stop at the Subway just on the other side of the border. (*They stare at each other for a beat, looking as if to go yet another round, before speaking in unison.*)

**Actor 1&2-** We can do both.

**Announcer-** Next scene!

**Actor 2-** (*Actor 1 & 2 head US, but Actor 2 turns and immediately returns DSC humming out the Imperial March theme from Star Wars. When he arrives DS, he stands to attention, whisks his imaginary cape away, then grabs hold of his light saber and makes the sound of turning it on. He then takes two breaths 'a la' Darth Vader before beginning in his best Vader voice.*) Luke, it isn't too late to join the dark side.

**Actor 1-** (*Noticeably not sure what to do with this because she isn't a Star Wars fan, steps forward and begins.*) My name is actually Lorelei.

**Actor 2-** No it isn't. Your name is Luke, I named you. I am your father.

**Actor 1-** (*Put off.*) Well if you can't tell that I'm a girl, it's rather unlikely that you 'are my father.'

**Actor 2-** (*Losing the Vader voice for a moment and through gritted teeth.*) Cross gender casting! (*Regaining his Vader voice again.*) As I was saying, it isn't too late to join me on the dark side (*Takes two 'Vader' breaths.*)

**Actor 1-** Do you smoke? Cause if you do, I don't know if you can tell, but you have some nasty raspy breathing going on.

**Actor 2-** (*Dropping the character completely.*) That is how Vader breathes! (*Actor 2 looks at Actor 1 who is clueless.*) Darth Vader?! You don't know who Darth Vader is!?

**Actor 1-** Didn't get the memo I guess.

**Actor 2-** EVERYBODY knows who Darth Vader is!

**Actor 1-** Wrong answer.

**Actor 2-** Unbelievable! (*He heads US and ends the scene.*)

**Announcer-** Next scene!

(*The next scene is all physical, no speaking until the very end of it. Actor 2, in frustration from the last scene, goes DSC and freezes into a full body, outrageous pose. He stands there a beat and holds it, then shifts it into another full body outrageous pose. Actor 1, after the third pose, sees this as a challenge, so she joins the scene by connecting herself to Actor 2 and the two then, in a connected way (always touching in some way, shape or form [literally], create seven different full body outrageous poses. Initially they start at complete odds with each other, but by the fourth body pose, they are noticeably enjoying themselves and just going with what the other person is doing, letting lose and having what appears to be, much fun. For the seventh pose, they really ramp things up, so much so, that their collective shape becomes disconnected, resulting in Actor 2 falling on to the stage floor, as both Actor 1 & 2 erupt in a fit of laughter. Actor 1 helps Actor 2 up, then as if hit by an epiphany, pulls Actor 2 out of his laughter, turns to*



*the audience and speaks.*) Binary fission: daughter cell number one, and daughter cell number two! (*Actor 1 looks at Actor 2 then delivers the following.*) Cross gender casting!

**Announcer-** And scene! (*Actor 1 and 2 head back US, laughing at the silliness of the scene. Their attitudes are noticeably changed.*) All right performers, for this next scene you've been given the creative challenge of using the house space to create your scene! Are you ready? Then get at it!

**Actor 1-** (*Heads out into the audience while talking over her shoulder.*) Dr. Fitzhenry, come on Dr. Fitzhenry, I know you detest the heat of the equatorial jungle, but we must keep moving if we ever hope to find the rare Chickalagumbo plant.

**Actor 2-** Ah, Dr. Barnes! I detest this heat of the equatorial jungle. I should probably just sit for a moment and have a rest. (*Sits in the lap of an audience member in the front row while Actor 1 continues down the row.*)

**Actor 1-** (*Stopping and returning to find Actor 2.*) Doctor? Doctor? Where did you go? (*Comes back around to the front.*) Come on Dr. Fitzhenry, you seriously cannot hope to ever find the Chickalagumbo plant if you insist on lollygagging every step of the way!

**Actor 2-** Ah Dr. Barnes! We cannot just be rush, rush, rush. Sometimes we need to take time to stop and enjoy the scenery. That is how I found the rare pincer leaf herb. Did I ever tell you that story? (*He gets up without really having paid any attention to the audience member whose lap he sat in.*)

**Actor 1-** Only about a 100 times.

**Actor 2-** Yes well, it really was a fascinating find and I never would have made the discovery if I had not, 'stopped to smell the roses.'

**Actor 1-** We cannot afford to be doing that on this trip. If we do not find the Chickalagumbo plant soon, we will have missed the window of opportunity for this growing season as it only blooms for a brief duration on this exact day, and then withers a few hours after.

**Actor 2-** My, you know a lot about this plant!

**Actor 1-** As do you; I mean we are botanical experts and the world authorities on this species of plant.

**Actor 2-** I know. I was just admiring how knowledgeable you are and thinking to myself, self, what a splendid research partner you have in Dr. Barnes.

