

BEYOND THE BORDERS:

A teacher's introspection on transformative pedagogy using critical theory and drama

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores a pedagogical enquiry that has transformed the way I think and the way I teach. I used a variety of critical and theatre theories to frame my enquiry and for four years consecutively, visited a non-government organization (NGO) in India that uses theatre as an alternate pedagogical tool. I reflected upon the methodological differences between the theatre practices of the NGO and my practices. I then turned my enquiry inward to consider how my learning informed my teaching practices. I then created an alternate theatre project for some students in the American Midwest with Ashok, an artist from India. Ashok spent twelve days training the students in what I refer to as action theatre, while I coordinated, observed and reflected. This theatre is a form of social activism; it is designed to provide a forum for the students to express their socio-political views and raise individual and collective social awareness in the process. After the training period, the students presented a play using these theatre methods. They engaged in discussion with their audience directly after their play. After the training period, Ashok returned to India. He took on the role of mentor and informant to my ongoing enquiry. My enquiry then shifted from an introspective one to a practical one. Some of the students who wished to do so continued creating plays in this fashion. I took over the leadership of the group at their school. A new theatre troupe was created and I used the concepts learned at the NGO and from Ashok in an American suburban context. The theatre troupe created plays for three years. When I moved back to Canada, the troupe stopped its operations. Some students in the group continued activist work using art as a medium by finding other opportunities. I turned my enquiry inward once again to reflect upon how these processes have changed the way I think and the way I teach.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to a grandmother and a daughter. My maternal grandmother passed away at the age of 100 on December 15, 2009, the day that I defended this thesis. Grammie was a passionate and devoted high school English teacher. When I was a child, she inspired me with her stories about her students and how she motivated them to write creatively. She retired at the age of 70 and was given a bicycle and she went exploring. She was generous, witty and very headstrong. My daughter Shaela was born in 2007, well after the theatre project and research upon which this thesis is based, but before the writing of this work. Shaela is the biggest blessing I have been given so far; she is the joy of my life and quite possibly my most influential teacher ever.

I especially thank all of the students who joined me on this journey and especially the nine research participants who generously shared their valuable insights and taught me more than I ever could have expected and gave me incredible hope for the future, as well as Subodh and Ashok for their patience, faith and for opening up my mind and showing me alternate paths in pedagogy.

I thank Larry O'Farrell and Rebecca Luce-Kapler, who reminded me to honour the arts in this work and encouraged me to think academically in ways that I have never thought of before. Larry helped me to value the arts in education, introduced me to ritual theatre and gave excellent theatre advice. Rebecca encouraged me to think creatively and academically at the same time. She opened up the world of narrative writing as well as creative academic writing to me. Rebecca's attention for detail and perennial patience with me as I struggled to write helped me to eventually

believe in my thoughts and in the processes that I chose for this work. She made academic writing come alive for me and she has also helped me to connect with the feminine voice that I have been suppressing for years.

I thank the mothers in my life: My mother has instilled in me an independent spirit and a passion for adventure and learning that defines me today. Miriam has helped me to affirm the feminine and supported me at times when I thought I was alone. Jane has taught me to raise my standards and to respect myself and love others unconditionally. Mary, Kate, Kathy, Deb, Kay, Miriam, Dorothy, Debbie, Bonnie, Marian, Elinor, and others—have bestowed upon me motherly love and guidance; these supports have sustained me and taught me to give my love and support to the students whom I teach.

I thank the fathers in my life. My father has helped me to grow spiritually. Rex encouraged me to think and teach creatively and to take risks; Bill showed me that education must include social justice; Phil taught me a strong work ethic and had faith in me when I was not exhibiting much promise.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband and best friend, who has embraced our life together and makes it a beautiful adventure. He is the kindest person that I know. I love his patience with people, his playfulness and his open mind.

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CHAPTER ONE

THESIS GUIDE: A READING COMPANION

Thesis map

This thesis is written in first person narrative form and in three acts to represent a full-length play. Each act follows my pedagogical transformation chronologically. The purpose of my research is explored introspectively in Act I and a précis of the purpose and rationale follow this thesis map. The rationale, conceptual framework and review of literature mirrors this chronological transformation and these elements are embedded throughout the thesis. The methodology is briefly identified in Act III, and an elaboration of methods follows this map in the Thesis Guide. Data and discussion are introduced in Act II and are embedded throughout Act II and Act III.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to document my transformation as a teacher. In this thesis, I look inward to my teaching practices and my values toward art and social justice in order to consider a pedagogy that incorporates social action through the medium of drama as a holistic, comprehensive process rather than a pragmatic, compartmentalized one. I explore some complexities of an action theatre project/troupe that I designed with an artist from India. Using critical theory as a lens, I reflect upon my experiences and my role as an educator. I shift my understanding of pedagogy from the categorical, such as a teacher of drama, to an understanding of myself as an individual connected to students and the world through cultural relationships that include privilege, difference and complexity. By navigating the research process, the examination of my pedagogy undergoes a prolonged and deep scrutiny. By writing about the pedagogy that I

strive to develop, I share my insights with others for the consideration of pedagogical processes.

Rationale

As an educator, I struggle with participating in pedagogies that rely heavily on standards and assessment. There is great justification for approaching arts-based education for its intrinsic aesthetic and cultural merits. It therefore seems antithetical to put into practice teaching methods and curricula that are solely outcomes-based. While learning outcomes are important, I believe that there must be space to encourage divergent thinking, creative problem solving, and fostering creativity. Regardless of the outcome achieved, the process of engaging in these activities must be valued, without conditions. It is this creative space that I seek, and once found, that I study and consider.

Methodology

I use a variety of qualitative research methods that include the following: interviewing students from Maple Creek Collegiate (MCC)—a pseudonym—who were in a theatre project and then troupe called *Beyond the Borders (BTB)*; interviewing and engaging in an ongoing dialogue with an expert informant on action theatre; using participant observation (Kirby & McKenna, 1989) of the work in progress, play productions, audience feedback and student and teacher metacognition; collecting writing folders from students who volunteered to submit their work for analysis. I initiated a call for research participants, and interviewed all who volunteered. There were nine in total. I received EREB/GREB approval for my research design and their protocols for the entire data collection process (see Appendix V for letters). Some research participants were interviewed immediately upon ethics approval; others were interviewed one or more

years later when new members volunteered to participate in my research. I am grateful to all research participants who openly shared their ideas with me and facilitated my reflection.

Interviews: Research participants

I would like to briefly introduce you to the nine research participants: their names are pseudonyms and I use the past tense to reflect the the time of data collection for which these profiles apply.

Alex

Alex was a grade 11 student at MCC. She was an active member of the drama club. She was an enthusiastic and loyal member of *BTB* from its inception until her graduation from MCC. Alex was a very hard worker and took a rigorous academic program, was heavily involved in extra-curricular music, drama and sports activities. She was also an active member in her church. Alex joined for the theatrical learning experience, to challenge herself, and to raise awareness.

Aruna

Aruna was a grade 10 student at MCC. She had prior experience in theatrical and dance activities, both in and out of Maple Creek. She was interested in theatre and dance from a world perspective and had heard about Indian theatre and dance forms. Aruna joined *BTB* at the beginning and stayed until her graduation from high school. She was enrolled in the mainstream courses at Maple Creek, and also got involved in some sports and volunteer activities. Aruna was very social and friendly. She did not take on leadership roles but was very effective in keeping up the team spirit.

Claire

Claire was a grade 9 student at Maple Creek Collegiate. She joined *BTB* in 2004, after a theatre event at the school. Claire took on many small and large acting roles and in the last two years of the programme, she got involved with production and fundraising duties. She stayed with *BTB* until I moved back to Canada and was one of the participants in the India '05 Experience. Claire was also an accomplished athlete and was part of the language club at MCC. Like Aruna, Claire brought to *BTB* a perennial positive spirit and demonstrated a strong work ethic. She was very passionate about social justice.

Deilek

Deilek was a grade 9 student at MCC. He joined *BTB* in 2004 and immediately gained the respect of group members with his strong work ethic. Deilek co-wrote many of the scenes for plays produced in his first year with *BTB*. He also acted in many plays, both with *BTB*, and in Maple Creek's drama club. Deilek was a high achiever, a strong athlete, sat on a number of school clubs that are of intellectual nature, and was active with his church community. He was interested in politics and wrote letters to local, state and federal representatives regularly.

Günther

Günther was a grade 11 student at MCC and was enrolled in a rigorous academic program. He was also a high achiever. He took on many leadership roles in *BTB*. In addition to Günther's active role in Maple Creek's drama club, he was very active in the music and sports programs at the school and various church activities in the community. He excelled at all levels of his academic and extra-curricular activities. Günther joined

the program to enhance his drama training and to have a fun learning experience during his summer holidays. He stayed with *BTB* until his graduation from MCC.

Ivanka

Ivanka was a grade 10 student at MCC. She was very active in the drama club and demonstrated a serious passion for social justice. She joined *BTB* at the beginning for both of these reasons, and strived for greater leadership positions than she obtained. Ivanka was very interested in global issues and was highly media-literate. She frequently stopped by my classroom to ask about Ashok and to discuss privilege and oppression. She took a combination of mainstream and advanced courses and stayed with *BTB* until her graduation from MCC.

Sarah

Sarah was a grade 9 student at MCC. She joined *BTB* in 2004, and took on many acting roles. She also organized and produced one *Hunger Banquet*, a fundraiser that *BTB* ran twice in order to raise awareness about local and global poverty, as well as funds and food for the local food bank. Sarah was also involved with social justice projects outside of Maple Creek, such as with her church community and with Habitat for Humanity.

Shenandoah

Shenandoah was a grade 10 student at MCC. She joined *BTB* some time in the fall of 2003, after hearing about the summer activities and learning of the group's need for another musician. Her initial status was that of musician in the group, but later performed small acting roles. Shenandoah was a talented musician and athlete, and partook in a number of other extra-curricular activities such as the social action student group (SSA) at MCC on top of her rigorous academic schedule. Her interest in social justice was very

strong, but she also was interested in increasing her self-advocacy skills through her involvement in this group. Shenandoah stayed with BTB until her graduation from MCC and she was one of the members to participate in the India '05 Experience. When she joined *BTB*, she was reserved; when she left, she was very outspoken.

Taylor

Taylor was a grade 12 student at MCC. *BTB* was his first theatre experience, and he was a member of the group since the beginning. Taylor did not partake in any other drama activities at Maple Creek. Taylor was also a musician and an athlete. He decided to join the project in order to challenge his shyness and work towards a greater level of self-advocacy and awareness.

Interviews: Informant

I interviewed an expert on theatre for social change three times. V. Ashok Kumar (Ashok) provided the initial theatre training in June 2003. He mentored me throughout the lifespan of the theatre troupe. His role was that of an informant to the research. Note that this is not a pseudonym.

Ongoing dialogue

I engaged in an ongoing dialogue with Ashok. This method of intellectual development is supported by António Faundez and Paulo Freire (in Freire, A. & Macedo, 2001) and provided for clarification of developing ideas on an ongoing basis. Since Ashok and I were geographically separated, this ongoing dialogue took the form of regular emails and telephone calls. We also met a few times in India when circumstances permitted.

Participant observation

I recorded my ongoing learning by using a teaching journal, where I collected artefacts from *BTB* such as scripts, research, promotional posters and where I wrote in order to reflect upon my pedagogy. I also reflected upon student work and audience feedback in my journals. All names of students, whether they were research participants or members of *BTB* have had their names changed to pseudonyms.

Personal writing folders

Both Ashok and I recommended that students in the theatre project keep personal writing folders. I invited the research participants to tender their writing folders to me for the purpose of this research. Three of the nine participants submitted writing folders.

The Play

As mentioned above, this thesis follows my transformation that involves the intersection of critical pedagogy and art, chronologically over five years. Act I explores the beginning of my transformation, which is mainly an intellectual one. During this time, I travelled to India and reconnected with the artist in me that I had subverted. Act II explores processes that I underwent to create a praxis (Freire, 2002a) that reflected my ongoing transformation. During this time, I co-created a theatre project with Ashok that was aimed at enabling high school students to use action theatre pedagogies so that they could explore and express their world views and in the process, raise personal and collective social awareness. Act III explores my ongoing praxis as well as my reflections. During this time, I advised the group from theatre project to theatre troupe. I hope that

this thesis invokes introspection and pedagogical questioning on your part. I also hope that you enjoy this play!

CAST with speaking parts (in order of appearance):

Chorus

Rebecca Stroud Stasel	[narrator, graduate student/teacher/theatre director/activist]
Jerzy Grotowski	[theatre director, Poor People's Theatre project]
Arundhati Roy	[activist/writer, winner of the 2004 Sydney Peace Prize]
Henry Giroux	[critical theory philosopher/writer]
Augusto Boal	[theatre director/actor/writer/activist, Theatre of the Oppressed]
Martin Luther King Junior	[African American civil rights activist/minister, Montgomery Bus Boycott]
Nelson Mandela	[politician/activist, Anti-Apartheid Movement]
Subodh Pattanaik	[theatre director/writer/activist/pedagogue, creator/director of Natya Chetana, a theatre NGO supporting human rights for the people of Orissa, India]
John Berger	[art critic/painter/novelist]
Helena Norberg Hodge	[writer/linguist/activist, founder of Ladakh Project, founder & director of International Society for Ecology and Culture]
Edward Said	[literary theorist/cultural critic/activist, postcolonial theory, Orientalism]
V. Ashok Kumar	[theatre director/actor/musician/educator/activist, international fusion artistic-activist projects with artists around the world, muse to Rebecca]
Peggy McIntosh	[feminist/anti-racism activist, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack]
Neil Peart	[lyric writer & drummer for rock band RUSH]
Denis Goulet	[an academic]
Paulo Freire	[critical theorist, Pedagogy of the Oppressed]
Geoff Miles	[an academic]
Achak Deng	[Sudanese refugee who inspired Dave Eggers to write a book about his experiences]
Theodore Adorno	[an academic]
Ellen Dissanayake	[academic, anthropology and performance arts in premodern societies]
Victor Turner	[academic, anthropology and performance arts in premodern societies]
Richard Schechner	[academic, experimental drama]
Brian Sutton-Smith	[academic, experimental drama, anthropology]
Voice of Deilek* ¹	[memory of a member of BTB]
Adrian Jackson	[translator for works of Augusto Boal]
Richard Shaull	[academic, Paulo Freire's work]
Deilek*	[high school student, member of BTB]
Alex*	[high school student, member of BTB]

¹ Deilek, along with all names that have asterisks indicate students referenced in this thesis; all are pseudonyms.

CAST with speaking parts (in order of appearance) cont'd:

Cast and Crew of *Beyond the Borders*—a variety of characters' names*² appear in BTB scenes within this play

Ivanka*	[high school student, member of BTB]
Voice of Brian	[memory of an academic who attended Rebecca's Colloquium]
Tracy Crossley	[academic, action theatre, constructive controversy]
Voice of Rebecca	[Rebecca's voice in her own head]
Paul Gorski	[academic, activist, writer, current president of National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME) in the USA]
Bruce Cooper, Lance Fusarelli & Vance Randall	[academics, policy analysis]
Voice of Spect-Actor #1	[memory of an audience member at a BTB performance]
Claire*	[high school student, member of BTB]
Voice of Spect-Actor #2	[memory of an audience member at a BTB performance]
Voice of Günther*	[memory of a member of BTB]
Voice of Spect-Actor #3	[memory of an audience member at a BTB performance]
Voice of Aruna*	[memory of a member of BTB]
Voice of Spect-Actor #4	[memory of an audience member at a BTB performance]
Voice of Spect-Actor #5	[memory of an audience member at a BTB performance]
Voice of Abi*	[memory of a member of BTB]
Voice of Alex*	[memory of a member of BTB]
Taylor*	[high school student, member of BTB]
Günther*	[high school student, member of BTB]
Shenandoah*	[high school student, member of BTB]

² All character names in the scenes/plays in this thesis have been changed.

CHAPTER TWO

ACT I: Beyond the Borders of Rebecca's mind

Prologue

CHORUS: *Rebecca is a teacher of high school
Drama, Law, Languages and other stuff
She thinks teaching and roaming are so cool
and wonders what seeking a dream looks like*

*From Canada, Malaysia the US
China and India she roams about
Her choices, her wanderlust, her life
Movement and learning, the two she'll scout*

*She will tell you of her transformation
It is her play: this Thesis in three Acts
She left her warm place and into unknown
Artist, Activist, pedagogy reacts*

*The tree waits for spring to come back to life
Dormant artist awakens to new sky
With her new eyes, she feels some new strife,
as she transforms, cocoon to butterfly!*

*She questions and thinks and grows and grows
Her transformation lives and gives her voice
Creative and playful, she glows and flows
Hail to the arts! Open eyes, a big choice.*

*She sees new suffering, as old as time
Seeks humanity and equity in school halls
For someone told her to keep searching and hoping
For the cracks within the strongest school walls!*

*She doesn't know what lies beyond the cracks
But is certain that art and equity dance there
Will you look for this freedom in your way some day?
This is her journey; she hopes that you care.*

Scene i: *Graduate school: Queen's University, Faculty of Education. Rebecca has just started her Masters programme and finds herself interested in Cultural Studies. She struggles with the numerous manifestations of RESEARCH and a heavy reading schedule. In the midst of falling behind on her duties, she learns that she has been selected to receive a generous travel fellowship, in order to travel to rural India to attend*

the International People's Theatre Festival, hosted by non government organization (NGO) Natya Chetana. Her professors graciously support Rebecca's leave from the Queen's campus.

REBECCA:

My experience in graduate school was destined to be shaped by 9/11 from the start. September 11, 2001 was the first day of classes in my programme. Like for many others, the events of 9/11 awed me; they also made clear certain distinctions between Canada and the United States that for me had been blurred for years. My mother is American. As a child, the only difference that I felt between visiting relatives on my father's side and visiting relatives on my mother's side was that we had to drive north to visit my father's kin and south to visit my mother's kin. National identity, politics, and cultural ethos all eluded me as a child. Because the cultural ethos of both nations was imbedded in the values and traditions of my extended family, my sense of identity blurred cultural distinctions between the two countries. I felt like my country was twice the size as that of my classmates, with the small issue of needing to answer a few questions at the Ivy Lea Bridge once in a while. If questioned about my own status, I of course felt Canadian, on account of my having spent most of my childhood years in Canada, but had my parents chosen to raise their children in the USA, I think I would have felt American. Several years prior to 9/11, I would start to follow both Canadian and American election campaigns, and so perhaps my personal sense of national identity was budding, about to bloom anyway, but the events of 9/11 really brought into focus the different lived realities of my relatives north and south of the border. It was at this point that the borders between these two countries became clear. Perhaps this clarity has also been felt by other Canadians and Americans whose lifestyle includes multiple border crossings, since the events of 9/11 have led to legislation such as the *Patriot Act* and *Homeland Security*,

which has made anyone crossing the border, but especially those of a particular skin colour or passport name (Buderi, 2004), to be acutely aware of the military might and political power of the US government.

For me, as a new graduate student enrolled in several courses in cultural studies at Queen's University, unlike the US administration's increasing jingoism, I needed to know why someone would be so motivated by hatred to conceive of the 9/11 plan in the first place. I was not alone in this curiosity. Many of my graduate course lectures reframed their focus around the events of 9/11. Within a couple weeks of starting the programme, I was reading Edward Said as well as Ann Coulter. While Coulter (2001) spoke of responding to the 9/11 attacks with more killing and converting certain people to Christianity, Said (2001) called for critical examinations that would lead to a greater understanding of the East and West. Hmm! Were they talking about the same event? I would often find refuge in the aphorisms of John Berger (1977), such as "we only see what we look at" (p. 8) and "never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one" (in Roy, 1997, epigraph) I find these statements very poignant. First, Berger challenges me to discover what it is in specific situations that I am inclined to look at and also what I am inclined to not see, by virtue of my biases, interests and social conditioning. Second, Jerzy Grotowski (in Bogart, 2001) unpacks Berger's warning about narrowing one's interpretation of a single story to equalling a single truth:

JERZY: If a phenomenon can be defined as 'it is that, and only that,' that means it exists only in our heads. But if it has a real life existence, we can never hope to define it completely. Its frontiers are always moving, while exceptions and analogies keep opening up." (Grotowski, as cited in Bogart, 2001, p. 55)

REBECCA: Grotowski's message makes sense, and yet, I can recount many instances where conflicting stories about one singular event have given me pause to reflect.

Perhaps it is human nature to assume that the truths that each of us has constructed are right and that those with conflicting truths are false. When such discrepancies come to light however, we are made aware of the fluidity of the phenomena we experience.

Clearly, Coulter and Said must have been looking at different aspects of 9/11 to come up with such vastly different analyses of the event. I was surprised that the Palestinian male writer made more sense to me than the American female one. At the time, I was neither familiar with the vast diversity in tone and style in which both Coulter and Said write.

Said's writing to me at the time seemed very intellectual and somewhat intimidating to a new graduate student. Coulter's glib style on the other hand, seemed designed more for shocking than for appealing to an intellectual community. While I have a taste for sarcasm, I could not fathom Coulter's remarks because they seemed to be intended for an audience who would take such remarks seriously. Later, as I read more widely on 9/11, I was personally struck by an article by Arundhati Roy (2001), entitled "War is Peace." In spite of her searing sarcasm, it is clear that Roy is both serious about her writing and offers hope to her writers. She starts her article with the subtitle "The world doesn't have to choose between the Taliban and the US government. All the beauty of the world—literature, music, art—lies between these two fundamentalist poles" (p. 1). I am drawn to this claim because in spite of the grim topic as well as the seemingly untouchable and ever-powerful entities of Taliban and US government, Roy offers hope to her readers. The hope is to be found in the possibility that lies beyond the borders of the opposing ideological poles. The impact of this is twofold for me. First, Roy shows that there is always space for possibilities even where one might least expect to find it. Second, Roy calls her readers to look to the arts to find possibility and hope.

The arts offer possibilities to break through a variety of oppressive systems. Many artists have already discovered that their work lies outside of the perimeters of binary thinking. Roy then goes on to put a human face on the war on terrorism. She observes, “People rarely win wars, governments rarely lose them. People get killed. Governments moult and regroup, hydra-headed” (p. 1). This challenges the numerous messages that the media dispersed, indicating that the war on terror could be won. Roy unpacks what it means to win: the winner is situated at one end of a binary pole and at the other end is the loser. And while the mainstream media had elected the Taliban as the intended loser of this war, Roy provides another illustration in which political players such as Taliban and the US administration are situated at opposing yet similar poles, while the losers of this conflict are the bystanders. By reframing the conflict in this way, Roy contrasts those who hold political power and those who do not. She contrasts the effects of war on governments with the effects of war on people. The image of the hydra is powerful because a hydra has many heads, and thus it is difficult to ascertain which head is the true or one identity. When a government becomes hydra-headed, it is powerful, as is the mythical hydra, and it is elusive. There are many heads to overcome; one might just as well submit and risk less or no wrath. Roy then goes on to say that “They first use flags to shrink-wrap peoples' minds and suffocate real thought” (p. 1) illustrating how the use of a flag may direct people into a simplistic notion of patriotism, negating the complexity of the real issues, or the “real thought.” I also noted the increasing images of the American flag in the media when I visited south of the border. Roy displays her bold and poetic writing prowess when she illustrates the duplicity of Tony Blair and George W. Bush in their messages to the people, then sums it up with three short oxymoronic metaphors:

ARUNDHATI: When he announced the air strikes, President George Bush said, 'We're a peaceful nation.' America's favourite ambassador, Tony Blair, (who also holds the portfolio of Prime Minister of the UK), echoed him: 'We're a peaceful people.' So now we know. Pigs are horses. Girls are boys. War is Peace. (Roy, 2001, p. 2)

REBECCA: Perhaps Roy intended to elicit a laugh to ease the tension of this powerful essay. This would be fitting, as the art of which she speaks of finds itself in between the poles and art often contains elements of tragicomedy. I enjoy her simple illustrations. These would be useful to an audience that might be living in a context of simple answers. Her deconstruction certainly is accessible, and I am thankful that Roy had the courage to speak so boldly about this issue. Roy invites me to be brave in articulating injustices that I perceive in my own lived experiences.

Roy's criticism of the actions of the US and UK governments of that time facilitates a postcolonial interpretation of US foreign policy by illustrating its mission infrastructure as culturally myopic. Regarding the food packets that the US military dropped in Afghanistan, she writes, "Nevertheless, the food packets had a photo-op all to themselves. Their contents were listed in major newspapers. They were vegetarian, we're told, as per Muslim Dietary Law(!)" (p.3) By referring to the food aid that was dropped into Afghanistan as a photo opportunity, Roy invites her readers to question the motives behind the decision to provide aid to Afghan civilians. For me, the effect is to consider the cost and energy involved in dropping aid as an advertisement campaign rather than a charitable donation or humanitarian aid, which is how it was presented in the media. Although there is no question that the aid was delivered, Roy portrays the motives behind the act as self-interested. In addition, I find Roy's article to be very powerful in her economy of words and symbols. In this case, the specific voice of the speaker is anonymous; however, the sponsoring agent (the US government) is clearly visible. The

exclamation point in parenthesis serves to illustrate the error in the US government's cultural myopia, in this case, by misunderstanding Muslim dietary laws. As an educator, I try to be respectful of cultures and practices that are not my own, and my time in Malaysia taught me just how complex cultural diversity is. In a sense, this complexity is veiled in Canadian schools, as many students who are racially mixed are not recognized but are rather absorbed into the mainstream culture and assumed to be simply Canadian. However, anyone who has spent time exploring the ethos and cultures that constitute Canadian-ness would be quick to acknowledge that defining what is Canadian is an elusive task that yields contradictory results. However, Roy's exclamation point serves to remind me to check my assumptions about other cultures, especially when I make public statements, as in a classroom for example. In this sense, the work of Roy and Said have helped me tremendously, not just to examine issues of power and integrity on the world stage, but within my own little world, where my words may be taken to construct truth and understanding for those whom I teach.

Perhaps one of the biggest imperatives that I learned through graduate courses was to think critically. I had heard teaching colleagues, especially English teachers, speaking of this, but the articles that we read and the discussions that took place took critical thinking to a new level for me. Learning how to think critically and teaching students how to think critically is both complex and treacherous.

HENRY: How does one explore the contradiction between validating certain forms of "correct" thinking and the pedagogical task of helping students become critical agents rather than simply follow the dictates of authority[?] (Giroux, 1994a, p. 146)

REBECCA: This is a perennial question for me. Who am I to validate thinking which is right and that which is wrong? If I am successful at distinguishing these for my students, am I not inculcating them to my biases, and if so, how can this lead to critical thinking?

I heard a word in my graduate classes used in a derogatory fashion. The word was privilege. What confounded me at the time was why all of my professors and the PhD students attending these lectures, when they clearly viewed privilege as something morally problematic, were they all quick to situate themselves within a social context of privilege? It would take a couple of years for me to embrace the significance of privilege, and when I finally did, I would also find my place in the work of multicultural education. I will address issues involving Whiteness and privilege in detail in Act II.

It is fair to say that I quickly began to drown in my graduate work. This was my own fault. I had taken on too many TA/RA duties and had underestimated the impact that these duties would have on my ability to keep up with the readings, the essays, and my family duties. I came by these mistakes honestly; I have always been both ambitious and a hard worker. I have always taken risks. When new opportunities arose to take on a new responsibility, I thought of all the adventure—the learning potential—and eagerly accepted. When a professor suggested that I write a grant proposal for the Elliot-Upitis travel fellowship so that I could go to India for a month to complement my graduate programme, I eagerly accepted. I lived with one of my brothers at the time, who had spent considerable time in a relationship with a PhD student. His words of encouragement as he observed me toiling over the writing of the grant application (thus falling further behind in my work) were: ‘I don’t know why you bother; no one ever gets these grants in the end.’ True to my stubborn and renegade nature, I ignored my brother’s

advice to stop wasting time on this silly travel idea and get back to my graduate course readings. When I received the letter of acceptance of this grant, I'm not sure who was more surprised, my brother or myself. In any event, I scrambled to get blessings and assignments from my professors and TA/RA advisors, and planned my trip.

Traveling alone is not new to me, and so I do not find it intimidating. I spent three weeks backpacking in Vietnam in 1995 all alone. It was a self-imposed rite of passage into "backpackerdom". Prior to this trip, most of my backpacking travels were done with the company of people whom I met in Malaysia in the early 1990s. In Kingston, I brushed off predictions by colleagues, friends and family, that I was crazy to go to India by myself, that India was virtually impossible to navigate alone, and that I would surely become sick while there. Two professors at the Faculty of Education—Larry O'Farrell and Shehla Burney—knew the director of the NGO Natya Chetana, where I would spend half of the month-long stay. This was enough insurance for me. Fortunately—like my brother's psychic talents—my naysayers' predictions proved false as well.

Scene ii: *The "extra" graduate course. This scene takes place in two locations: the first is at Natya Chetana's office headquarters (HQ), where Rebecca and a number of other foreign guests use as their "home base." The second is at Natyagram, which is a small theatre commune outside of the village of Khurda, some 30 km from Bhubaneswar. Rebecca has just arrived to learn about Indian Theatre forms. She believes that this will be her only trip to India. How little she knows of her own future!*

AUGUSTO: Art is good for the health and should be recommended by all doctors. So is Theatre! (Boal, 2001, p. 148)

MARTIN: I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. (Luther King, 1963, p. 3)

NELSON: No single person can liberate a country. You can only liberate a country if you act as a collective. (Mandela, 2004, p. 157)

SUBODH: If we want to see a change in our society, we need to address the mind of the people. (Pattanaik, as cited in *Natya Chetana*, 2004, p. 7)

AUGUSTO: Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it. (Boal, 1992, p. xxxi)

SUBODH: The play should be around a subject that is very close to the problems or tensions of human life of present days. (Pattanaik, 2003, p. 13)

REBECCA:

Natya Chetana, translated to English from the local Oriya language, means “theatre of awareness.” *Natya Chetana*’s many projects all centre around this principle of raising awareness. Its mission is,

[T]o explore and develop theatre and artistic abilities for reviving own cultural roots and highlighting socio-political-economical themes for supporting people’s movements leading towards a self-reliant society with equal justice and right (*sic*) (Natya Chetana, 2004, p. 4).

I knew this much prior to arriving, and also that *Natya Chetana* members frequently travel by bicycle through the countryside of rural India, speaking with the local people and constructing plays about the issues that the local people faced. The vast scope of the work of *Natya Chetana* would soon begin unfolding itself to me.

I arrived in the Bhubaneswar airport in the rural and socioeconomically depressed state of Orissa, on March 2, 2002. My directions were to look for an Indian man holding a sign with my name at the airport. I saw numerous signs, but none with my name on them. After a couple of hours, I tried to contact the NGO by phone, but the person who answered could not speak English. I emailed the director Subodh Pattanaik informing him of my trouble and my intention to find a taxi to take me to *Natya Chetana*’s headquarters (HQ). After two more hours, I left the airport alone with someone carrying my luggage to a taxi stand, and once outside, I noticed two things. First, the sun was invitingly hot for

someone coming from a winter blizzard. Second, there was a man waiting patiently outside the airport holding a sign with my name on it. I approached him and said “Subodh!” to which he replied “No, come.” I was led to a white Ambassador car, where Subodh waited and greeted me warmly. He too, had been waiting for hours.

It was explained to me that all foreign guests were to sleep at HQ, in Bhubaneswar. The Indian guests plus a PhD student from Finland had been cleared through the authorities to stay at *Natyagram*, which is where the actual festival takes place every year. *Natyagram* means “theatre village.” Subodh and the other full-time members of *Natya Chetana* designed and built this theatre village. It sits on a plot of land amidst several farms, houses and a cement plant on the periphery of Khurda.

After meeting the other foreign guests that came from France, Belgium, Finland, and Canada, I retired to my room, which I shared with a reporter from Belgium and an actress from France. Sleeping atop thin mats on hard granite floors amidst the faint humming of mosquitoes might sound impossible, but with the requisite jetlag, I slept fitfully until the next morning. Somewhere between five and six a.m., we were awoken to have a snack and then drive to *Natyagram*. A convoy of jeeps and cars transported us daily from HQ to *Natyagram*. We returned around midnight every night. The daily ride to Khurda served as an excellent eye-opener for me to see how challenging daily life can be for many Indians. The Transnational Highway from Kolkata to Chennai was in its early development stages. In 2002, the highway to Khurda was simply called the National Highway. It consisted of uneven and sometimes severed roadways, full of potholes and dust, stray dogs and cows, women and men on their way to work, often carrying large bundles balanced on their heads, children in uniforms, holding hands, giggling on their

way to school, motorcycles, cars, busses and horn-honking trucks, their music bringing my attention to their elaborately decorated bodies, their interiors adorned by flowers covering various deities. The multiple forms of traffic all vied for the same highway spaces at times. The drivers of the *Natya Chetana* convoys skilfully navigated what seemed to me a very complicated obstacle course. Eventually, we turned off the National Highway on to a dirt road, also full of potholes, past a concrete factory, and into a vast, arid and rugged terrain. The entrance to *Natya Chetana*'s compound *Natyagram* was marked by a large sign, painted in both Oriya and English, welcoming visitors to the 2002 *International People's Theatre Festival*. A statue of the Hindu goddess Saraswati stood in her dancing pose, greeting guests as well. The compound was gated.

Every time I visit *Natyagram*, I note several changes that reflect its ongoing development. In 2002, on my first visit, *Natyagram* consisted of a large rust-brown building called "Museum", where numerous artefacts and images are kept, including a number of photos of Larry O'Farrell visiting *Natya Chetana* a few years earlier, an open-air round building with a thatched roof, called "Meeting Place", where the Morning Prayer, play adjudications, rehearsals, workshops, meetings and various other activities take place, a tent called "Reception", where actress and secretary for *Natya Chetana* Sujata welcomed people and endeavoured to orient them to *Natyagram*, a long, rectangular, two-storey building, which served as "Eating Hall" upstairs and "Dormitories" downstairs, a smaller rectangular building, painted yellow with several fire pits, called "Kitchen", a very long but thin rectangular building, painted both yellow and then with various black designs and images depicting rural and theatre life on it, which is where Subodh's "Office", "Director's Sleeping Quarters" for Subodh and his wife, and a

“Storeroom” were kept. Behind the dormitories/eating hall was a long, narrow, wall. This would eventually become dormitories for traveling theatre troupes. In 2002, a number of cows lived there, and some tents were pitched for the traveling theatre troupes. Behind this, toward the reception tent, was a large constructed stage. The stage had a stone foundation and covered with wood and packed sand. It achieved a proscenium-like quality by the use of numerous black and khaki tarpaulins. It was also wired for light and sound, and the tech tent sat beside the stage. Beside the kitchen was a manual water pump, where the members of *Natya Chetana* would wash and brush their teeth. Behind this was a fence, where one could see beyond to a large water reservoir.

The dormitories had been assigned to various members of *Natya Chetana* and Indian guests by gender. Satu, the Finnish PhD student, dressed similarly to the other women of *Natya Chetana*, stayed in the female dormitory. One of the rooms that was used as a dormitory at night was converted to a guest room daily strictly for the use of foreign guests. This room would have a table with bottled water, fruits and snacks, and many mats on the floor for us to find refuge from the hot sun and take a nap, should the need arise. I would retreat to this room during the daily adjudications, which were held in Oriya, with moderate translation to English. These adjudications were microphoned, and so we could hear the English segments easily from this room. During these times, I slept off jetlag, wrote in my journal, and got to know the foreign guests. I began bonding with Satu, who had been spending at least six months out of every year for the past few years in India, working at NGOs and then returning to Finland to complete her graduate work.

When we arrived each morning, the festival activities were already under way. We missed the Morning Prayer, the yoga and sometimes part of the first workshop. We

were cordially greeted and shown to our workshops. There, I noticed a heavy reliance upon physicality. I would come to appreciate this as a hallmark of the theatre practiced both by *Natya Chetana* and by Ashok, a freelance artist whom I met at the festival, and with whom I would later engage in two international collaborative projects.

Physicality has not been central to my theatre experience, either in my practices or in most of the theatre that I have seen. I can only think of three instances where I have used physicality as a specific theatre technique. First, a play I directed in 1991, *Go Ask Alice* (Shiras, 1976), revolves around the events prior to Alice's death. She experiments with LSD and I used sequences of creative movement and dance to illustrate Alice's hallucinations. Second, when I taught drama in several rural Ontario schools at the beginning of my career, all of my junior classes would do a unit in Children's Theatre. Twice a year, we toured the local feeder schools, performing plays. Many of my students acted abstract objects, such as trees and parts of monster caves. Additionally, my students would call upon students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 classes in the audiences to participate by miming various things to complement the plays. Finally, I deliberately used physicality to explore abstractions in scenes from *The Farm Show* (Theatre Passe Muraille, 1976), a play that I directed in the late 1990s. I dealt with physical restrictions creatively: fire regulations restricted staging options and prohibited the amounts of hay that we needed; it was impossible to use actual tractors and other large farm implements; there were scenes in which the setting was too expansive for a high school stage. Hence, many scenes involved elaborate mimes.