**Actor 1-** Well I do hold a double PhD from Harvard.

**Actor 2-** Dr. Barnes! Look out! Oh no! It seems that you have stumbled into a quicksand pit!

**Actor 1-** (*Moves into the seating area near the back of the house and starts grabbing the hands of the audience members there to 'fight' against the quicksand.*) Argh! I can't get out! I cannot get out! The sand is too much!

**Actor 2-** (*Taking someone from the audience and placing them in the aisle far enough away from the action, but still within reach, then holding that person's hand while leaning in.*) Not to worry! I am anchored into this mighty tree. Grab my hand, I will help you.

**Actor 1-** I can't move! It's too much! I can't get out!

**Actor 2-** Trust me! Quit resisting and calm yourself!

**Actor 1-** I can't.

**Actor 2-** You can.

**Actor 1-** I can't!

**Actor 2-** You can! (*Exasperated.*) Get ahold of yourself woman!

**Actor 1-** Alright.

**Actor 2-** Now grab my hand. (*Actor 1 does and Actor 2 subsequently pulls her out.*)

**Actor 1-** Oh doctor, your arms are like knotted ropes!

**Actor 2-** Well, I do work out. *(They have a very brief moment, and then snap out of it.)* Ah, hem, nothing like a bit of drama with our drama!

**Actor 1-** Yes, we should keep going.

**Actor 2-** Yes, we should.

**Actor 1-** *(Heading further down the aisle and looking along a given row at the back of the house.)* It looks like we have some dense jungle ahead of us. Steel your resolve doctor. *(The two begin to make their way along that same row, clambering up and over the audience members. They ‘Excuse me, pardon me’ their way through, until they arrive at the other end of the row/the opposite aisle.)*

**Actor 2-** We have made it.

**Actor 1-** Yes we have.

**Actor 2-** But the day is waning. I am not sure if we will find the Chickalagumbo plant in time! *(Actor 2 begins to turn to make his way down the aisle back towards the stage.)*

**Actor 1-** Dr. Fitzhenry, stop right where you are.

**Actor 2-** What’s the matter?!

**Actor 1-** Don’t make any sudden moves.

**Actor 2-** What is it?! What is it?!

**Actor 1-** There seems to be a spotted leopard in the bushes to your immediate right three steps/seats behind you. *(At this, Actor 1 scurries around and prompts the audience member sitting in that location to stand and put on his/her best leopard claws and growl, before returning to her original spot on the other side of Actor 2.)*

**Actor 2-** Oh, my.... My specialty is plants not leopards! What should we do?!

**Actor 1-** The only thing we possibly can at this point; feed it. *(Actor 2 begins to whimper as Actor 1 mimes taking a bottle and saucer out of her pockets. She opens the bottle and pours it into the saucer, before coming around Actor 2 and placing the saucer in front of/in the hands/paws of the audience member playing the leopard.)* Nice kitty, nice kitty...

**Actor 2-** Right, nice kitty, nice kitty, nice kitty... *(Frozen in place.)*

**Actor 1-** Come on Dr. Fitzhenry. *(The two tiptoe their way around the audience member. Once they are in the clear, the audience member can have a seat, and the two let out a collective sigh.)*

**Actor 2-** That was too close, but *(sarcastically.)* I am really glad that you had a bottle of milk and a saucer with you on our jungle trip.

**Announcer-** You have one-minute left!

**Actor 1-** One can never be too prepared! *(They have now make their way back around to the front of the audience again, not far from where they began.)* But sadly it seems that we have journeyed through this fun loving and willing to take a risk jungle and have come up empty handed! Further still, it looks like we are right back where we started!!

**Actor 2-** What?! *(Looks around and finds the spot/person that he sat with at the outset of the scene.)* Oh, right you are. Here is the spot that I sat in before. But wait! No! It cannot be!

Yes, yes it is! *(As Actor 2 is saying this, he is taking a closer look at the person whose lap he sat on earlier. Actor 2 prompts the audience member to get up and stand with the two actors.)*

**Actor 1-** Dr. Fitzhenry is that... *(Moves over and begins to interact with audience member. Taking him/her by the arm and raising it. Tousling his/her hair.)*

**Actor 2-** Yes, yes it is; the coveted Chickalagumbo plant!

**Actor 1-** And it was right here all along!

**Actor 2-** Most things usually are. We just don't realize it, until we've seen it through the eyes of a journeyer. *(Actor 1 and 2 look at each other and drop their characters/have a moment of introspection, before getting right back into it.)*

**Actor 1-** We'll be famous!

**Actor 2-** We already are famous, humph, if only in our own minds! But now my good doctor, we will be rich.

**Announcer-** And scene. *(Actor 1 and 2 thank the audience member who played the plant, and give a wave to the other audience members who partook, before heading back USC on the stage.)* Alright team, looks like we have just enough time for one more scene. Get in there and make it happen!