The point here is that I viewed physicality as symbolic and a choice that a director might make when an alternative type of representation was called for. It would indicate

an elevated sense of creativity for a more advanced theatre crowd and not used as a general rule in theatre. Perhaps my assumptions were that the average audience would not appreciate the concept of suspension of disbelief to this extent unless they were inclined to a lifestyle that included a lot of theatre. If these were my assumptions at the time, I would attribute this to the rarity of physicality in plays that I saw as an audience member. At *Natya Chetana's International People's Theatre Festival*, however, physicality was used as a staple in theatre activities, from the workshops to the plays. I noted in my journal the effectiveness of physicality in the play *Biplabi Bihanga* (Natya Chetana, 2002) that was featured. This was not the first play that I had seen performed entirely in a language that I do not understand, but was the first of such plays in which I could understand the basic plot as well as various themes. In particular, I was impressed with the performance of one actor named Nibaran, who played a monkey. Many of the characters in this play were animals. This was a play about communal harmony and urbanization. Nibaran's character came alive on account of his fantastic understanding and usage of physicality. His portrayal was so visually strong that one would be able to describe the monkey's disposition. *Natya Chetana* is a very well organized and documented NGO. Upon reading through some of their publications, I learned the value of physicality in the context of the social landscape in which the organization presents their plays. In the publication *Intimate theatre* (Pattanaik, 2003), Subodh explains the rationale for focussing so much on the visual elements of a theatre production:

SUBODH: The play should be around a subject that is very close to the problems or tensions of human life of present days. And the theme should be explained through an event, which is possible to explain through visuals. People come to SEE a theatre and never expect to HEAR a theatre. Even then there are story telling theatre forms which can sustain the expectation of the audiences that speak in the same language. However, Natya Chetana believes theatre as a universal

language to bridge the gaps of the existing spoken languages. (Pattanaik, 2003, p. 13).

REBECCA: While I agree with Subodh that people do indeed come to see a theatre rather than to hear it, my experience in most Western theatre productions is that they are dialogue-based. There are many lines and few stage directions in these theatre texts. Productions mirror this tendency. Even plays with elaborate stage directions, such as those written by Tennessee Williams, for example, are rooted in the dialogue in the script. I believe that Subodh's logic may have practical applications in Western theatre, although most audiences in North America are not familiar with the need to bridge the gaps of the existing spoken languages. Most plays I have seen and all plays that I have directed have been in English, and it is usually correctly assumed that everyone in the audience has some functional mastery of English. When I went to a production of *Balconville* (Fennario, 1979) my English-speaking friends noted an excessive use of French in the play, which made it inaccessible to them. Since I speak both English and French, my experience had been quite different; I found it very refreshing to watch a play fusing English and French. It resonated with conversations I often participated in with some of my francophone friends. However, in Orissa, as well as in many parts of India, one cannot assume that everyone in a theatre crowd will speak the same language (Ashok, 2003). According to Subodh (Pattanaik, 2003-2005), there are more than a dozen official languages in India, of which Oriya is one. In addition, there are fifteen dialects of Oriya in Orissa. Some people may not be able to understand dialects not close to their own. In addition to this, there are 64 different tribal communities in Orissa, each with their local language. Many tribal people do not understand any version of Oriya fully. I have since learned that not all Indian languages have their own alphabet. Konkani, for example,

borrowed the letters of the language that is used in proximity to the Konkani people and so some will use the Marathi letters while others use Kannada letters. By creating plays that are “more visual and less dependent on dialogue” (Pattanaik, 2003, p. 14), *Natya Chetana* effectively bridges this gap, thus including all of their audience members.

JOHN: Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. (Berger, p. 7, 1977)

REBECCA: Yes. I have a one-year-old daughter, who is just starting to try to form words. She has yet to use a specific set of phonetic sounds, such as “Mama” to consistently refer to me. Yet, if I ask her “where’s your horsey?” she will toddle over to her rocking horse, slowly climb on, and begin rocking. If I say “sit down”, she will, and then expect a bottle. If I ask her where Dolly is (her thumb-sucking doll), she will go find her doll, pick it up and begin to cuddle it. When my husband says “high five,” she puts her palm up to his, and when he says “bye bye,” she begins waving. Yet, she cannot speak. As Berger accurately notes, the child recognizes before she can speak. There is much that she understands even if she cannot verbalize these thoughts. The effect of *Natya Chetana*’s highly visual and physical theatre has left a great impression upon me.

I have since wondered how I might apply such practices in my own theatre work on a more regular basis than when I try something abstract or alternative. There is something very potent about the visual image, and the longer I teach, and the more my students become dependent on visual technologies, the more I think that while technologies are complex and come with their own sets of problems, there is something primordially appealing when messages are transmitted visually. If this is so, then a highly physical theatre may be very effective in reaching audiences and helping them to create

their own personal meanings within their own frames of reference. And if this is the case, then I believe that the meanings that people construct from visual images may be less confining or directive than verbal ones, since the exact words are not given. For example, at a workshop that I led at *Natya Chetana's International People's Theatre Festival* in 2003, one of the groups decided to depict the anger of the goddess Kali just after she had beheaded her husband. I was not familiar with the story of Kali at the time. It was clear to the Indians at the workshop that Chuni, one of *Natya Chetana's* finest actresses, who portrayed Kali, did an excellent job. I was struck by the anger in Chuni's facial expression, including the lolling of her tongue out to the side, and this made her look crazed. Chuni stood atop half a dozen other actors who were supporting her on their shoulders, thus elevating her above the crowd, just as the gods are above mortals. My attention was drawn to her fist, which she held up triumphantly. She looked awesome, angry, powerful, and god-like. I was later told that in this fist that she held up, was the head of Kali's husband. The effectiveness of this pose allowed me to construct a much different meaning than those who were familiar with Kali's story. Had I witnessed instead a scene in English, where a woman came in, announcing her recent act of killing her husband, I do not think I would have been able to appreciate the depth of human emotion as I had by watching Chuni, in her striking tableau, being carried around the working space like an icon by the other actors. Because the audience member is free to construct her own personal meanings with this image, the use of this theatre offers potent possibilities for meaning making.

Scene iii: Natya Chetana's play Biplabi Bihanga (2002) and other festival plays. It is the evening of the first night of the festival. Natya Chetana is the first of three theatre troupes to present a play. Prior to their play, a series of speeches and rituals of lighting incense and oils and presenting flowers and other decorations to honoured guests takes place.

Subodh emceeds this process, making sure to address the audience both in Oriya and English. The guests who are present on special invitation: professors, politicians, society people, reporters as well as the festival's foreign guests have all been provided chairs to sit at. In front of them, on the ground, sit several hundred local people, and in family picnic fashion, they have arrived with their blankets, snacks, and other paraphernalia to make them comfortable for the evening's activities.

REBECCA:

The theatre experience at *Natya Chetana* was unique to my theatre experiences in many ways. First, seats may have been provided but the whole decorum of audience behaviour was fluid. A respectful silence, the way I have been trained to attend performances, was neither expected nor encouraged. I had been talking with Mamata, Subodh's wife, prior to the speeches, and so I sat with her. Mamata cheerfully narrated various developments regarding the work of *Natya Chetana*. She also explained some of the characters at the beginning of their play. Had it not been the wife of the director of *Natya Chetana* speaking with me, I might have felt awkward by participating in quiet dialogue while important events were taking place on stage. I noticed that quiet conversations were taking place with other guests. It felt more like a classroom than a theatre; in certain classrooms, one may speak about the learning that is taking place without disrupting the flow of the activities, and so it seemed here.

Satu joined me, but later decided to sit with the local people on the ground. I watched her with admiration, mingling with some of the local children, who displayed joy at her arrival. When Mamata left to go speak with some of the evening's honoured guests, Ashok sat down, and quietly translated certain scenes from another play to me. An evening of theatre performances at *Natya Chetana's* festival might last several hours and consist of the work of several theatre troupes. Ashok explained that long evenings of theatre were not uncommon in the Indian experience, which made me think of what I had

read about theatre activities in Ancient Greece as well as oratory and debate activities during the pioneer days in the USA. I wondered what has happened to my attention span, to expect plays to be short, but to perhaps only be capable of focussing on a play short in length. I once fell asleep at theatre in Canada during in a 5-Act play.

Natya Chetana's plays are apparently very Indian, according to those who explained certain aspects to me. Their plays are not, however, stories from *The Bhagavad-Gita* (1972) or *The Ramayana* (1954) as many of the other plays I saw at these festivals were. From what I could tell, the plot of *Biplabi Bihanga* involved two groups of people. One group involved men in business attire, and their demeanour was impatient and authoritative. The other group was simply dressed in natural tones, with a more relaxed demeanour. I understood the interchange to involve rushed city people and simple rural folk. Perhaps the stereotypes were intended; perhaps it was me projecting my world view (Berger, 1977) onto the play. There was some quarreling between the two groups, but eventually, the two groups seemed to work things out. I think the rural group had been convinced by the business group to allow certain construction to take place. The play was set in a natural environment full of neutral colours—a variety of greens and browns—it seemed like a jungle. There were all kinds of animals, but two animals whose actors commanded a strong presence on stage. The first that struck me was a monkey, played by Nibaran. His character seemed very agitated at the developments, and just like a monkey, was quick-witted and physically agile, thus providing great resistance and opportunities for humour (for the audience) and annoyance (for the characters of the business people). The other animal that struck me was a bird, played by a young actress named Purnima. She seemed very sad, and moved around the stage singing and moving

mournfully, as if she could sense her impending doom. The play seemed to be a tragedy, and by the end, there was much destruction and sadness. My impression was that the animals and the rural people had been betrayed by the business people. I was impressed at how much I was able to appreciate this play. It held my attention from beginning to end, and had me thinking long after the play had finished.

The plays showcased at *Natya Chetana*'s festivals do not end at the conclusion of the performance. Every play gets its performance adjudicated the day following by the other theatre people at the festival as well as by certain elite theatre people who were at the performances. Adjudications take place in the Meeting Place. Microphones and translations between English and Oriya are used. I have observed adjudications in Ontario for plays that I have directed as well as plays that my students have directed at Canadian festivals such as Sears³ and the Canadian chapter of the International Thespian Society (ITS)⁴. What struck me as different at *Natya Chetana* is that the adjudications lasted much longer; one could last for three hours. During this time, adjudicators and the members of the troupe being adjudicated engage in interactive dialogues. Boal (1992) illustrates the need to break barriers between spectator and actor. Similarly, I saw no barriers between the various players. They were engaged in an intellectual discussion of their art form. Furthermore, any audience member was invited to attend, and were also invited to speak up about their own impressions. A theatre professor from Finland named Jouni spoke up frequently and his comments were responded to. Satu also spoke out a lot

³ *Sears* is a competitive drama festival that is held annually, usually in the spring. All plays are adjudicated and certain plays are selected as "winners" and the students in these plays move to the next level, until the competition is province-wide.

⁴ ITS is a non-competitive drama festival, also held annually, usually in the late fall. All plays are adjudicated, but unlike the Sears process where certain troupes "win," all troupes are presented with a celebratory banner at the end of the festival, and in my opinion, these festivals have been more beneficial to my students, who enjoyed celebrating the high quality plays produced by some of the more seasoned troupes, rather than feeling beaten by them.

during these adjudications. When a particular nuance of a character's work was referenced, for example, the actor who played the character might spend a great deal of time explaining all of the processes he used to get to this choice. It seemed to me that the theatre work carried out by the people in the theatre troupes had given their work much more in-depth thinking about their work than what I have been used to. I do not necessarily expect my high school students to consider their roles as seriously as professional actors do. Most of the people in the theatre troupes who showcase their work at *Natya Chetana* however have full time jobs and do these theatre projects on the side, which speaks volumes of their commitment to their work. It also speaks of a commitment to a level of analytical and insightful thinking that many educators try to foster in their classrooms. I would consider this engagement for years to come.

Scene iv: Around Orissa in a convoy of Ambassadors. After the festival, news of political unrest erupting in a nearby state reaches the national news. The Prime Minister of India advises tourists to suspend travel plans in the next few days. Subodh and Mamata invite all foreign guests to remain with Natya Chetana All but two guests accept.

REBECCA:

My plans to see the holy city of Varanasi after the festival on my way to New Delhi for research aborted when *Natya Chetana* invited the foreign guests to stay on with the *Natya Chetana* family. Although many Indians and tourists from abroad make spiritual pilgrimages to Varanasi, ironically, my not going there proved to be a blessing in disguise and a spiritual one at that. Subodh and Mamata arranged for us to first see the ocean and the temples in Konark, and then to take us to meet with some people who worked in NGOs up in the hill stations and tribal areas of Orissa. Although tourists flock to the seaside town of Puri, home of a famous temple, as well as to Konark to see the Sun Temple there, it was a treat to be offered alternative destinations as well. First, we spent a

day in Bhubaneswar. During this time, Subodh, Mamata, Sujata, Santosh and Chuni showed us some of their artefacts and other ongoing projects. Chuni, in addition to being a fine actress, is a skilled puppeteer. *Natya Chetana* engages in numerous theatre projects that involve elaborate usage of puppets. We were treated to a workshop at the HQ and a tour of their working spaces and their store rooms full of documents, props and puppets. Santosh, Chuni's husband, is an actor and skilled musician. He demonstrated how to play a number of Indian musical instruments. Sujata attempted to teach me and a couple other female guests how to dance a specific Indian classical dance, as well as how to tie saris. I failed miserably at both lessons, but was impressed by the intricacy and delicacy of Indian dance as well as the sari.

A convoy of cars awaited us and I departed with Subodh, Mamata, Ashok, five people from *Theatre du Fil*, a theatre troupe out of Paris, Bernie, a Belgian reporter with the European Union, and Jouni. On the long car rides between destinations, I asked Ashok many questions that were either theatrical or sociological in nature. Ashok shared generously of his knowledge. These discussions helped me to form my own understandings of the events of the festival as well as my first experience in India. By the end of this trip, I had forged a new friendship that will probably last a lifetime. Ashok invited me to Bangalore, where he could introduce me to various theatre forms. I would take almost a year to accept his invitation, but my return would inspire us to begin a collaborative project in 2003.

Scene v: Canada. Exhilarated and exhausted, Rebecca returns to graduate school, attempting to fit what seemed like a lifetime of learning into its respective compartments within the paradigms of her world. A number of voices appear in Rebecca's head, causing her to experience numerous internal arguments, such as this one:

HELENA: Only then did I recognize that I had been walking around with cultural blinders on, convinced that the Ladakhis could not be as happy as they seemed. Hidden behind the jokes and laughter had to be the same frustration, jealousy, and inadequacy as in my own society. In fact, without knowing it, I had been assuming that there were no significant cultural differences in the human potential for happiness. It was a surprise for me to realize that I had been making such unconscious assumptions, and as a result I think I became more open to experiencing what was really there. (Norberg-Hodge, 1992a, p. 84)

EDWARD: Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism. (Said, 1978, p. 2)

HELENA: We urgently need to steer toward sustainable balance—a balance between urban and rural, between culture and nature, between economic development and true happiness. Ladakh can help to show the way, by giving us a deeper understanding of the interrelated forces that are shaping our society. This wider perspective is, I believe, an essential step in learning how to heal our society and ourselves. (Norberg-Hodge, 1992b, p. 60)

REBECCA: Edward, I thought that Orientalism is when one promotes Western hegemony by explaining anything non-Western in a way that exoticizes, demonizes or otherwise sets up a binary of superior-inferior when comparing West and East? But here, Helena first acknowledges limitations in her own understanding of culture and then depicts Ladakhis as having knowledge and wisdom that ought to be considered by those in the West. So how can she be an Orientalist?

EDWARD: [No one] ever forgets that ‘going native’ of playing the Great Game depends on the rock-like foundations of European power...I doubt...that any white man or woman lived within the orbit of European imperialism who ever forgot that the discrepancy in power between the white rulers and the native subjects was absolute, intended to be unchanging, rooted in cultural, political, and economic reality. (Said, 1993, p. 161)

HELENA: The fact is that the developed nations are consuming limited natural resources at such a rate that it is impossible for underdeveloped areas of the world to follow in their footsteps. When one-third of the world's population consumes two-thirds of the world's resources and then exhorts others to do as they do, it is little short of a hoax. Development, it turns out, is all too often a euphemism for exploitation, another form of colonialism. (Norberg-Hodge, 1992c, pp. 27-8).

REBECCA: But I don't think that Helena is playing the Big Game! And I don't want to be an Orientalist! Why must I give up on my newfound interest in researching theatre in India?

HELENA: [You don't.] I would...suggest that we cannot presume ours [cultures] are superior to theirs. We should not carelessly discard ours, but neither should we disdainfully disregard theirs. In fact, just as the non-Western world has learned from us, it is perhaps time that we begin learning from them. (1992a, p. 4)

EDWARD: Too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent. (1978, p. 27)

REBECCA: I'm not saying that I'm innocent, and Helena acknowledges this as well, but I'm also vehemently opposed to saying things that will denigrate, exploit, or otherwise misrepresent the people who have shown me so much, and who have such wealth in principles and creativity. How can you say that projects done in this spirit are bad? I just cannot abandon this interest! But I don't want to exploit a people who have endured so much exploitation already. Helena did it properly. There must be a way for me to as well. Is there a way?

JOHN: We only see what we look at. (Berger, 1977, p. 8)

EDWARD: [I]t has regularly seemed otherwise to me, and certainly my study of Orientalism has convinced me (and I hope will convince my literary colleagues) that society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together. (1978 p. 27)

REBECCA: What do you mean?

EDWARD: [T]aking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a western style for dominating restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (p. 3)

HELENA: [Rebecca, Edward is right. However, you must also consider this:] We have much to learn about and from (as opposed to projecting onto) cultures that are less materially complex but more spiritually complex than our own, and trying to place what we learn about them, and by comparison ourselves, into a species-centered framework. (1992a, p. 8)

REBECCA: But can't I research and teach without ascribing to the corporate institution for "dealing with" the Orient, I mean Indian theatre forms and Indian wisdom?

EDWARD: [M]y contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically,

sociologically, military, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. (1978, p. 3)

REBECCA: I get that! Sort of. Maybe. You know, about European colonialists going in to parts of Asia, taking what they wanted, and producing what they called “knowledge” about people. In a way that would favour them politically, of course. I get that it was wrong. Can I not study and teach about this without becoming The Man? Perhaps by acknowledging myself as an outsider and not trying to represent them, but rather discuss some genial ideas? Can I do this without being accused of being an intellectual colonialist?

EDWARD: [You must consider that] western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections. (p. 8)

REBECCA: So my interest in researching Indian theatre forms is nothing more than a “battery of repressions” and “desires”?

EDWARD: The determining impingement on most knowledge produced in the contemporary West (and here I speak mainly about the United States) is that it be nonpolitical, that I, scholarly, academic, impartial, above partisan or small-minded doctrinal belief. One can have no quarrel with such an ambition in theory, perhaps, but in practice the reality is much more problematic. No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. (pp. 9-10)

ASHOK: [Intent is not relevant; end result is the same.]

PEGGY: [Perhaps I can be of some assistance here. I think what Edward is trying to bring to your attention is the issue] of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant groups one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth. (McIntosh, 1990, p. 4)

ASHOK: [It’s so interesting...motives innocent; damage still done.]

REBECCA: So my act of trying to research and write about *Natya Chetana* is an act of racism?

PEGGY: [Allow me to answer by inviting you to consider your situation by examining mine:] I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege...(p. 1)

NEIL: *There is unrest in the forest,
There is trouble with the trees,
For the maples want more sunlight
And the oaks ignore their pleas...
But the oaks can't help their feelings
If they like the way they're made.
And they wonder why the maples
Can't be happy in their shade.* (Rush, 1978)

PEGGY: My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. (1989, p. 1)

REBECCA: And you and Edward have come to learn that this is not the case, that racism is much more entrenched?

JOHN: To look at is an act of choice. (1977, p. 8)

ASHOK: [It's so interesting, isn't it?]

PEGGY: [What Edward is warning you about is that because of your privileged position, you have been] taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us" (p. 1). I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a patter of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person...In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color (p. 3). For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. (1989, p. 4)

REBECCA: So what do I do now?

PEGGY: Disapproving of the system won't be enough to change them...To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. (p. 5)

ASHOK: [The tribals may innocently believe when multinational corporation offers to *give* them free hospital, free school, they think not to ask *why?*]

JOHN: The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. (1977, p. 8)

REBECCA: And now that I see that my vision was influenced by this privilege that I was previously unaware of, will I be able to research with integrity?

All the voices in Rebecca's head disappear!

Scene vi: Rebecca's conceptual landscape. As the voices in Rebecca's head persist in tormenting her, Rebecca reads more specifically with a new interest in postcolonial, feminist, and postmodern thinking. She accepts a position in the American Midwest to teach a few advanced classes in Rhetoric, where Rebecca invites her students to explore privilege; to coach debate, where Rebecca is stimulated by the sharp minds of today's youth; and to advise a drama club in a school that is expanding its theatre infrastructure with a new black box theatre. Rebecca accepts the position once her coursework is completed, wonders how a thesis idea might evolve amidst her argument-riddled psyche.

REBECCA:

I returned from India wanting to return to India to spend an extended stay with *Natya Chetana* in order to research their work more closely and write a thesis about it. The arguments in my head, coupled with advice from a professor at Queen's led me to believe that it would be better for everyone if I instead began an action-related project in an environment where my status in comparison with the human subjects in my research would not be problematic. On the one hand, I saw that both Satu and Jouni spent much of their professional time in the field, working with small, grass-roots organizations like *Natya Chetana* towards common goals. I did not observe anything hegemonic in their work. In my correspondence with both Jouni and Satu, I came to appreciate their vast awareness and appreciation of the complexities of the issues that face international development projects. Why, then, would it be inappropriate for me? To begin with, a thesis on my research of a group within a culture that I knew little about that would not be based on any specific action project seemed flat and inaccessible. What use would

such a document be without a meaningful project to go along with it? Second, the professor whose advice I ultimately heeded cautioned that I would probably not pass through Queen's ethical review standards if I proposed to go and interview a number of Indian thespians. Finally, the spectrum of my reading had grown to include more scholars and my wider reading has helped me to appreciate some of the nuanced complexities of my research interests. There was the perennial postcolonial problem of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Years later, I would learn to benefit from Said once I realized that his voice awakened a consciousness within me, but at the time, I blurred his guilt-invoking wisdom with my own sense of class guilt. But it wasn't all about me making silent apologies to Said. I discovered other scholars who provoked or otherwise interested me. Paulo Freire, for example, whose work has been modified and adapted by educators in many countries around the world, attracted me as well. Denis Goulet, who wrote the introduction to Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* (2002b), wrote of Freire's philosophy:

DENIS: [T]o 'problematize' in his sense is to associate an entire populace to the task of codifying total reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and social forces. ... Only thus do people become subjects, instead of objects, of their own history. (Goulet, as cited in Freire, 2002b, p. ix)

REBECCA: What I observed in *Natya Chetana's* production of *Biplabi Bihanga* was a process of codifying a particular reality into symbols. These symbols generated within me a certain consciousness thus putting me in touch with the social forces surrounding me.

This is one of the powers of drama; in fact, this process seems to be integral to *Natya Chetana's* philosophy, whose stated mission is to,

explore and develop theatre and artistic abilities for reviving own (*sic*) cultural roots and highlighting socio-political-economical themes for supporting people's movements leading towards a self-reliant society with equal justice and right. (*Natya Chetana*, 2004, p. 4)

If *Natya Chetana* can lead people towards creating their own self-reliant societies with justice and equal rights, then they would fulfill Freire's (2002a) imperative for the people to become subjects instead of objects of their history. Since *Natya Chetana* has been meticulous with their documentation, there is evidence that their work has led to acts of the people as subjects of their own history. Here are three examples of social movements in response to some of the plays that *Natya Chetana* has produced:

- tribal people stopped truck load of Bamboos (*sic*) to revolt against deforestation {Play *Kahapain Atmahatya* – 1992}
- people raised voice at the labour contractors to demand the minimum wages declared by the government {Play *Pachis Bhoota* – 1994}
- women audiences took immediate action by breaking alcohol shops on protest {Play *Bisa Bazar* – 1997} (*Natya Chetana*, 2004, p. 2)

When the people become subjects in their own history, they may become militant. I recall discussing my impression of Fennario's *Balconville* (1979) with a professor during my undergraduate studies, and he suggested that I analyse the play from a Marxist perspective, in which the utter collapse of the community at the end of the play symbolizes hope for a new beginning. If I were to analyse *Natya Chetana*'s 2002 production of *Biplabi Bihanga* from such a perspective, I might also note the revolutionary dynamics of the people in response to their oppression. My analysis at the time, however, was emotional; I imagined a negative outcome if communities continue to believe in urbanization without asking critical questions that I believed were raised in the play. While I prefer non-prescriptive plays, when solutions to problems are explored dramatically, they may be taken symbolically, thus leaving the audience with the ultimate challenge of how to approach said problem. Furthermore, because a solution may be explored dramatically does not follow that the theatre experience is coercive but rather

provocative. Nonetheless, acute responses to action theatre experiences are not uncommon, as is illustrated in the three examples above. Furthermore, such responses may be directed toward the theatre troupe, as Subodh and Ashok have both described to me in personal conversations. *Natya Chetana* has documented some of their members being beaten by factory workers who feared losing their jobs if action to stop industrial pollution were taken as a result of the production of their play *Chaita Charita* (Natya Chetana, 1993). Like Paulo Freire, who has endured prison and exile to demonstrate his commitment to social justice, members of *Natya Chetana* also demonstrate a strong resolve by risking personal safety in the interest of the greater good. *Natya Chetana* illustrates Freire's (2002a, 2000b) liberatory pedagogy of personal experience that when they—in their own thoughts and actions—take charge and subvert their objective status into a subjective one, they empower themselves. This inspires me to seek a liberatory pedagogy through drama within my own social context.

Reading through Freire's (2002a, 2002b) work, I quickly realize why he is so accessible. For example, I find myself reading parts of his book as if I were the speaker. The following passage illustrates how well he can connect to his readers:

PAULO: I can say one thing – when I began this course I was naïve, and when I found out how naïve I was, I started to get critical. But this discovery hasn't made me a fanatic, and I don't feel any collapse either. (Freire, 2002a, p. 35)

I feel this phrase personally because it is precisely when I hit my own brick walls of ignorance that I awaken to a critical consciousness within myself. This awakening motivates me to social action, but I have yet to participate in any social action that has led me to harm others or contravene laws, or behave in a way that would be classified as fanatical, yet I can understand why Freire might have felt the need to include that last

sentence because I think that people who commit themselves to action subsequent to an awakening often perceive themselves as being perceived by others as fanatics or on the brink of emotional collapse. What this passage tells me is that this process is a normal human response and not one that should alarm the person experiencing such internal awakening, nor should it alarm those who witness the internal transformation in others.

I found myself inspired deeply by Freire, and at the same time compelled to continue to read Said, in spite of feeling guilty when I did. I trusted Said, and was looking for authentication or affirmation from him that the research that I wanted to do in India would be work of integrity and merit. I thus began looking to Said as an ethical checkpoint, in hopes that his words might prevent me from corrupting myself in my work with the people I had come to admire and respect in India.

Diversion: A Retrospective Interlude

REBECCA:

When I consider this period of five years in which I first went to India and started feeling an awakening within myself as well as a newfound sense of energy and meaning in my life, I have wondered what exactly it was that made it possible. For quite some time, this eluded me, and in retrospect, I believe it is because there are several key events and dynamics that incite personal transformation, such as the awakening as described by Freire when a person exchanges naïveté for critical thinking, but there are other powerful agents of change as well, and during this period of five years, I encountered a number of them. Helena Norberg Hodge (1992a) encountered one of these agents in her time in Ladakh. When she noticed that Ladakhis manifested rich expressions of happiness and wealth within their culture, she began to examine her Western notions of happiness and

wealth, which were all linked to scientific and capitalist notions of progress. After a period of time, however, Norberg Hodge was able to transform the way she understood such concepts, which led her to proclaim the Ladakhis are wealthy people and that the West could learn much from this culture, rather than trying to impose its belief in progress as a necessary shift towards globalization (1992a). It was in this spirit that I felt drawn to the people and the work of *Natya Chetana*. Prior to reviewing the literature based in critical theory, I would have referred to this type of learning as gifts that one receives/learns when far away from home. When reviewing the literature, I noticed that much scholarship has been produced in this arena, and has been referred to with terms such as “exile” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Freire, 2002a, 2002b; Giroux, 1994a; Macedo, 2003; Said, 1984, 1993), “uprooted” (Ehrenreich, 2001) and “homelessness” (Adorno, 1974; Giroux, 1994a, Janmohamed, 1994, Said, 1984, 2000). Freire has actually experienced exile, whereas others, such as Henry Giroux, use the term metaphorically to explore the sociological dynamics one experiences when one transgresses borders of one’s culture, whether it be by choice or by necessity. In examining the life and work of Paulo Freire, Giroux says,

HENRY: Freire is an exile for whom being home is often tantamount to being “homeless” and for whom personal identity—one’s own and that of Others—is viewed as a site of struggle over the politics of representation, the exercise of power, and the function of social memory. (1994a, p. 143)

REBECCA:

I use the term exile metaphorically to highlight the cultural alienation experienced in the example of a deliberate lifestyle choice that one makes in order to disturb one’s comfort zone for the purpose of personal growth. Of course using the term like this is oxymoronic, and does not deny the lack of privilege and opportunity that real exiles

experience, nor is it intended to diminish the trauma experienced by being forced to leave one's home, or the terror experienced by those whose survival was truly endangered.

Edward Said, who also experienced life in exile, observed,

EDWARD: Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience....[I]t is life outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal;...no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew (Said, as cited in Bayoumi & Rubin, 2000, p. xxviii).

REBECCA: The act of deliberately placing oneself beyond the borders of one's cultural and geographical home offers rich experiences that Mary McCarthy describes as "an oscillation between melancholy and euphoria" (as cited in Bayoumi & Rubin, p. xiv). I have experienced such oscillation in my extended times in Malaysia, China, India, and the USA. I find exile too risqué a term such as exile to describe my own experiences, and so will use it metaphorically as well as the term "imposed homelessness" to acknowledge the choice involved in my experiences. Geoff Miles articulates the problem of social positioning well:

GEOFF: "How do we construct a discourse which displaces the effects of the colonizing gaze while we are still under its influence?" (Miles, as cited in Hutcheon, 1990, p. 176).

REBECCA:

I think about this enigma frequently and have yet to articulate a satisfactory response. Said, however, articulates the dialectic in such a way that challenges some common assumptions about clinging to comfort:

EDWARD: The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (Said, 2000, p. 365)

REBECCA: Said frames the exile experience—which in its full complexity, must be an experience that no one would willingly choose—to break through my own barriers of thought and experience, removing myself from “familiar territories” at physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual and cultural levels. Further, by examining the experiences of those who have survived the struggle of true exile and who have shared the transformation that has ensued as a result, I am able to problematize my own complacency.

ACHAK: This book is a form of struggle, and it keeps my spirit alive to struggle. To struggle is to strengthen my faith, my hope and my belief in humanity. Since you and I exist, together we can make a difference! (Deng, as cited in Eggers, 2006, p. xv).

REBECCA: What compels me about this passage is that Deng—a Sudanese refugee—writes to a largely middle class American audience whose experiences of struggle are generally less extreme than his own. In doing so, he invites those who do not share his past struggle to consider symbolic sites of struggle as an experience that can both inform and motivate one to action. Theodore Adorno also invites us to explore beyond our borders:

THEODORE: Refusing to negotiate or deconstruct the borders that define their own politics of location, they have little sense of moving into an “imagined space,” a positionality from which they can unsettle, disrupt, and in Carol Becker’s words, “illuminate that which is no longer homeline, *Heimlich*, [emphasis added] about one’s home.” (Adorno, as cited in Giroux, 1994a, p. 148)

REBECCA: The practice of self-imposed homelessness for the purpose of self-inquiry is one method that I use to increase my social awareness. It is a process that I discovered by accident when I spent a year and a half in Southeast Asia in the 1990s. This experience led me to embrace the eight experiences in India during this decade that would provide

me with a short term sense of homelessness. Once when I was in India, I asked Ashok how he can cope with a lifestyle devoid of privacy. He replied “I have privacy in my imagination” (Ashok, 2003-2006). He explained that he could go into his head any time he wanted to, at home, in a crowded train, and find quietude within himself. This conversation offered me a remarkable opportunity to question my own paradigms and to see the limitations of my thinking, and how his daily life permitted him much greater freedom than what someone from a Western perspective might think. In my ethnocentricity, I had projected a set of values upon Ashok and this allowed me to express my Orientalist feelings through a moment of pity.

I will never understand the full scope of what it means to be Indian. It is likewise impossible for me, as a Caucasian Canadian, to understand the full scope of the African American history. It is too complex and academic pursuits can only go so far. Said gives words to describe my anxiety about conducting authentic and ethical research:

EDWARD: “My two fears are distortion and inaccuracy, or rather the kind of inaccuracy produced by too dogmatic a generality and too positivistic a localized focus” (Said, 1978, p. 8).

REBECCA: Does this mean that people should refrain from engaging in research that is located outside of one’s cultural milieu? I am sure that this is not what Said intended. However, Said’s warnings have convinced me that my research in this area must be in the form of a narrative, so that I may speak for myself and not for the people of *Natya Chetana*. I have learned from these experiences—not so that I can speak of what I perceive when Indians engage in theatre and activism and how these experiences have been transformative for me.

I have also found the process of self-imposed homelessness to identify sites of resistance within myself and within the systems that I live. Adorno (1974) goes further:

THEODORE: “[It] is a part of morality not to be at home in one’s home”. (p. 39)

REBECCA: I think that one can achieve a sense of exile both within locations of comfort and habit, such as at home, as well as away from home. Said (1984) illustrates some intellectual advantages experienced by one who has had the experience of living as an exile using a musical metaphor:

EDWARD: Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision give rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal... There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be. (Said, 1984, p. 55)

REBECCA: Said’s metaphor illustrates two autonomous voices expressing themselves in tandem. There is a kind of rhythmic, balanced chaos in musical practice. I have also used a technique that I call “split scene” directing plays that has yielded a similar effect. This is a theatrical way of achieving a parallel structure and juxtaposing two characters, plots or themes at the same time.

I have also come to appreciate some of the other agents of personal transformation, and would like to now examine the beginning of this transformation within myself by considering the works of Ellen Dissanayake (1992) and Victor Turner (1982) who helped me to see that concepts of art are cultural artefacts. My first experience in India was strangely spiritual. I felt moved by the people and their work, and yet when attempting to describe my experiences, I felt ill-equipped to find language to describe my learning that would be successful in transcending common Orientalist

constructions of what India meant to my audiences. Language is connotative and both emotionally and politically charged (Boal, 1985, 1995, 1998, 2001; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Foucault, 1976; Freire, 2002a, 2002b; Huxley, 1932; Lewis, 1993; Said, 1978, 2001). For example, when describing the lifestyle of the members of *Natya Chetana*, which is a simple and communal one, I wondered how I could describe the holistic and integrated approach to art and activism without being charged with labelling them “primitive” because of its socio-political implication. Furthermore, I find it fascinating that many western manifestations of art are uniquely categorized as specific aesthetic practices or artefacts (Dissanayake, 1992). While art has always been central in all societies, it appears to have been categorized and commodified in Europe around the period of Enlightenment, from the eighteenth century CE and onward.

ELLEN: [Prior to this time], the sorts of objects that in the post-eighteenth century West came to be called art—paintings, sculptures, ceramics, music, dance, poetry, and so forth—were made to embody or to reinforce religious or civic values, and rarely, if ever, for purely aesthetic purposes. (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 39)

REBECCA: That such artefacts have always existed integrated within artistic, spiritual, practical and other realms of everyday social life, but have been reconstructed as objects of art to be studied, analysed, traded and sold, divorced from their practical and cultural value, speaks of the increasing power of a capitalist social framework. The shift towards framing education from a business model (Giroux, 2003, 2004; Mundy, 2005) is problematic. This power has redefined our cultural lives to view art as separate from our way of life. To truncate or even sever art from its context is to devalue the human experience. One might appreciate this claim if one considers the effects of the widespread commodification of women in the media (Kilbourne, 2000; Wolf, 2003) as an analogy. What makes the performing arts so powerful for me is that the artists are there, infusing

energy into the artistic artefacts, live, un-truncated, and this heightens the sense of the actor's humanity. As for my experience at *Natya Chetana*, where the artistic work that members of this group practice is integrated with a communal lifestyle that actively challenges a capitalist framework, discussing the larger context of lifestyle to those whose world view has not included such integration of art with lifestyle is problematic for me. For one thing, I must come to terms with how my understandings of the philosophy, approaches, lifestyle and art of *Natya Chetana* contrast with my own world view. Furthermore, like Norberg Hodge's experiences in Ladakh, I felt like I had happened upon a people of great wealth, in spite of their obvious fiscal poverty from a GDP/GDI perspective. Dissanayake helps me to understand that wealth which Norberg Hodge explains and that which I observed at *Natya Chetana*. Dissanayake explains, "[p]eople living in traditional societies seem much closer to the verities of life than people living in highly technological societies like our own" (1992a, p. 45). Turner (1982) also observes that in the communities that he studied, art was not separated from other aspects of people's lives, including work. Like Dissanayake, he finds that work, play and leisure are less separated or defined in their own rights (p. 30). I was at *Natya Chetana* to learn, and quickly learned that there are many responsibilities other than theatrical ones when one lives at *Natyagram*. I believe that this integrated lifestyle of communal sharing of work duties and art combine to provide an enhanced learning experience that facilitates transformation in a way that studying theories cannot provide.

While Norberg Hodge's research is based in ecology and anthropology, the research background of Dissanayake and Turner both lie within the fields of anthropology and the arts. They have both conducted field research over extended times

in pre-modern societies in Africa, and have devoted a substantial amount of their academic work to the study of the arts within these communities and have analysed their research from a Western perspective. I find their research dynamics similar to my own, and thus they help me to make sense of the mixing of pre-modern lifestyle concepts with art. In their work, I grasp a sociological perspective that appreciates some valuable aspects of pre-modern societies, aspects that seem to be lost or at least challenged by the inception of globalization. Yet there is more to it than this. Dissanayake and Turner each provide a unique way of understanding the critical value to human beings and to humanity of art. In Dissanayake's case, it is her exploration of human beings' biological need to "make special" (1992), a process that separates the functionality of art with its spiritual qualities. It was not until I had returned to *Natya Chetana* the second time that I realized the spiritual value of art. When I returned in 2003, Subodh had arranged for all foreign guests to stay at *Natyagram* rather than at HQ. This meant that I was able to partake in the Morning Prayer. The prayer involved the members of *Natya Chetana* and the Indian members of visiting theatre troupes to gather in the meeting room, which was a circular room/outbuilding with pillars and wide open spaces to the surrounding nature, a thatched roof and a shrine to the Hindu god Ganesha. People would sit patiently on the floor in circular formations, and wait for Subodh. Upon his arrival, Subodh made a few remarks in Oriya. The Morning Prayer—a song—would follow. Over the years I would learn all of the words to this song as well as the melody, which I came to "make special". According to Subodh, "[t]here is a spiritual justification to do a common prayer at the beginning of a rehearsal" (Pattanaik, 2003, p. 19). An understanding of Turner's analysis

of transformation through ritual is facilitated when approaching theatre from a perspective of ritual and spirituality, of metaphor and symbol.

VICTOR: Social life, then, even its apparently quietest moments, is characteristically ‘pregnant’ with social dramas. It is as though each of us has a ‘peace’ face and a ‘war’ face, that we are programmed for cooperation, but prepared for conflict. The primordial and perennial agonistic mode is the social drama. (Turner, 1982, p. 11)

REBECCA: Turner’s work is powerful for me because of his great understanding of theatre, ritual, and because he is able to cast his anthropological gaze in a theatrical light. The son of an engineer and an actress, Turner learned to approach research from a scientist’s perspective as well from an artist’s. His research on liminality—which he explains in his work *From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play* (1982) in the context of ritual and theatre provides great insight into the transformational power of theatre.

Theatre is not always connected with ritual, although one could argue that all theatre contains elements of ritual. When Subodh speaks of the justification for prayer in theatre processes, he may well be referring to a dynamic of liminality. This involves the second phase of a ritual, which allows the individual to disassociate himself from his physical, social and cultural reality in order to enter a physical and psychological non-status for a period of time. According to Turner, during this time, the alienated individual is removed from all cultural norms. He then experiences a euphoric freedom that is characterized by increased creativity and fluidity of personal identity. This phase is most pronounced in rituals that require the removal of the individual to be transformed (such as a coming-of-age ritual) from his society for an extended period of time. During this time, the individual temporarily sheds his identity, cultural and physical ties, and has both the daunting responsibility of self-care and survival, but at the same time, the incredible

personal freedom and creativity to redefine himself as he sees fit. I cannot help but notice the parallel to the experience of the actor getting into role, by psychologically leaving her own sense of identity—which is informed by a complete set of social norms—and entering an imaginary world of the character that she is to become. In order to do so, she must suspend her individual status and cultural package in order to adopt an alternate status. This is more challenging work than it appears. I recall preparing to play the character of Meg in *Crimes of the Heart* (Henley, 1982); it took me weeks to work on removing myself in order to become my construction of the character of Meg, a process that I navigated with mediocre results. However, even if the actor is portraying a real historical figure, this is still representative and imaginative work, and is not the same as becoming a real historical figure. Experimental theatre director Richard Schechner (in Turner, 1982) illustrates well the complexity inherent in bringing a character to light in theatrical performance:

RICHARD: Performance is no longer easy to define or locate: the concept and structure has spread all over the place. It is ethnic and intercultural, historical and ahistorical, aesthetic and ritual, sociological and political. Performance is a mode of behavior, an approach to experience; it is play, sport, aesthetics, popular entertainments, experimental theatre, and more. (Schechner, as cited in Turner, 1982, p. 4)

REBECCA: Schechner's understanding is of a nebulous, abstract-yet-real construct. This construct represents both illusion and reality, is intercultural and historical without being accountable to a specific location or definition. I find this to be similar to Turner's altered status—liminality—of the individual living through the second phase of ritual.

Turner has found many intersections between cultural rituals practiced in pre-modern societies and the theatrical experience. When researching these societies and

comparing their dynamics with large scale, industrialized society, Turner warns the reader not to draw hasty generalizations:

VICTOR: the symbols found in *rites de passage* [emphasis added] in these societies, though subject to permutations and transformations of their relationships, are only involved in these within relatively stable, cyclical, and repetitive systems. It is to these kinds of systems that the term ‘liminality’ properly belongs. When used of processes, phenomena, and persons in large-scale complex societies, its use must in the main be metaphorical. (Turner, 1982, p. 29)

REBECCA: I use Turner’s discussions of liminality metaphorically to show how the theatrical experience is somehow like the liminal experience that Turner describes. The individual who experiences something similar to liminality while engaged in a theatrical process may also feel similar states of altered reality, fluidity of social norms, and in the end, personal growth and transformation.

The cognitive space in my consciousness that has allowed for understanding my transformation has been made possible by my experiences at *Natya Chetana*’s theatre festivals in 2002 and 2003 was so powerful that it called me to increase my commitments to the arts and to activism in doing so, I was able to understand myself in new and complex ways. Dissanayake, Turner, Boal, Norberg Hodge all affirm for me those art processes that I observed, participated in, and “made special”. Their work and the work of other artists and critical theorists help me to frame my understanding of the processes that I engaged in during what I consider to be the second phase of my transformation, which will be the basis of Act II of this thesis.

Scene vii: Natya Chetana’s ‘Peoples’ Theatre Festival’ calls again! Toward the end of 2002, Rebecca receives an email from Subodh, inviting her to the 2003 International People’s Theatre Festival. Satu emails Rebecca, encouraging her to come back. Rebecca makes her plans and returns to the festival in January, 2003.

REBECCA:

My second visit to *Natya Chetana's* festival had less impact on me than the first. It did, however, lead to thought followed by action on my part. The way I understand it now is that the thinking phase, which was brought about primarily by my first experience, resulted from encountering a great amount of different ways of thinking in such a short amount of time in an environment in which I was an interloper. This experience was powerful and left a profound impression upon me. The action phase follows the thinking one, although the thinking never ends. It does not involve the same intensity of thinking or feeling, although the action itself might lead to new thinking and feeling. The action phase is significant because it is the testament to the commitment of putting thinking-to-action, which is the product of the thinking. While the second trip did not produce the powerful impact on me, it did help me to commit to a certain lifestyle. Without this second trip, I may simply have understood my experience as a uniquely powerful and spiritual one. However, because I did return to the 2003 festival, seeing the commitment of others to a lifestyle of arts and activism encouraged me to do the same. I thus returned to the festival again in 2004 and 2005; indeed, as long as my employer would permit.

I took up Ashok's invitation to learn about theatre in South India, and arranged to meet him and a few other artists prior to going to Bhubaneswar. In Bangalore, Ashok introduced me to many of his theatre, dance and music friends and colleagues. He also took me to a couple of orphanages where he conducts volunteer workshops. He also gave me a marvelous tour of Bangalore and some nearby attractions. We took in some street theatre⁵. Ashok continued to educate me by answering all of my questions about arts and social issues, launching into long, detailed explanations that would lead me to ask more questions. He also introduced me to a couple of art forms that emerged out of the

⁵ Street theatre has various forms and uses and these will be discussed in Act II.

neighbouring state of Kerala. Kathakali and Kalarippayattu are unique dance drama forms to this state. The former utilizes dance to dramatize a couple of famous stories from the *Ramayana* (1954), which are central to Hindu families' cultural ethos. The latter is a dance form that utilizes stylized martial arts forms. Both require impeccable stamina, flexibility and agility. I was impressed by the physical training that a performer of these two art forms must devote in order to perform. Finally, I attended a rehearsal, a workshop, and a couple of performances of projects that Ashok was involved with. He called these "fusion projects" (Ashok, 2003-2006). These projects involved him working with a number of artists from India, Norway, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The artists fused their creative ideas, bringing their formal training and cultural backgrounds into the work. I believe that seeing these projects in action may have led us to start conceptualizing a fusion project that was about to begin.

In many respects, the festival was the same. As mentioned earlier, I stayed at *Natyagram*, which turned out to be less exhausting than commuting daily from HQ. It also provided for me to participate in all activities, from the Morning Prayer and yoga to casual conversations post-show in the evenings. In this respect, my experience was enriched. In addition, Subodh had asked me to lead a couple of workshops, and I had condensed and modified some workshops that I had led in Ontario. Leading these workshops proved both frustrating and fruitful. Communication was a big issue due to language. Subodh translated my directions from English to Oriya, and I translated my directions from English to French. Still, there were communication breakdowns as well as unforeseen cultural issues in terms of how I view a theatre process and other

participants' perceptions. Nonetheless, these workshops were rewarding at the same time because of the learning that emerged from it.

At the festival, I continued to bond with Satu. While my bond with Ashok centered around comparing theatre and to some degree, activism between India and Canada and the USA, my bond with Satu centered on academic issues that Western scholars faced when working with NGOs in India. I am lucky to have forged these friendships. Satu and Ashok have to this day, both influenced me intellectually and have influenced my understanding of the work that I approach.

The French theatre troupe *Théâtre du Fil* was there once again, this time with almost a dozen thespians. They were running an ongoing collaborative project with *Natya Chetana* that extended beyond the festival time. Part of their work during the festival was to create a fusion play, using members of *Theatre du Fil*, members of *Natya Chetana*, and festival participants. Since I speak French, I found it very exciting to be able to converse theatre with a number of Europeans, and to act as translator for the facilitators who led workshops in French. I was impressed by the theatre projects that they took on: these were theatre activists and as such, all of their theatrical ventures have as their goal social change. The leader of the *Théâtre du Fil* invited me to join this project. I felt honored. Both plays that I had seen produced by *Natya Chetana* were extremely well done. Because of their physicality, it was not a problem for me to understand the key themes, in spite of the play being entirely done in Oriya. I had read some work by *Natya Chetana* and was compelled by the process that they use. It was a model that I thought I might use in creating an action theatre project. Here is a brief summary of their process:

SUBODH: [T]he rehearsal goes through phases like—developing the group spirit, Empowering the actors, selecting a story, development of a script, the scrip reading

and getting feedback from the theatre doers, creating the stage settings, composing the play on the set, designing the properties and costume, getting feedback from the sample critic audiences, technical rehearsal, self reflection through video and then documentation of the final shape through photo and video for future references. (Pattanaik, 2003, p. 19)

REBECCA: The play that we collaboratively produced that year, which was void of language until the very end, depicted cultural harmony as well as complexity. It involved two cultures coming together to share a common space. One culture was showing the other culture the way and both cultures were polite yet reserved. I could not help but note the parallel to the fact that a number of Western people were living with members of *Natya Chetana* in the space normally occupied only by them. Here we were: a group people drawn together by our love of drama, coming from vastly different worldviews. I think that it is fair to say that many people involved were hopeful, tentative, and maybe even suspicious. Turner articulates the issue of cultural complexity very well, and suggests that the kind of experimental theatre that interested Richard Schechner offers valuable clues to unpacking some of the elusive mysteries of this issue.

VICTOR: ‘Experimental’ theatre is nothing less than ‘performed,’ in other words, ‘restored’ experience, that moment in the experiential (*sic*) process ...in which meaning emerges through reliving the original experience... This form then becomes a piece of communicable wisdom, assisting others (through *Verstehen*, [emphasis added] understanding) to understand better not only themselves but also the times and cultural conditions which compose their general ‘experience’ of reality. Both Richard Schechner and I... envision theatre as an important means for the intercultural transmission of painfully achieved modalities of experience. Perfect transcultural understanding may never be achieved, but if we enact one another’s social dramas, rituals, and theatrical performances in full awareness of the salient characteristics of their original sociocultural settings, the very length and intensity of what Schechner calls ‘the training-rehearsal-preparation process’⁶ must draw the actors into ‘other ways of seeing’ and apprehending the ‘reality’ our symbolic formations are forever striving to encompass and express. (Turner, 1982, p. 18)

⁶ Schechner, R. (1979). The end of humanism”. *Performing Arts Journal*, 10/11, vol. IV, nos. 1-2.

REBECCA: In the plot of the play that we produced, as could be predicted, two of the young people fell in love. Isabelle, a young woman from *Théâtre du Fil* and Dilip, a young man from *Natya Chetana*, portrayed the young lovers. Their love was not acceptable to either group. Violence erupted and the two young lovers fled the community in sadness and fear while everyone else fought to the death. The last line was delivered in three languages. First, Sujata, a young woman from *Natya Chetana* spoke the line in Oriya, followed by Olivier, a young man from *Theatre du Fil* who spoke the same line in French. I was given the honour of delivering the same line in English. The line was: “perhaps some day, everything will be possible. I don’t know [pause] but we’ll try together” (*Natya Chetana & Theatre du Fil*, 2003). The symbolism of this line had a profound effect on me. This line was to become my mantra for some time to come. My resolve from this point on was to try. The mantra came with the caveat I don’t know [if we will be successful in our attempts] but the point was to try.

If I were to pinpoint the turning point in my understanding of myself as a teacher and my understanding of myself as an activist and an artist, being given the responsibility for delivering this line and then getting into role for the play would be it. It represented my beliefs, and the euphoria of stage production cemented this imperative within me.

Turner explains the powerful transformative power of symbols:

VICTOR: The ritual symbol becomes a factor in social action, a positive force in an activity field. Symbols, too, are crucially involved in situations of societal change—the symbol becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends and means, aspirations and ideals, individual and collective, whether these are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred. (1982, p. 22)

REBECCA:

Preparing for this play had my stomach in knots. First, when I became a director years ago, my acting career halted. Second, this was not the type of audience that I was used to engaging with. Most of the audience members did not speak English. Third, I had never acted in a play that was so physical and so non-verbal. This style followed the philosophy of *Natya Chetana*'s theatre style:

SUBODH: The play should be around a subject that is very close to the problems or tensions of human life of present days. And the theme should be explained through an event, which is possible to explain through visuals. People come to SEE a theatre and never expect to HEAR a theatre. Even then there are story telling theatre forms which can sustain the expectation of the audiences that speak in the same language. However, *Natya Chetana* believes theatre as a universal language to bridge the gaps of the existing spoken languages. (Pattanaik, 2003, p. 13)

REBECCA: I found it very exciting to be challenged to use my body and my own emotional state to such an extent as to solely transmit the message that way, instead of focusing on how to deliver my lines properly. There was the last line, of course, but that line, although poignant, was not where the energy of the play was, even if this was the overall message. In preparation, I felt exhilarated and scared at the same time. I was proud to be part of something that meant so much to the people who were creating the play. I was inspired by the issue being explored and by the message. On the night of the performance, I was invited to partake in the rituals that are so common to the *Natyagram* stage: I lit an incense stick, I meditated with the group, and felt both “liminal” (Turner, 1982) and “in flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) as the Indian actors chanted in Oriya.

This was the first time I acted bare-footed and in a sari. I recalled my ambivalence at wearing a sari in my journal. Wearing the sari excited me. It reminded me of the times I participated in cultural events in Malaysia, where I felt like an outsider pretending to be on the inside. I thought of the book that I had brought to India with me, *Orientalism*

(Said, 1978). Was I exoticizing Indian culture? I felt both ashamed and nervous, and asked Sujata, who was tying the sari for me, if it was appropriate for me to be wearing a sari. Was I not appropriating the culture by this act, I asked. Sujata replied that women wear saris both in public and while performing on stage; this is the proper way for a woman to dress, and it would be inappropriate for me not to wear the sari. Still a little apprehensive, I found refuge in Norberg-Hodge's documentary film (1993), which I had recently watched, and told myself that if I opened my mind and behaved carefully, I could learn some valuable lessons at this festival. In retrospect, I find parallels between my status on an Indian stage with that of Turner's liminoid novice,

VICTOR: [Who are] in fact, temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure. This weakens them, since they have no rights over others. But it also liberates them from structural obligations. (1982, p. 27)

REBECCA: Coming onto the stage, the familiarity of the heat of the lights blinding me from the public brought back all kinds of memories. However the euphoria was new: this euphoria elevated me and although I still felt nervous and clammy, I recognized a physical state in my body that was undeniable: I felt high.

After this performance, I no longer argued with Ashok about me not being an artist. I came to embrace it, and felt deep gratitude to all of the people of *Natya Chetana* for facilitating such an experience for so many people on an annual basis. I returned to North America, fixated on becoming a theatre activist. To this day, I marvel at all of the things that I've learned from Ashok, Sujata, Mamata and Subodh, from thinking about how humans and other animals share the earth's space to treating theatre processes with a deep, spiritual respect.

I decided to commit myself to being an artist and activist. This contrasts with my previous self-concept as someone who does arts and activism from time to time. Being involves a greater commitment and an internalization of what it means to me to be an artist and activist. Subodh and Ashok taught me that I could be an artist, activist and teacher at the same time, and that even though I do not devote my time entirely to art and activism, this does not negate my identity as artist and activist. This transformation of my self reminds me much like the liminoid: I began as a teacher who did drama and helped out with causes. In liminality, my identity was removed and I explored my self from within a cultural context that is foreign to me. I emerged, still a teacher, and still one who does drama and causes, I have found great meaning and this fuels my passion for my work. I am still transforming. It is a fluid and messy process (Sutton-Smith, in Turner, 1982).

As a teacher, one of the greatest gifts that the experiences with *Natya Chetana* has bestowed upon me is the permission for me to rely on my intuition and on my personality traits that are more emotional and less intellectual in nature. I have also found that my teaching has improved and the intellectual aspect of my teaching has not suffered as a result. It is possible that as a teacher, I'm more intellectual than ever, but I'm also tuned in to my emotional state. Now, being an artist (as opposed to doing art) permits me to acknowledge and give praise to the arts. I am allowed to let this passion show. I honor the artist within me, and I can see more easily the artist within others. For example, one day, I decided to test Ashok's theory that everyone is a drummer. I stated this thesis as if it were a fact in one of my classes. To my surprise and also my delight, the students began to drum on their desks. Two students whom I knew to be drummers in bands started this,

but then the rest of the class followed. Some beats were louder and kept the overall rhythm for the whole class. Everyone in the class participated and it sounded beautiful. Eventually, this drumming session was interrupted by another teacher who asked that we stop our music because it was distracting his class. We did, but after he left, we shared a giggle, a bonding moment for the whole class, and for the rest of the semester, we enjoyed great chemistry, perhaps because we experienced what Dissanayake calls “making special” (1992).

The experiences of exiles, liminoids and thespians all share certain dynamics that act as powerful agents of transformation. Sutton-Smith (in Turner, 1982) sums up my transformative experience well in his explanation of the value of children’s games:

BRIAN: We may be disorderly in games [and, I would add, in the liminality of rituals, as well as in such “liminoid” phenomena as charivaris, fiestas, Halloween masking, and mumming, etc.] either because we have an overdose of order, and want to let off steam [this might be called the “conservative view” of ritual disorder, such as ritual reversals, Saturnalia, and the like], or because we have something to *learn* through being disorderly. (Sutton-Smith, as cited in Turner, 1982, p. 28)

REBECCA: This metaphorical view of liminality and explanation of games invites me to view my pedagogical practices in a new way. I see transformative value in the theatre that I produce as a director, but also in the drama games that I play with my students. I see transformational value in placing myself outside of the comfort and order of my home and into the unknown cultural practices abroad that helped me make sense of critical theorists’ discussions of exile.

VICTOR: What interests me most about Sutton-Smith’s formulations is that he sees liminal and liminoid situations as the settings in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc., arise—as the seedbeds of cultural creativity in fact. These new symbols and constructions then feed back into the ‘central’ economic and politico-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and *raisons d’etre* [emphasis added]. (Turner, 1982, p. 28)

REBECCA: Here, Turner makes me feel empowered to ethically engage in collaborative drama projects with my friends in India. I have found, that in spite of a vast ocean of cultural difference that separates us, we have found commonality in what Dissanayake claims is as natural:

ELLEN: In my view, the biological core of art, the stain that is deeply dyed in the behavioral marrow of humans everywhere, is something I have elsewhere called 'making special.'...young animals play indefatigable. They seem to play for play's sake, for sheer enjoyment and intrinsic reward. Thus it would seem that play has hidden survival benefits that outweigh the costs of its energy expenditure and risks. (Dissanayake, 1992, pp. 42-3)

Scene viii: The American Midwest. Via phone and email, Rebecca plans collaborative projects with Subodh and Ashok.

Prior to leaving *Natya Chetana* to return home in 2003, I had a few meetings with Subodh and his wife Mamata. We fleshed out a plan to collaboratively create and implement a summer residential theatre camp for a group of girls from impoverished areas of Orissa, and whose futures worried Subodh and Mamata. The focus of the theatre camp would be to provide a safe, consistent, school-like environment where girls could learn some valuable skills and improve their self esteem through drama activities. The objective was to help these girls stay in school and focused on developing skills that would keep them from exploitation as they approached adulthood. My task was first to find a grant that would fund such a project and to collaborate with Subodh in creating a curriculum. Once this was done, Subodh, Mamata and some members of *Natya Chetana* would start the preparations, and I would return to *Natya Chetana* during the summer holiday to work directly with Mamata in executing the programme. I applied for a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) grant. Technology failed us. Subodh sent CIDA the requisite letter of consent via email from a rural internet café, and

CIDA never received it. This invalidated our application, and we were informed that 2003 was the last year that CIDA was giving grants for these types of projects.

Around the time that this opportunity was disintegrating, a colleague of mine suggested that I sponsor an artist from *Natya Chetana* to lead a training session for our American students. I had recently accepted an invitation to teach in the American Midwest. The professional attraction that lured me to this school was the knowledge that the Maple Creek Schools district⁷ would soon be heavily investing in the performance arts by revamping their current proscenium theatre with new technology as well as building a black box theatre. I had been told that the administration was looking for someone willing to build up the theatre department. This was a challenge that excited me and a career opportunity that I continue to be thankful for. I emailed Subodh to explore the possibility of sponsoring one or more artists from *Natya Chetana* to spend some time at this school. Subodh thought that releasing one or more members of *Natya Chetana* for such a length of time from their work would not be feasible, but we decided to continue to think about future collaborative projects. By this time, the friendship between Ashok and myself had grown considerably, and when I approached him about coming, he was both receptive and enthusiastic. We thus began planning a programme to bring some of my students, from an affluent suburban school, to train with Ashok. At the same time, Ashok would train a group of students from an inner city school. After a period of time, we would bring both groups together and they would create a fusion play for the public, that would explore their social issues from their perspectives, and they would prepare and

⁷ I have selected the pseudonyms Maple Creek, Maple Creek Collegiate and Maple Creek Schools to refer to the community, the school and the school district that I became associated with and where most of the research that I carried out took place. I selected this name to reflect the affluent, secluded suburb that it was, which was heavily treed and surrounded by lakes.

perform this play using the theatre techniques that Ashok would teach. I applied and was approved for a grant that would provide for Ashok's travel expenses, a small allowance for theatre items, and a modest stipend for me and the teacher of the inner city school. By law, we were not allowed to pay Ashok, and so he agreed to volunteer his entire summer of 2003 to work on this project. This project worked out so well that the Diversity Coordinator asked me to continue Ashok's work, and so *Beyond the Borders (Action Theatre Project)* © was born. The members of *Beyond the Borders*, or *BTB* as they more affectionately referred to themselves, wrote and performed a number of scenes, plays and workshops for three years after Ashok's departure. Most of their venues were in the Midwest, two years before I left this school to return to Canada and *BTB* stopped producing plays, Subodh invited them to *Natya Chetana's* International People's Theatre Festival in 2005. Ashok met up with them at the festival, coached them once again, and produced their first nonverbal play, which they called *Outsider (Beyond the Borders, 2005)*, and performed before an Oriya-speaking audience. The next Act will show me applying my transformation through action specifically with my work with Ashok and with *BTB*. We will now break for intermission.

CHAPTER THREE

ACT II: Beyond the Borders of Rebecca's teaching practices

Prologue

CHORUS:

*She opened her mind
Beyond the Borders of Truth
Serendipity*

REBECCA:

Public school districts in the US are divided by municipalities and are not homogenous in student population, pedagogies and policies.

CHORUS: *All schools are equal but "some are more equal than others!"* (Orwell, 1945, p. 114).

REBECCA:

In addition to public funding, levies are often proposed to help pay for costs that are out of the scope of the budget. This translates to a wide range of resources for individual school districts, as the moneyed suburbs experience a higher levy pass rate than those of lower socioeconomic status (SES). Because of this, it is not unusual to hear about one school district being in dire need of resources, while another school district is well equipped, thus enhancing the educational experience of its respective students.

Structurally, the city where I conducted my research is similar to many American cities: there is a relatively small city core that comprises the business districts, the older city residences, industrial zones and slums. The Midwest is vast; a generous urban sprawl surrounds the city core. Freeways or waterways divide many sections of the metro area. Slums and working class residential neighbourhoods butt up against or are located within industrial sections. The collective population of the numerous suburbs exceeds the

population of the city proper. Each suburb comprises its own community and has its own municipal status. School districts are thus often called the same name as the municipality in which they operate.

CHORUS: *Not all Maple Creek students attend Maple Creek Schools.
The elite have choices.
Ah, the charter schools!
Ah, the private schools!*

REBECCA:

Maple Creek Collegiate is located in one of the most affluent suburbs in the state. Maple Creek is known for its gorgeous physical landscape. Many homes are constructed on large wooded lots along the vast waterfront. Maple Creek boasts prestigious both yacht and golf clubs with pricey and exclusive membership options. Equestrian is a common hobby. Maple Creek, however, does not have a public recreational centre like many other suburbs have. The economic diversity in and around Maple Creek is noteworthy. This is because prior to it being a suburb, it was a cottage retreat area. What used to be summer cabins have been converted to simple, year-round homes. These small homes do not sit on waterfront property, but are within walking distance of a public beach. Over the last fifteen years, the land around these homes has developed into new subdivisions of upwardly rising middle class homes and vast mansions. Housing prices in 2003 therefore ranged from under \$200,000⁸ for one of these cottages up to \$7,000,000 for waterfront estates. Most homes, however, would be considered upper-middle class, located in new subdivisions, and have been developed in the last twenty years.

CHORUS: *Imagine the suburbanites:
surrounded by the indigents of Summer Court
and the snobs on Country Club Lane
how they construct their identities!*

⁸ All prices are listed in US dollars.

And most of the kids mix at the schools!

REBECCA:

In addition to the cottages, mansions and the new homes, there is a group home that houses adolescents. These adolescents are in rehabilitation programmes, mainly for prior drug abuse and crime. On the main street are a few apartment buildings, in which some people on social assistance reside. Teenage children from all of these areas come to Maple Creek Collegiate, although some of the children from the wealthier areas attend nearby private schools. This economic diversity provides some complex challenges within the educational system in Maple Creek.

The SES is relatively high in comparison with that of the other surrounding suburbs and urban areas. Maple Creek is set apart from many urban and other suburban school districts, where similar referenda often fail. The results of such referenda affect school resources and reputations, leading to a widening gap between such affluent suburban school districts and their neighbours in less affluent suburbs or the urban centre.

CHORUS: *“Suffer the children for the sins of their fathers.*

Poison the seeds and you poison the harvest.” (Directions in Groove, 1994)

REBECCA:

Children in this community live in a quasi-isolated state, because the suburb is far removed from the city, where there are many cultural offerings.

CHORUS: *The burb is far from the inner city*

Far from the violence, the crime, the Blacks!

The children are safe

Safely tucked away.

REBECCA:

Maple Creek Collegiate sits on a large campus with many acres of wooded land. The campus is located near some fine horse ranches. The high school building and that of the middle school are both situated on the same campus, and thus share some physical resources, such as sporting fields and theatres. The feeder schools and the alternative learning centre are located elsewhere in Maple Creek. The high school building has had several additions over the years, such as a larger library, a proscenium theatre, a black box theatre, several technology labs, an academic wing and tennis courts. This campus is well equipped both inside the buildings and out. As with many suburban schools, the high school building is mostly one-storey, and thus sprawls out in various directions, giving it a pleasant appearance from the outside, that is complemented with some shrubbery and flower gardens as well as many sports facilities.

A number of lawsuits launched by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) against the state's education system have led to legislation and judgments allocating money to be specifically used to reduce racial and classist discrimination in schools. The Association for School Inclusion Program⁹ (ASIP) was created and entrusted with the court-ordered money in order to promote and oversee school districts to develop more inclusive educational programming. Maple Creek School district was defined by ASIP as a culturally isolated school district. This is because the students of colour represented approximately only 1% of the population at the high school that served approximately 1000 students.

The majority of students from this school proceed to higher education after they graduate. The curricular drama program has curiously not enjoyed widespread notoriety. From a curricular standpoint, the program has all but closed down. The extra-curricular

⁹ ASIP is a pseudonym.

theatre program at Maple Creek, however provides opportunities for involvement in a full-length fall play, a small 1-Act festival, and a full-length spring play or musical. Approximately 50 students participate in the drama club annually. It is thus the largest arts-based school club, even though it is not well-supported. The reputation of the drama club, according to many students, has always been poor. Attendance at theatrical venues pales compared to the Friday football events that pull together the community, where people from every age mingle. During my time at Maple Creek, the school administration and the parents made me feel very welcome and supported in all of my theatre efforts.

Scene i: Feeling transformed, Rebecca reflects upon how to approach her pedagogy, which has yet to reflect this transformation.

VOICE OF DEILEK: I think one of the great things about BTB that would be helpful to any person, especially in a political role, would be that it allows you to look at all of the issues, or, not all of the issues but many issues that aren't necessarily addressed in school or by a class, or a linear type of education. It's a (pause) almost like an independent exploration of sociological aspects and relationships between people and entities which classes don't help you learn and you also get to see how different patterns and how people interact and how people either succeed or fail to understand the uniqueness in other people or in other cultures. And I think that especially would help in helping someone become a political leader. (Interview #2 with Deilek. p. 1)

REBECCA:

The processes I described in Act I provided a structure for pedagogy of theatre activism that I wished to explore in further depth. Theatre activism is referred to in the literature many ways, including "action theater" (Howard, Solberg & Scott, 2009; Wilson, 1998), "action theatre" (Crossley, 2006) agitation propaganda, or "agit prop" (Boal, 1998; Filewod, 2001; Mason, 1992; Wasserman, 2008), "community theatre" (van Erven, 2001), "cyco-theatre" or "psycho-theatre" (Natya Chetana, 1994), "didactic theatre" (Boal, 1998), "forum theatre" (Boal, 1985, 1992), "guerilla theatre" (Boal, 1998;

Lesnick, 1973), “intimate theatre” (Pattanaik, 2003), “legislative theatre” (Boal, 1998), “newspaper theatre” (Boal, 1998), “organizational theatre” (Clark & Mangham, 2004; Meisiek & Barry, 2007), “participatory theatre” (Singhal, 2004), “people’s theatre” (Natya Chetana, 2004), “popular theatre” (Stafford, 1996), “populist theatre” (Boal, 1998), “protest theatre” (Ganapathy-Doré, 2000), “social protest theatre” (Elam, 1997), “public performance” (Martin, 2004), “street theatre” (Ashok, 2003; Mason, 1992), “theatre of awareness” (Natya Chetana, 2004), “workers’ theatre” (Bonn, 1973; Heather, 2001). Not only is theatre activism referred to in many ways, some of the above terms may also refer to theatre that is not specifically designed for activism. Street theatre, for example, although used widely in various parts of the world for political purposes—as a response to McCarthyism in the USA in the 1960s (Mason, 1992) for example—has other functions. According to Ashok (2003), there are at least three different types of street theatre. One type is performed by street artists who are looking to collect money from people passing by. This concept is much like busking that one sees in large cities around the world. Another type is performed by amateur artists who are seeking to educate the public about a number of stories central to culture/religion. Yet another type is performed by amateur artists who are seeking to raise the public’s awareness about a number of perceived social injustices and call them to social action.

Bim Mason (1992), who chronicles a history of outdoor performance and street theatre, claims that the meaning of street theatre is both fractured and obscured. Much of the work practiced by street theatre artists takes place without many people being aware of them. According to Mason, the media is not likely to cover such events in comparison with events at more traditional theatre venues. Mason also explains the lack of coherence

to be due to declining scholarship in the area coupled with a general shift of public policies to the Right. While I believe more scholarship in this arena is warranted, I question Rightist governments being the cause of declining groups of theatre activists. For one thing, many students who joined *BTB* used their voices to critique Rightist policies. For another, I have had conversations with a number of academics who work with people in Europe, Africa and Asia. They lead me to believe that the street theatre scene is vibrant. I would think that the grassroots nature of many theatre groups, coupled with physical restraints, such as time and money to organize may have more to do with such activists escaping media and academic notice. For example, many theatre activists work full time in other professions, organizing theatre when they can. Additionally, theatre activists may not be focused on self-promotion. I am aware of a number of theatre troupes that have produced many works for social change that escape public notice. Finally, because theatre activism may be well explained by critical pedagogy, it does not surprise me that groups of people who create art that challenges the status quo are not given adequate attention by the media or in scholarship. The media is often tightly controlled by corporate interests (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) and there are a number of political and academic issues that may prevent practitioners from receiving funding to carry out a project or to present their work at academic conferences (Ashok, 2003-2006).

Because I am open to learning from anyone who understands or practices theatre for social change, I use the term action theatre when referring to the pedagogy that I am developing. Although Ashok often spoke of street theatre to refer to his own activist artistic work, his context is different from mine. His work has taken place on the street, in town squares and parks; mine has always taken place indoors in a theatre, conference

room or building commons area. Action theatre is the term that I am most comfortable with because it is theatre that is designed to call people to social action. This pedagogy highlights my increasing commitments to the arts and to embed my teaching within a framework that would address various inequities in the educational system, which represent larger social inequities that are well explained by critical theory.

Notwithstanding the intrinsic merits of these pedagogies—that which I observed in India and that which I intended to develop—was the question of how to apply these methods to the student population that I worked with on a regular basis. I could appreciate how the work of *Natya Chetana* provided alternate forms of pedagogy within the various public and private social frameworks in rural India; the public and private social frameworks in suburban USA however are quite different. I believe, along with Norberg-Hodge (1992a), that there is much that people in the West can learn from people in small communities in India if we are so inclined. The issue for me was how to bring about this process so that learning would take place in a productive way.

Running this pilot project with Ashok provided me with an opportunity to work in a medium that allowed me to explore many aspects of my developing pedagogy without remaining committed to this medium. For one thing, I could explore Ashok's pedagogy—which was similar to *Natya Chetana*'s in many respects—to see how it evolved in an American context. Second, because Ashok was the leader of this project, and I the coordinator, I had the luxury of spending much of the active training time observing Ashok as well as the students and was able to focus my attention on learning rather than on leading during this time. This provided a practical benefit: because I was not teaching, but rather facilitating, there was little risk of the students who volunteered to participate

to commit themselves to a method that they might not be comfortable with. At times, I felt overwhelmed by my responsibility in bringing an artist from the other side of the world to two student communities and was responsible for the care of Ashok while he was in the USA. In retrospect, I am glad that I took the risks and the responsibilities associated with this project. It has been a struggle marked by growth.

I was very mindful of pitfalls of development projects, which often favour Western interests at the cost of those in developing countries (Ibister, 2003, Norberg-Hodge, 1992a; Roy, 2004, Shiva, 1997). It was essential that I not interfere with Ashok's professional autonomy throughout the project, which is why we decided that I would not teach during this period. During the spring months of 2003, I frequently communicated with Ashok, to get a sense of the type of workshop that he wanted to provide. At the same time, I liaised with various actors and stakeholders in Maple Creek to get a sense of what their interests were, and I relayed these to Ashok, although it was understood from the beginning that Maple Creek and its representatives would respect Ashok's autonomy. One condition that ASIP required for me to receive a grant to fund this project was for Maple Creek to form a partnership with an inner city school for this project. I had recently made the acquaintance of Nicki¹⁰, a theatre teacher/director at City Park High¹¹, one of the urban schools. She had trained with Augusto Boal and had been successfully running a curricular action theatre program in her school for several years. I approached her about the possibility of a partnership. We had several fruitful discussions, and mutually decided to each recruit approximately a dozen students from our respective schools, and act as coordinators/supervisors while Ashok would be the sole trainer to

¹⁰ Nicki is a pseudonym used to protect the identities of the students who participated in the program.