**Actor 1-** *(Both Actors have now achieved a noticeable degree of comfort with each other. At the end of the Announcer's line, they can both be seen to be thinking hard about what to do. This only last three beats at most, when Actor 1 has a moment of inspiration. She heads DSC and grabs a mime box to sit on, pretending to clink away on a piano. As she does so, Actor 2 is standing upstage waiting to be inspired, when Actor 1 begins humming the tune to Journey's 'Don't Stop Believing' before singing the opening line.)* Just a small town girl, living in a lonely world. She took the midnight train goin' anywhere.

**Actor 2-** Just a city boy, born and raised in South Detroit. He took the midnight train goin' anywhere.

**Actor 1-** An actor in a crowded room, a smell of sweat and deodorant perfume.

**Actor 2-** For a smile they can share the stage, it goes on and on, and on, and on.

**Actor 1&2-** *(Looking at each other before breaking into the chorus line of the song.)* Don't stop believin', hold on to that feelin', stage light people. *(The two actors finish the scene singing 'Oh, oh, oh!')*

**Announcer-** And scene! *(The two freeze in this final scene looking at each other with smiles on their faces, as the lights go down. Lights up on The Maestro of the Drama as he was at the outset of the play.)*

### **The Maestro of the Drama-**

And so  
 There it is  
 Finished  
 A dip  
 A dive  
 Into this world  
 Of possibilities  
 And me and the other  
 Of people  
 And relationships  
 Of uncomfortable  
 And sideways  
 All encompassing  
 Learning  
 Of culture that was,  
 Could be

And is  
(and without)

Does it matter?  
Does the drama  
Matter?

A culture  
That encompasses  
Feelings  
And choice  
Doing  
And laughter  
Struggling  
And play  
And playing some more  
Does it matter?  
Does the drama  
matter?

You came  
You saw  
You looked  
You listened  
You felt  
You decide

*(Lights Fade.)*

## Chapter VI: Conclusion

### Conclusion

As a classroom teacher, I have always aimed to instill within my students the notion of perspective when they are either producing or consuming a text. Being purposeful in my approach to this research in terms of following Irwin's (2004) Artography methodology, I found that it worked exceedingly well with the rhizomatic intentionality that I was also seeking to explore. I feel that having investigated the topic of the impact of drama education on the development of high school students as an 'Artographer' has allowed me to stay true to what Barone and Eisner (2012) suggest effective arts-based research aims to be. To live well as both art and research, the work needed to be considered through the lens of both artist and researcher. I feel that I have done this in my work. The additional considerations of the teacher lens allowed me to return to the purpose of my work, both for myself and for others (that being the aim to further the thinking and dialogue on the topic, which of course it could be suggested that the artist and researcher lens also have potential to do). The three lenses were always 'worn' collectively, working in sync towards the end goal. As a fluent French language speaker, at the outset of the study, *j'ai connu presque métissage veut dire* (I understood what métissage meant) in an intellectual capacity. Having explored it through this research, I feel that I understand it better now with my heart as a result of having lived in it.

While I felt that the research that I would do for this study would lead me to a renewed understanding of the impact of drama on a high school student's educational experience, I found four concepts that stood out from the collected data: **Initiation**, **Transition**, **Habits of Mind**, and **Interdependency**. Most of these concepts connect well to the work that has already been done with regard to the impact of drama on students. Specifically, ideas concerning transition

can be found in the research of Gallagher (2000), and then of Hughes and Wilson (2007). Ideas related to the notion of the habits of mind are apparent particularly in the research of Booth (2013) but also in the work of Akrong (2009), Boyes (2004), and Nelson (2009). The concept of interdependency is present in the research work of Gallagher (2010), Nelson (2011), Radford (2005), Thompson (2006) and Burton (2010). While initiation has a connection with the notion of transition, the research that I undertook has revealed to me a distinction between the two (hence its inclusion as a separate finding).

In considering the concepts that were uncovered and then explored interpretatively through the play, I found that I renewed my own perspective on the impact of drama education on a high school student's development. In spending a significant amount of time delving into this research, I feel that I have a deeper understanding of each of the concepts that were uncovered and the role that each plays in a student's experience in a drama education experience.

### **Initiation**

Initiation, or 'the hook', lived particularly in the various findings. A focus developed on a key moment (or moments) that the participant was taking part in (or about to take part in); an experience that was truly dynamic that he/she had yet to know in his/her life, but had a strong sense that taking part in it would leave him/her a changed person after it had transpired. In the words of Berowne, one of the participants, he exclaimed, "I knew after this there was no going back. I could not undo what was being done and because of this I would never be the same again" (personal interview, July 17, 2016).