¹¹ City Park High is the pseudonym that I gave to the school where Nicki worked. I chose this name to reflect the urban mix of dense residential and industrial landscape in which this school is located.

provide instruction. Fourteen of my sixteen applicants and nine of Nicki's nine applicants committed to the project. Ashok and I brainstormed names for the project; we decided to select Ashok's choice of *Beyond the Borders*¹². Later, because of the positive response to our work, the Diversity Coordinator at Maple Creek encouraged Nicki and I to continue our partnership. Nicki and her students expressed an interest in continuing the work, but there were significant scheduling conflicts; Nicki was writing a book and she had a rigorous touring schedule with her theatre troupe. The partnership thus dissolved after the pilot project. In spite of this, the Diversity Coordinator still encouraged me to continue my work with the students at Maple Creek because she saw a potential for great work emerging from the group. She also believed that another partnership could eventually be found to help my group to face the conceptual work that gave rise to the NAACP's lawsuit in the first place. *Beyond the Borders* (also called *BTB*) theatre troupe was officially formed in September, 2003.

Scene ii: June, 2003. Rebecca and Ashok have just spent two weeks finalizing the plans for Beyond the Borders. The pilot project begins, first in an elementary school in Maple Creek; then in a dance studio in City Park.

REBECCA:

The *pilot project* ran over a twelve-day intensive schedule. During this time, Ashok spent the first four days working with the fourteen Maple Creek students. I booked a space in one of the elementary feeder schools in Maple Creek. We met there daily, where Ashok began his street theatre workshops. This was of big interest to the Diversity Committee of Maple Creek as well as to a number of artists, educators and activists who worked or lived in the community. The theatre methods that Ashok provided training in

¹² Because students created a theatre troupe by this name a few months later, Ashok's two-week training will henceforth be called *pilot project* and the first play that was also called *Beyond the Borders* will be called *June 20 play*.

differed greatly from the Eurocentric theatrical models used at Maple Creek Collegiate. Ashok began the training with a quiet meditation and inviting students to decorate a Ganesha¹³ shrine. Ashok then worked on body awareness and discipline by teaching a series of South Indian yoga postures called *surya namaskara*¹⁴. After this, students were required to warm their voices in a series of exercises. Ashok referred to these activities as the warm-up, which he repeated over the first four days. After the warm-up, Ashok engaged students in a discussion of social issues then wove these themes into various drama games and trust activities. Many of these games that Ashok used are similar in practice to drama games I have used though the metaphors differ. For example, he took the students through a trust activity that I knew as *Taxi driver*, but Ashok called it *Mahout and elephant*. Another was the game that I know as *Red Light, Green Light*. He called that *Stealing Grandmother's Cookies*. See Appendix I for instructions.

It interests me that similar drama games are used across the cultures and that the cultural frameworks are embedded within the context of such games. For example, the titles and explanations of Ashok's drama games reflect an appreciation and awareness of one's natural environment, whereas the same games that I teach my students are titled and explained in the context of an industrialized culture. I was also struck by the similarity in Ashok's approach to the drama classes that I had taught. This affirms for me Dissanayake's (1992) claims to the universality of art as well as people's need for it. It

¹³ Though Ashok explained the significance of the Hindu god Ganesha to theatre people in India, which is often done in India prior to commencing theatrical work it was made clear to students that this practice was not intended to be a religious one, but simply to provide the students with another way of seeing things, and to establish the theatre space as a symbolically sacred one so that the space would be respected at all times.

¹⁴ *Surya namaskara* means "sun salutation" in Sanskrit, and is a common morning yoga activity involving a series of postures that warm up and stretch the body. They are typically done in the morning in honour of the rising of the sun. Some of the poses suggest a person showing reverence to something that is above and out of reach. I have done some yoga postures just after sunrise while at *Natya Chetana's People's Festival* in Orissa. I have been told that the yoga positions called *Surya namaskara* are more prevalent in South India than in the north.

also affirms my belief that the path towards developing inclusive pedagogies—and on a larger scale towards peace—must involve cross-cultural interactions between people at the small and personal level. When individuals cross their cultural boundaries and engage in making special through art, they affirm that “if we try, perhaps anything will be possible” (Natya Chetana & Théâtre du Fil, 2003). Similarly, the power of grass roots activism is that it can be easier to successfully implement at the micro level and these positive results may be used to support others in their transformations. Working with Ashok proved in many respects to be more manageable for me culturally than I had expected. This may in part be attributed to the frequency with which both Ashok and I had imposed “homelessness” (Adorno, 1974; Giroux, 1994a; Janmohamed, 1994; Said, 1984, 2000) upon ourselves. However, it also proves that people can successfully challenge the limits of their cultural borders in order to increase learning. This is an experience that benefits my pedagogy regularly as I continue to look beyond the constructed borders of my classroom, school, community and culture. It also benefits my pedagogy because these constructed borders are eroding naturally as the result of globalization. Geographic, economic and political borders are giving way to a new social landscape in which cultures themselves are more mobile, more integrated with other cultures, and less easily defined (Mundy, 2005).

In addition to weaving social issues into drama games, Ashok assigned homework to each student. Every day, they were to conduct their own research and find statistics, data, media headlines, or personal anecdotes on a social issue of each student’s choosing. After doing some daily drama activities, Ashok then discussed the findings that students shared from their homework. This approach departs from my past practice. I taught

drama to foster a love for the arts and not for students to make social statements.

Pondering my career, I have always been attracted to theatrical material that is rich with social commentary. For much of my past work, the interpretation of the social commentary was up to me as director of a play or musical, and my pedagogy did not necessarily invite students to autonomously share their world views in such theatrical productions; their responsibilities had consisted of learning lines provided by the text, and blocking provided usually by me. In this sense, Ashok's approach was vastly different from my own: Ashok required that students own their work by defining it, analysing it, and representing it, as a student collective, free from his interference.

Eventually, by the fourth day, students engaged in activities that blended various theatre forms to tell stories relating to their social issues. He made frequent use of tableaux. This form is sometimes called image theatre¹⁵ in India, and similar to the dramatic form that I know as tableaux. Students freeze in a position to create an image, like seeing a snapshot. Since Ashok found the students to be highly articulate, he incorporated dialogue to be used in conjunction with these tableaux by using a narrator who was not part of the image. Students had constructed several scenes representing a variety of theatrical styles. The use of physicality was noticeable in all scenes. I see the value in using the term image theatre since a tableau is one frozen image to create an effect, whereas students also made use of their bodies while using stylized movements not normally attributed to humans. Staging, pacing and use of monologues and creative sound all helped to highlight the intense visual images that the students created. In their scenes, the students addressed issues of ageism, homophobia, sexism, child and spousal abuse, body image, stereotyping, racism, colonialism, and made statements on some

¹⁵ Boal (1992) also refers to a form called Image Theatre.

current events that were playing out in the courts across the USA, such as same-sex marriage and handgun laws. Ashok told me after one workshop day that the issues that the Maple Creek students raised differed from the issues that he was used to in his work with in Indian students. He asked me to explain the meaning of many of the *isms* he had heard about and told me that he was going to learn a lot by working with these students.

After the first four intensive days, Ashok assigned the Maple Creek group to work without our supervision for four days, so that we could begin working with the City Park students. The Maple Creek students met at the public library or at other students' homes, developing stories and issues into stories as told by a student-centered voice. Meanwhile, Ashok engaged Nicki's group in the same intensive training that the Maple Creek students had just finished. There, just as in Maple Creek, Ashok trained the students while I watched, took notes, pictures and videos¹⁶. Nicki's students had already been exposed to action theatre from a Boalian perspective. They adapted quickly to Ashok's methods and constructed drama artefacts that were much less dependent upon dialogue than those of Maple Creek yet much more physical. In this way, Ashok found the City Park students theatrically advanced and easy to work with. He explained to me the value of both theatrical approaches and encouraged me to recognize and work with such differences.

I would like to elaborate on some similarities between pedagogies. The more I read Boal, the more I note such similarities between his practices and those used by Ashok and *Natya Chetana*. Adrian Jackson (as cited in Boal, 1992) describes Boal's work as inciting change, primarily because of the active role that the audience plays:

¹⁶ Permissions had been sought and received for taking photos and video data for the purpose of promoting the *pilot project*. A documentary had been planned as a 'Phase 3' of this project. Because the ongoing work of *BTB* became all-consuming, I never got to Phase 3, and am no longer employed by this school district.

ADRIAN: Several actors rehearse a scene in which they then play in an appropriate public space; the scene usually involves an unexpected subversion of ‘normal’ behavior within that particular society. In reaction to the incidents in the scene, the public becomes involved in an argument, usually aided by a couple of agent provocateur actors mingling with the public and expressing extreme and opposite reactions to the events of the scene. (Jackson, in Boal, 1992, p. xx).

REBECCA: When the audience members participate in this way, they become subjects, as opposed to objects, and this transition is essential if the people are to become culturally powerful (Boal, 1985; Freire, 2002b). When I asked Ashok to describe his process, what he described could have been a testimonial to Boal’s work:

REBECCA: How is the street theatre organized?

ASHOK: The street theatre, done in, street theatre group as such, as per my knowledge...generally, the kind of people who are kind of sensitive, and um, something really bothers them. They feel they should react. They should have response to this. People get together. Generally, the script is evolved during the process of the production. It is not, ‘ok, now the script is done’ no, in theatre, the script is done, and then we sit together and read, and discuss, but everyone is important. Actors sometimes become a writer. Writer becomes an actor. Spectator becomes an actor, actor becomes a spectator.

REBECCA: Spectators become actors?

ASHOK: Yes! So, when we kind of initiate the discussion, so, they will, oh, how he become the part of the play. They start asking ‘why this character beaten this character?’ or ‘why he, this character refuse to accept his idea?’

REBECCA: They interrupt? Is it typical of them to interrupt during the middle of a performance?

ASHOK: Sometimes when there is something very sensational, for example when I directed a play on harmony, like Hindu/Muslim. They interrupted, community people. You know. They stopped us in the middle of the play. And then, it’s like that, we have faced, there are a couple of cases, but generally, unless if it is a very um sensational or something to do with the religion or something to do with the one community, the other things people *do* accept, they start thinking, they react, after the play, but sometimes when we do something to their life, and you know.

(Interview #1 with Ashok, 2003, p. 2)

REBECCA: I had heard some of the European guests at *Natya Chetana*’s festival refer to their work as Boalian. The most interesting thing for me is that neither Ashok nor the members of *Natya Chetana* have had exposure to Boal’s work. I decided that whatever gifts of insight that Ashok and Subodh gave me, I would acknowledge publicly. Because

Ashok has developed his theatre methods without Boal's influence, I find it problematic to credit Boal for the theory used, even if similar.

Scene iii: At the dance studio in City Park, and then later at Alex's house in Maple Creek, the two communities of students come together to work on the theatre project. The effects of White privilege becomes evident to Rebecca.

REBECCA:

At the conclusion of the four days with the City Park students, both groups came together. While Nicki and I supervised, Ashok introduced the two groups of students together by leading them through a series of drama games and then asking them to show-and-tell their work, with each group showing the other group pieces of issues-related theatre games and scenes. I was impressed by this means of introduction of the students to one another and to their work. I had been worried about team building issues once we brought the two groups together. Ashok observed what I had already begun worrying about: students organized themselves in their cliques whenever we took breaks from the theatre work. For example, when the students sat to observe some theatre work, the City Park students sat together, but separate from the Maple Creek students. One of my students had also noticed this, and she came to the workshop the next day, inviting everyone, including teachers, to come to her place for a meal, swimming and Jet Skiing, hoping to build a team spirit. I struggled to work through the social dynamics that I was observing. It was not a scene that I could relate to from my childhood, which had been full of change that amounted to exciting adventures. Instead, I observed suspicion.

Months later, I confided this to the Diversity Coordinator for Maple Creek. Marilyn¹⁷ helped me to understand the concept of privilege that I had heard so many references to in my graduate program. I now understand that my response to change is a

¹⁷ Marilyn is a pseudonym.

reflection of my own privilege. For me, change has been borne of choice, and such choice has been calculated to predict positive outcomes. Marilyn explained that many students from City Park High may not have enjoyed the consistency of positive changes and choices that I have enjoyed. As Marilyn explained, the choice of the Maple Creek students to attend this swimming party may have involved excitement at making new friends and having fun on the lake. Marilyn analysed my anxiety over being able to have the two groups of students like each other. Perhaps I needed to let go of this need and just learn from observation and experience. Perhaps the City Park students didn't know how to swim. In this case, how would they maintain a sense of dignity at Alex's party? Perhaps the students didn't have swimming suits. Perhaps they didn't have transportation from the city centre to the suburb where Alex lived. Perhaps they had to babysit siblings, prepare dinner, or go to their jobs. I responded to Marilyn by questioning why the students wouldn't have disclosed any of this information, but Marilyn calmly explained the essence of McIntosh's work (1990), which was that perhaps I—as well as my students—responded to this from a place of privilege that none of us was aware existed. In this sense, it is possible that Alex's generosity was perceived as an act of arrogance, one that would force all involved to notice the socioeconomic differences between the students of Maple Creek and City Park. Thus, through an act of generosity on the part of Alex that backfired, and with the help of Marilyn's wise guidance, I was able to challenge some of my assumptions about how I approach my role as a teacher/facilitator.

I had not considered the risks of confronting this privilege in this partnership, but both Ashok and Nicki had, which is why they suggested that the fusion part of the *pilot*

project be held entirely at City Park. I am fortunate to have benefited from Ashok's and Marilyn's guidance; I believe they have prevented a few faux pas on my part.

Further to the challenges upon educators who embrace inclusion in their pedagogy are the numerous fractured pedagogies by those who are attempting to address multicultural education. Some of these pedagogies serve as foils to the issue, doing nothing more than placate real attempts to dismantle the hegemony of Whiteness. A pedagogy may even originate from the dominant culture with the intent to preserve dominant culture (Gorski, 2006b; Sleeter, 1999). Other pedagogies that come from critical theorists such as Banks (1998), Gay (2000), Howard (1993) and Sleeter (1996), policy analysts such as Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall (2004), and others—fortunately—are not homogeneous, and offer a variety of perspectives that speak to the multifaceted needs of inclusive teaching. Akbar (2004), Giroux (2005), Gorski (2006a, 2006b), Milner (2008), Subodh, (Pattanaik, 2004) and Sleeter (1996) call for keeping this debate political. This challenges educators, who are often directed by their administration to avoid bringing politics into the classroom. I provide two personal examples to support this: after being handed the responsibility, as drama club advisor of a school, of overseeing the annual creation of a Remembrance Day play that made up a large part of a Remembrance Day Assembly, one year the school administration cancelled the play at the assembly. I was not consulted in advance of this event, but was told that the administration did not approve of one of the scenes (student-written and performed) because a pacifist statement had been made by one of the characters in the play—a mother who had been informed that her son had been killed in battle. The year that the play was cancelled, I was permitted to run the play that the students had prepared for a

limited audience in my drama classroom, which was a very large tech shop that had been converted into a classroom and a performance area. This play was widely attended by many teachers and students who packed the room. For the play in my classroom, I also let my students write their own scripts and the play included a dance drama scene that invoked a critical discussion of war in general. The year after that, the entire assembly was cancelled in favour of a short speech delivered over the P.A. system and I was told that my students—and perhaps I as well—did not understand the meaning of Remembrance Day and that the plays that I was allowing them to produce were offensive. What the administration had wanted from me, I found out in retrospect, was to assign popular poems to members of the drama club for them to memorize and recite at the Remembrance Day Assembly. More recently, I was told to avoid using biased articles in my English class and also to prevent students from making politically biased remarks that might offend other students. In both cases, I believe the administration intended to avoid critical scrutiny from the public by maintaining the status quo. In both cases, if this will is enforced, then the opportunity for students to explore their ideas in a public forum is lost. The problem for educators is that if they follow these types of direction from their principals, they are accomplices in the maintenance of the hegemony of the dominant culture, not to mention negating one of their functions, which is to assist independent and critical thinking in their students. However, if they do not follow this type of direction, they risk facing disciplinary measures that may have career-crippling effects. Furthermore, even if teachers do not succumb to pressures to conform to the largely conservative agenda of educational policy (Giroux, 1994b, 2004, 2008; Gorski, 2006a, 2006b; McIntosh, 1990; Williams, 1991), the presence of multiple perspectives from the

various arenas of critical theory may serve to confuse educators such as myself, who find themselves trying to challenge their own pedagogies in order to develop more culturally responsive ones (Castagno, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2003; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Postman, 1985).

The experience of Alex's party helped me to appreciate that I cannot project my beliefs on to the students with whom I worked. In fact, McIntosh's work has helped me to understand a key challenge of partnerships between suburban students with inner city students that I have not found elsewhere. Her work has also informed my subsequent work with social justice and equity education. The *pilot project* thus facilitated my transformation as a teacher in a number of ways. I decided to imbed White privilege work into my pedagogy from this point forward.

It should be noted that the students in the *pilot project* demonstrated respect for the work produced, and all students repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to embrace the work and the perspectives of one another. Ashok repeatedly observed to me that the City Park students created physically impressive drama while the Maple Creek students created powerful pieces verbally. Once the students had shared their work, Ashok began the work of coordinating a play that the two groups created from the issues that they had been addressing during the training. Ashok's role became more of a resource person, guide and technical director during these last four days. In this sense, students were provided with enough guidance to feel comfortable with the theatre form, but had virtual control of the content. With the work that they had constructed, they put together a series of scenes that followed the issues in what the students felt reflected a sound progression

of exploration of issues. On the last day of workshops, Ashok organized the material that the students developed to create a play that would last between 30-40 minutes.

Scene iv: City Park High School's Black Box Theatre, June 20, 2003: the collective performance of Beyond the Borders©!

REBECCA:

According to Ashok (2003), theatre offers a window to the world to audiences who are often illiterate, thus he used a production format that consisted of three parts. The first was a pre-show activity consisting of music, dancing and drumming. In India, this serves as an announcement to the people that an event of public interest, such as a play will take place. A theatre troupe will march through a village drumming and dancing. I have participated in four of such marches with *Natya Chetana* on the first day of their festivals. Since we wanted the students to be exposed to an Indian form, we chose to keep this pre-show element. The second was the actual play presented to the public. We advertised this on the radio and distributed flyers, naming the event “Beyond the Borders” (Beyond the Borders, 2003a) once the audience congregated in the Black Box Theatre at City Park High, the pre-show of music and dancing acted as an artistic prelude to the actual show, rather than a public announcement. The third was a talk-back session between the actors and the audience members.

In order to prepare for the pre-show, Ashok had met with Pete, a talented violinist and Maple Creek student. Pete was not part a participant in the *pilot project*, but was willing to join as a musician. Ashok and Pete met and rehearsed a version of a South Indian raga¹⁸. Pete played a tune for Ashok, who was impressed. It was a simple melody

¹⁸ A kind of tune used in training musicians in classical Indian music. The one they used is a common raga in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

in a minor key. As their rehearsals progressed, Pete began improvising complex variations of the raga, while Ashok accompanied Pete by playing a djembe¹⁹.

The raga, although used for a different purpose than it would be in India, did provide a window of time for the students in the theatre troupe to sense that their work as actors was about to begin and get into role. From a practical standpoint, it reminded me of the overtures in musical productions that served to make real for the actors standing invisible in the wings that in moments they would be on stage while preparing the audience by setting the tone of the play. As an actor, those few moments for me have always been important for me to let go of whatever worries were currently monopolizing my thoughts and to enter my stage identity. I observed a similar process with the members of *BTB*, who engaged in their own processes of relaxing, warming up, concentrating and meditating. Later, when *BTB* became its own theatre troupe, the students decided to continue to use this as a nice distinguishing feature of their troupe. Pete joined *BTB*, and appeared on stage primarily in the pre-show playing his violin.

Part way through the raga played by Pete and Ashok, the performers from Maple Creek Collegiate and City Park High entered the stage quietly, and stood in a circular formation in the middle of the stage. We used a thrust staging concept, creating a stage in the centre of the room and the audience seated around it on three sides. The second element of the preshow began immediately after Pete and Ashok had stopped playing. The students performed a short Indian folk dancing piece that they learned from Ashok as part of their physical training. Following the dance, students demonstrated one series of the *surya namaskara* yoga poses to the audience, and then began their play. While I

¹⁹ A hand drum from Senegal and Ghana. Ashok is also a professional djembe player and fuses his Indian-style techniques on the djembe.

appreciated these latter two parts of the pre-show as having warm up and stretching merit, when the Maple Creek students formed their theatre troupe, *BTB*, they eliminated the dance and yoga, opting to warm up and stretch out of sight of audience. Ashok conceded that the yoga and folk dances might not figure into a theatre performance, but he wanted the American audience to appreciate some of the pure forms of yoga and dance that the students had learned during their training, and so in this sense, the performance of such took on an aesthetic quality rather than the more complex integrated function as practiced in India. As a teacher, I saw merit in yoga training, particularly in my belief that in order for students to achieve a high level of physicality in their theatre productions, that time spent practicing yoga and dance would lead to better body control. However, as a teacher, I would also struggle between the Western theatre culture that is highly verbal in nature and the Indian one that is highly visual in nature.

Ashok explained how this same form of theatre that he practiced in India requires minimal props, set, costumes, and technical support because these plays are supposed to be mountable outside, in a number of conditions. *BTB*'s play itself was performed without any technical sound. All sound effects were provided by Ashok playing the drum, Pete playing violin, and through voice. We set the stage lights simply in a few areas and a student volunteer and Nicki worked these. All students wore the same costume: black tee-shirts and blue jeans. There were only two props in the play and these were bamboo poles. This was a liberating process for me; I learned that meaningful theatre can be created without a heavy reliance on props and technical support.

The play integrated the work by both student groups, and students were inclusively cast in all scenes. The scenes reflected issues that were important to them

such as nationalism, evangelism, homophobia, physical abuse, body image, steroid abuse, ageism, patriotism, alcoholism, family discord, teen popularity, and alienation. The students' use of physicality impressed me. They used many tableaux and levels when acting. For example, in a scene depicting alienation, the students formed a circle and made a tableau facing outward toward the audience. The focus was on the student in the centre, who delivered a monologue. He tried to connect with the people in the circle, but they would not face or acknowledge him. He discovered that he was trapped in the circle and could not escape. The frozen tormented looks and poses of those in the circle depicted that they too were alienated and trapped.

Following the play was a post-show discussion. Ashok selected a panel of five students who demonstrated excellent leadership and verbal skills. The five students took turns explaining the process they had been through and then invited the audience to ask questions or make comments that would further the thinking of everyone.

The post-production dialogue is the link that is designed to lead to action. When people in the audience participate directly with the actors, they cease being spectators, and become "spect-actors" (Boal, 1985). This is because they are no longer passive audience members watching helplessly, but are actively engaged in the issues analysis along with the actors. Because actors also are listening to what the audience is telling them, they are both actors and audience (Ashok, 2003; Boal, 1985). Once the public become aware of their situation and vocalize it, they cease being objects of their own history but subjects of it (Freire, 2002b). This is the critical point about raising mass awareness: the common people for whom public policy is inaccessible become active citizens, aware of their ability to use their voice as agents of change, aware of their ability

to mass organize to seek social change. Freire's work, a postcolonial text (Giroux, 1994a), speaks to a wider audience than those oppressed people of his native Brazil. Richard Shaull (as cited in Freire, 2002a) describes the social oppression of Freire's description as subtle mechanisms that kept people "'submerged' in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible" (p. 30).

RICHARD SHAULL:

[A]dvanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in a new 'culture of silence.' (as cited in Freire, 2002a, p. 32)

REBECCA: The process of constructing plays about issues that the students feel passionate about and then engaging in dialogue with their audiences is a process through which the students can further their understanding of a number of complex social issues. By exploring and presenting these issues in a way that reflects their worldview to the public, the students engage themselves and their audience in what Freire calls a "[c]ritical and liberating dialogue (2002a, p. 65) in which the students display their hope that such issues can be worked out in a more humane fashion. According to Freire, "[c]oncern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization" (p. 43). The recognition of dehumanization calls them to action. Many of the issues the students chose to aesthetically explore depict dehumanization and lend themselves well to analysis using critical theory. Action theatre invites me to transcend my previously limited pedagogy. Action theatre processes seem to extend artistically from Freire's epistemology. According to Freire (2002a), this liberating dialogue is complex. It is creative, messy, leads to conflicts, and the path to a better future. Whereas "[s]ectarianism, fed by

fanaticism, is always castrating” (p. 37), “consciousness [which] causes anarchy” (p. 35), is liberating.

Freire’s hope and his “trust in the people, and [his] faith in men and women, and in the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love” (p. 40) is evident throughout his works (2000, 2002a, 2002b) and leads me to believe that tensions and conflicts that may arise from adopting such practices of freedom may be subverted. I find Freire’s pedagogy very compelling in an environment where I often feel oppressed or coerced to implement public educational policies—and in doing so, promote such policies—that ought to be examined more critically. In Freire’s invitation to engage with my students in a critical and liberating dialogue, I feel optimistic that my teaching efforts demonstrate my commitment to service that drew me to teaching in the first place.

Ashok had warned me that sometimes these dialogues turn into arguments, because the presentation of the issues is to some degree political. In India, these arguments take on a range of manner, but they can become violent (Ashok, 2003; Natya Chetana, 2004). Although neither Ashok nor I felt that the students would face any physical danger as a result of them performing this play, I was worried about possible psychological harm that might be caused by students facing harsh criticism of their work. Ashok prepared students for the possibility of an audience member taking issue with their representation of an issue, by explaining possibilities and role playing by posing as a distraught audience member. I observed with keen interest, and noted that a couple of the students in the group expressed the desire to be ideologically challenged that night.

During the post production panel, students received numerous positive comments about the maturity level of the group, the depth of issues analysis, their acting skills, their

teamwork skills, their creative use of humans and bamboos for props, but no one challenged the students ideologically or aesthetically on their work. At the time, I was surprised. Somehow, I had decided that the work that the students were doing was so subversive that someone would have to be offended. In retrospect, there are many reasons why the reception to this play was predictable. First, most audience members were friends, family members and allies of those in attendance at the play. Finally, my husband, who was born and raised in the Midwest, explained the cultural mores in the Midwest call for the decorum of civility. I can relate to this because I sense something in the Canadian ethos that encourages one to avoid conflict. This also gives me pause to reflect about a difficult challenge that *BTB* would need to face: to create an environment that would lead to authentic critical and liberating dialogue and not just a dialogue of praise and good manners; the former can lead to “creative leaps” (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 37) and “constructive controversy” (pp. 35-37) while the latter may inhibit it and create an environment of “groupthink” (Janis, 1972, as cited in Crossley, 2006, p. 37). Whatever the reasons for the positive reception to the *June 20 play* (Beyond the Borders, 2003a), parents of the Maple Creek students who participated as well as those on the Diversity Committee urged me to continue this work.

The following day, I returned to Canada, ecstatic about the outcome of the *pilot project* as well as about the possibility of keeping this energy going in the fall.

Scene v: Summer, 2003. Ashok’s departure.

When Ashok’s work was done, there was general elation among the *BTB* group. I felt it too. This elation, however, was tempered by the bittersweet realization that Ashok would be leaving the Maple Creek community. Ashok had come to the USA as a

volunteer worker. The terms of Ashok's sponsorship as well as those of the grant that I received required me to be responsible for his room and board, but did not provide for any remuneration to compensate for his missed time from work. After giving numerous workshops at the Maple Creek schools prior to the *pilot project*, drumming performances at two concerts and his work with *BTB*, Ashok left a significant imprint. This gift of Ashok's time did not go unnoticed in the community.

The community members celebrated Ashok's generosity in a variety of ways: Ashok was invited to attend services at various places of worship; at Alex's lakeside party, the students taught Ashok how to use a Jet Ski and then took turns riding with him on the lake; Ashok was invited to a number of parties and was recognized at these parties; Ashok was invited by various students and staff members to various social and meal gatherings; the members of *BTB* took up a collection and presented Ashok with a cash gift and some souvenirs, and when they presented these to him, they invited him to return to the community as a professional and as a friend.

After the work the *pilot project* was complete, we continued to discuss our recent work, and since I had been encouraged to continue it, Ashok and I debriefed our project many times. This helped me to come to an understanding of my role, but it has also informed my work as a graduate student. While I have read more widely than Ashok has on the topics of action theatre, I was afforded the luxury of verbalizing my understanding with someone who was more experienced and knowledgeable in the practice of action theatre. No amount of scholarly reading can match this.

One example of how my graduate work has been informed emerged from discussions that Ashok and I engaged in regarding the intersection of academia and

practice. I have come to the conclusion that there need to be more spaces within academia for scholars to interact with non-academic practitioners; for practitioners who are not academically recognized to find places within academia for the purpose of their own professional growth and for sharing with those in academia; for academics to put into practice that which they are researching. Both Ashok and I have experienced various barriers to these processes, and while academic integrity must be valued, so must the experience. I have seen numerous policies set in place to protect the former, but few policies or practices that protect the latter. Experience provides for a much richer understanding of the subject matter than any amount of studying can provide (Dewey, 1938). By overlapping our shared experience with the two-week pilot project with our discussions, Ashok provided me with an understanding that would help me plan my future leadership of the ongoing theatre project that was about to emerge. During this time, I came to appreciate my understanding of the significance of the work that we had just completed, that we had “made special” (Dissanayake, 1992) the initial *BTB* experience; I felt excited to sally forth into the future.

When it came time for me to drop Ashok off at the airport, however, my heart became heavy with the weight of loss. I had enjoyed rich professional benefits from the result of the work that Ashok and I conceived. My appreciation of Dissanayake’s term “making special” has grown intellectually within my musings and pedagogy. The creation of *BTB* and being part of a group that began crafting an art form by exploring their issues through this form transformed me in ways that I could not have imagined possible. I am reminded of the line that I delivered in *Natya Chetana*’s play with *Théâtre du Fil*: “perhaps some day, everything will be possible. I don’t know [pause] but we’ll try

together.” (Natya Chetana & Théâtre du Fil, 2003). Ashok, I, and a group of adolescent students had collectively embarked on an exploration of what could be possible. It is as if we were all ideologically embracing that line, waiting for an opportunity to celebrate it through action. When I said good-bye to Ashok, and returned to my life as a teacher, student and member of the Maple Creek community, I felt renewed faith in the hope that is expressed in the collaborative play by *Natya Chetana* and *Théâtre du Fil*. I also experienced anxiety over my new role: as much as I admire all that Ashok does, my feet are not meant to wear his shoes.

Scene vi: *September, 2003. Rebecca invites the Maple Creek students from the pilot project to form their own theatre group. Beyond the Borders (BTB) becomes official.*

REBECCA:

I invited the students who participated in the *June 20 play* (Beyond the Borders, 2003a) to become the core group for their new theatre troupe. The students liked the name of *BTB* and asked if they could invite friends to join. In addition to this happening, we put out posters and announcements inviting the student body at large to participate. Two of the students who participated in the *June 20 play* had graduated and moved away to attend college. One student opted not to stay with *BTB*. The rest began talking about our first project. At the same time as this group was officially formed as a school club, students approached me and one other teacher at the school to advise a new *Students for Social Action (SSA)* club. We agreed. Two of the students in *SSA* decided to join *BTB*. One of these young women, Allison was more interested in helping me to direct the plays than to act in them. I thought the idea of a student director was a good one. For one thing, I had never really fully appreciated the concept of a director-less troupe. Both Freire (2002b) and Boal (1985) call for empowerment for the people by the people. Ashok’s

theatre form utilizes the theatre group as a collective director (Ashok, 2004) and ideologically, I see the value in approaching social justice theatre work in this way. *Natya Chetana*'s practices, however, seem to both support and refute this approach. Subodh is the director of the NGO *Natya Chetana* as well as the director of most of *Natya Chetana*'s plays. He critiques the traditional theatre practices that endorse a caste system through a hierarchy that places the director at the top, followed by lead actors, then bit actors, then technical crew, then behind-the-scenes people. At the same time, Subodh's sovereignty in terms of influencing the direction of *Natya Chetana*—both philosophically and artistically—cannot be denied. It is very useful to have a person who is willing to take on the added responsibility of leading. I was willing to take on this role as staff advisor to *BTB*. It is also useful to have a person who is willing to watch actors in rehearsal for the purpose of helping to guide them to a more cohesive theatrical piece. I was less comfortable with this role, not because I don't enjoy directing because I love this role, but because I wanted the artistic work and rhetorical perspectives to come solely from the students so that they could own it fully. That Allison, and to a lesser extent Pete, were willing to wear the director's hat for the betterment of *BTB*'s work was a great boon to the troupe.

I asked Allison how she saw herself helping me, and she said that she was good at research, writing, organizing, and would soon learn various theatre techniques in order to eventually help the troupe with stage direction. I knew that Allison was friends with a few members of *BTB*. At the next meeting, I announced the plan to have Allison help out with the above-mentioned duties. She was welcomed by the group, and turned out to be very skilled in all areas that she had promised. In fact, over the course of the next two

years, Allison would, in addition to researching, writing and organizing, take on acting roles, and once she realized she had great improvisational skills and a strong, clear voice, she also began to act and serve as spokesperson during many post production panels. In her final year in high school, Allison wrote a play about a certain social justice issue, won an award for her play in a writing contest, and then proceeded to turn it into a film with a few other members of *BTB*. This was a project independent of *BTB*'s work, and it was my first indication that my pedagogy was having a ripple effect. I would soon see other members of *BTB* take on separate projects that combined social justice and art.

In the fall of 2003, Allison and some other students in *BTB* and *SSA* put into action an idea to host a hunger banquet. Allison and John, who both belonged to *SSA*, planned the event by using the resources found on Oxfam's website (Oxfam America, 2009). *BTB* presented a play depicting some issues that pertain to poverty. The focus would be on raising funds and awareness to fight poverty. Because the students felt it was important to address the issues of poverty on both global and local levels, they decided to donate half of the proceeds to Oxfam and the other half to the nearest food bank.

Scene vii: Fall, 2003. BTB mounts its first play without Ashok and without the students from City Park.

In October, 2003, we hosted the *Hunger Banquet*. It was not very well advertised although at the time we thought it was. Still, we raised almost \$500, and the event was attended by the principal of the high school, which really impressed the students. Prior to *BTB*'s performance, John emceed the event on behalf of *SSA* and led the guests through a process of becoming wealthier but more often than not, becoming poorer. He explained scenarios and attached them to people in the audience. This is part of the Oxfam program. People are eventually seated in three groupings to simulate a reflection of the global

distribution of wealth. John, as emcee, by providing the fruit of Allison's research: samples of personal narratives and analysis, selected where each audience members sat. A substitute teacher who was well-loved by students and staff alike, sat at a table covered in fine linens all to herself, where she enjoyed a full-course meal by candlelight with her own pair of waiters. It was probably her popularity that led John to send her there to represent the top 10% of wealth in the world. It was probably equally deliberate that John sat the principal in the area that represented the poorest 50% of the world's population. Although the principal was very popular with the students and also respected by members of *BTB*, I think this was John's way of joking with the principal. The principal willingly played along. Approximately ten people sat at regular wooden tables and were served a simple meal. They represented the world's middle class. The rest—including the principal—had to sit on the floor and were each given a bowl of rice with a few beans in it. Once everyone had been fed their food, which was donated by the school cafeteria (a private company), the theatre began. We followed the same theatrical format used in June. Pete played the same raga on his violin, and since Ashok was back in India, I played the djembe. *BTB* had not yet adopted a scripting process, other than what Ashok used, which was to have someone write basic notes. Each student was to either compose a monologue or choose one from the Oxfam website. Allison had done superb initial research and had short listed and edited a number of monologues to provide a series of touching vignettes that represented people from around the world. See Appendix II for examples of these monologues. Allison also chose one monologue for herself and acted in the *Hunger Banquet*. These monologues were performed along with a few scenes. One of the scenes was incorporated a number of tableaux that depicted

Globalization, sweat shop conditions; substance abuse, a drug deal & an addict in withdrawal; domestic poverty, two homeless people living under a bridge; international poverty, people and corpses huddled, a couple of orphaned babies & a malnutrition image; [and] effects of poverty, domestic abuse. (Rebecca's teaching journal, 2003)

Another scene, written by two members of *BTB* involved a politician explaining the genius of his campaign to his secretary. They purposely chose to depict stereotypical gender roles to highlight power differences. The male politician walked casually through a slum filled with homeless people sleeping on the streets. Every time the politician encountered a homeless person, he showed his contempt for the person by kicking the body before stepping over it to continue dictating to his female secretary, who scribbled in her notebook. His speech consisted of listing a number of social services to be cut because “they aren’t necessary” (Beyond the Borders, 2003b), and instead he would use the money to build a public pool and mail the voters a \$300 rebate cheque. While he moved through the slum, the people living on the streets gradually awoke and came to an awareness of who was visiting their abode. In an effort to appeal to his humanity, they slowly surrounded the politician and his secretary, holding up their hands in a plea for help. He brushed them aside while working himself up to a narcissistic climax in which he proclaimed: “after all, this is America, the richest country in the world! There is no poverty here!” (Beyond the Borders, 2003b)

Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall (2004) cite public protests as a form of ad hoc policy evaluation. It just so happened that the amount of the rebate referenced in this play—\$300—was the amount of the last rebate cheque that Americans received from George W. Bush in 2002. By satirizing this event, members of *BTB* were able to publicly criticize this administrative choice as a reckless political move that served to further

disenfranchise those who might be most in need of social services while ensuring that the politician got himself re-elected. I felt very proud of the students for creating this scene for many reasons, not the least was that the students were well aware of how conservative their community was and had the courage to voice some of their dissenting opinions.

Students had printed the monologues on the placemats of the guests, in order to personalize the anguishing experience of one who lives in poverty. They used one highly physical scene that they had used in the *pilot project*, in which students formed a mass in the centre of a circle and raised their hands upward. However, the message of their tableau changed. In the *June 20 play* (Beyond the Borders, 2003a), the image was meant to depict hope. In the *Hunger Banquet* (Beyond the Borders, 2003b), the image was used to depict desperation. Only the facial expressions changed. The potential for physical theatre is exciting. The members of *BTB* were becoming skilled at conveying powerful themes and symbols through body language.

As with the *June 20 play*, the students held a talk back session after their play. Most of the comments were again very affirming. A couple of parents asked students to explain how they felt presenting such heady issues. One man asked why he had been made to pay \$10 to come to this school dinner theatre and be forced to eat rice and beans on the floor. He also wanted to know what we were going to do with the money since it obviously was more than his dinner was worth. Ah. Finally a voice of concern surfaced to challenge the group. John and one student from *BTB* used this as an opportunity to voice rhetorically what they had been attempting to do through art, which is to get people talking about the unfairness of the inequitable distribution of wealth. They explained that many people in the world don't even get as much rice or beans in a day as the man got for

his dinner. They informed the audience that the cafeteria company had donated the meal and service, and that the students made their props, so that 100% of the monies received would be donated to the local food bank and to Oxfam.

Scene viii: Maple Creek. Things are going well for BTB. While students revel in the concept of a director-less troupe, Rebecca struggles to keep up to the activities while developing her pedagogy that will reflect in the activities of the group. Students write first scripted play entitled Omniphobia.

REBECCA:

After the *Hunger Banquet*, word started spreading amongst the community. Requests began coming from Diversity Committees for *BTB* to perform at multicultural education functions, at teacher in-services and at graduate classes for a local university. *BTB* produced plays for the school's annual *I-Act Festival* along with other student and teacher-directed plays. It presented plays and pieces of plays at assemblies. It held its own theatrical functions in Maple Creek's Black Box Theatre. We were busier than we had planned. In spite of this, I noted a reticence on the part of many members to perform for their own peers. When I asked students why, a number of them expressed a variety of anxieties associated with being judged by their peers. Deilek articulated this sentiment well in one of his journals:

DEILEK: One considerable deterrent, I suspect, was how we would have been received by our classmates. There are enough students that would be immature about the subject to make a mess of the whole thing, and they'd pull all the followers down with them, leaving only a small fraction actually appreciating the messages and getting something valuable out of it. Most people in *BTB* weren't too concerned with the ways that they were perceived by other students, so it wasn't fear of being labelled or anything like that, but mostly that they probably had little faith in our school to grow under the exposure. (Deilek's participant journal A)

REBECCA: Deilek's journal clarifies that which confounded me for many months:

although the members of *BTB* felt comfortable with their individual reputations within

the school—reputations as creative, free-thinkers who buck certain trends and as members of *BTB*, which represented a group that protested the meaning of status quo, from cliques at schools to public policies—yet did not feel comfortable with their peers seeing their specific work. It wasn't the risk of being labelled radical, as I had presumed, but the risk of the reaction of the audience socially spiralling down to a place from which public humiliation might be inevitable. Deilek had described the Maple Creek community as one that “encourages a freedom of opinion and thought enough that it doesn't discourage students who choose to close out the rest of the world” (Deilek's participant journal D). What Deilek describes is a paradox that may provide for conditions that create a strongly conservative status quo while at the same time allowing for counterculture cracks where subversion to the status quo is acceptable. The two challenges are then to first ensure that the students who wish to subvert feel safe enough to do so and second that they are able to do so in such a way that their messages get acknowledged. In one of her writing folders, Alex explains,

ALEX: If the skit is too preachy or tries to push a certain point of view onto high school students, they will just tune it out. The main goal of theatre activism in a high school setting should be to get high schoolers interested in the problems the world faces today. It should make them want to do something, instead of just sitting and watching television. It should inspire them to try to make a change. (Alex's participant journal C)

REBECCA: Deilek expressed a collective lack of faith in the community to “grow under the exposure” of the plays of *BTB*. I also experienced moments of weak faith in the community's ability to respond to *BTB*'s work with productive dialogue, which may have inhibited me from opening certain dialogues, in spite of my belief that opening the dialogues are essential to democracy and to the pedagogy that I am developing. In one of her journals, Alex echoed my regrets. She wrote: “I don't think there would have been

problems, I wish we had performed in front of the school” (Alex’s participant folder #20). However, in the case of Alex, I think that she has reflected upon this reticence to perform in front of peers, to challenge other people’s perspectives. She writes,

ALEX:

I think BTB has helped me to not be afraid to speak my mind about issues. I go to school in a very conservative area, and even though the theatre group here is more liberal, many still have tunnel vision about issues. BTB taught me to look at all points of view and to discuss issues with people whose views are different than my own. (Alex’s participant journal # 31)

REBECCA:

By early 2004, things were looking promising for *BTB*. My annual trip to India to attend *Natya Chetana*’s festival conflicted with the school’s annual *1-Act Festival*. Another teacher who directed a play for the 1-Acts agreed to supervise *BTB* in my absence, and they performed. Since the *Hunger Banquet*, the first play that *BTB* created fused some of the material from their first two plays. At a number of rehearsals, Günther, a student with great charisma and leadership ability, had observed a growing culture of fear manifesting in the USA. He suggested doing a play about fear and the group enthusiastically agreed. They called their play *Omniphobia*. The play had six independent scenes, and they depicted various manifestations of fear as they pertain to abuses of power in society. The first scene made use of tableaux. *BTB* opted, for many of their plays, to use tableaux in conjunction with monologue narratives that the students had written. In *Omniphobia*, the monologues offered a sensationalist and haunting perspective of society. For example, the first few monologues began like this:

KYLA: Domestic Abuse! [pause for tableau] Two thirds of all marriages at one point or another will experience domestic abuse.

DRUMMER: Tickatackatickatak...BOOM!

BRI: Homophobia! [pause for tableau] Matthew Sheppard was the victim of a hate crime on October 6, 1998. 6 days later, he died from complications

to his injuries. Now there's a group of activists trying to put up a monument saying that Matt Sheppard entered Hell on October 12, 1998 all because he was gay. [pause] Is it right?

DRUMMER: Tickatackatickatak...BOOM!

DANIELA: Body Image! [pause for tableau] Many teens feel the need to fit in with today's thin ideal media. Sometimes drastic measures are taken, and a teen begins to show signs of an eating disorder, such as anorexia nervosa in which a victim actually starves him or herself to a point where he or she only has 15% of the body weight that is considered normal, or bulimia nervosa which is characterized by alternating episodes of bingeing and purging. It is estimated 10% of teens have an eating disorder, 90% of which are female.

(Omniphobia ©, BTB, 2004a, p. 1)

REBECCA: The tone of the monologues that followed these matched the somewhat shocking use of statistics and actual events that students had researched on their own time. Further, the monologues that they wrote reflected issues that they were passionate about. For example, two students wrote monologues reflecting racial issues:

DINAH- Ignorance! [pause for tableau] All Muslims are out to get us; HIV is spread through casual contact. [pause] Ignorance is much more than not knowing that $2 \times 2 = 4$, and consequences are farther reaching than failing a math test. Ignorance is the cause of hatred and fear in our society.

DRUMMER: Tickatackatickatak...BOOM!

HARA- Segregation! [pause for tableau] You would think after all of the efforts from people like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, segregation would be eliminated in the United States. Yet in some states today, they still have separate schools for their white and black students, which also held separate proms.

(Omniphobia ©, BTB, 2004a, pp. 2-3)

REBECCA: Another student provided a chilling recollection of history that served to deconstruct popular notions of nationalism:

BRANDEIS- Nationalism! [pause for tableau] Millions of corpses at Wounded Knee, Sand Creek, Nicaragua, and Vietnam. [long pause] Is our flag big enough to cover them all?

(Omniphobia ©, BTB, 2004a, p. 2)

REBECCA: The monologues ranged from one sentence to one paragraph, all depicting various social ills in society and reflecting the pervasive fear that Günther had wanted to

work on thematically. The methods that students used to create these reflected a pedagogy that I learned from Ashok: students researched media coverage of certain events that interested them, and then attempted to think critically and create a new philosophical lens through which to view the issue. Upon reflection, these practices help me to connect to Boal's (1998) discussion of the various forms of popular theatre by combining concepts such as "newspaper theatre" (pp. 234-246) and "didactic theatre" (pp.216-219), where students learn to decode the political agenda provided in media messages and then reframe them from a perspective that challenges the dominant discourse. Paulo Freire (2000), explains how alienation is socially constructed:

PAULO: Irrisistibly attracted by the lifestyle of the director society, alienated man (*sic*) is a nostalgic man, never truly committed to his world...His alienated culture prevents him from understanding that his thinking and world-expression cannot find acceptance beyond his frontiers unless he is faithful to his particular world. (p.8)

REBECCA: Freire and Boal speak to me as I reflect upon *BTB*'s work, such as Brandeis' "Nationalism" monologue. Is it possible that the popularity of nationalistic jingoism, as expressed in mainstream films, E-mail forwards and other expressions appeal to us because we are alienated from our humanity? What other effects of alienation are being manifested in public discourse that lead to social construction that may betray our authenticity? What is authenticity? How is it that Brandeis was able to step outside of mainstream discourse in order to ask the revolutionary question "is our flag big enough to cover them all?"

The work seemed to rouse the audience and much discussion of these monologues ensued in the post production panels in comparison with the other scenes, thus affirming for me the impact and value of using monologues and tableaux as a form. However, the

last monologue departed from the barrage of fear images and rhetorical flourishes. It happened quite organically; the students had agreed to write a play about fear and yet one student chose to frame this in a hopeful perspective:

CHRIS- Love! [pause for tableau] Despite the plethora of problems and negative emotions in this world, there still prevails a certain positive energy by blessing and positive emotions, the most prevalent of which is love.

(*Omniphobia* ©, BTB, 2004a, p. 3)

REBECCA: The effect of ending this scene on such a note gives me tremendous hope for the youth of today and for the future (Giroux, 2005). The world is indeed messed up as the other students have pointed out in their narratives. And yet, the blessing of love is everywhere if one stops to take note. I think the inclusion of this last monologue really changes the tone of the previous ones; it is certainly critical that one look at the problems that surround us and acknowledge our participation as both oppressor and oppressed (Boal, 1985), but at the same time, this last scene provides the crack in the cement, the possibility of healing and goodness in a world that may otherwise seem very ill. It is this opening that affirms a necessity to act rather than to choose apathy.

Omniphobia impressed me on a number of levels. As illustrated above, Scene i offers a survey of isms and issues that rear their ugly heads in society. Scene ii unfolds in a classroom being led by a substitute teacher. The purpose of this scene is to provide a public critique of the implementation of various educational policy initiatives across the country to reinstate the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in school. Günther and Pete asserted their belief that the government was trying to sell fear to the public after 9/11 and used the Pledge of Allegiance to promote patriotism in schools. They were also concerned about government secrecy. Jennifer Earl (2009) examines the dimensions of

fear and secrecy as policy strategy, raising some of the concerns creatively presented in this scene. According to Günther, students—like lambs to the slaughter—mindlessly echoed the increasingly jingoistic tune by a coercive government, although they would not feel coerced. After all, every student has the right to not participate in the Pledge. As this scene illustrates, students who decline to participate in the pledge are subject to ridicule and bullying from their peers as well as by staff. One student even calls him a “Communist” (Beyond the Borders, 2004a, p. 5), hence drawing a parallel between Bush Jr. and McCarthy politics. Because members of *BTB* wished not to alienate any of their regular teachers who might attend this play, they chose to portray the teacher as a detached substitute teacher in an attempt to avoid accusations of portraying teachers as cruel participants of a hostile high school environment. In the course of the teacher leading the students through the morning announcements, it is revealed that the attitudes in this school are pro-athlete, anti-art, rightist and one with an unproblematized heavy drinking population. As several audience members remarked in the post-production panels, the classroom that *BTB* portrayed could be found in any high school. What I find brilliant about this scene (see Appendix III for script of this scene) is that in addition to portraying a shift toward a nationalistic society that repeats empty slogans and fails to question its government’s dubious motives for its actions, it also manages to portray the regular classroom as a shockingly hostile and unsafe environment. If you are an artist, you are a geek. If you’re in drama, you’re gay. If you don’t recite the pledge, you are a communist, a traitor and an atheist. If you like pottery class, you must be a pothead. You cannot possibly enjoy high school unless you regularly drink yourself into oblivion. When I reflected upon the post-production panel’s comments about this scene, I was

struck by the number of testimonials by adults about how hostile they perceived the high school of their youth to be. In fact, I recall my grade eight year as being defined by daily fear of walking home because a group of girls who decided to pick on me that year would habitually wait for me in the park, where they would take turns insulting and punching me. And yet, in spite of all of these real traumas of our past, we can still reflect on this period of our lives with tender nostalgia. I found myself questioning just how safe Maple Creek Collegiate was, which students would dread getting on the bus, going to the bathroom, attending pep rallies, and so on. Here, in the Black Box Theatre of Maple Creek Collegiate, the students presented this narrative to a group of students and former students, and then actors and audience members alike shared their experiences. From my perspective as the leader of this group, I felt a sense of healing from my own past.

The third scene in *Omniphobia* dealt—in a sort of slapstick fashion—with the topic of racism. The scene involves a female and male of undisclosed age leaving their comfortable suburb to go downtown, where the people are different. They get lost. The female wants to ask people they meet for help. Each time she starts walking up to a bystander, her male companion stops her, citing stereotypical reasons for not trusting/fearing these strange-looking people. Here is an excerpt from scene iii:

DAVE- No! No! No! He's a Latino! He's probably got a pound of drugs in his pocket! (*Asian walks by-IKANI*)

LINDA- She looks nice. Let's ask her!

DAVE- No! She's Asian! Stay away from her! She's probably got SARS! She'll give it to you!

LINDA- What's SARS?

DAVE- It's a disease that can kill you.

LINDA- Oooo. I don't want to die.

(*Omniphobia* ©, BTB, 2004a, p. 7).

REBECCA: As one can see from this excerpt, the satirical tone defines this piece. It ends in an ironic twist: after Dave vetoes all of the people Linda approaches, they come across a White person, ask him for help, and get mugged.

The fourth scene, like the second one, received lots of audience feedback. It was intended to depict favouritism of certain aspects of high school life, chiefly organized sports, at the cost of other aspects, chiefly the debate team. It was written by two members of *BTB*; one was also a varsity debater on the team that I coached and the other was the captain of one of the school's sports teams. In this scene, the principal is in his office dictating a memo to his secretary, when the football coach arrives to announce that they made it to state finals again. The principal congratulates the football coach and promises the coach extra money for equipment as well as a day of shortened periods in order to run a pep rally. The football coach leaves and the principal continues to dictate his letter but is interrupted by the soccer coach, who announces that the team made it to state. The principal congratulates her and promises a school-wide field trip opportunity with free busses to the event so that the school can go cheer the girls on. He then returns to the dictation of his letter, which is a rhetorical flourish about the value of education.

When the soccer coach interrupts, the principal is dictating the following:

JEFF: Now where was I, Ms. Smith? Oh, yes, education is the most valuable thing that we can give our children and that is why we must value it so highly. We are meeting our obligations to the tax payers and the future when we value education.

(Omniphobia ©, BTB, 2004a, p. 9).

REBECCA: When the debate coach arrives to his office, the principal has just finished dictating this:

JEFF Don't worry, I'll be there. Good-bye. (*JAYA exits*). Now, back to that memo, 'An education is the most valuable tool we can give the future

generations. As such, it should be valued above all else... (*there is a knock on the door*) While the community has generously agreed to fund our levy, it is simply not enough. Can you out a price on a student's learning experiences?' (*there is another knock on the door*) Yes, come in. Oh hello Ms. . . uhh. . .

(*Omniphobia* ©, *BTB*, 2004a, p. 10).

REBECCA: The principal cannot remember the debate coach's name, but she proceeds to announce that her team made it to state, and requests a bus to take the team to the tournament. The principal stutters for a bit, then explains that the school has faced unusual expenditures and that the best he can do is provide for half of the cost of one small bus. When the debate coach presses him, he pleases himself with a brilliant idea:

JEFF Yes, sorry. (*pause, pacing around his office*) But you know, you could raise the money, have a fundraiser. You could have a bake sale.

RAE A bake sale, sir?

JEFF Yes. And you know what you could call it? A **de-bake** sale! (*pause*) The kids will love that.

(*Omniphobia* ©, *BTB*, 2004a, p. 11).

REBECCA: The principal then asks the debate coach when the tournament is. Upon discovering that it falls on a school day, he lectures her about having students missing school and instructs students to individually approach their classroom teachers for permission to miss their classes. The debate coach leaves, diminished, and the principal finishes the scene by telling his secretary:

JEFF Now, Ms. Smith, as I was saying. An education is the most valuable thing we can give our children.

(*Omniphobia* ©, *BTB*, 2004a, p. 11).

REBECCA:

As much as the whole group felt trepidation at presenting a high school scene that satirized aspects of our own school, the scene was more of a projection of what the members of *BTB* felt was an overall attitude, reflected by students and administration that

favoured sports over the intellectual and aesthetic clubs, but did not single out the debaters as the oppressed. The principal of Maple Creek was a former English teacher, had been an active anti-war protester in his youth during the US occupation of Vietnam, and worked hard to increase academic rigour in the school. He was supportive of debate and of the arts. Respected by most of the students and popular with parents in the community, he also was a fabulous ally to me when I proposed to begin a curricular debate program, and so our portrayal could have been perceived as a vindictive political move on the part of me or of *BTB*. At the same time, I did not wish to become a censor for the work of *BTB*. I had faith that I could explain the situation to the principal and that he would respect the decision on principle. For the risk that we took for being interpreted as attacking the principal, we were nervous. It didn't help that one evening we were rehearsing this scene in the hallway outside of my classroom, and the principal appeared suddenly, looked grave and ordered me to come and speak with him. I looked at the members who were in the midst of this scene, and they all looked worried. I left the group, instructed them to continue. They watched me leave silently. The principal led me to his office. On his computer screen was a gruesome picture of me in a nightgown with blood oozing from my mouth and my eye, and I looked peaceful but was holding a knife in my hand. The photo was taken at a golf club that hired Maple Creek's Drama Club every fall to provide a haunted house experience for the children of its members. The principal thought that this picture was both funny and indicative of my commitment to school spirit and extracurricular life at the school. He thought that the staff would appreciate the image and wanted my permission to show it at the next staff meeting. It

was an ironic twist of fate that the principal found me when *BTB* was creating the debate scene.

While I see the value in critiquing the social stratification of extracurricular activities, I must concede that this scene, brilliant and funny as it was, did not belong in the play. Another thing that I appreciated about this scene, which led to its humorous effect, was its physicality. A number of students played inanimate props during this scene. Jim played the principal's chair, Matt played the principal's desk (in one production, two students collectively positioned themselves to be the desk), Callie played the secretary's chair and Michael played the typewriter. This last prop provided most of the humour. While the principal dictated his empty rhetoric about the importance of education, and while Sabah typed, Michael's head wiggled all over the place in response to her tapping her fingers on his head. Whenever she reached the end of a line, Michael made a "ding" sound in a falsetto voice and then Sabah mimed the returning of the typewriter's carriage. I was very impressed by the students' increase in usage of physicality in their plays, and especially their increase in use of human props.

It was around this time, however, that in the midst of the requests for performances, completing requirements for my graduate programme, my teaching duties, my coaching and directing duties, and the equally frenetic schedules of every member of *BTB*, many of us began to show signs of stress. I believe that under the pressure of "just doing this little scene for this graduate class" and "just this little piece for this assembly" that we all felt stretched. In retrospect, had I understood my strain as well as that of the members of *BTB*, I would have resigned from some of my paid duties in order to immerse myself more fully into this work. At the time the Diversity Committee encouraged me to

continue this work; I thought that *BTB* would become my favourite extra-curricular activity, and one that would be thesis-worthy. I now understand why it is that Subodh devotes himself full-time to the work of *Natya Chetana*. I was committed to so many different things that I was at risk of becoming ineffective at all of my duties and burning out. It is easy to look back on this oversight of mine now, but at the time, I was both energized by the success of *BTB* and overwhelmed by the responsibility of creating a program without ever having any experience in running a theatre troupe. I was used to working long hours and, with this project, the hours became much longer.

The biggest casualty of this oversight is that I did not have the luxury of appreciating each moment and learning from it what I could have had I been less busy. I was at the peak of my teaching career too, it seems. In the fall of 2002, a parent of a couple students in the debate team that I coached, asked me to design a course in debate as well as to lead a debate camp in the summer. In addition to taking on the new debate class, I taught a couple of Advanced Placement © classes. While these classes were rewarding to teach, the work load was phenomenal. By the spring of 2005, I would reach a level of burnout that would take some time to recover from, but up until then, I flew high with all of my accomplishments and those of my students. In 2004, I received a state-wide award for *Ethics in Education*, the debate team kept growing and its performance improving and *BTB* was performing at many venues.

Now that Ashok had returned to India, and I was charged with leading the group, I found less time for quietly observing the work of the group and writing in my teaching journal. There were many details to work out, some theatrical, but many involved communicating with the necessary people in order to get *BTB* organized for our shows.

More than once, a date for a show would approach, and the members of *BTB*, who were classic high achievers in the school, in trying to juggle their *BTB* duties with those of the school band, sports, debate, and from their involvement in their local church communities, found themselves unprepared to present a full play. In the fall of 2003, for example, we had been asked to present a play at a multicultural fair that brought the communities of Maple Creek and an adjoining school district together. We had two scenes ready by the week of our performance. I called the Diversity Coordinator, who was working with a committee to run this multicultural fair, and she kindly told me just to present the couple of scenes as work-in-progress. Relieved, I took this information to the members of *BTB*, who were also relieved, and this is what we did. Their performance at this fair was a big moment for *BTB*, because it was the first time that *BTB* performed in front of many of their own peers. By this, I mean peers at their school who were outside of the circles of friends that members of *BTB* were a part of.

Scene ix: Inside Rebecca's head, she thinks about these experiences while reflecting on her graduate school readings.

REBECCA:

The concept of *BTB* was rooted in Ashok's philosophy that action theatre should be director-less. Traditionally, a high school theatre director of a play has considerable power over the actors. It is the director who chooses the script, who analyses the themes and chooses the themes to explore, who selects the actors to play specific roles, and who guides them through the acting process. Due to high school students' limited theatre experience, a high school play director might dictate characterization and blocking to the actors rather than guide them through a process of character-discovery. When students fail to attend play practices, the director may sanction the student actor, and may even

choose to cut the student from the production altogether. In professional theatre, the director's role may be more or less authoritative and stratified than in high school. In action theatre projects involving youth that seek to create a more equitable world, the moral imperative to dismantle stratification within the theatre troupe is necessary for the integrity of the work. When Ashok discussed this with the students in the *pilot program*, and later when I revisited this idea with the students, their reactions to this seemingly revolutionary style was mixed. Some students embraced my abdication of my normal directorial duties. While I gave feedback when it was requested, in the absence of my creative authority, certain students took great initiative to advocate for their perspective; others became less engaged than they had been when they were acting within more rigid director-actor roles. Those who embraced this style became leaders within the group. Others became increasingly frustrated with the seemingly growing power of a certain number of *BTB* members. Ivanka, in her second interview, shares:

IVANKA: Well, I think it's interesting, we have our own little mini-community within the group, and you know, there's some people who have more, they can say more. There's some people who you know, don't get listened to. There's some people that others don't like. There some people who are considered, you know, popular in the group. I think it's interesting to compare that to the rest of the um community as a whole. Or even the world if you can assume the world is like that. And I think it's just kind of interesting how that works. (Interview #2 with Ivanka, p. 6)

REBECCA: What I had thought of as a natural selection of who wished to do more work (initiate and lead) and those who wished to do less work (listen and follow) is actually a more complex social interplay between the members of *BTB*. Ivanka did express her opinions frequently, and her opinions were often ignored or rejected by the group. Thus it is inaccurate to conclude that those ideas that make it to play production are as a result of total group consensus, just as it is inaccurate to conclude that all those who stopped

contributing were mere followers with no inclination to lead or self-advocate. I suspect that had I not been so overworked at the time, I might have spent more time reflecting upon this issue to the benefit of those who might have seemed less apathetic had they believed that their opinions were valued. Ivanka stayed loyal to *BTB* until I moved back to Canada, in spite of her feeling oppressed by some of the other members of *BTB*. I do not believe this oppression was intentional. Furthermore, I believe that Ivanka's loyalty to *BTB* and her courage to challenge her peers created what Crossley (2006) calls "constructive controversy." None of us were aware of the benefits of this friction at the time and so I was not equipped to facilitate the constructive controversy enough to affirm Ivanka in her work. Fortunately, Ivanka is feisty enough to face the criticism of her peers, and for this, I believe that she strengthened the work of everyone. When I asked her how she felt about the concept of director-less theatre, she responded.

IVANKA: Yeah. That's why anarchy would never work. Cause you *do* need, I think that you need someone to be in charge. Cause, I mean, it's supposed to be a democracy I guess. But you know with democracy, democracy has a leader. You always need someone to be on top, leading. Or else everything will just lose total control, cause you need, you can say that everyone is equal, but everyone has a notion that they need to be on top. They need to be powerful, they need to have more money, they need to have bigger houses. And I think that's just kind of part of your, um, when you're born, you get that, you have that, um, you get that, the [pause], um, when you're born, you have something inborn? [pause]

REBECCA: Like an instinct?

IVANKA: An instinct! It's kind of, sorry, an instinct that you need to be on top. You want the best of everything. And so I think if the idea was that everyone was equal, everyone would then have the instinct to try and take over. So I think you need someone to, the definite leader, or else everyone else would, [pause] I don't think that would work. It's never worked in the past.

REBECCA: So it's an ideology, but it doesn't work in practice?

IVANKA: I don't think so. I think. I mean, it's a good theory. It would be *amazing* if that was true, but any way you look and any way you see, it's not like that.

REBECCA: Mmm hmm.

IVANKA: In the schools, you have the teachers, you have the cliques. And if you go to a country, the country's ruled by a president or a dictator. And I don't think people would be able to work together peacefully if everyone were equal. You need, I think it's sad but you need everybody, you need those rungs of the ladder. You need people on the top and you need people on the bottom. (Interview #2 with Ivanka, p. 7)

REBECCA: Ivanka's views certainly explain why a director-less theatre troupe may have been embraced ideologically but much is more complex in its execution. I immediately think of Freire. Shaull, who wrote the Forward to Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (2002a):

RICHARD SHAULL: [Freire's] early sharing of the life of the poor also led him to the discovery of what he describes as the "culture of silence" of the dispossessed. He came to realize that their ignorance and lethargy were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination – and of the paternalism – of which they were victims. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were kept "submerged" in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible. And it became clear to him for the maintenance of this culture for silence. (Shaull, as cited in Freire, 2002a, p. 30)

[*Paulo Freire appears, calm, smiling, watching, he whispers softly*]

PAULO: The alienated culture begins to be judged. Certain intellectuals begin to change their former views of society, really discovering society's structure for the first time. What alienation defined as the intrinsic inferiority of the popular masses is now objectively recognized to be the result of alienation itself, which is discovered as the manifestation of a situation of domination. [This is what Ivanka is telling you about]. Thus the more the alienated culture is uncovered, the more oppressive reality in which it originates is exposed. A twofold pattern thus emerges. On the one hand, the culturally alienated society as a whole is dependent on the society that oppresses it [—did you hear what Ivanka said? She believes that she needs the rungs of the ladder—] and whose economic and cultural interests it serves. At the same time, within the alienated society itself, a regime of oppression is imposed upon the masses by the power elites that in certain cases are the same as the external elites in and in others are the external elites transformed by a kind of metastasis into domestic power groups. (Freire, 2000, p.9)

REBECCA: Perhaps—unintentionally, of course—I have recreated a system of domination and paternalism, so that even though my *intent* is to create a pedagogy

that frees students from their dispossessed selves, I achieve another version of an oppressive system. And yet you, who speak of Freire's liberatory pedagogy, speak of hope! How?

PAULO: Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (Freire, 2002a, p. 44)

RICHARD SHAULL: 'The practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. The development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society. But it could also contribute to the formation of a new man and mark the beginning of a new era in Western history. (Shaull, as cited in Freire, 2002a, p. 34)

REBECCA: You speak of men and women dealing critically and creatively with reality. I have done this. But I don't yet see the formation of a new era that is defined by freedom. Ivanka has just told me that elitism is being entrenched in *BTB*. What do I do?

PAULO: [Ivanka says that anarchy won't work. Why? Anarchy is messy but so what?] I have encountered both in training courses which analyze the role of the conscientização²⁰ and in actual experimentation with a truly liberating education, the "fear of freedom"... Not infrequently, training course participants call attention to "the danger of conscientização" in a way that reveals their own fear of freedom. Critical consciousness, they say, is anarchic others add that critical consciousness may lead to disorder. Some, however, confess: Why deny it? I was afraid of freedom. I am no longer afraid! (Freire, 2002a, p. 35)

REBECCA: So basically Ivanka, the fearless sparkplug who never gives up, is afraid of her own freedom? This does not make sense to me.

PAULO: Men and women rarely admit their fear of freedom openly, however, tending rather to camouflage it – sometimes unconsciously – by presenting themselves as defenders of freedom. They give their doubts and misgivings an air of profound sobriety, as befitting custodians of freedom. But they confuse freedom with the maintenance of the status quo; so that if conscientização threatens to place that status quo in question, it thereby seems to constitute a threat to freedom itself. (p. 36)

REBECCA: I see. Ivanka fears the chaos that ensues with anarchy, and perhaps even craves the status quo because I'm always tiptoeing around issues of offending the principal, offending the jocks, etc. and may be reinforcing the need to keep the status quo to the students. However, how do I promote careful diplomacy, which I

²⁰ In Freire's (2002a) book, conscientização "refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35).

believe is necessary, when you are saying that freedom involves anarchy, which is necessarily revolutionary. I'll end up losing my job and accused of hurting the students by promoting rebels without a cause!

VOICE OF BRIAN: Perhaps you'll know you're successful in this programme if the community runs you out of town. (A comment made to me during my colloquium in 2003)

REBECCA: Hmm. Well, I shall have to think on this some more.

PAULO: I will be satisfied if among the readers of this work there are those sufficiently critical to correct mistakes and misunderstandings, to deepen affirmations and to point out aspects I have not perceived. (Freire, 2002a, p. 39)

REBECCA: So even you concede that your ideas may need more rethinking?

PAULO: [Of course. This must always be the case, but the] pedagogy of the oppressed, the introductory outlines of which are presented in the following pages, is a task for radicals. [Are you willing to be a radical?] (p. 39)

REBECCA: Depends on how radical I must become.

PAULO: Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization... (p. 43)

REBECCA: Go on...

PAULO: [S]ooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both. (p. 44)

REBECCA: Perhaps the reason Ivanka keeps hanging on is that she is in the middle of her struggle to regain her humanity! Perhaps I am too!

PAULO: This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. (p. 44)

[Paulo turns around and disappears and instantly Henry Giroux appears]

REBECCA: Can you tell me if I'm doing the right things? What am I doing wrong? What should I keep and what should I ditch? You've liberated so many Brazilians, as well as educators' minds around the world. Please help me to see my successes and my failures!

HENRY: [It] is precisely in this spirit of affirming public discourse, civic morality, and what it might mean to conduct your lives as engaged citizens attentive to the suffering of others and the fragility of democracy itself that I want to frame my brief remarks. (Giroux, 2005, p. 213)

REBECCA: This is what I'm trying to do, but I'm feeling so discouraged every time I hear these voices. I'm terrified of oppressing and perpetuating the exploitation of the youth.

HENRY: [T]he futures we inherit are not of our own making, but the futures we create for generations of young people who follow us arise out of our ability to imagine a better world. (p. 214)

REBECCA: But what about the philosophy of a directorless theatre and the problems that have arisen, as Ivanka points out?

TRACY: [You should thank Ivanka for challenging *BTB* and making everyone aware of its growing pains.] The possibility of 'groupthink' is reduced in this context because...the students practice and discuss the methods and roles for collaborating as part of learning about the theatre forms. (Crossley, 2006, p. 41)

HENRY: [All of you are in the process of] dreaming and acting upon a more just and democratic future [and this] means you will have to... begin with the recognition that justice is the merging of hope, reason, imagination, and moral responsibility tempered by the recognition that the pursuit of happiness and the good life is a collective affair. Where does education fit into all of this? Education suggests developing a language and set of strategies for translating private troubles into public considerations and public issues into individual and collective rights. Rather than widen the gap between the public and private, you will need a vocabulary for understanding how private problems and public issues constitute the very lifeblood of politics. I stress this point because you are living in a world that is increasingly collapsing the public into the private, creating conditions in which public discourse and politics disappear only to be replaced by a litany of individual flaws to be born in isolation. (2005, pp. 214-215)

REBECCA: You make everything sound so...*possible!*

VOICE OF REBECCA: Perhaps some day, everything will be possible. I don't know [pause] but we'll try together. (Naty Chetana & Theatre du Fil, 2003)

REBECCA: Yes! We must try! If we don't try, how will we know? This is what action theatre is all about! Social action through the arts! It's a political choice, as Augusto Boal says!

HENRY: Politics takes many forms but central to it is the need for citizens to be able to translate individual problems into public concerns. And that is going to be your

job... [as the leader of Beyond the Borders.] Today, I ask you to think of [yourself among the] competent professionals who also have a special obligation as civic leaders...(2005, p. 215)

REBECCA: If you were in my shoes, what would you say to Ivanka and the other members of BTB who feel like their voices aren't heard?

HENRY: I believe that one of the many great challenges facing your generation is how to resist the manufactured cynicism, moral despair, and social Darwinism with its cult of competitiveness and war against all ethic served up in all the spheres of public life and mirrored daily in reality TV shows. (p. 215)

[Henry turns and disappears; Paul Gorski appears. He is on his way to an important meeting.]

PAUL: [Remind yourself to do this in all of your work. Repeat after me:] As an educator, I have a dual responsibility for developing and actively undertaking a process of introspection and self-examination regarding my race and other dimensions of my identity. First, I have a responsibility to myself to constantly work to examine my identity and how it informs the lenses through which I see and experience the people and world around me. Second, I have a responsibility to the students, workshop participants, and community groups I reach in my teaching and facilitating to explore how my identity development affects their experiences in my classes and workshops. (Gorski, 2000, p. 1)

REBECCA: Okay. I've been doing this for my own self-checks, but will extend this to how it informs my pedagogical practices.

[Paul disappears; Peggy McIntosh floats above Rebecca's head. She straightens her sweater as if to speak publicly, and smiles]

PEGGY: [Hi Rebecca. I've been following your conversations for a while. Since your students are in such an upwardly mobile and predominantly white suburb, perhaps you could frame your pedagogy around something that affects everything in this school but is largely invisible:] I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks. (1990, p. 1) [Since it is likely that both you and your students are unaware of just how many codebooks, visas and blank checks you have, why not lead your students through this exploration and see what kind of social justice theatre emerges from their findings?]

REBECCA: I love this idea Peggy! It will be so much easier than trying to *solve* racism, especially when most of our oppressions are dwarfed in comparison to the oppressions that many people experience with risk to life; we seem to only risk

embarrassment. This is something that I think *BTB* could embrace, and help them explore their own biographies and narratives! Thanks!

PEGGY: [Sure thing. Let me know how it goes!]

[Peggy disappears, leaving Rebecca floating on a cloud of hope and possibility. Scene fades]

Scene x: Rebecca incorporates an examination of White privilege in her work and provides opportunities for the members of BTB to do the same.

BRUCE, LANCE & VANCE: If we truly want to craft better policies for better schools, we must center our education policies around concerns for equity and social justice...it does not take much imagination to view policymaking as a positive-sum game in which excellence for *all* [emphasis added] children is the realized objective of policymaking, as we believe it should be. (Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall, 2004, p. 49)

REBECCA:

I am not sure when my pedagogy took a sharp turn in the direction of the examination of White privilege as framework to practice social justice in my pedagogy because this was a big focus of the Diversity Committee from the beginning and so I was exposed to a number of courses and trainings in this vein during my tenure at Maple Creek that it must have slowly influenced me to the point where it finally became obvious. In the spring of 2004, I was asked to help chaperone approximately 50 students from Maple Creek at the White Privilege Conference (WPC5) in another state.