It was revealed through the interviews that drama has the potential to raise the stakes for learners. Whether students are taking a class for the first time, or have taken drama classes and been part of productions for the duration of their time in high school, each time a new experience

is begun, there is an initiation that takes place. Mircea Eliade in the introduction to his seminal work *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* defines initiation as “a decisive alteration” (1960, p. x). Eliade proceeds to describe the experience of an initiate, whereby “the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation” (1960, p. x). I found that the data collected from multiple interviews suggested that coming to a drama class or taking part in a dramatic production was for the participant, as Tybalt stated, “a significant part of their day” (personal interview, May 25, 2016). And while it is understood that the ‘drama hook’ can only arguably be set once, the authentic, real and immediate environment that a drama experience embodies has participants engaging wholeheartedly in the process of becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable, or arguably experiencing an initiation each time. Participants cited knowing well what they were taking part in intellectually when they entered drama class/the rehearsal room, but that there was an emotional intensity that was awakened each time regardless of how many times they had been there. As such, an initiation was renewed repeatedly. The data suggested that it is not so much that it gets easier (each drama experience is different in time and place and people), but that the participant brings more and subsequently expects more of him/herself and the experience(s) overall. This experience is not unlike that of a rock climber who is rappelling down a cliff face. Though he/she may have rappelled countless times, varying conditions create a new experience each time as he/she leans out over the cliff ledge and commits him/herself to the system (rope, anchor, harness, rappel device). In so doing there is a notable heightened awareness each time of the experience and the rappeler’s role therein. In the words of Rosalind, one of the participants, she exclaims, “it stays new and exciting and real each time. The first time it happens, you are like, ‘whoa’ this is huge,

but that feeling never goes away. It happens each time you dive in and take part” (personal interview, June 3, 2016).

### **Transition**

Transition was born out of the state of flux that was mentioned repeatedly throughout the data. The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines transition as “a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another” (transition, n.d.). Instances were cited about moments of being ‘comfortable with the uncomfortable’, and the personal grappling that was part of that ongoing and continuous change. Further still, a culture shift of sorts was cited, whereby participants could see in themselves and in others the notable change of thinking and being that had occurred as a result of having taken part in many given dramatic experiences. These notable shifts in thinking and being fit well with what Mezirow (1997) describes as transformative learning “the process of effecting change in a *frame of reference* (emphasis his)” (p.5). Mention was also made of a student’s longing to take part in a dramatic experience, but of there being an inability observed in some to fully embrace the change and subsequently ‘staying stuck’ because of it. I discovered that once a participant was in and a part of a drama experience, there was a culture that was created in the environment. Participants spoke of drama class as a place of risk and safety, a place of trial and error, a place of play. Some embraced it immediately. In other instances, participants approached it (or noted others who approached it) timidly or cautiously even with some bordering on being defensive. It was found that through drama education a lot is being asked of participants on so many levels (time, social, and emotional commitments), but there was the potential for much to be gained as people on the whole were willing to take risks and invest in the experience and subsequently themselves. There was an evident transition that occurred on the part of participants who embraced the opportunity



to let their guard down and engage. There was a shift in thinking and being that became the embodiment of drama culture. Rosalind, one of the participants, illustrates this point by saying “you are changed and then you create the changed vibe in the class” (personal interview, June 3, 2016). The shift does not happen all at once for participants, and some are further along on the journey than others, but there is without doubt a notable change that occurs for those who take part that subsequently sets the tone for the space and then for them as people. Tybalt, one of the participants, said, “We were more and more willing to try stuff, not just in this class, but in life. We became, we became ‘yes’ men. And we realized the more we said yes... the more opportunities we had” (personal interview, May 25, 2016). This change in attitude was palpable and all participants noted it as a significant area of personal development for themselves.

### **Habits of Mind**

Resilience can be defined as “positive adaptation or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity” (Herman et al., 2011, p. 259). The immersive learning environment that drama allowed for, with a multitude of opportunities to fail and try again, but doing so in a holistic way, became the essence of the third concept, habits of mind. The data suggested that the learning that transpired in drama, while rooted in dramatic content, was actually training for life. The playful atmosphere that drama created kept the learner engaged. This notion aligns well with what Booth (2013) describes as the habits of mind “the key processes, actions and attitudes activated when we invest ourselves in the flow of creating”. Tackling the work in varied and engaging ways other than what is the norm in high school, kept things fresh. The creative risk-taking, yet safe and supported environment provided participants with a training ground to see, think, and breathe in various role-play settings without the penalty of real world consequences on their life.