Around the same time, *BTB*'s own voice was clearly emerging as well as a distinct theatre troupe with a distinct philosophy and style. Less than one year after Ashok arrived in the USA, *BTB* seemed much less like an experimental project that made use some interesting theatre techniques and much more like an autonomous theatre troupe with an eclectic mix of techniques that seemed to fit the personalities of the membership. The theatre troupe had various signatures. One such signature was our introductory raga

that included the djembe and one string instrument. Another was the post-production panel, in which all of the work—regardless of how much or how little—was synthesized into an interactive moment between the actors and their audience members. These would inform the next step in our process, and it became clear that all members of the troupe, regardless of whether they volunteered for a role in post-production panel, were deeply influenced by these sessions. The material that *BTB* developed saw many permutations of current political critique, and the critique often pointed to the effects of the Bush administration's response to 9/11 and the world events that succeeded this tragic event. The students were on the whole, very well-informed and they were pleased to display their perspectives through their art. Finally, although much of the material was heady and inspired by angst-ridden perspectives, the presentation of such material often involved the use of satire, irony, sarcasm and comic relief. In the final act of this Thesis, I will provide more data from *BTB*'s plays, participant interviews, participant journals and my teaching journals in order to more fully analyse the voice of *BTB* as well as an analysis of my own personal and professional transformation as a result of this project.

Although there were times when I felt exhausted and discouraged, new hope kept appearing in serendipitous ways, and in doing so, I continually found energy to continue my journey, even when I was not sure where I was going. For now, it is time to draw the curtain and take a brief pause.

during my trips to India from 2002 through 2005 at the time that I was granted the Elliot-Upitis travel grant that made possible my first trip there. Equally surreal to me at the time of Subodh's invitation, and now as I reflect back, was the possibility that my role in the public education of middle-class youth in North America would involve taking students to India for three weeks for an educationally and personally enriching experience for all who participated in this field trip, which was called *India '05 Experience*. This experience marks the highlight of my career so far and provides a fitting place of closure for my time with *BTB*. In this final act, I would like to reflect upon what I have learned about my teaching by watching and listening to the members of *BTB*.

During the 2005 festival, I was not aware that I would choose to return to Canada or that a return would trigger the closure of the troupe's activities. My decision to leave came suddenly and was based upon personal reasons. I had arranged for another teacher, Jane, who taught at a Maple Creek feeder school, to take my place. It would have been difficult to coordinate rehearsals but she was the only teacher I could find who was willing to advise *BTB*. I met with the theatre troupe and announced my decision and asked if they wished to meet with Jane. They did and the meeting went well. It is fair to say that Jane is one of those loving grade school teachers that students love and remember. Some of the students in *BTB* remembered Jane fondly. No plays materialized, however. It is challenging for an advisor to build new relationships with her students when she is not a staff member in the building. Finally, the loyalty that educators and students demonstrate for one another is often one that is shaped by the personal connections that are made between the students and their teachers (Sleeter, 2008), and both Jane and I had developed special bonds with our students in our own ways and

contexts, and these relationships were destined from the beginning to end. While it saddened me to hear that *BTB* ceased to exist after my departure, I was also pleased to see that many of its members continued to find avenues to express themselves artistically and demonstrate their commitment to social justice through other activities and by joining other established groups that would support their work in this direction.

As I had said earlier, I became very personally vested in the work of *BTB*. It took some time for me to let go of this feeling, but time has provided for a healthy emotional distance. Scrutiny and analysis are critical to the betterment of educational programming. In this sense, *BTB* became an ideal research classroom for me to learn about my own teaching. I find this ironic because *BTB* was created for the purpose of providing an artistic vehicle for students to engage in self-directed pedagogies (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009) by exploring and expressing their social and political views and for them to discuss such views with their audiences. And yet the entire process that I experienced with *Natya Chetana*, followed by *BTB*, has transformed *my* pedagogy.

BTB began as an experimental project that was led by an artist from India who used teaching methods that allowed for a much deeper exploration of social issues (Castagno, 2009; Crossley, 2006; Sleeter, 2008) than I had been using as a drama teacher-advisor. This necessarily meant that the membership of *BTB* would need to navigate some complex aesthetic, social and philosophical landscapes prior to creating a troupe voice that they could consider their own. The membership was not Indian, nor was their audience. At the same time, the theatre forms provided by Ashok compelled the members of *BTB* to use such forms and to modify them to suit their socio-artistic preferences. Since the type of pedagogy that focuses on students' specific knowledge rather than

material that has been canned for mass use in public education has been found to be effective with the education of indigenous populations in North America (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009), I wonder if this approach might also benefit other populations of students.

In spite of the numerous challenges that faced the members of *BTB* to create their unique collective voice and style that adequately represented the diversity of the membership, it happened. *BTB* did create its unique identity so that when a *BTB* play was advertised, the public would be able to predict to a certain extent the type of issues that might be raised, such as critiques of the current public policies being enacted and cultural apathy, the satirical presentation of material and the general format of the play that began with a raga, continued with a play and finished with a dialogue between performers and audience members.

My understanding of my role to the students of *BTB* was in continuous flux. What artistic ideals I would promote, how I would promote them, the extent to which I would intervene in the creation of the artistic artefacts, how I would approach discipline, how I could promote the autonomy of a group of students who were in an educational system, which is by design, oppressive and coercive (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Giroux, 2005, 2007; Vaught, 2008, 2009), were all perennial struggles for me. The American public educational system is generally not one where pedagogies that challenge Whiteness (bell hooks, 1996; Foley, 2008; Gay, 2000; McIntosh, 1990; Milner, 2008; Said, 2001; Williams, 1991) are readily practiced. Although educational policy seeks to generally prepare students for a better future with pedagogies that focus on the demonstration of specific learning outcomes and improved performance (Mundy, 2005), not enough is

being done to address the need for culturally responsive pedagogies (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2002; Sleeter, 2008) or ones that encourage critical thinking (Giroux, 2005; Macedo, 2003). There is incredible pressure placed on teachers to align their pedagogical focus on policies that reinforce systems of domination (Giroux, 2009; Said, 1978, 1993). And yet, the arts provide space within the ideological structure (Roy, 2001) where educators may find their cracks in the wall through which their freedom may be negotiated (Boal, 1998; Delpit, 2003; Diamond, 2001; Freire, 2000, Vavrus, 2002).

Since the balance of power in classroom activities is generally held by the teachers and administrators rather than by the students, the issue of promoting equity and democracy through an elite, hierarchical system was one that I grappled with as I struggled to keep my energy and optimism high so that I could lead well. At the point in *BTB*'s history that is reflected at the end of Act II, my transformation as a teacher began to reflect an imperative to include discussions of White privilege in our process (Gorski, 2000; McIntosh, 1990). My role as staff advisor to *BTB* provides an appropriate point of entry for me as a White teacher approaching anti-racism and equity education.

I wish to examine that final works of *BTB* and data that I collected. I analyse what I have learned by observing and interacting with the members of *BTB*. I reflect upon my own transformation as a teacher by reviewing all of these as they pertain to the evolution of *BTB*. And then, in *BTB* fashion, I finish this play and invite you, as the current audience, to engage one another in a post-thesis discussion in the hopes that your discussion will lead to meaningful ways in which we, as teachers, parents, academics, students, and public agents, approach pedagogy.

Scene i: Maple Creek. Fall, 2004. Rebecca is tired and worried about the lack of commitment of the original group, of which many are entering their 12th grade and

shifting their focus to “college” [university] entrance. BTB adopts a new status quo of presenting “in-progress plays” because time is now an enemy to everyone.

REBECCA:

In 2004, I became aware that some of the students who were initially powerful driving forces within *BTB* were starting to drift away. I had spoken with Ashok, who mentored me numerous times over the telephone about my concerns from the fall of 2003 until the summer of 2006. Ashok had said from the beginning that students must be disciplined in their commitment to the work of *BTB*; otherwise, the troupe would devolve. There is a great justification for maintaining high expectations when approaching multicultural education (Delpit, 2006; Sleeter, 2008).

In response to Ashok’s advice, I made a decision in the spring of 2004 that haunted me for many months to come. We were preparing for a play and as the production date drew near, I noticed that a few of the students, perhaps just less than one quarter of the group, appeared disengaged at rehearsals. By this time, students had become accustomed to trading various roles for plays that contained scenes that were repeated from one play to another. My reasons for promoting this practice were both practical and theoretical. From a practical standpoint, *BTB* was organized so that students signed up for projects on a per-gig basis. This meant, for example, that if Alex signed up for the September 9 production for the local community college show, that she might be assigned to play a variety of roles that we will call A and B in scenes that we will call x and y. Let’s say that we liked some of the material that we used in the September 9 production and decided to use scene x in the October 26 production as guest performers for a graduate class. We might decide to use and modify scene x for this performance. However, let’s say that Alex did not sign up for the October 26 venue. Who would play

the role of A? Our system of interchangeability would provide for another student to play this role. In this case, either a student who was familiar with the scene would shift into the roles, or a student who was not would learn from the group the essence of the role.

The theoretical standpoint was to embed in our practice a concept of equality within the group. I am aware that equality and equity are two different principles and that in embracing multicultural education, there are instances where promoting equity is necessary, however, in this case, the message that I wished that the members of *BTB* would embrace is that no particular member has ownership or entitlement to a play or to a role or for that matter be imprisoned by a role beyond the individual production that the student committed to. Subodh had spoken to me about director-less theatre and so had Ashok. Ashok had seeded this notion in the students during the *pilot project*, and I had seen in Freire's (2002a, 2002b) and Boal's (1985, 1995) philosophies, an imperative that the oppressed must resist the temptation to become oppressors and I believed in creating theatre where there were no directors and no leads and no long-term affiliations between one member and the role he or she played. I drew upon Said's (1978, 1993, 2001) work on representation and believed that there were pedagogical possibilities by shifting roles because representations would change, thus diminishing any possible harms of homogeneity of view. I thought that by shifting actors into similar roles, we could invoke Berger's (in Roy, 1997) message that "never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one" (epigraph). Switching students did in fact create new interpretive possibilities that I observed repeatedly during the ongoing work with *Respect! What respect?* (*BTB*, 2004-05) Theatrical material was developed collectively; the actors of the original scenes usually wrote the lines for their own characters. I have always encouraged

students to ‘write what you know’. For example, Shenandoah created and acted a specific character for a play in 2004. The scene was meant to highlight perceptions of people of racial minorities. Shenandoah is Asian. Shortly thereafter, she gave up her role to Sharleen, an African-American *BTBer*. Sharleen recreated Shenandoah’s character to conform to mannerisms and language that she used. This changed the character in question, but maintained the integrity of the message of the scene while keeping it real, because the way Sharleen played the modified role was authentic to her world view. I have since come to appreciate that pedagogically, having “group structures [that] tend to be more fluid and often follow more organic than systemic processes...tend to be collectively developed rather than segregated into different areas of expertise” (Crossley, 2006, p. 35). In doing so, “the students practise and discuss the methods and roles for collaborating as part of learning about the theatre forms” (p. 41), which increases a variety of collective creative problem skills solving, while reducing *groupthink*.

The decision that has haunted me follows: I announced my decision to make attendance at the dress rehearsal mandatory, and that any students who failed to attend would see their parts given to other students for the next performance. Two students failed to attend. When they arrived to perform on production night, I kept my promise. Subsequent to these events, one student quit *BTB* and my relationship with the other student was strained for almost a year. Even though I knew that cutting uncommitted students was a common practice among high school drama advisors for high school plays and musicals, I felt guilty about following through with this because I had resisted the temptation on many occasions to assert control over the group in any way other than to facilitate their work and advocate for them to community members. It was important to

me that students understood our director-less philosophy. Thus, in the fall of 2004, when I observed waning commitment from some students, I feared that I had betrayed the director-less principles and would see the imminent termination of *BTB*'s activities.

I felt awkward broaching this topic with the students because much of the critical literature that I had read (Banks, 1998; bell hooks, 1996; Boal, 1985; Freire 2002a; Gay, 2000, 2002; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999; Said, 1978; Shiva, 1997; Williams, 1991) cemented in me the imperative that I must not exploit my position of power over the students or coerce them into involuntary participation. While I secretly wondered whether the troupe's life had run its course, I approached three students individually about inconsistent attendance at rehearsals. The students told me the same thing: they were looking ahead to college admissions and wished to increase their devotion to their studies and broaden their extra-curricular portfolios. They told me that they would have increasingly less time to devote to *BTB*. At the same time, I took up the offers of two mothers of *BTB*ers to help me with various administrative tasks. They had supported our work from the beginning and had observed that I had too many responsibilities and not enough time; they asked me how they could help. At our meeting, we all discussed the necessity to respect the autonomy of the members of *BTB* and that while in principle having a team of adults supporting the work of these students would be helpful, there was also the risk that too many adults—including mothers—would diminish students' motivation because the adolescent years are ones that are marked by the wilful separation of child from parent. As a teacher, I try to create safe opportunities for students to take liberties in the interest of their feeling comfortable with their increasing autonomy and developing confidence in decision-making. By placing my trust

in students, they may affirm to themselves through their actions that they are capable of adult responsibility and that they are trustworthy to be given adult responsibilities.

Upon much reflection, I realize that I spent more time thinking about *BTB* than the students did. At the time, I struggled over my desire to project a need for students to be as committed to the project as I was. Pedagogically, this is still a site of struggle for me.

I recognize that everyone's time is limited and we must learn to make choices with these limitations in mind. I also recognize that commitments to clubs, committees and teams have great value. My question is: how does one balance commitment with the exigencies of an increasingly complex world? Today's students are presented with greater choices in their leisure time and at the same time, they take on greater responsibilities outside of school with part-time work and within increasingly complex family structures that may involve students residing intermittently in two homes where all parents work for wages. There is also the issue of technological advances creating plugged-in lifestyles that alienate people from real human interactions. Within this new social landscape, I understand that the commitment that the members of *BTB* made to participate at all while engaged in a number of other activities speaks of a healthy attitude toward *BTB*'s work as well as toward their own lives. Therefore, while I was consumed at the time by how to properly deliver this program, I am thankful that *BTB* did not become an all-consuming life force in the lives of the students who became involved in it. And, while I was not interested in creating a cult, I felt a need to have the work of *BTB* affirmed, and one of the best ways for this to happen was to observe a commitment to it similar to what Ashok had encouraged me to foster. As I write today, having enjoyed the luxury of time and space to

distance myself and to reflect, I think I would be better prepared today to face this issue were *BTB* still an active theatre troupe. Today, I would have the confidence to directly confront the issue with the club and involve them in discussions and subsequent decision making. This is consistent with what my pedagogy represents. The postcolonialists whom I admire so much all call for open communication so that voices are heard. Recent research (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003) also shows that when policies are consultative, they receive greater commitment by stakeholders and are more effective in their implementation than authoritative ones. A paper that I delivered at a conference about action theatre was themed “we [the students] will be heard” (Stroud, 2006). I was interested in how students created an autonomous voice that reached public space. At the time, however, I must have been nervous about *what* I would hear if I addressed the group about my perceived lack of commitment. However, my reticence to communicate led predictably to some assumptions on my part.

I understand a few things now about *BTB* and other school clubs: commitment must be voluntary and membership must not be too restrictive. Otherwise, working conditions may oppress the spirit of those who work so hard to make artistic expressions of their world view. This spirit must be valued. Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1997) the author of flow theory, provides a number of explanations for valuing “flow”, which can be compared to “being in the zone”. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow allows individuals to devote great amounts of time to an activity, to enjoy doing it, and to take risks while pursuing their interests that have positive implications for motivation as well as production (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider & Steele Schernoff, 2003). Because “creativity, no matter where it takes place is so pleasurable” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p.

9), educators as well as policy-makers would be wise to consider flow theory as it relates to motivation and creativity when reflecting on effective pedagogies.

Returning to my reflection on how to lead student clubs, a structure must be in place that will support the hard work of those who are willing. It is also important to have structures that support high standards of quality (Delpit, 2003; Sleeter, 2008). The structure should be flexible (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003) in order to promote constructive consultation between stakeholders. The big challenge for equity educators is how to enable freedom within limits (Luce-Kapler, 2009).

At the time, I decided to keep thinking about this issue of commitment and also to provide more flexibility for the students who were producing plays. If their time was stretched due to many demands, I would try to honour this. Most of the members of *BTB* could be classified as high achievers. The students' collective profile included many students who were on the honour roll, who were involved in organized sports and sometimes as team captains, who were musicians in the school and community bands, who held leadership positions with their church youth groups, and who were involved in other school clubs. I thus announced to the group at our fall rehearsals that according to my professional judgment, they had sufficient training to be able to ad lib to a certain extent as long as they had the gist of the direction of a particular scene. Because of this, we would run fewer rehearsals and we would accept performance engagements on condition that we could produce in-progress work. This announcement pleased many people in the group, who had just been asked to provide a performance for the *Festival of Nations* in the fall, which was a joint-venture carried out by three school districts.

Scene ii: At their first fall “in-progress” production, a group of grade 9 students in the audience are inspired to join BTB. They bring new, fresh energy and hope. BTB creates a play on the exploitation/harassment of young women, which ends up on television.

REBECCA:

The *Festival of Nations* was geared to promoting cultural diversity by showcasing various art forms, artefacts, foods and customs of the cultures that were represented by the diasporas of the participating school districts. The organizers were well-aware of problems with superficial multicultural education pedagogies that either provided a discourse that would not permit examinations of the connections between multiculturalism and power. For example, schools might introduce cultural celebrations at schools, such as hosting a “Fajita Friday” event, and then make claims that diversity is celebrated and supported. These same schools might also provide training to their teachers that ascribes to pedagogies, such as Ruby Payne’s *Framework for understanding poverty* (1998) which puts forth arguments that the solution to teaching students in poverty is to get them to ascribe to middle class values, and then make claims that they have an effective achievement-gap policy. Both of these examples come from perspectives that do not acknowledge hegemonic structures such as power and privilege and both are damaging and disrespectful to all students.

The organizers opted for a night that included but was not limited to the sampling of foods and showcasing art forms. Many organized ethnic groups were invited to set up information booths where people could stop and have informal discussions.

There were performances from various groups of students from Kindergarten through grade twelve as well as from various adult performers. *BTB* was given a half-hour spot to perform a play or part of a play.

BTB created a scene that was meant to deal with two issues that the group had wanted to expose but were previously too intimidated to do. These issues were sexual harassment in school and the favouritism of various school groups. The scene created for the *Festival of Nations* led to the creation of a play, which came to be known as *Tiffany* (Beyond the Borders, 2004b), and then later *Respect! What Respect?* (Beyond the Borders, 2004-05). We committed to working on this play for a while and I asked that it be scripted as students would be switching many roles throughout the year.

In the first scene of the play, a young student named Tiffany is characterized through a series of monologues given by those who know her, such as her mother, her boyfriend, her best friend, her brother, her ex-boyfriend and a number of classmates. Many of the monologues provide bitter memories, and thus Tiffany is constructed as an enigmatic and fractured person who is beautiful, smart, outgoing, funny, compassionate, shallow, cruel, selfish, conniving and fragile. What the troupe wanted to do was portray the objectification of young women at their school through a contradictory and complicated process that would identify Tiffany as both a talented ringleader of girls who manipulate and bully others, as well as a victim of sexualized objectification in our culture.

The *Festival of Nations* was a success in general, as well as for *BTB*. This was not *BTB*'s first performance at Maple Creek Collegiate, but it was their first performance that was so widely attended by the student population of Maple Creek. The social ostracizing that some students had feared failed to materialize. On the other hand, four grade nine students and two grade eleven students joined *BTB* after this performance. The newcomers brought with them tremendous artistic energy as well as a strong passion for

social justice work. *BTB* had received a lot of feedback about the scenes, and decided to proceed to script it and to develop it into a play for future productions. The group spent the next few months working on and performing the play at various stages of progress. I now invite you to one of *BTB*'s performances for an abridged version of the first scene of this play.

Scene iii: *Winter 2004/05. A play within the play. Beyond the Borders presents **Respect! What Respect?** BTB performs at a number of venues in and around Maple Creek, including a local television station, which airs this play many times.*

Respect! What Respect? (i.e. *Tiffany*) by: *Beyond the Borders*

Cast and crew of BTB all wear black plain t-shirt, blue jeans.

Stroud plays drum as actors slowly walk on stage and take their places. When they have their positions, A gives the cue, and starts to turn. Then everyone turns their backs to the audience, then crouches down and freezes. At 1st BOOM, A stands up, faces the audience, and starts her monologue.

***Tickatackaticatackaticatackaticatackaticatacka
BOOM!***

1. A—**Mom:**

Ah, my daughter Tiffany. She was so sweet as a child. Friendly to all she met, and we got along fantastically. But now, I don't feel as if I know her anymore; she's never home...always with her friends, boyfriends. I don't even know who she is dating! She used to tell me everything, but now...I feel as if I don't know who she is. She will be graduating next year and after that I won't even see her each day – rushing through breakfast or coming home late at night, I really miss that girl...

***Tickatackaticatackaticatackaticatackaticatacka
BOOM!***

2. B—**Jock, Garrett**

Hey dudes. Guess what? This one gorgeous chick, Tiffany, ditched this nerd to go to Prom with me. Oh, yeah, and I'm a quarterback. But Tiffany, yeah, she's freakin' hot, you gotta realize. It's kinda funny. She thinks I want, like, a real relationship, but dude, who does that? It'll be hi-larious when she realizes I only have the hots for her. Yeah... I'm a quarterback. I bet she has, like, five hot friends that I could hook up with after she's done. Oh, man, I've got it made.

She'll ditch me, and I'll still have four easy catches after that! Plus, I'm a quarterback. Who doesn't love me, man? Without counting those other nineteen girls, seriously, I am loved. Dude... I'm a *quarterback*...

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

3. C—Tutor, Erin

So. . .last semester I had to tutor little Miss Tiffany in math. Well to be honest I had never really talked to her before that. And I always thought she was like the biggest brat ever!!! But when she asked me if I'd help her study for the final so she could pass the class—I thought well maybe she is a nice girl. Whoa, was I wrong about that! I worked with her after school everyday for about a week in a half and the first week she was really nice and as much as I hate to admit it, we had a pretty good time. But every time someone we knew would walk by and talk to her she would always have to tell them that I was her math tutor...like, for fear that they would think she was actually "hanging out" with me. But...whatever. So the day before the final I went up and asked her, while she was talking to her friends, if she needed help tonight and she COMPLETELY ignored me. So then a few days later in math class our teacher was announcing the top five people who did the best on the final and believe it or not, Tiffany was one of them! and our teacher asked if she had gotten any help from anyone or what she did that made her do so well and I started to smile because I thought she was going to say I helped her, but all she said was "I didn't even have a tutor, I guess I had it in me all along".

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

5. E—Anti drug pink hair girl (Abi)

I can't believe Tiffany. The other day I was just walking in the halls minding my own business. I was kind of in a rush to get to my class early so I could study for a test. All of a sudden a door whips out in front of me; I then run into it and drop my books all over the hallway. If that wasn't embarrassing enough, Tiffany had to make it worse by shouting at me in front of everyone in the hallway, "Gosh if you weren't so stoned you would be able to hang on to your books." I felt terrible, I know it is a stereotype for people in drama club to do drugs (which we don't) and I don't think my pink hair helps me any but really that was so cruel. You know that feeling when you just about to puke, well that how I felt the rest of the week. People kept on staring at me, I don't do drugs and all I want to do is dig a hole and bury myself in it.

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

6. F—New girl w/ jokes

Well, two weeks ago I moved here from Connecticut, EAST COAST REPRESENT! Anyway, I immediately met Tiffany. Gosh, she's so flippin cool! She showed me around and introduced me to all her cool friends. She even took me shopping one day and showed me all the new hot fashions. Tiff's so funny too! She told me all these awesome jokes like...

Why did the chicken cross the playground?
To get to the other slide. {laughs}

Gosh, that Tiffany, she's like my flippin idol!

***Tickatackatickatackatickatackatickatackaticka
BOOM!***

7. G—Geeky guy

Tiffany...Tiffany Jasmine Preston...the name just rolls off your tongue. Her smile can brighten your day. She possesses both beauty and brains. I don't see why she hangs out with those ignorant morons she calls friends when she could be conversing with intellectual equals such as myself. Why does she want to be popular? She used to be so nice. Now she tries to be stupid, so she will be accepted. What is her prerogative to act in such a self-depreciating way?

***Tickatackatickatackatickatackatickatackaticka
BOOM!***

8. H—Old rejected friend:

I remember that we used to be best friends in middle school. We did *everything* together. We promised each other we'd stay friends no matter what happened. But Tiffany really started to change. She started wearing make-up, and short skirts. She shaved her legs, and only wanted to talk about boys. Tiffany stopped playing tag with me after school. She'd hang out with the "girly-girls" instead. After a while, she wouldn't even say "hi" to me in the hallways—she acted like she was embarrassed to even know me. One day I asked her why she was acting like this, why she wasn't acting like my friend any more. And she said "We're *not* friends. You don't even act like a girl—you don't wear make-up, your legs are really hairy. You probably don't even like boys. You're such a dyke." I never thought someone who used to be such a good friend, could say something that horrible.

***Tickatackatickatackatickatackatickatackaticka
BOOM!***

10. J—Tennis team mate

Tiffany? Oh—I LOVE her! She’s just *amazing*! She’s been captain of the tennis team for 2 years now. She organizes everything for the team—from bake sales to team slumber parties. I don’t know how the team would function without her. And Tiffany is an awesome player too! I think she’s won, like, EVERY match she’s been in. I wish I could be like Tiffany. She’s *perfect*...

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

11. K—laugh, Madison

I dunno, I guess I've always wanted to be like her. Well, who doesn't? She's gorgeous. Of course, there's always been something about me that's not quite right. My hair has never been perfect, my clothes aren't expensive enough, and my makeup isn't expertly applied. Somehow, Tiffany always manages to look like she walked right out of a catalogue. Oh, don't think I put her on a pedestal or anything like that, I don't—it's just that everyone else does and I guess I wish that I could be regarded that way for once. (*pause*) I know what you're thinking, that I should just become friends with her if I care so much, I should just talk to her. You see, I'm afraid that she'll laugh at me. It's what Tiffany and her friends are notorious for...their laughing. One of their high-pitched giggles could mean the end of your social life. I don't know why you have to look a certain way or act a certain way, I don't understand popularity. What makes one person more important than the other? It just the stupidest thing, but for some reason, and I know this sounds bad, but for just once, I wish that *I* was their friend, that *I* was the one doing the laughing.

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

12. L—Girl made fun of @ lunch

So I was sitting at lunch one day and I turn around and I see that little son of a B-I-T-too much talking smack about me. It was Tiffany, Miss "I'm Better Than Everyone Else". Just because I dress different and because I'm not popular doesn't mean you can talk crap about me. Did I ever do anything to you? No, I didn't.

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

13. M—younger brother

Tiff? She's alright, I guess, sorta. I never really see her any more. She is always going to movies with her friends or sulking in her room after a fight with Mom. The only time I do see her is in the morning before school, and she is always perpetually worrying "Is my hair alright?...Do these shoes go with my pants?" I remember when she first started putting on makeup and worrying about those things. Now, I can't remember what she looks like without makeup, and who she is, under all of that goop.

Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!

14. N—Rejected prom guy, Clyde

Wow... What can I say about Tiffany? Well first of all, she is really hot. And she *seemed* to be nice at one point, but then she... well, why don't I tell you the story of how I asked her to Prom. So I had been planning how to ask her for weeks, and when I finally got the nerve to ask her, it didn't go as I imagined it. I walked up to her at a football game, and started out by saying "Hi Tiff." I knew things weren't going to go well when she said "What makes you think *YOU* can call me Tiff?" I was a little shaken up by that, but I pressed on anyway. "Umm... Okay.... So what are you doing for Prom?" Was what I asked in hopes that I would save myself. She responded by saying "Are you asking me to Prom?" I was thinking, *wow! She is a mind reader. Either that or I'm really not smooth.* "Well," I said, "Will you go with me?" She paused for what seemed like forever, and then responded with "I guess so. But only if no one better asks me." Well it turns out, later that night Garrett asked her and she melted into his abdomen with a faint "Yes." What an ironic turn of events that a mindless brick-of-a-jock ended up getting Tiff.

Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!

15 O—Best friend

Tiffany is my best friend. About two years ago I was new at school and I didn't know anyone—no one was friendly and no one was nice. I even ate lunch in the bathroom. Well. . .until the day Tiffany talked to me. She took me shopping, let me borrow some of her clothes, she even did my hair and make-up. Within like two weeks I was hanging out with her every weekend and I was in the "popular group". Tiffany is probably the most fun person to be with and the nicest. I mean she is just so honest! like for instance. . . she'll tell me if my hair looks terrible or if I look fat in a pair of jeans. She's really not one to small talk. But even though she's really mean to pretty much everyone but the small group of people she talks to, she's still my best friend! And although she talks bad about practically the whole school and compliments random girls on their outfits and then turns to me and says that that's the ugliest thing she's ever seen, I still think she's the greatest!

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

16. P—On/off boyfriend Bobby

Tiff? Oh yeah, her and I were hitched for quite some time—which can be spread into about fifteen increments. Talk about an on and off relationship... it's just that, yeah, she's hot, but she's not the best around. So I went out with her, and then along comes one bombshell of a chick, and we're through. Times fifteen. But it took me two weeks just to get the privilege of calling her "Tiff." Plus, inflatable abs really itch, and that was not flying with me. Off came the abs, and out went Tiffany. No emotional strings attached. I have a girlfriend right now, but her eyes are just a taaaad too close together. So who knows? Maybe I'll dump her and get my own set of hot abs. By the way, I'm shallow.

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

17. Q—Older brother, Drew:

Having a hot younger sister is not as sweet as you'd think. Granted, it's cool to live in the same house as a goddess. But honestly, it just sucks. Then you have to factor in that all the profane locker-room conversations revolve around what your sister looks like when she is, shall we say, "not meeting school dress-codes." And then all my friends ask me to hook 'em up with her, which sucks because I don't have the power to do that. And my parents always ask me about what she does when they aren't watching. And the worst part of all was when I learned that one of my friends was at my house for a night once, but he wasn't staying with me.

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

18. R—Popular ex-friend Trista (ex-girlfriend of jock)

Tiffany? Yeah, we used to be BFF. Best Friends Forever. The relationship was as superficial as the acronym we called it by. We hung out all the time... shopped together, ate lunch together, gave each other makeovers...all the usual girly things. I told her *everything*. Everything she knows about Garrett? From me! She curls her hair now because he always liked my hair curly! That good-for-nothing, two-faced...brat! She stole him from me! BFF? Ha! I can think of a few more acronyms to go with that one!

Everyone FREEZE! Stroud plays drum

***Tickatactickatactickatactickatactickatacka
BOOM!***

(*Beyond the Borders* ©, 2004, pp. 1-10).

Scene iv: Post-production panel of the play. Rebecca fuses a recreation of BTB's signature Post Production Panel from her memory, teaching journal and student data.

VOICE OF SPECT-ACTOR #1: How did you choose the title of *Tiffany* for this play?

VOICE OF DEILEK: We wanted to choose a name that was glittery, a name befitting a modern-day princess. At the same time, we did not want to choose a name that would identify any of Maple Creek's princesses. As far as I know, there are no students at Maple Creek named Tiffany. Therefore, the name worked for us.

CLAIRE: [W]e decided to commit to this Tiffany idea for an entire school year. This was also a shift for *BTB*, since we have been writing and developing plays on a per gig basis. (Claire's writing journal B1, p. 1, 2005)

REBECCA [aside]: The name of the play changed from *Tiffany* to *Respect! What respect?* because people started referring to Tiffany the person and *Tiffany* the play as if they were one and the same. The original idea for this work came from Ivanka, who, ironically, had told me only months before during my interviews with her that the group rejected most of her ideas. The aim was to construct a high school social environment that represented a "hyperreality—paroxysm and parody all at once" (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 77), in which a select few students, representing the dominant culture reigned over the rest of the students, who felt marginalized by the privileged ones. In this play, *BTB* recreated a system of social construction of woman in which the woman is objectified, exoticized, demonized and silenced by those who construct her. Tiffany is objectified by both males and females—including by herself. Normalized practices of viewing women as objects of sexual desire (bell hooks, 1984; Wolf, 2003) as portrayed in the media are found in numerous parts of the script. While the characters in this play would not find

problematic a friend who shows another when she looks fat in a pair of jeans, the monologues were deliberately satirically written by the students to reflect normal high school conversations that perhaps should be talked about and problematized.

Satire can be an effective method of intersecting art and activism (Obeyesekere, 1999; Taylor & Bain, 2003) as well as of using art as a political tool to expose or subvert problems with the dominant culture (Haut, 2007; Wasserman, 2008). A satirical artistic artefact may encourage discussion that facilitates people to come to their own understandings of the issues being dramatized (Singhal, 2004). Because satire indirectly criticizes through a comedic presentation of metaphor and caricature, its weakness as a form of social action is that it may be misunderstood (Flam, 2004) in a number of ways. One of the roles of the post production panel is to clarify any possible misunderstandings. This mechanism assumes, however that these misunderstandings will be voiced. Certain social circumstances create an environment whereby people do not feel safe to voice dissent and thus a civil silence may lead others to believe that consensus or agreement has taken place (Crossley, 2006). I think that many people may be reticent to voice criticisms of a play produced by a group of energetic and hopeful high school students. A parent, for example, who attends to show support to her son who is in the performance, may resist the urge to publicly voice concern over the manner in which an issue has been portrayed because this conflicts with her desire for her son to develop a healthy self-esteem. Thus, I will never know about some of the criticisms that might have helped *BTB* to improve its work. What I can do is to reflect on how developing my leadership affirms and denies a “constructive controversy” (Crossley, 2006, p. 33) in order to facilitate safe space.

With *Tiffany* (Beyond the Borders, 2004b), *BTB* attempted to portray the high school landscape as harsh terrain for all those who traverse it, from the school's teenage heroes to its losers. Listening to the discussions at rehearsals, I understood that this anything-but-neutral educational zone is a site of severe emotional conflict for many students. Educators would do well to consider the cultural environment of their students.

VOICE OF SPECT-ACTOR #2: It's amazing how much has not changed since I went to high school twenty-five years ago. Your play spoke to me because I felt like it could have been my high school.

VOICE OF GÜNTHER: Thank you.

VOICE OF SPECT-ACTOR #3: Have you even seen the movie *Mean Girls*?

VOICE OF ARUNA: Yes, and some of what we did was inspired by *Mean Girls* (Fey, 2004). Because, even if this movie is not that realistic, it's Hollywood, you know, there are the cliques of popular girls and sometimes girls can be really mean. Just as mean or more mean than boys, but it doesn't get talked about much. There's nothing worse than being excluded in high school. This is the worst fear that a teenager can face.

VOICE OF SPECT-ACTOR #4: Why are all the athletes portrayed as dumb? Don't you think that you're stereotyping them in a bad way here?

CLAIRE: [Thank you for this feedback. We rely a lot on what you have to tell us. This helps us] to think about the flaws in our work and we really need people to help us out with that. I mean it's great to always get support, but we need to improve, and there was feedback for that, and we have been working on fixing some of the problems. Actually, it's a tough play to do right, because it's about negative stereotyping too, and in order to do that, we have to portray some negative stereotypes, which looks like we're bashing jocks or whatever, but that's not the intent, the intent is to get people thinking about respect and the damage that no respect brings down on a person. (Claire's writing folder B1, 2005, p. 4)

VOICE OF SPECT-ACTOR #5: Why didn't you let Tiffany speak for herself? You have all these other people describing her but I want to see what the *real* Tiffany is like.

VOICE OF ABI: This is a good idea. We talked about this too. We asked ourselves what is real. But all that we know about the Tiffanys at our school is based on impression. Fantasies if you like. Beautiful ones, ugly ones, and all those interesting ones in between. We wanted to show how Tiffany became real to those who knew her, for better and for worse. Yes, this Tiffany is stereotyped, but in the end, the social construction of others is a projection of how one comes to understand the world. What we also realized after doing this play a couple of times is that we cannot create a *real* Tiffany. If we bring her in, she might seem boring and flat and she might also destroy all the myths that surround her, and this is the point of the play: what happens when high schoolers gossip about one another.

VOICE OF ALEX: Thank you very much for coming to see our play. We will think about your comments and thank you for your support.

[applause, members of BTB leave stage area, audience members leave and/or mingle with the cast members. Rebecca retreats to reflect].

REBECCA:

A conscious decision had been made not to let Tiffany speak for herself. Her aura, what she represented, the symbol that she stood for required that she be entirely constructed by others. Creating the play in this fashion also allowed *BTB* to subvert the symbol of the dominant culture (Tiffany) into a passive role to see what happens when voice is solely given to the oppressed (the students representing the fringe groups). For this, the troupe received both praise and criticism. Some people affirmed that it is the

individual's experience of what is real that is more revealing, such as the mythology of Tiffany that her peers constructed, rather than who she is, that determines meaning-making. Others wanted to see the *real* Tiffany debunk the mythical one. I observed many long, complex discussions ensue. The group tried to bring Tiffany in; however, no matter what ideas were brought to the table about how we could deconstruct Tiffany and re-humanize her, the problem was that now that Tiffany was created in other peoples' minds, how could we possibly portray her in such a way that we could retain the essence of the play? We did not have a Tiffany in the group as constructed in the script, but students drew from their perceptions of the stereotype of the beautiful ice-queen, for example, their own experiences and constructed her thus. What the students captured reflects a postmodern view, which is how reality can be challenged and said to be socially constructed:

DEILEK: In specification to the *Tiffany* scene individually, I would say that, um, the two monologues which I wrote for that scene, um, the nerdy, rejected guy and the older brother of Tiffany. I was speaking, I applied a lot of real world events to writing those monologues. I have an older brother and an older sister and the brother is the oldest, and I know my older sister was talked about in the locker rooms and (pause) in the guys' locker room, and I heard that from my older brother, so I specifically applied that into writing the older brother monologue, although I made it slightly more exaggerated for effect—

(Interview #1 with Deilek, pp. 3-4).