A chief result of the transition was that participants were developing habits of mind regarding who they were/are as people. In some situations, this was hidden deep down and the opportunity to take part in a drama experience uncovered and awakened them. Rosalind, one of the participants, shared that

Drama gave me, gave us the chance to learn in a way that we hadn't since we were in kindergarten. It reminded me about when I would try things and not care about success or failure. It was fun just to try and see what would happen. (personal interview, June 3, 2016)

In the throes of growing up, their willingness to explore had been suppressed and left to be un/underdeveloped and in need of nurturing and support. In others, it was newly found and something that needed the time and environment in which to grow. In both instances I noted that participants cited this opportunity to play and be as being instrumental in shaping them and others who had taken drama into, as Cordelia, one of the participants explained “creative problem solvers who would not give up and go home when things got tough” (personal interview, May 20, 2016). Learners grew in their persistence. Living and experiencing through dramatic play allowed participants the chance to see and be in various situations that were not their own lives, but given the immersive nature of drama, allowed the opportunity to explore the varied situations as if they were (Akron, 2009; Burton, 2010; Thompson, 2006). Tybalt, another participant, offered his explanation of how empathy can develop within a high school drama program, “you could be that person suffering through addiction without having to actually be that person. I don't get it fully what they experience, but I feel like I have a better understanding because of playing that role” (personal interview, May 25, 2016). There is an abundance of opportunity to extrapolate play experiences and learning and apply them directly to

real life and living (Booth, 2013), subsequently strengthening the character of students who are taking part.

### **Interdependent Learning**

The final concept, interdependency, was uncovered as the language in the data turned from me and my, to we, and us. Working with the idea that interdependence is the “mutual dependence between things” (Ragsdale, 2015), or more particularly people in this instance, participants spoke profusely of their own gains, and the noted gains of others, but then shared about the collective gains of the group overall. Nonlinear, yet neither chaotic, what transpired could be suggested to dwell in the realm of complexity theory: where change and adaptation flourish (Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2008). Dramatic opportunities that brought varied groups of strangers together to achieve a common goal, saw them leaving with newly formed relationships that continued to live outside of the context of the world of dramatic play. Examples were even shared of renewed perspectives concerning how given individuals were viewed before and then after a dramatic experience.

The individual experiences, while empowering students in particular, also affected the group overall. What started as a gathering of strangers soon became a collective of people who depended on each other. Miranda, one of the participants suggested, “You can’t get up there and bare your soul on stage or in a drama exercise without somehow, in some way connecting with people” (personal interview, June 14, 2016). In all of the interviews participants talked about “tearing down walls”. They noted that they felt quite vulnerable at first doing this, but they recognized that in so doing, there was less and less that impeded them in understanding other students and working together with them. In those situations, where guards were kept up, participants also noted that it was difficult to move forward as a class/cast. I discovered that

there was an interdependency that was established among students as common goals were realized. Tybalt, one of the participants, commented “A show with multiple parts can’t be done by only one person” (personal interview, May 25, 2016). There was less focus on the individual and more of a focus on the shared dramatic challenge that was before them. Not only was there a coming together, but there was in some instances a notable shift in thinking about other people, where initial impressions were done away with once individuals developed a better working/playing knowledge of each other.

I was a strong advocate for drama education before the study, but now my advocacy voice has grown even stronger as a result of my own learning. The ways in which initiation, transition, habits of mind and interdependency impact and contribute towards a student’s person on the whole, furthers my resolve that drama education should be a necessary part of each high school student’s educational experience. With the potential to impact learners deeply as people, both presently and as their future selves, I have provided evidence to suggest that students who do not have the chance to explore and grow in a dramatic setting in their high school experience are arguably less prepared than they could be for life if they had.

### **Concept Exploration**

It is my intention as an artist and learner to create a piece of research that has the potential to be a *genesis* moment, or now as my interpretation of the data would suggest, an *initiation* moment for others who have yet to begin their own dramatic journey or realize the potential of drama within the context of their own life and learning. The conversational interviews, the journal of journals, the writing on the wall, then finally the script were a natural and well-suited inquiry path by which to explore the topic of the influence that drama education had on the development of a small select group of high school students. The work began in the

storied interviews of the participants. It was sifted through, and then arranged through both the journal and then kinesthetically as a result of the writing on the wall effort. In so doing, I feel the creative process was kept very much central to the work overall.

### **An A/r/tist's Reflection**

Reflecting on the varied roles of artist, researcher, and teacher that I assumed throughout the course of the work, I feel that I have begun to recognize more clearly the depth of understanding and richness of experience that Irwin (2004) talks about in her A/r/tography methodology. For me, it was as if this triad of roles offered three distinct lenses through which to see the data and then subsequently interact with it. As teacher, my thoughts were always concerned with how I would make my work accessible to others to be considered. The script was a first step in this, but there still needed to be entry points within and throughout the narrative itself for a diverse audience to be invited. As researcher, I was constantly questioning and considering the data. Time and again, I read and re-read, took a break, then set about reading and re-reading again, all in an effort to probe as deeply and with as much attention as I could. As artist, I found myself continually thinking about the data as dialogue, hearing it through the voice of varied characters acting and reacting to each other on stage. What would drive a character to share a given thought or idea? Where in the data could I further delve and connect ideas similar to the trending thoughts of a given character? The words were the medium as I listened and created a script out of the stories that were being told. I feel that there was a true 'métissage' (Irwin, 2004) of the three roles. I was never wholly in one role or the other. They were in a constant state of flux, and continue to be so, even now, as I am typing these words.