REBECCA: Deilek, for example, had come to his own understanding of how his sister was objectified and constructed into a mythical persona in the locker room, as described to him by his older brother. Being someone who knew his sister in her full human complexity as opposed to a caricature of a one-dimensional sex object (Wolf, 2003), Deilek was interested in the effect that such a construction may have on others, and wished to open dialogue with audiences about this. He explains,

DEILEK: [I]t's difficult to (pause) well first of all, if you're trying to create a theatrical presentation of an issue, first you have to understand what the perspective of your audience is going to be, because you have to somehow make it clear to them, through their perspective what issues you're discussing. And then from there, you have to make sure that it isn't just from their perspective, because, ideally, especially with a group like this, we have to make sure that all the perspectives are addressed and that the issue is made clear not just from the perspective of the speaker or from the audience, but from those affected by the perspectives of the speaker or the audience. (Interview #1 with Deilek, p. 3).

REBECCA: I must clarify that Deilek's sister was not Tiffany, nor did she possess personality traits that were represented in Tiffany. For several reasons, I think this play was a success. First, as Claire mentioned, we committed to evolving this work for the entire 2004-05 school year and this decision helped us to grow tremendously and closely examine our work. Not only were we able to explore the issue of social construction, we were also able to explore our own methodology and critical enquiry processes. For one thing, the processes that *BTB* experienced by working through this same play many times while the participation of students and their respective roles varied, resulted in what Crossley (2006) refers to as "devised performance" (p. 35). The group dynamics, according to Crossley, provide opportunities for students to engage in "constructive controversy" (p. 34), which is essential for "effective collaboration" (p. 35). Group work in schools tends to focus on learning outcomes that can best be observed and judged based on the quality of the end-product. In contrast, "devised performance" leads to the development of skills such as "mediation, negotiation, constructive controversy" (p. 34) and "deep" thinking (p. 33). We received ample feedback as well as requests for repeat performances, which allowed us to continue in this fashion and enhance the complexity of the learning environment. The fact that we received so much feedback demonstrates that *BTB* fulfilled its purpose of getting people talking. Finally, the theatre troupe had its

biggest growth spurt during the 2004-05 year, which suggests to me that more students wanted to be part of the processes that *BTB* engaged in.

Scene v: Pella, Iowa. The Diversity Committee, Rebecca, BTB and two other student groups attend the White Privilege Conference (WPC) in 2004 and again in 2005.

REBECCA:

WPC was a popular conference with Maple Creek's Diversity Committee. WPC brought in inspirational and accomplished scholars, artists and activists as keynote speakers such as James Banks, Geneva Gay, Awele Makeba and Peggy McIntosh. The 2004 conference began including a youth strand with some talented youth workers from California. While the chaperones attended academic workshops on a number of anti-racism education topics, the students participated in an artistic program designed to help them confront their own sites of bigotry, both as oppressors and the oppressed. The Diversity Coordinator from Maple Creek had encouraged me to invite any interested students from *BTB* to attend, and approximately one quarter of the Maple Creek students who attended were in *BTB*.

I was not able to observe the work of the leaders in the youth strand although several students relayed to me what transpired. They did theatre workshops that seemed to synthesize the various stages of Boal's work: The revolutionary political drama of *Theatre of the oppressed* (1985) and the more hopeful ideologies found in *Rainbow of desire* (1995), using activities found in his *Games for actors and nonactors* (1992), that provide many examples of practical applications of drama games. Boal (1985) has stated that "all theatre is political" (p. ix). Without disagreeing with Boal, I suggest that the activities may be used to activate students' knowledge and creativity, even when people may not be aware of the political structures around them. Freire (2002a) likens the phase

of unawareness as one of dependency and ignorance. The essence of Boal's work as I understand it is to facilitate: the coming to awareness of systems of domination and oppression as they exist in society; the development of tools to address the oppressive power structures; individuals to become subjects, rather than objects by participatory experience. This is done by eroding the barriers of actor and spectator. For example, the students told me that they had made use of various examples of "image theatre" (Boal, 1992, p. 2) as well as "sensory exercises" (p. 42) and "emotion exercises" (p. 43). They reported feeling energized by the activities and discovering things that could possibly be used by *BTB*. The students also did some entry-level academic workshops aimed at confronting power and privilege. Finally, they did poetry workshops. On the last night of the conference, there was a talent show for all guests, starring the youth from across the country who had attended. I watched with interest the various scenes. This was the first night that I experienced spoken word and slam poetry. The students, including some of the students from *BTB* performed their gripping poetic narratives with trepidation and courage. I was struck by the shocking honesty of the performers. As I listened to the performers creatively explore their hopes and fears through this medium, I imagined what they face in their world that is at times similar to the world of my teens and at times not. There were also many moments where I felt proud and hopeful for the future as I watched them illustrate their amazing hopes and dreams. The students touched upon many of the racial issues that one might expect at a White privilege conference. They also touched upon other issues that seemed to me to be the issues that they spent a lot of time thinking about. I got a very strong sense that the performers were, in their effervescent and raw way, pleading with the adults in the audience to listen to them. They were also sharing

some extremely personal information, and in so doing, they were gently placing their trust into our safekeeping.

I felt, as the bus made the long journey back to our state, that the future would be in good hands with the youth who are growing up today. I must hold on to this optimism, for there are many times when I worry about the youth of today and hence the world of tomorrow. However, on this quiet, reflective journey home, I felt calm and hopeful.

WPC5 was a great bonding experience for those who went, and upon our return, I became acutely aware of the good marriage that *BTB* and White privilege exploration could make, and so I believe my focus on this consciously began at this point.

Scene vi: After months of planning and organizing, of corresponding with Subodh and Ashok in India, four members of BTB, along with Rebecca and two other teachers board a series of planes for India. The three week trip involves numerous interchanges between the participating American students and students in India, visits to orphanages, schools, a week at Natya Chetana's festival, and some workshops in South India. Interact and Rotary Clubs facilitate this trip. The itinerary is tight, and includes the activities in the following cities/regions: Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Natyagram, Konark, Puri, Chennai, Bangalore, Ooty, the Western Ghats, Mysore, New Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Mumbai.

REBECCA:

At the International Drama/Theatre Education Association (IDEA) congress in Ottawa in July, 2004, Subodh invited me to bring *BTB* to *Natya Chetana's* festival. It took months of planning, proposals and meetings before the Maple Creek School District gave their approval, but once approval was granted, I invited a colleague of mine, Brooke, who advised Maple Creek's Interact Club, to join me in leading the India '05 Experience trip. The school district had decided that it would be best if two teachers led the trip as opposed to one. Brooke was the only person I could think of at the time who would appreciate such a trip. Because she advised the Interact Club, which is a service club that engages in both local and international projects, we decided to blend a number

of purposes for this trip. The festival was paramount in my mind, but we also liaised with Rotarians from around India and created an itinerary of brief Interact Club exchanges. For the purposes of this trip, the three members of *BTB* who participated joined the Interact Club and the one Interact Club member who participated— a Maple Creek student who was born in India but adopted to American parents—joined *BTB*. We had initially hoped for between five to ten students to go on this trip, but learned that parents were not quick to commit \$3000 and entrust their beloved child's safety to two relatively new staff members of Maple Creek Collegiate. The lower number of participants however provided for an excellent teacher-student ratio. It also made possible certain travel arrangements such as hiring a driver with a nine-seat passenger bus that would have been impossible if we had increased our numbers by only two more people. The chaperones included me, my eldest brother (a high school teacher who had recently relocated his career from Europe to Canada and thus had free time), Brooke, and Ashok. Ashok would be with us for approximately two thirds of the trip's length, from *Natya Chetana's* festival outside of Bhubaneswar until we flew to Delhi. It was thus easy to organize constant supervision, and we adhered to strict protocols to ensure the students' safety at all times. The Maple Creek School District also appreciated the value of Ashok's volunteer commitment, as he would, in addition to coaching the students to create their first play for a non-English-speaking audience, be our guide around India and help us to organize our itinerary and resolve potential issues along the way. This generous gift of his time set many minds at ease, including my own. As the lead supervisor for this trip, I felt the weight of taking on to a certain degree the moral and legal responsibility of four American youth while abroad.

We left the Midwest on a frigid, blustery January afternoon and were greeted many hours later on a warm, sunny morning in Kolkata by a friendly family of Rotarians, who ushered us to their home for sleep, food and then a visit to their school and to a performance put on by a number of Interact Clubs in the state of West Bengal. We dropped the first of many humanitarian²¹ packages with these Rotarians, who would see the package to the Rotary Club of Port Blair, India. A Maple Creek student, whose heritage is Sri Lankan, organized a tsunami relief program for the victims of Sri Lanka and India. It was serendipitous that a month after the tsunami, we travelled there and had devoted more than half of our allotted luggage space for various care packages that we would drop at various locations in India. This particular package included many blankets, towels, children's clothing and medicines that were donated by a group of doctors around the metropolitan area near Maple Creek. We sorted through the items prior to leaving, and did not bring any items that had multinational advertisements or American slogans, as we felt this would be inappropriate.

The following day, we visited the orphanage where Ayanna lived prior to her being adopted to her parents in the USA. The head nurse greeted us and gave us a tour. A matronly woman of advancing years, she put her hand on Ayanna's head and told her that she had been a nurse at this orphanage for 28 years, and thus would have helped care for Ayanna while she was an infant. Ayanna stood stoically and smiled at the nurse. At that moment, I wondered what was going through Ayanna's mind. Even though I have an adopted sibling who is not caucasian, I find it impossible to understand the complex issues surrounding one's identity when one is transplanted from one cultural milieu into

²¹ Interact is a student club that promotes Rotary's mission "service above self". I recognize that the word humanitarian is politically charged, can reinforce language as a tool of domination and should be questioned.

another one, especially when race is involved. Ayanna's adoptive mother had jumped at the chance for her daughter to go see the country where she came from and had volunteered many hours helping with fundraising and public relations to help this trip happen. Later, Ayanna would share with me how she felt at that time, but in the orphanage, when the head nurse reached out to her, she remained composed and calm. I then watched the students interact with the infants and toddlers with awe. There were rooms filled with cribs that contained beautiful infants, rooms filled with youth beds, some with toddlers sitting on them, and some empty for the moment. The yard was full of toddlers and school-aged children playing, and there was a room that we were not permitted to enter where the sick children were kept. This is just one of many orphanages in India, one of many more in the world. Recognizing the presence of so many heartbeats that escape public notice proved both emotionally powerful and challenging for me. This was the first of many non-scripted experiences that I would observe the four students absorbing. In this sense, I found myself experiencing India in a way that I had not during my previous six trips. Rather than exploring my own responses to the experience, I found myself more interested in learning how the students, Brooke and my brother responded to similar experiences. After visiting the orphanage, where we dropped off the second humanitarian package, in this case a variety of school supplies, blankets, baby formula and stuffed animals, we were treated to a tour of Kolkata by our Rotarian hosts. This was the only Indian city on our itinerary that I had not previously visited, and so the newness of my experience held some appeal, and the Kolkata that I saw contrasted sharply with the city that I had read about. I felt compelled, however, to watch the reactions of the four

students as they experienced India—indeed the first time any of these students had been outside of their country within their memory range.

That evening, we boarded a night train and headed for Bhubaneswar. Although many of us still felt the effects of jetlag, everyone embraced this train experience. For me, the sleep on the gently rocking train proved very restful. The next morning, we were greeted at the Bhubaneswar station by Sanjaya, an actor/photographer/public relations and assistant-to-Subodh, who took us directly to *Natyagram*, where we were received by the entire *Natya Chetana* family. There, we met Ashok, and our work began.

Ashok worked with the students similarly to the way he worked with them in 2003, although only one of the four students had met Ashok back then. The big challenge theatrically was to create a play that the audience—many of whom spoke Oriya but no English—would understand. Further, Ashok was looking for some issues in which both actors and audience members could relate to (Ashok, 2005). The students decided to choose the theme of alienation to explore for their play. They believed that everyone must face alienation in some form or another. There would be little point in creating a play with English dialogue, although reviewing the videotapes of the play, there were a few single-line expressions in English, such as “score!” which would likely be understood not because of the word but because of the high level of physicality achieved in this play.

The students named their play *Outsider* (Beyond the Borders, 2005). It depicted a young child who wanted to fit in with the children around her. This is the synopsis that one student in *BTB* wrote:

Outsider

A young American goes through a process of self-discovery in a culture where individuality is revered. She loves to play with animals but discovers that other people are not interested in interacting with her. She tries to show her love of

animals to those around her, but no one is interested in her interests. Feeling lonely in this individualized world, she tries to fit in. She discovers that the only way to do this is by giving up her self and acting like the others. However, as soon as she becomes part of the group, the rules seem to change and her new friends seem to forget their behaviors that she had learned in order to fit in, as they discover new fashionable activities. So she continues to adapt but eventually decides that she doesn't belong to the fickle culture and decides to be content with who she really is. (written by a member of *BTB* and then submitted to Rebecca's teaching journal, February, 2005)

Abi played the young child. She was a peppy sophomore who was quite small of stature, and her size provided an effective visual contrast with the other three actors. In the play, after numerous attempts to fit in, and numerous retreats into her discouraged self, Abi's character finally presents a confident posture, distances herself from the other three actors and walks to the front of the stage, where she holds out her arms and says in English, "I am who I am. And this is all I can be." This is the only sentence in the play. The play ends on a hopeful note, with Abi's character deciding not to denigrate herself with futile attempts to find acceptance through conformity.

The whole play *Outsider* lasted approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Its simplicity matched the childlike quality of the main character, and I believe that its message came across well the evening that *BTB* performed at *Natya Chetana's* festival in front of an audience of several hundred people. The play was well-received. I was impressed by how quickly Ashok and the four students were able to pull this together. It was highly physical too, which was critical to being able to get the message across. I noticed both types of applause in the audience that I had become accustomed to at *Natya Chetana's* festival. First, there were those who clapped. Second, there were those who rolled their tongues emitting a lolling sound. I relaxed.

The task of producing a play for a non-English speaking audience had threatened me. I did not want to jeopardize the trust of students who risked coming to a country whose customs they knew little about by having them alienated on stage, even if these were renegade students and even if they were doing a play on alienation. I like to push the limits of my own comfort levels and encouraged this with the students who signed up for this trip, but I did not want to push them so far that they would have a bad performance experience that might adversely affect them. On the one hand, I felt confident in Ashok's abilities to prepare these four students for their task. I also trusted that Subodh would not have invited *BTB* had he not felt that their artistic contributions would be respectfully received by audiences that he knew well. On the other hand, I felt anxious about much that *BTB* did because going through colloquium and ethics review scared me about possibly damaging those I wished to learn with the most. I tried to reassure the students prior to their performance. I watched them go through the same pre-performance rituals, such as stretching, removing their shoes, and burning incense, as I had. It was as if I could see myself coming to *Natya Chetana's* stage for the first time several years ago. A cycle was playing out. It felt right. It was made possible because everyone involved had invested trust in one another, and this trust was honoured.

Briefly recapping the three-week adventure that we enjoyed in India, after the few days that we spent at *Natya Chetana*, we moved to the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and then north to the National Capitol Territory of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. The students gave more performances of *Outsider*. Ashok had organized a few school and orphanage visits in Bangalore, and with the multiple performances, the students were able to evolve their play somewhat based on group

reflection and some feedback that they received. For me, the orphanage visits were the most powerful aspects of the trip. At the orphanages, the four American students were greeted by children who were sometimes playful, shy, smiling and afraid. The disconnect between the privileged lives that my students lived and those of hand-to-mouth lived by the children in the orphanages brought more than a few tears to several of us. The gifts that we brought seemed ridiculously inadequate. In addition to the supplies that we brought from the USA, we also brought bags of rice and some spices and other foods that we had purchased at the local market. Nothing we gave to these children could compare to the imprint that these young souls made on our minds. Perhaps these imprints went both ways, although I would have no way of knowing, but the imprint made upon me was forged through playful mutual human interaction. Perhaps one of the most emotionally redeeming aspects of these orphanage visits for me was the interchange that happened at a Bangalore orphanage. When we arrived, we were taken to a large room that was empty save for some pillars. Using body language only, the *BTB* students taught the children how to play a couple of games, including *Duck Duck Goose*. The children ran around, shrieking with laughter. After the second game, to my surprise, the children then sat us in a circle and taught us a game that they knew. They gave instructions in Kannada, the language of Karnataka that in our group only Ashok understood. Through body language only, the Kannadiga children were able to teach us their game.

This experience reminds me of an important aspect of my transformation: teaching should not be a prescriptive set of directives that channels information from teacher to student (Freire, 2002b), although one might accept this method as it has been used frequently (Giroux, 2003, 2004). Teaching, rather, is an interactive exchange between

learners, representing a shift toward a more student-centered focus (Bourner, in Crossley, 2006). Thus, the term “teacher” is misleading. While I may teach my students certain concepts in the curriculum and the students must be evaluated for their mastery of such concepts, there is much more teaching that is going on. For that which the students teach one another, the classroom teacher is actually facilitating an organic interplay between all who engage in the experience. It must therefore be acknowledged that students are constantly teaching each other as well as their teachers (Boal, 1985; Freire, 2002a, 2002b) and that the learning environment that teachers help to shape is one that contains systems of dominance that privilege some people at the expense of others (bell hooks, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000, Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999; McIntosh, 1990; 2006; Williams, 1991). Throughout my career, I have noticed that students, through their behaviour, teach me valuable lessons, and the moment when I observed the children in the orphanage reacting to the games by responding with games affirmed to me that an important interactive moment between everyone took place: an unforgettable bonding moment occurred for anyone in the room who was open to this act of trust and play. The fact that the American students and the Indian children shared neither language nor culture and they were still able to share this interchange speaks of the power of human interaction. It also seemed to break through the barriers of class and race. It was a learning process whereby all children in the room were on an equal playing field and both groups accepted one another as having agency, power and valuable knowledge to share with one another.

I think it behoves educators to take the time to reflect deeply upon the concept of organic, interactive learning where everyone in the room has agency, power and

knowledge. This is increasingly difficult to do, because the necessity to implement the recent policies in evaluation and assessment (Limestone District School Board, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000, 2004, 2009) are such a drastic shift from its previous model that it is easy to become overwhelmed with this sole educational initiative and ignore the importance of the educational issues that fall outside of measurable data. However, this reality makes the necessity to commit to such thinking even more imperative. I feel very personally the apocalyptic phrase that “Education [is] under siege” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993, title) because while teachers attend to the minutia of getting evaluation right, they risk losing what they stand for as teachers and in doing so, they risk failing to make the personal and individual impact on their students that they are capable of.

BTB completed several projects after India '05 Experience. They performed *Outsider* a few times in the USA, and a grade ten student organized a second hunger banquet, which we called *HUUnger Banquet* (Beyond the Borders, 2006) because *BTB* performed it at the local Unitarian Universalist Church. *BTB* donated the proceeds, half to a local food bank and half to Amnesty International. My husband—fiancé at the time—is a drummer, and so he played the djembe during the performance and thus was introduced to *BTB* just before *BTB*'s curtain was drawn for the last time and I resigned from my position at Maple Creek and returned to Canada.

Scene vii: After Rebecca transcribes the data from her interviews with the research participants of BTB, she reviews the hundreds of pages of conflicting information. Those voices of students and scholars who haunt her appear as she writes.

JOHN: Never again will a single story be told as if it's the only one (Berger, as cited in Roy, 1997, epigraph).

REBECCA: You can say that again! Ivanka's responses contradict Günther's responses. In fact, Günther tells me that they need less structure but later says they need more structure.

TAYLOR: I didn't really have as many talking parts, cause I wasn't as comfortable as the other people were (Interview #1 with Taylor, p. 1) [S]ome of the people that had more acting experience would take charge. (Interview #1 with Taylor, p. 4)

ALEX: Well, I normally do set high expectations for myself. (Interview #1 with Alex, p. 1)

REBECCA: [H]ow do you relate those—your high expectations—how does it affect your role within the group?

ALEX: I think it gives me a little more leadership. (Interview #1 with Alex, p. 1)

IVANKA: Well I think a lot of people also think, they kind of think they're better at it than everyone else, so they just kind of make themselves this, this self-made leaders and it's just kind of announced...it's kind of like dictatorship, as odd as that sounds. (Interview with Ivanka, p. 2)

ALEX: A lot of times we agree on stuff, so it's not a big deal, so I think it's more of a democracy. (Interview #1 with Alex, p. 5)

GÜNTHER: Um, well we'd have the idea. Then, we'd all try to talk at once. Then we figured out that wouldn't work. And then we'd, the, the person who introduced the idea would start explaining, and then, ah, usually a couple of people in the room would start understanding where they were trying to go with it. (Interview #1 with Günther, p. 4)

ARUNA: First, we thought of the issue. And then we decided like, we get that stereotype from the media and so we thought 'oh, how about we use, like, we're watching TV and this is what comes on' and then we're just like 'okay, well we'll have two people and they'll be like, flipping through the channels, and then they'll see the commercial or something' and that's like what always happens. You know, you see the commercial on diet pills or like, crazy diets advertised on TV and you know, steroids for men and so we just, kind of put it all together. (Interview #1 with Aruna, p. 4)

GÜNTHER: I really didn't have any expectations of what I'd be doing going into this...I knew it would be different from that but I didn't really think about *how* [emphasis added] it would be different. (Interview #1 with Günther, p. 1)

IVANKA: I kind of expect myself to become better... (Interview with Ivanka, p. 1)

REBECCA [to SHENANDOAH]: So I'm hearing you say that you want to make a positive impact in the group?

SHENANDOAH: Yeah. People like positive attitudes and I think that's what a group needs. (Interview #1 with Shenandoah, p. 2)

ARUNA: [I]t's kind of like a team thing...I think we needed everybody to bring it all together (Interview #1 with Aruna, p. 2).

DEILEK: My own expectations are to eventually in the future um, have a leadership role, theoretically, in some, in a political sense, and so I guess I find myself now, not necessarily in a leadership role, but as a strong member of the group, which leads me hopefully to some day be able to support the ideals the group has and promote the concepts of the social issues that we discuss. (Interview #1 with Deilek, p. 1)

REBECCA: What does a better world look like? (Interview #2 with Deilek, p. 1)

DEILEK: Well, I suppose ideally, a better world would be a place with a lot more respect and relationships built on understanding and acceptance as opposed to superiority and thinking that, say one culture and one gender, or one sexuality is better than another. (Interview #2 with Deilek, p. 1)

TAYLOR: The greatest challenge is all of us agreeing on...sometimes we had conflicting views on things. (Interview #1 with Taylor, p. 4)

GÜNTHER: Ah, getting everyone to be on time to practice. And getting them to focus. (Interview #1 with Günther, p. 5)

Scene viii: Canada, a couple of years later. Rebecca writes about what she learned from the members of BTB by observing them, interviewing them, and collecting student journals. Discussion.

REBECCA:

Perhaps one of the most challenging tasks that new researchers face is how to make sense out of the data that she collects, how to select which pieces of data are best suited to analyse, and how to analyse the data. I had looked at both quantitative and qualitative data in my research courses. The data were academic to me, and I had not appreciated how data becomes much more complex when the researcher has a personal attachment to the research as well as to the subjects. Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2004)

illustrates how the understanding of data and the richness of the interchange of information are limited when the interchange undergoes a transformation from an organic relationship between researcher and participant to an inanimate transcript. Perhaps in many research projects, such a transformation is desired. I believe it is called objectivity.

TRACY: [On the other hand], “[w]hilst task objectives can be assessed through an evaluation of products, many process-related outcomes cannot since they are less explicitly evident. These outcomes can include the development of skills of conflict management such as mediation, negotiation and constructive controversy: skills that are related more explicitly to social behaviours than task-oriented behaviours. (Crossley, 2006, p. 34)

REBECCA: To me, this statement affirms the work of *BTB*, because its method invites students to engage in a complex exploration of conflicts that are intended to challenge how they think, why they think what they do. Crossley also explains how students feel anxiety about their impending evaluation and this anxiety inhibits constructive controversy. To me, Crossley’s analysis calls educators to examine their pedagogies and consider the role of evaluation and how the way we are evaluating may limit students’ abilities to learn how to manage conflict as adults. In fact, I have come to view evaluation as paradoxical, perhaps even oxymoronic. On the one hand, evaluation provides essential feedback that can inform better performance, better pedagogies and better policies. On the other hand, because there is a tendency to evaluate that which is easily measured, I now question how, since “[w]e live in a testing world” (Stroud & Cheng, 2002, p. 1), can we provide pedagogies—and their evaluative components—that focus on that which is not easily measured. Later in her article, Crossley claims that drama processes, especially action theatre provide models of pedagogies that engage students in developing skills that are not easily measurable or assessable:

TRACY: This type of collaborative working [action theatre] differs in a significant way from most group-based performance assignments because the product is created during the performance rather than prior to it. The possibility of ‘groupthink’ is reduced in this context because group work skills are explicitly related to the task objective rather than implicitly underpinning it, and the students practise and discuss the methods and roles for collaborating as part of learning about the theatre forms.” (Crossley, 2006, p. 41)

REBECCA: Crossley’s research helps me to understand the pedagogy that I aim for. She helps me to understand much of what I felt instinctively about my transformation as a teacher. One last thing that I have gleaned from her work is that many norms—including those pertaining to evaluation—are understood but not spoken of in education. I think this applies to her example about an unspoken norm that we avoid conflict in order to get along. For me, it also applies to evaluation. The prevalence of evaluation in education is to me like the ubiquitous telescreen in Orwell’s (1949) dystopian novel *1984*: “Big Brother is [always] watching” and the knowledge of this inhibits autonomous behaviour. An excellent example is illustrated in my ethics review process. I believed that I needed to prove that *BTB* had raised collective and individual awareness in the participants of the program. I therefore constructed many research questions around this theme (see Appendix IV for interview questions). I had obtained permission to follow an emergent research design, so I constructed questions for follow up interviews that spoke to themes that I saw emerging from the first set of interviews. I had also received permission to assign participant journals, and while few students submitted these, those who did spoke directly to questions that interested me later on in the research process. This proved beneficial as I became more experienced with research. Finally, I counted myself as a research participant, kept my own teaching journal and used participant observation (Kirby & McKenna, 1989) as central to my research methodology.

I learned many valuable lessons from this research process, although I still cannot look anyone in the eye and claim that *BTB* has in fact, raised individual and collective awareness. The first thing that I learned from the data collection process is how little I knew when I began this work about the entire research process, specifically regarding effective interviewing. It is one thing to read through various works of other researchers but it is quite another to carry research out from start to finish. Perhaps the first time is the hardest, but although I thought I knew what I was looking for at the time, I can see now, upon years of reflection that such time provides clarity of vision that is difficult to obtain on the spot. I approached my research seeking to understand how action theatre can transform students in a number of ways such as educationally, artistically and socio-politically.

Reviewing the hours of transcripts, I have observed a number of ripple effects from this work. Most of the students who participated in *BTB* have gone on to become advocates for issues that they believe in. Many have taken on fairly ambitious artistic challenges. Perhaps they would have done so anyway. However, I believe that a number of students have been transformed for the better through their involvement in *BTB*. A number of students who were in *BTB* keep in touch with me, and I am impressed by the levels of advocacy in their communities and commitment to the arts that these young adults, mostly in university these days, exhibit. However, I do not take the credit for this. I understand now that as transformative as action theatre may be, I can only examine my own transformation.

Alex, Aruna, Claire, Deilek, Günther, Ivanka, Shenandoah, Sarah and Taylor were nine of approximately 40 students who made contributions to *BTB* between 2003 and

2006. The above students, in addition to showing outstanding commitment to *BTB*, generously shared with me their hopes and dreams, their vision, their trust and their criticism. In addition to their commitment, Ashok devoted an incredible amount of his time and energy to creating this project and mentoring me through its tough spots. For all of this, I am very grateful. I am grateful to all of the members of *BTB* who devoted time to one or more of the works that the theatre troupe created during its existence. Without their faith in me to bring this experiment to their school, my transformation would not have taken the shape that it has. I have also “made special” the work of *BTB* and found it easy to give my commitment to the members over the years. I am thankful for the successes of *BTB* as well as the hard times. As their testimonies show, the students share some vision and they disagree on issues as well. The hard times and disagreements have given me great opportunities to think about my pedagogy and I am a better teacher today as a result of this.

My examination of this work does not end with this thesis; there is enough material for me to spend many more years of reflection, and hopefully I will some day have another opportunity to create action theatre projects with students. I will be better prepared for this. I hope that within these three acts, I have also given you pause to think and wish that the *BTB* format of performance followed by discussion could come alive for this thesis. I now invite you to open your own discussions about the ideas herein.

CHAPTER FIVE

EPILOGUE

CHORUS: *Lesson 1: The benefits of laughter.*

*Now Rebecca is done, but her learning continues!
Live, love, laugh...
Laughter is an underrated pedagogy.*

REBECCA:

When I began collecting data, I was surprised to note the recurrence of references to the use of comedy in *BTB*'s plays. The sarcastic tone of this principal/coaches scene in *Omniphobia* (Beyond the Borders, 2004a) illustrates the style that *BTB* came to develop and include in some of their scenes over the years. One thing that had troubled me in considering the pedagogy I wished to practise, including my leadership approach when merging social action with arts in education, was the increasingly sarcastic or flip scenes that *BTB* produced. It troubled me because I felt that too much sarcasm and attention to eliciting laughs from its audience would lessen the impact of the social action that *BTB* was designed for. Ashok helped me through this by coaching me to adopt the strengths of the group and incorporating these strengths so that their true voice emerged. Ashok noted that Günther, along with a few others, was very skilled with humour and with crafting very cutting scenes that presented the ironic complexities in which humans live. Many scenes that *BTB* created portrayed humans as blindly hypocritical. The comedic fashion in which *BTB*'s scenes evolved blatantly exposed the disconnects between proclaimed rhetoric and actions that contradict such perspectives. The humorous style provided for comic relief to some serious criticisms of our public lives. What I questioned, sometimes late into the night, was how far should we go with humour before the importance of the

message gets lost? At the time of this research, I was not familiar with the theoretical framework of satire as pedagogy of protest (Blom Hansen, 2000; Crow, 2002; Haut, 2007; Obeyesekere, 1999; Westwood, 2004; Zandberg, 2006), and the benefits and limitations of using satire to further critical discussion (LaMarre, Landreville & Beam, 2009). One of the members of *BTB*, however, was.

Günther, a self-professed “alpha” (Interview #1 with Günther, 2004, p. 2) was a natural leader and everyone in the group deferred to him. He was also a talented actor, not only versatile in mainstream plays but also a great mimic of television personalities and impressive at improvisation. He was confident and assertive, and hence much of his material was adopted by the group. When interviewing Günther, I asked him what issues interested him and what format he would choose:

REBECCA: But I’m just wondering where it might, if it went back to an open format, where it should be going.

GÜNTHER: If it were completely up to me, I would take it, more of a current events type thing. Um, cause that’s just where my personal tastes run. Ah, you know stuff...civil liberties I think would be a good one. Um, kind of how political elections have turned into, not so much elections, more as, you know, the all the negative-esque stuff like that. More of uh, I wouldn’t say pop culture, more of a current social, what just to use a good word on this, ah, a social *direction* type thing. Or more commentary on, I hate to say pop culture, that *society* as it is, is going down now... Yes. But that’s just me.

REBECCA: Sort of like editorializing on where society is going?

GÜNTHER: Yeah. But more, I mean, my tastes also are towards satire than some of the other, yeah.

REBECCA: Which may be how you guys got the humour infused into your material.

GÜNTHER: I, it’s my opinion that people respond better to, ah, more heavy messages if they’re laughing. Laughter is rather disarming for sensitive issues.

(Interview #1 with Gunther, 2004, p. 4)

REBECCA: Günther’s statement has given me pause to reflect for a long time. Is it a general truth that people generally respond to heavy messages when they’re laughing?

Crow (2002), for example, has noted when comparing Western and African use of

theatrical satire that “pleasure in many African cultures in playful theatricalizing and comic, often satirical observation and parody of different kinds of behavior at the everyday social level” (p. 133). In my experience, I respond well to satire. Judging by popular response to Michael Moore’s films (2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2007), which are renown for their satirical examination of sensitive political issues, my response is hardly unique. Perhaps the use of humour within the exploration of a serious issue may have the effect of helping the audience personally connect with the piece, although there are criticisms worth noting. Haut (2007) has noted that historically satire welcomed men into critical discourse while excluding women; LaMarre, Landreville & Beam (2009) claim that “[b]ecause satire is often ambiguous, biased information processing models provide an excellent framework for understanding how audiences see what they want to see” (p. 213). While this claim helps me to see that *BTB* may be constructing circular arguments, a practice that I do not support when teaching media literacy, for example, I also think that people generally connect to all art—especially theatre—in a very personal way, so that it would be hard not to put one’s personal framework to their understanding of a satirical piece.

Günther was highly media-literate and well-read. He loved satire, and I could not see Günther being vulnerable to circular arguments. He had a sharp intellect and a critical mind. He spoke often and confidently; he had all of the qualities of a great orator, and so it did not surprise me that his peers listened to him carefully. They also followed his leads. Günther was playful. In his interaction with peers, he successfully oscillated between presenting deep observations from his critical mind and hilarious representations

of the banality and contradictory society in which we lived. I was curious about his perception of the processes that *BTB* used. In our first interview, I asked him,

REBECCA: [W]hen you're developing an issue, to be put into a play, how does it translate from the conceptual issue to an artistic artefact? So like actually getting it to go somewhere?

GÜNTHER: Um, well we'd have the idea. Then, we'd all try to talk at once. Then we figured out that wouldn't work. And then we'd, the, the person who introduced the idea, or... would start explaining, and then, ah, usually a couple of people in the room would start understanding where they were trying to go with it. Then they would get up and ad lib some dialogue or whatever, and then, as it usually occurred, someone would say 'oh we're not using enough physicality', or 'we're missing this' because I think the group tended to put more towards sketch comedyish, cause like we all watch a little too much *Saturday Night Live*, but, I guess that's a cultural thing—um... And, so we'd just start, we'd start kicking it around and if it started going somewhere, we'd have that, then we'd come back and practice that and then later, we'd come back to it, and if we liked it we'd go with it, otherwise, we'd axe it.

(Interview #1 with Günther, 2004, pp. 4-5)

REBECCA: Günther's sometimes humorous, sometimes searing candour, as illustrated in the way he articulates himself, is a quality that I believe may have intimidated students like Ivanka, who were younger than Günther and less sure of their ability to articulate beliefs. However, I also observed that students trusted Günther because they perceived him to be honest, for better or worse. This mirrors my perception of him. I believe that he is referring to me when he says "someone suggested we're not using enough physicality," but he had a way of directly bringing up a point that he might not agree with in a diplomatic way. His reference to the group's interest in *Saturday Night Live*, which at first I perceived to be a potential liability of the group, would be reframed in my mind, with Ashok's guidance, to be utilized as a strength of the group.

CHORUS: *Lesson 2: The energy of hope.*

*Hope is a winding river
It winds and twists around the most difficult of spaces,
a purifying life force, making beauty in all that surrounds it.*

*It comes from life, and moves to life,
and when it reaches the ocean,
it opens up endless possibilities.*

REBECCA:

Another important lesson that I have learned directly from the students in *BTB* is the necessity for me as an educator to keep my hope for what I do and what the students do alive. It is hope that allows students to put faith in their teachers and coaches, and it is hope that allows educators to put faith in their students and also hope drives educators to face the plethora of challenges that come our way, be they policy challenges or social ones. In the midst of my perennial confusion, the activities of *BTB* continued and I must admit that the hope I had for all that was *BTB* was as perennial as the confusion. I took very seriously waning energies and interests of *BTB* members, and judged my leadership abilities harshly. However, students were also quick to encourage me with reminders that they also wished to just be teenagers. For example, in August, 2004, an educational consultant approached me and requested that *BTB* perform for and talk with educators at an in-service that she was planning. It was a beautiful, hot, sunny week when I telephoned a number of students to ask them to participate, and although I felt defeated when only four students committed to this, I could have interpreted the commitment more positively. I expressed my fears to this consultant, since we had less than a week to come up with something, but she encouraged me to bring an in-progress piece. We did.

On a hot, August day, the four students arrived at the convention hall to a crowd of approximately 250 educators, and performed their scene. They were interested in showing the culture of fear in society. This had been an interest of theirs for the duration of the troupe's work, and spoke to the post-911/Iraq war context in which they lived.

Their scene was followed by a question-answer period. I thanked the students for their work, and they acknowledged to me that their commitment was trumped by the excellent weather. Their work, however, was greatly appreciated and we received a number of emails commending the students on their scene, their leadership ability, their critical thinking and their creativity. We realized that we could continue *BTB*'s work in such a way, which perhaps was a mixed blessing, because we were invited to many in-services, and each time, we took in-progress work. The teachers who were voluntarily at such in-services were always appreciative, which served to affirm that we didn't need to perform polished work. I have learned the importance of decision making based on hope rather than a host of other emotions, such as fear, anger and greed. It seems to me that whenever I have placed hope and faith in my students, they have always delivered.