Of notable learning for me as teacher, researcher, and artist is the exploration of this topic through an arts-based methodology. Again, I know that I already am a strong advocate for the arts in general and drama in particular. To have the chance to make use of the art that I recognize has significant potential to impact others and to promote dialogue through its use, has me all the more convinced of its value and role in teaching and learning. The research supports educators' claims about the value of an arts education in general and a drama education in particular and why we should include it in the curriculum (Davis, 2012). The expanded audience that it includes, not to mention the impact for experiential learning that resonates academically and intellectually as well as socially and emotionally is for me a strong argument for its inclusion. Having immersed myself in it directly as a researcher, I am excited to share my learning outward.

Looking back at the research and thinking about what I learned, I am drawn to the two inquiry questions that were the drivers in this work; what impact has drama had on my own development, and what impact has it had on the development of a small group of high school students that I have taught? As I read over the script and listened to the characters, I became cognizant of just how vital drama is for some students as they equip themselves and prepare for life. The arts have value in and of themselves, but it can't be denied that they create learning experiences that engage students and allow for growth and development that is social and emotional as well as intellectual (Boyes, 2004; Nelson, 2011). I believe that many students forget most of what they learn in high school, save for those moments of learning steeped in heightened emotion. Davis (2012) talks about learning that centres around the arts as a place where "emotions are treated directly, and their expression is a frequent learning objective" (p. 33). The risk-taking nature of the work that transpires in drama assures that learning is

emotionally rich. Further still, the learning is kinesthetic and involves the student overall, aiming to reach him/her regardless of learning style. The learner is the focal point of the action, he/she is being asked to live in, to play in a moment. The emotions that are rushing through him/her as a result of this experience are real and draw him/her into it, making it all the more authentic (Davis, 2012). Thinking about the main concepts that came out of the work (Initiation, Transition, Habits of Mind, and Interdependency) and weighing these in the balance of what society is asking of its youth as they equip themselves to be the future leaders, the research that I have done suggests more than ever that high school students need the arts and drama in particular as part of their educational experience. What a learner experiences as a result of journeying through the moments contained in the four concepts revealed in this research has the potential to impact and shape him/her regardless of their future role in life. It does not prepare students with a body of knowledge, rather a body of experiences. These experiences or rather the students' reflective considerations on these experiences, are what make the lasting impression that will serve him/her long after their drama class/school production days are done.

### **The Value of Arts-Based Research**

The value that this arts-based research has for others more wholly goes back again to what Barone and Eisner (2012) suggest that any arts-based research should do, and that is to provide a renewed perspective on the topic being addressed. This research interpreted in the form of a script provides a different and varied point of view. The storied approach in combination with the variety of scenes invites stakeholders into the discussion on the impact of drama education on the development of some high school learners in an accessible manner. The data has been interpreted through a script in which the author deals with the various concepts, but gives body and voice to them, providing context for the ideas and subsequently inviting

audience and reader to interact in a very different way using an art form, in this case a dramatic script, to communicate for the analysis. In addition, the research also further validates the role that arts education in general and drama education in particular potentially has in terms of its impact on the lives of high school students in a southern Manitoban context.

### **Future Research**

In considering the potential for future studies by other researchers, the topic of the impact drama has on the development of students can be further delved into and explored. For instance, what is the impact of drama education on students who are reluctant learners? Are there specific forms of drama and theatre that are having a greater impact on a high school student's development? What is the effect of drama education on high school learners who have experienced significant trauma in their lives? What is the impact of drama education in the development of early years' students? In addition, using arts-based research to investigate the/a topic to complement other methodologies is another area of further research exploration.

The world now, more than it ever has, requires individuals who are creative risk-takers (Pink, 2006; Robinson, 2015). It requires people who are willing to dare boldly, and when failure is imminent do not surrender, but rather band together and push through or attempt the task again with renewed perspective. My research findings provide evidence to suggest that drama education plays an integral role in helping to shape some students into individuals with these qualities. As a result of interpreting the collected data for this research in the form of a dramatic script, I have offered a diverse audience of stakeholders the opportunity to consider anew how empowering drama education can be for some high school students, and just how integral it can be in human development.



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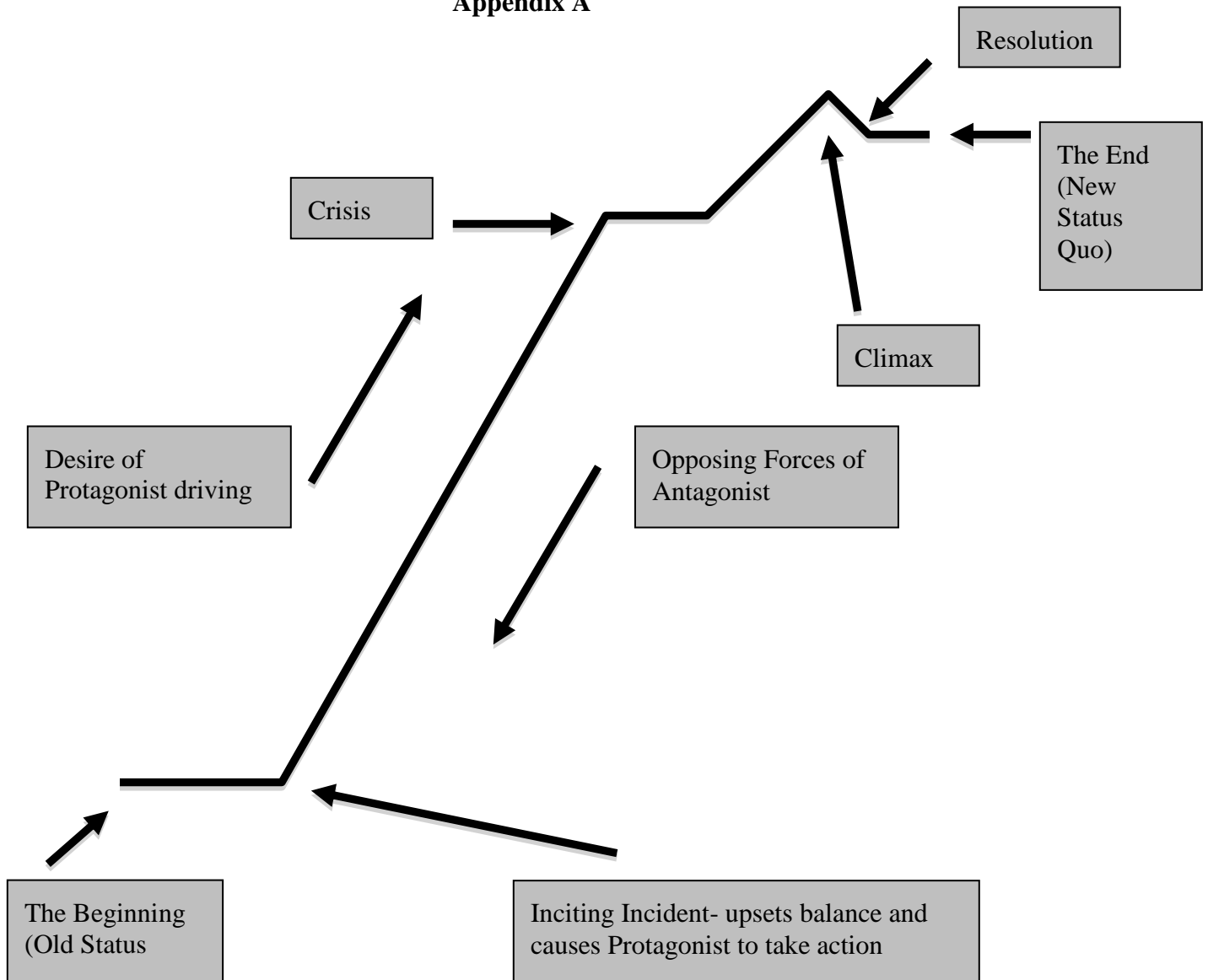
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Appendix A



Dramatic Structure Chart (Martini, 2013)

## Appendix B

Interviews were conducted one on one with each of the participants.

### Questions for Interview #1

1. What prompted you to get involved in drama in high school?
2. What prompted you to take a drama class initially?
3. Describe what it is like for a student to be part of a dramatic experience.
4. Explain in detail one of your best moments in drama class/as part of a school production. Can you tell me specifically what made it so good?
5. Describe for me one of your worst moments in drama class/as part of a school production. Again, can you tell me specifically what made it so bad?
6. What have you learned (about yourself, others, life in general) as a result of your participation in drama?
7. Describe for me what is going on for you in this image/video of you in the heat of performance.
8. Of the show posters on my wall, chose one that stands out for you based on the impact it had on you (good or bad) and describe that experience.
9. Journals are often used to process the learning that goes on in a drama class. Did you use one during your time in drama? How has it helped you in terms of your own development? Give me a descriptive example of what a noteworthy entry might look like for you.
10. Paint (figuratively not literally) a then (before you took a drama class or were part of a school production experience) and now (after having spent time in a drama class/part of a production) picture of yourself.

11. Looking back at your high-school experience, how did drama impact your social and emotional development?
12. Did drama allow for opportunities for you to experience/think beyond your capacity/comfort level? Can you explain?
13. Were there any key elements from taking drama that helped you in your understanding of the work of a dramatic artist that also carry beyond the realm of drama/theatre education?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to share about drama and/or its impact on you?
15. Metaphorically speaking, fill in the following sentence starter. Drama is \_\_\_\_\_.

Explain what you have just shared.

### Appendix C

Interviews were conducted one on one with each of the participants.

#### Questions for Interview #2

As the questions for each interviewee were based on their responses as a result of Interview #1, both in finding out more about interesting commonalities, blatant discrepancies, or exploring interesting key concepts, I have not written down specific common questions. Types of questions asked are as follows:

1. In our first interview, you mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Could you elaborate further on this?
2. You said that you were going to bring in a photo/image/artifact from a dramatic experience you remembered and shared during interview #1. Could you show it to me and talk about its significance in terms of its impact on you and your development?
3. You had started to talk about a dramatic experience during interview #1 that you said you needed to 'sort out' before elaborating on any further. Can you share about it now?
4. In reviewing what you shared during the first interview, you said \_\_\_\_\_ then went on to say \_\_\_\_\_. Can you explain this discrepancy?
5. I was fascinated when you talked about \_\_\_\_\_ in terms of your drama experience. I wondered about how you think others might respond to a similar situation?

**Appendix D**

Field Note Template (Creswell 2008)

Field Notes

Setting:

Date:

Time:

Length of Observation:

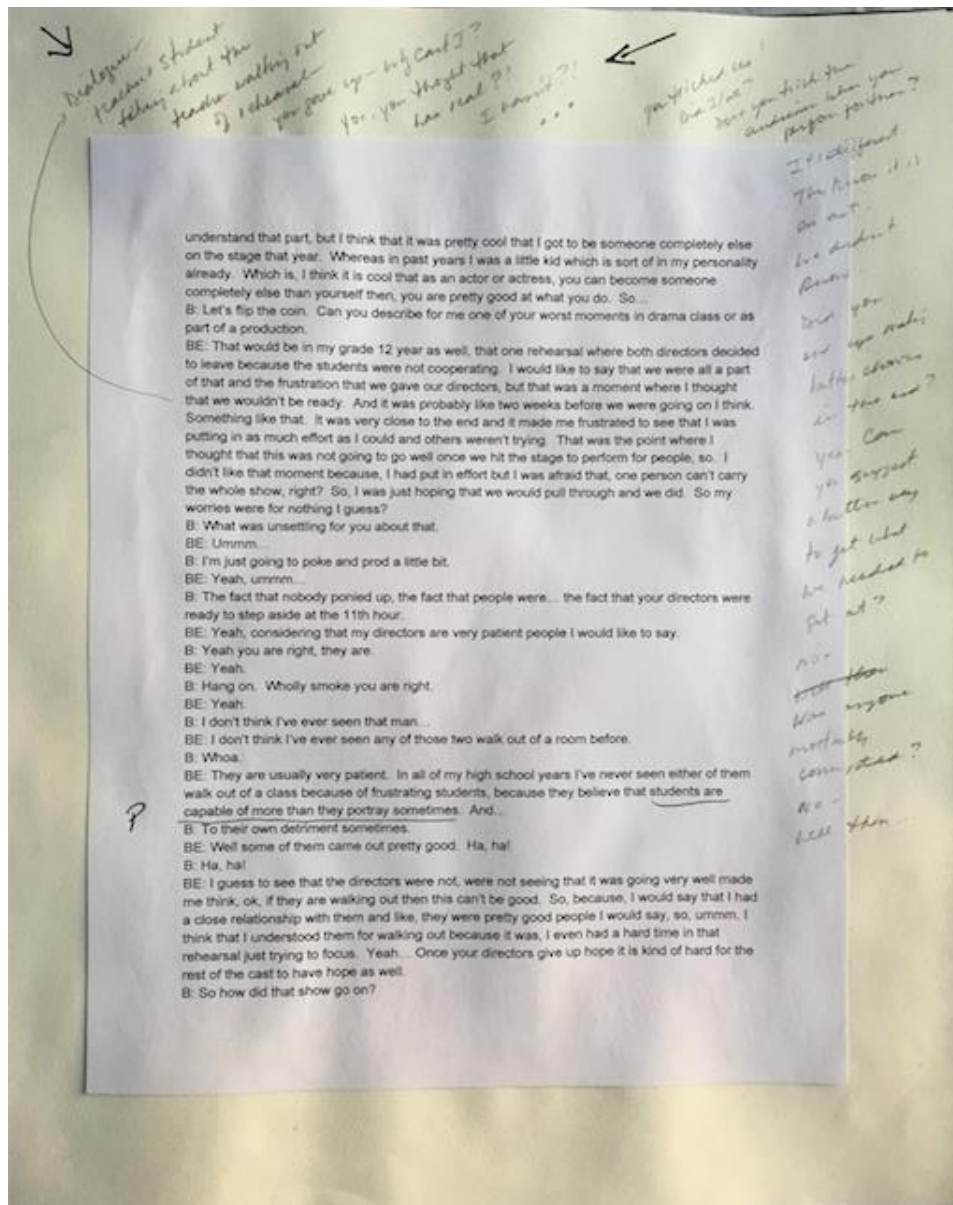
Description of Participant

Reflective Notes



Appendix F

Journal of Journal/Promptbook



### Appendix G

#### Concept discovery/‘Writing on the Wall’