CHORUS: *Lesson 3: Teachers take care:
Children's knowledge is underrated and their capacity to open their minds is great.*

*Careful the things you say, Children will listen.
Careful the things you do, Children will see. And learn.
Children may not obey, But children will listen.
Children will look to you, For which way to turn, To learn what to be.
Careful before you say, "Listen to me." Children will listen.*

(Sondheim, 1988)

REBECCA:

The lyrics in the last song of the musical *Into the Woods* (Sondheim, 1988) are very powerful for me. I directed this musical in 2004, and noticed that on every production night, when the character who sang these and other prophecies—the Witch—to her audience, I was brought to tears. Of course, I had worked with the young woman who played the Witch many times in drama projects, so there was the maternal feeling on my part that had only been realized in a surrogate, metaphoric way at this point.

However, it made me realize something that continues to haunt me. I feel very blessed to be entrusted to teach some of the youth in our public high schools. At the same time, I hear the Witch's warning very loudly: as teachers, we may feel stress when students do not listen, but we ought to feel anxiety when they do listen. I say this because I believe that the Witch is right: children are impressionable. They often trust us when we have not earned this trust. As employees in public service, we must consider our role very seriously. Deep reflection upon our practice is called for and we can grow when we do reflect upon our pedagogy.

I had mixed feelings about the balance of process and product with *BTB*'s work. On the one hand, lowering the bar allowed us to stay afloat and still provide an outlet for students' creativity and critical understanding of the ills in their society. On the other hand, I felt—as did some of the students in the troupe—that our work was compromised by publicly displaying our work in its rehearsal stage. In a series of student journals that I assigned, which were always voluntary and hence not submitted by all, I attempted to learn more about student attitudes toward *BTB*'s work. Deilek wrote:

DEILEK: Messages about the importance of selflessness and sacrifice are hard for isolated, affluent teenagers to embrace willingly. Because Maple Creek is an environment that is very conducive to a narrow understanding of life around the country, let alone the world, it makes students that would rather maintain the status quo than have their way of life disrupted. Maple Creek has incredible inertia in its ways, and that is both manifested in the students' lack of interest in the messages of *BTB*, and also a cause for students who have a different perspective (like *BTB* students) to keep their thoughts to themselves and groups of like-minded people. (Deilek's student journal B).

REBECCA: Reading through this Deilek's journal, I am impressed by his acute awareness of the privilege that had shocked me when I first started working with these youth. Even though I had grown up in a middle class environment and am the daughter of

two highly educated professionals, my teenage years were not marked by the abundance of opportunity and material comforts that were considered normal in Maple Creek. While Deilek's reality involved growing up in an environment of abundance, he nonetheless had managed to become aware of the benefits but also obstacles that such an environment is apt to produce. Deilek identifies his peer group as isolated. This choice of words brings to mind a sense of being oppressed on the part of the person who is isolated, although I had heard enough from parents to know that one reason for living in a remote suburb is to protect their children from the problems of the inner city. William Upski Wimsatt (1994) problematizes the suburban ideology that can be easily found in the cozy community of Maple Creek, and yet there is something very compelling about a high school student being able to articulate the environment so well. This sense of isolation has been described by several participants, and allowed Ashok to tap into the rhetorical stance that I have seen in Boal's theatre process when I have trained with *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) practitioners.

CHORUS: *Lesson 4: When you assume something, you make an Ass out of You and Me.*

REBECCA:

I have learned to challenge my assumptions about my profession. I have given much thought to the controversial issue of the separation of personal and professional during the writing of this thesis. I had learned early in my career the dangers of blurring the lines between the professional and the personal. My experience as a drama teacher was that many youth were drawn to my confidence. Perhaps my own youthfulness had some influence on this, but I think the arts and in particular drama have a strong power to unleash personal revelations within an artistic—hence professional—environment. When

actors share a theatre experience with one another, they bond in a way that can be very powerful personally (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). I have experienced this with fellow thespians in my undergraduate days, and have continued to experience this with my drama students. Yet, when a student began telling me of her personal history, which was fraught with sexual abuse and struggle, I did not know how to properly support this student. The result for me was a lot of stress and insomnia. Teaching English provided me with a more comfortable personal distance from my students, but when I went to India in 2002, and for the years that followed, I bonded deeply with a number of theatre professionals in India and social justice activists in the USA, and this bond remains strong to this day. Ashok and I created *Beyond the Borders*, and through our dedication to this work, we “made special” (Dissanayake, 1992) this labour. It has occurred to me that the boundaries that I constructed in order to protect myself in my early career, I let erode in this project. I believe this gave intense benefit to those who participated in the project, while at the same time, rendering the project and its participants somewhat more tenuous and vulnerable. This may be the cost of becoming an artist rather than doing art. For example, my professional and personal relationships with Ashok grew simultaneously. On the one hand, I benefited from a gifted artist-activist who came to help get *BTB* started and then mentored me through the entire life of this theatre project. On the other hand, I benefited from an amazing friendship that was forged beyond the borders of each of our individual worlds and included our collective world views. It turns out that each of these two dynamics served to strengthen the other relationship, but it could easily have turned out otherwise. Our professional partnership could have put a fatal strain on a friendship, or the friendship could have put a fatal strain on our professional one. In

choosing a path of venturing on this journey as friends and as colleagues, we both took great risks and put great faith in one another. I now see the issue of personal involvement as much more enigmatic, much more complex than a simple danger of certain peril that must be avoided.

CHORUS: *Lesson 5: Experience is the means and the end of education.*

[*The challenge for educators is*] “to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (Dewey, 1938, p. 28).

REBECCA:

Perhaps the biggest lesson that I have learned from the entire experience, but mostly from watching students in their processes is that education needs to provide for actual experiences (Dewey, 1938) that will lead students toward greater responsibility and advocacy. As a high school teacher, I am hired to help students acquire certain skills that they will need in the future. It is also understood, however, that teachers are social guides who through modeling and creating a certain tone in the classroom, inform students on how to behave socially. In high school, our students are transitioning from childhood to adulthood. How do we best prepare our students for their future lives as adults? This is no simple task. In reviewing my journals and the research participant journals, as well as the interview data, I understand that the entire *BTB* experience has affirmed for me what I have believed for a long time: in order for children to transition from a state of little power and little responsibility to one of greater power and greater responsibility, they must be given many opportunities to experience power and responsibility. In doing so, they can test their ideas and discover their budding values systems. In addition, they strengthen their confidence in self-advocacy and responsibility-

taking. This is how good leadership is developed and no amount of learning theory can replace the value of experience that is necessary for this, although theory can be used to enhance learning through experience. Without actual experience, however, students' understanding of power and responsibility remains academic, just as my understanding of research was academic until I experienced it. Opportunities must be created so that students can explore their ideas and develop their autonomous voices. One such opportunity was created for me, thus making possible what has led to this thesis and I am constantly reminded of this gift: the Elliot-Uptis travel fellowship provides opportunities for graduate students to complement their graduate studies with experiential learning that will complement their research interests. For me, I was given the opportunity to spend a month in India, interacting with social workers, educators, artists and activists. In doing so, I was able to make greater meaning of my readings on postcolonialism, globalization, aesthetic education and development work. I actively interacted with professionals and helped to create artistic-activist theatrical artefacts. I experienced what I was attempting to learn about. The committee that administers the Elliot-Uptis fellowship received two post-trip reports from me for the two years that I applied for and was granted the fellowship. What the people on this committee do not know is how deeply their support for my experiential education has benefited me. I wrote these reports immediately upon returning from *Natya Chetana*, and thus the committee has not learned that their support has seeded my desire for creating an action theatre group, that learning about grant-writing has made this possible, and that the professionals with whom I interacted in India have become long-term friends and colleagues. Nor would they know that the fellowship changed the direction of my career in such a dramatic way. This is the impact that such

experiences can have, and this impact is monumental. Such opportunities are invaluable, and must continue to be made available to those in public and higher education alike.

This is the path toward agency and authentic learning. I have seen Gandhi's aphorism "if we are to teach real peace in this world then we shall have to begin with the children" frequently utilized in educational circles. If today's children represent hope for a better society in the future—and for me they do—then at some point, they must be entrusted with a certain level of responsibility to make decisions about themselves as active agents within their schools and communities. This is a messy process and one must expect a certain amount of chaos to be created from the transfer of responsibility.

It is, of course, easier to prevent this chaos and create a safe, predictable, and controlled environment in the classroom by restricting the amount of responsibility to students. There have been times when I succumbed to professional exhaustion and decided that the most efficient way of navigating a lesson was if I tightly controlled the way in which the lesson was carried out. However, I believe that such tight controls impede growth. For example, Claire writes about the growth in her personal confidence that occurred by her taking on a major responsibility with the play *Outsider*:

CLAIRE:

I really did love working with Ashok, his accent was a little difficult to understand however all of his positives outweighed (*sic*) the one negative. The positives are his willingness to help and you can tell that he seriously wants to help. Also his enthusiasm about theatre and social issues was really infectious. He did a lot for me in the aspect that he picked me for the lead role, I know it sounds conceded (*sic*) however that was the first time in my life that I thought that I was actually good at something and I wasn't a complete failure. This did a lot for my confidence as well because if I could put on a play before these people in a different country and also they had some sort of predisposition on the fact that we were Americans. Working with Ashok also taught me to think outside the box more. (Claire's participant journal # 1)

REBECCA: What Claire learned in the process of taking on this added responsibility is that she is “good at something.” This lesson has prepared her for greater responsibilities, and she now has accomplished a number of leadership tasks and acting roles.

I believe that an environment where students are given more responsibility, as chaotic as it may seem to an observer, provides for greater learning opportunities. One of the problems that I encountered with the format of entrusting students to carry out major responsibilities within the group is that some students would fail to honour their commitments, or they would complete them with the minimum amount of effort. When this happens, it can be painful for those who are results-oriented, such as for Alex, who wrote to my prompt about how to improve *BTB*:

ALEX: [C]ommitment from many of the participants needed improvement (Alex’s participant journal #33).

REBECCA: Alex also mentioned in both of her interviews how goal-oriented she is and she likes to get things done. However, when it came to the issue of student friction and student monopolies,

ALEX: With *BTB* there were still lead and small roles, but because we all worked on the scenes together and did a wide variety of skits, I think most people were content with the combination of roles they had. If they did not have any “lead” roles in a scene, it was because they were not stepping up and volunteering. (Alex’s participant journal #14).

REBECCA:

In contrast to Ivanka, who had felt oppressed by various members of the group and that her voice was ignored, Alex placed the accountability for being heard upon each individual. I can understand how both Ivanka and Alex experienced different realities.

Deilek pointed out that freedom can have different effects on people:

DEILEK:Maple Creek encourages a freedom of opinion and thought enough that it doesn't discourage students who choose to close out the rest of the world (Deilek's participant journal D).

REBECCA:

This observation by Deilek has profoundly influenced how I come to understand the director-less theatre troupe concept, which is rooted in principles of justice and equity. Although apathy may be seen as an unintended negative effect in a free society, mandating active participation may be perceived by the stakeholders as unethical and serve to de-motivate. This sentiment is expressed by Günther. When I asked him what was most challenging for him in his work with *BTB*, he responded:

GÜNTHER: Um, for me personally, I think it was learning to go along with skits that I either disagreed with or just didn't find appealing to me. I remember one skit specifically that I did, that I just didn't want to do, because it, it was the one about the teenagers and the parents and the time jumps...and, what we did that first night, I didn't really get it, the other people in the skit didn't really get it, the audience completely missed the boat on that one, because there was supposed to be audience interaction, and it was just kind of hard for me to go at it full throttle, not knowing if, uh, you know, if as cheesy as this sounds, if your heart's not in it, it's hard to do effectively. (Interview #1 with Günther, pp. 6-7).

REBECCA: Günther had qualified this challenge with an acknowledgement that while the group was good at accepting others' ideas, they were more resistant to seeing those ideas progress all the way to a performance:

GÜNTHER: I think the group as a whole is pretty receptive to new ideas. I think the real, um, it was, if anyone had an idea, you could get heard. It was just really hard to convince everyone that you could make a skit out of it. So, the hard part wasn't getting ideas introduced, it was getting them to go somewhere. (Interview #1 with Günther, p. 4).

REBECCA:

Ideologically, the purpose of *BTB* was to encourage students to participate as much or as little as they wished. Alex, who was older than Ivanka and had more

experience with Maple Creek's Drama Club, must have successfully advocated for herself. At the same time, I did witness Ivanka making great efforts to have her ideas accepted by the group and perhaps it was her age and lack of theatre experience, or perhaps it was her personality that detracted from her ideas making an impact. Thus, I can see how the ideology of *BTB* served Alex while it failed Ivanka in this respect.

Günther's philosophy fiercely endorsed individualism. It did not surprise me that he had difficulty adapting to group decisions that deviated from his own. However, his statement about needing to have one's heart in it is a theme that repeats itself throughout both of his interviews. For example, when asked what life lessons came out of the work of *BTB*, he responded:

GÜNTHER: I don't know if it was this that specifically taught me, but, this helped. If you want someone to do something, you can't force them to do it. They have to want to do it. And this relates back to getting people to show up on time or come to rehearsal. There's no way you can make them do it. They have to *want* to do it. And, I think that would probably be it. (Interview #1 with Günther, p. 7).

REBECCA: What Günther had learned reflects what I had believed from the onset: that my wishes as a teacher of drama should not influence the outcomes of the group. If *BTB* is truly to be the voice of the membership, then both ideas and initiative must come from the membership and the role of the teacher is to facilitate this process. When I asked Günther what challenges the group faced, he said:

GÜNTHER: [G]etting everyone to be on time to practice. And getting them to focus. It...I think one of the things that is because...most of these people have been involved in drama in one way or another. And I think that we were all kind of used to it being very structured. You know, like kind of like an after school sport. If we had to have a production, you know, opening night is here, it has to be, you know, there's a script. We have models that...this, this is very open-ended, and um, I felt that we did some very good skits, but also I think that we didn't necessarily understand that right away. We had to adapt to that, and that took some time. (Interview #1 with Günther, p. 5).

REBECCA: In contrast with Günther's frustration is Deilek's appreciation of BTB's director-less concept. He writes:

DEILEK: You were a wonderful motivator that never relied, from my experience, on pressuring people. You didn't make us do anything, you helped us to see why we *wanted* to do it. And we never felt that our opinions weren't welcome, so it was much more a collaboration, or so it felt to us, than a project led and run by you in which we just followed orders. (Deilek's participant journal G).

REBECCA: Later, Deilek echoes Günther's imperative for students to be personally invested in the work of BTB in order for it to be effective. He writes:

DEILEK: Working with Ms. Stroud was enlightening and fun. She has an undeniably apparent love for teaching and her students and that creates an environment that is very conducive to creative thinking and expression. Her instruction style left plenty of space for students to be leaders, which was good for the kinds of things we did. Action theatre necessitates personally invested people in order to be valuable, and Ms. Stroud's flexibility encouraged us to take ownership of our work. (Deilek's participant journal #2).

REBECCA: Deilek observed that while he appreciated the invitation to take on responsibilities within the group, the school and group culture also allowed for apathy. I struggled through this issue on an ongoing basis: where should I draw the line between inviting all seemingly interested students to participate in the *BTB* experience and dealing with apathetic or uncommitted members who were giving an impression to some of the more serious members of sabotaging the work of the overall group?

CHORUS: *Lesson #6: Formal education as we know it must be reframed.*

*The beauty of extra curricular education
it does not need to meet the same standards as curricular ed.*

*Extra curriculars are framed differently:
they tend to reduce stakes while increasing others.*

Get rid of the frames frames exclude.

Also, evaluation can be a problem

But beware: when you get rid of that, there's another type of evaluation going on:

PR: public relations!

REBECCA:

Perhaps it is easier to structure the types of long-term learning opportunities that *BTB* offered through extra curricular activities rather than in the classroom. Extra curricular education does not carry a burden of reporting to the government on students' evaluation scores. There are many opportunities already in every school structure. Student government, for example, invites all students to participate in dialogue with other students, teachers and school administration, including dialogue that pertains to many micro-level policies that affect them. Critics might argue that student government amounts to a popularity contest and excludes the majority of the student voices within the school. In spite of numerous attempts to de-stratify schools, elitism is alive and well and *BTB* has created numerous scenes that portray various facets of socially constructed caste systems. Furthermore, some *BTB*ers shared their experiences of elitism within the group. However, for those students who do belong to student government, there is an opportunity to learn about the system while participating in it, and this experience is critical to the learning and to the development of advocacy and agency within the students. Likewise, I can see how *BTB* offered an excellent opportunity for students to explore an art form that required those involved to take a stand on numerous issues and then present them creatively. Because I attempted not to lead but to facilitate, the students as a collective ended up making many decisions about the direction of their group. Practising democracy is very time-consuming and fraught with argument, cross-purposes and other obstacles that may lead one to believe that consensus will never be achieved. The process is also not immune to elitism; certain members of the group—for a variety of reasons that range from a desire to see things happening, to genuine enthusiasm for the subject, to a need to control something in their lives—take on additional leadership

within the group and this can lead to the experience of oppression on the part of others who have not gained the agency that some of their peers have. It is an extremely complex process that I believe any amount of workshop time cannot clarify because simplicity in process would limit learning. I also believe that space must be found in a curricular setting, otherwise this pedagogy is only accessible to some and it remains highly elite and ideological.

CHORUS:

*We thank you for your patience and time
For following pedagogy and paradigm
Of critical theory and art
The two make a great start
For a journey that can prove sublime!*

*You may have noticed other themes in this play
Rebecca encourages you to talk day by day
In your own forums
In your own quorums
And listen to others as much as you say*

*This Thesis in three Acts is now ended
We hope that gaps in meaning have mended
If not, that's okay
Learning is fluid, so they say
Your own pedagogy, feel free to append it*

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APPENDIX I: DRAMA GAMES

Red Light, Green Light

This is a tableau/body control game. One person plays the role of a TRAFFIC LIGHT and stands at one end of the room. The other people in the group play the role of TRAFFIC and they stand at the other end of the room. The TRAFFIC are all in a hurry, and want to get to the TRAFFIC LIGHT as soon as possible. When the TRAFFIC LIGHT is GREEN, (s)he is standing facing the wall (away from the group). This means that it is okay for everyone to move toward the TRAFFIC LIGHT. When the TRAFFIC LIGHT is RED, (s)he is standing facing the group. This means that the TRAFFIC must STOP in a frozen tableau. When the traffic light turns from GREEN to RED, (s)he turns around quickly and says ‘*Red Light!*’ At this point, if TRAFFIC LIGHT sees any TRAFFIC moving, (s)he calls them out and they are out of the game. If TRAFFIC LIGHT sees any TRAFFIC breaking their tableau, (s)he can also call them out and they are out of the game. The first TRAFFIC to make it to TRAFFIC LIGHT without being caught moving wins the game and becomes the TRAFFIC LIGHT.

Stealing Grandmother’s Cookies

One person plays the role of a GRANDMOTHER and stands at one end of the room. The other people in the group play the role of HUNGRY CHILDREN and they stand at the other end of the room. The HUNGRY CHILDREN are all in a hurry, and want to get to the GRANDMOTHER as soon as possible. When the GRANDMOTHER is standing facing the wall (away from the group), it means that GRANDMOTHER is sleeping and it is okay for everyone to move toward the GRANDMOTHER. When the GRANDMOTHER is standing facing the group, it means that she has awoken and the HUNGRY CHILDREN must STOP in a frozen position. When the GRANDMOTHER turns from the wall to the group, (s)he turns around quickly and says ‘*Stop!*’ At this point, if GRANDMOTHER sees any HUNGRY CHILDREN moving, (s)he calls them out and they are out of the game. If GRANDMOTHER sees any HUNGRY CHILDREN breaking their frozen position, (s)he can also call them out and they are out of the game. The first HUNGRY CHILD to make it to GRANDMOTHER without being caught moving wins the game and becomes the GRANDMOTHER.

Taxi driver

This is a trust game. Students must understand and respect the concept of *Safe Space*. Break the class into 2 groups, and each group A & B themselves. A becomes the TAXI DRIVER and B becomes the PASSENGER. PASSENGER stands behind TAXI DRIVER. Since TAXI DRIVER is blind, (s)he must close his/her eyes. PASSENGER creates a fist with one hand and gently places it in the centre of TAXI DRIVER’s back. When PASSENGER moves his/her fist up on TAXI DRIVER’s back, it commands the TAXI DRIVER to move forward. When PASSENGER moves his/her fist down on TAXI DRIVER’s back, it commands the TAXI DRIVER to slow down. A slight tap on TAXI DRIVER’s back commands the TAXI DRIVER to stop. If PASSENGER moves his/her

fist toward TAXI DRIVER's left shoulder, it commands the TAXI DRIVER to turn to the left and moving his/her fist toward TAXI DRIVER's right shoulder commands the TAXI DRIVER to turn to the right. Since TAXI DRIVER is blind, (s)he must rely on PASSENGER to properly command him/her through the space. There are a number of other PASSENGERS and TAXI DRIVERS and everyone is moving through the space at the same time, so it is important for all PASSENGERS to be careful when guiding their TAXI DRIVER. After a few minutes, switch roles. Then, stop, sit in circle and discuss experience.

Mahout and elephant

Break the class into 2 groups; each group A & B themselves. A becomes the ELEPHANT and B becomes the MAHOUT. Since MAHOUT cannot sit on ELEPHANT's head in this game, (s)he will stand behind ELEPHANT. Since ELEPHANT loves and trusts MAHOUT, (s)he will go anywhere in the jungle that MAHOUT says. In a gesture of trust, ELEPHANT will close his/her eyes. MAHOUT places the palm of one hand in the centre of ELEPHANT's back. When MAHOUT moves his/her hand up on ELEPHANT's back, it commands the ELEPHANT to move forward. When MAHOUT moves his/her hand down on ELEPHANT's back, it commands the ELEPHANT to slow down. A slight tap on ELEPHANT's back commands the ELEPHANT to stop. If MAHOUT moves his/her hand toward ELEPHANT's left shoulder, it commands the ELEPHANT to turn to the left and moving his/her hand toward ELEPHANT's right shoulder commands the ELEPHANT to turn to the right. Since there are many MAHOUTS and ELEPHANTS in the jungle and everyone is moving through the space at the same time, so it is important for all MAHOUTS to be careful when guiding their ELEPHANTS. After a few minutes, switch roles. Then, stop, sit in circle and discuss experience.

APPENDIX II: EXAMPLES OF OXFAM SCRIPTS

HIGH-INCOME

My name is John. My parents emigrated from Italy and raised my brothers and me in a tenement in Chicago. I worked my way through college and law school, taking on a variety of odd jobs, and then started my own law practice. I am now able not only to live in a fine home and travel extensively, but I've also been able to "give back" by paying for college for high school graduates with exceptional promise who come from disadvantaged backgrounds

HIGH-INCOME

My name is Ranjani. I am a 40-year-old woman living in India with my husband and two children. I am a doctor and my husband is a businessman. We live in a very large house with many servants. My children attend one of India's best private schools. They study very hard and hope to attain entrance into universities in the United States.

MIDDLE-INCOME

My name is Lourdes. I live in Brazil in a town just outside of Sao Paulo and I have five young children. My husband left me when I became pregnant with my fifth child, leaving me to raise the children and take care of the house by myself. I took a job in a textile

factory where I work long hours. I make just enough money to feed my children, but I don't get to spend as much time with them as I would like.

MIDDLE-INCOME

I am Bareded Bekele. I am a farmer and I live in southern Ethiopia with my family. I never had an ox until I received a loan of 330 birr (\$160) from a local group funded by Oxfam America. Before, it took 7-8 days to prepare my land for planting using hand tools. Now, when I team up with a neighbor who also has an ox, I can cultivate the same amount of land in 4-5 hours. This year I will plant more land; I expect to grow enough food to feed my family and have a surplus so I can pay the first installment on my loan.

MIDDLE-INCOME

My Christian name is Lawrence. I live in Hong Kong in a public housing project with my parents and eight brothers and sisters. We live in a 12' X 12' room, and we have a refrigerator and a hot plate on a small adjoining balcony. I am very fortunate to have received a scholarship to study law. I look forward to the day when I am earning a good salary and can move into an apartment of my own.

MIDDLE-INCOME

My name is Sophea. I am 21 years old. I left Saigon to live with a sponsor in North America, but my dreams of a new life quickly turned into a nightmare as I realized that my sponsor had no intention of taking me in. Alone in a strange country, I got caught up with the wrong crowd. I began selling drugs because I needed money. I was arrested and sent to jail for six months. I learned English in prison and when I got out I went to a local shelter for counseling. I now have a full-time job, but I still have to sleep in a night shelter. Someday, I hope to have my own apartment.

MIDDLE-INCOME

My name is Andreis. I am a farmer in Elandskloof, South Africa. Previously apartheid laws forced everyone in my community to leave their homes. With the help of the Surplus People's Project, we were able to reclaim our land and start rebuilding our community. We are dealing with many difficult challenges, but we look forward to a better future.

LOW-INCOME

My name is Zabaar Gul. I live in a cave in war-torn Afghanistan with my two sons and two daughters. Like over 100 families, I left our village and failed field and have made my home in a cave near the Oxfam food distribution center. I left my Kuzak village a year ago as we had nothing to eat, but life in the caves has been just as bleak. My husband left to earn money in Iran. He broke his arm and is now stuck there, unable to work and unable to return. My son Naseer now heads the family but he has been sick for two years and aches from head to foot. He coughs blood and doesn't have the strength to leave the cave to find firewood. I am worried that he might have TB. His angular body looks much older than 13. My seven-year-old daughter, Zebba goes to a near-by village to beg. I am not sure how long we can last without food.

LOW-INCOME

I am Pancho, a young Filipino fisherman from a long line of fisherman. My family has always made a decent living in the fishing business, but my income has gone down as the fish stock has been overexploited. My family now gets barely enough to eat.

LOW-INCOME

I am Ravi. I belong to an indigenous group in Gujarat, in western India. Like most people in this area, I work for the government, as a picker. I am guaranteed protected status by the government but the reality is that these laws are not being enforced and discrimination is rampant. Last year, I attended a rally to press the government for higher wages and benefits. We were successful and my wages were doubled.

LOW-INCOME

My name is Luisa. I live in Cashiriari, Peru. I am a member of the Machiguenga people who have hunted and fished around the Urubamba River for thousands of years. The land around my community is being exploited by an oil company, which has cut down trees and polluted the water. I live off of the river and the forest, and I cannot survive if they are destroyed.

LOW-INCOME

I am Anna Pedro. I live in Mozambique. My village has suffered from both man-made and natural disasters: the recently ended civil war in my country and a cholera epidemic that has killed many people. My neighbors and I joined together to deal with the cholera problem by building a fence around a new well drilled by the new Mozambican provincial water service.

LOW-INCOME

I am Elizabeth. Years ago, my father grew corn, yams and mung beans on our land in the Philippines. I always thought that one day my children would do the same. Now our land is a part of a large sugar plantation, and we cut cane for 35 cents a day. My young son works in the field, but he is very weak because he doesn't get enough to eat. I just pray he'll survive.

LOW-INCOME

My name is Fauzia. I live in Bangladesh. I work very hard in the fields, sometimes for as many as 14 hours a day and then I have to cook dinner for my husband and my son. I joined a revolving loan group and received a small loan to buy a cow. Now I have milk for my son and I sell the rest. It's only a little, but my son is healthier and soon I will be able to take out another loan.

LOW-INCOME

My name is Miguel. I am a farmworker in Florida. I typically work 14 hours in the fields with only a half-hour break for below minimum wage. I live in company-owned housing, paying for a place to live that does not even have a stove or a bed. I am organizing with other farmworkers to try to improve work conditions and increase my meager salary but I fear losing my job since my employer does not want farmworkers to unionize.

LOW-INCOME

My name is Adis. I live in the Rift Valley in Ethiopia. My husband died and I have seven children to care for. Because of the drought in this area it is very difficult to get water and food. My children are constantly ill. Recently I sold my last three goats. I hope things get better because I have nothing left to sell.

APPENDIX III: SCENE FROM *OMNIPHOBIA*©:

Pledge of Allegiance Skit

Cast: *PARKER*-substitute teacher
SOREN-Boy who won't say pledge
IKANI, FRANK, KEN, DIRK and *BEN*- rednecks
Rest of BTB-Rest of class

Students enter and are speaking very loudly in small groups. Bell rings and students sit. Random comments are made throughout the play applying to the different lines the teacher says as well as the other students.

DRUMMER: Tickatactickatactack...RRRRRRing! (*rings bell*)

TEACHER: Okay class, settle down. (*students continue to talk and laugh*). Ahem! Hello! My name is Mr. Perkins, and I'm filling in for Mr. Cuthbert, who is sick today.

FRANK: By sick, you mean a hangover? (*class laughs*)

TEACHER: I'm supposed to be reading the morning announcements...ah...here we...ah...Okay, here we are...ahem. Today is a "C" day—

KEN: "C" day! Wasn't yesterday an "A" day?

TEACHER: Listen, kids, I'm just reading them. All right, so listen up. Attention all pottery students. Everyone pick up your pots—

DIRK: Ha! Did you hear that? He said "pot" (*class laughs*)

TEACHER: Pick up your pots or they will be smashed.

STUDENTS (*laugh*) Haha. Get it? Smashed! Like you were last night right Mr. Perkins?

TEACHER: Drama club. The drama club meetings have been cancelled because of lack of funds.

STUDENT(S): Hahaha. Drama Geeks! You know what rhymes with thespian, don't you?

TEACHER: Cross Country...There will be a cross-country meet tonight at 4:00.

IKANI: Pah! Cross Country! That's for—

BEN: Hey, it takes hard work and dedication to run cross-country.

IKANI: You play football!

TEACHER: Football. There will be a game tonight at the football field. Let's cheer on our team. Go Beavers—

STUDENTS: (*in unison*) Yeah, fighting Beavers! (*cheering*)

TEACHER: Fighting Beavers??? (*pause*) Ok, it's Monday, time for the Pledge of Allegiance. How does it work in this school. Does somebody lead it?

IKANI: Stand up guys. Hands on your hearts. (*class stands up, slapping hands over hearts*)

STUDENTS: (*in unison*) I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation...(*slowly, students stop reciting The Pledge and shift to part to the side to reveal one student who is sitting down, not reciting The Pledge*)

BEN: What are you doing? Hey! Jimmy's not saying The Pledge!

KEN: Communist!

FRANK: Traitor!

IKANI: Athiest!

TEACHER: All right, all right, calm down. What's your name?

SOREN: Jimmy.

TEACHER: Why aren't you saying the pledge?

SOREN: Because I choose not to.

KEN: You must hate America! Traitor.

SOREN: Actually I love America. I just don't like what we're doing in other countries.

TEACHER: Are you aware that our recent governor passed a law stating that you have to say The Pledge?

SOREN: Yes, but that law also states that any student who doesn't wish to participate, doesn't have to.

IKANI: Athiest! You probably burn crosses.

SOREN: No, but you do.

STUDENTS (*react in anger, yelling out. Calm down*).

IKANI: My Dad says that if you don't say the Pledge, you should move to Iraq.

SOREN: I just think this is ridiculous.

TEACHER: I can see this is going to be a problem, so I'm going to ask you to go into the hall until we're finished. (*Teacher escorts Jimmy out of scene while others watch*)

IKANI: Okay everyone! Hands over your hearts! (*students stand in neat rows, place hands on hearts*)...

STUDENTS (*in unison*) I pledge allegiance to the flag—

DRUMMER: BOOM!

APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions for participants—Interview #1

1. What compelled you to join this theatre project?
2. What do you hope to accomplish with your involvement in this action theatre project?
3. How do your own expectations of yourself in this group relate to your role within the group?
4. How is the direction of the group achieved in terms of choosing material to develop for your plays (prompt...how do you decide what to write about)?
5. What types of social issues have you developed theatrical material for?
6. What specific issues did you bring to the group for consideration?
7. How was that contribution received by your peers?
8. When you are developing an issue, (prompt, for example the nationalism skit...the ageism skit...your poverty monologue) to be put into a play, how does it translate from a conceptual issue to an artistic artifact?
9. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge for this work? (the group?...you as an individual?)
10. What new skills (prompt...art...social...critical thinking) have you acquired since joining?
11. So far in the process, what have you learned from others? (your team mates? adult artists with whom you have worked? other students? audience feedback?)
12. What is the greatest challenge for you as an individual working within the group?
13. What is the role of the post-production panel?
14. (If you have been selected as a post-production panel member) how do you handle questions? (If not) How do your peers who have been on the panel handle questions?
15. How does the panel discussion inform the activities of the theatre troupe?
16. What kind of reaction do you want from your audiences?
17. How do you handle audience approval/disapproval?
18. Do you have any other questions or comments?

Interview questions for participants—Interview #2 followed an emergent design, so the questions were different for all participants

Interview questions for expert artist (Ashok)—Interview #1

1. How did you originally come to get involved in issues-based, or action theatre?
2. Specifically, what types of plays did you engage in?
3. How is action theatre approached and how is subject matter decided upon?
4. Who is involved in the creation of a play?
5. How are roles assigned in this type of theatre?
6. How do you approach developing the subject matter?
7. In your work in India, is a theatre troupe typically a plural group? How does the group deal with its differences?
8. Is audience interaction with the performers always part of this process?
9. Who takes the initiative for starting the dialogue?
10. What are some of the benefits of this art form?
11. What are some of the risks of this art form?
12. Other than the fact that most artists you work with are amateurs who hold down full time work, what other obstacles do you find in this type of work?
13. What commercial aspect is there, if any, in this type of theatre?
14. What is the status of this type of theatre compared to the other theatre forms in India? How do you deal with these differences?
15. Describe how you approach physicality when working with inexperienced actors.
16. You came all the way from India to teach some basic Indian theatre forms to students who had no familiarity with such forms, and that was your first time in the USA. Describe your expectations of this particular group and this project?
17. How did you organize this program?
18. What obstacles did you find specifically in dealing with this group?
19. If you were to advise me, how would you recommend that I continue this work?
20. You incorporated music, rhythm and folk dance into this work. What is the importance of this in theatre?

Interview questions for expert artist (Ashok)—Interview #2

1. Please tell me what your original motivation was for doing street theatre (action theatre) in India?
2. When did you begin doing theatre?
3. When you began doing theatre, what types of plays you did?
4. Is the interaction with the audience, after a performance, a regular part of the street theatre process?
5. When the dialogue between actors and audience members takes place, who takes the initiative for starting the dialogue?
6. How is the street theatre organized?
7. Is it typical of the audience members to interrupt the actors during the middle of a performance?

8. How is controversy expressed through theatre and what issues constitute controversy in India?
9. How is controversy handled by your audiences?
10. Are street theatre troupes in India culturally diverse?
11. Is street theatre risky in your opinion?
12. What obstacles do you find with street theatre?
13. What are the benefits of street theatre?
14. Please explain what your expectations were of working with this particular group (*BTB*).
15. What issues—different approaches to work or cultural differences—may have interfered with your work with the students?
16. How did you organize the process of the workshop in the USA?
17. In your opinion, how did the students interact with one another?
18. You incorporated both music and folk dance into the June 20 play. Can you explain how that fits in? What's the significance of that?
19. If you were still leading this theatre work, how would you proceed?
20. If I continue working with this group, what advice would you have for me?

APPENDIX V: LETTERS OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT

Letter of Information for Student Participants

Concerning Thesis Research of **Rebecca Stroud**
Faculty of Education, Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Proposed Title: Action theatre: A case study of a group that collaborates to use performance arts as a social tool.

Rebecca Stroud, a master's student at the Faculty of Education, Queen's University, invites you to participate in research aimed at analyzing certain characteristics and processes pertaining to how youths approach the merging of social voice and theatre by using a variety of performance arts forms from India and Brazil in the context of suburban Midwestern USA.

The **purpose of this study** will be to document and analyze the work of an ongoing action theatre project in which you are involved.

Six initial **interviews**, approximately 45 minutes in length, and six **follow-up interviews**, approximately 30 minutes in length, will be conducted at a time and location that is convenient for each participant. Each interview will be **audiotaped**. Tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet at my home. I will transcribe each interview, after which I will erase each tape. **Writing folders** will involve issue analysis* and process documentation** of the theatre project, as recorded by participants. **Participant observation** will involve my notes on the process of the theatre project, which will include issue analysis, play scripting, administration of the project, and the overall process.

* Issue analysis is how the participant approaches an understanding of the issues that are chosen by members of the group for theatrical representation. For example, if a participant chooses "domestic poverty" as an issue for a play, then the analysis may

include researching the issue on the internet and in newspapers/magazines, then forming a thesis and story that develops the thesis. This phase of issue analysis is done outside of group time, and then the participant would bring such analysis to the group for discussion and creative collaboration so that the group may then become involved in analyzing the issue.

** Process documentation is how the participant will narrate his or her understanding of the process that (s)he goes through in this theatre group. For example, a participant may record titles of several skits that were explored at a rehearsal, which helps to solidify the concept in his/her mind. From that, (s)he may document “homework tasks” such as memorizing a slogan in a skit, bringing statistics on an issue to the group, and remembering to bring a red t-shirt to the next performance.

No data used in this research (**interviews, writing folders, and participant observation**) will contain names of participants, or the identity of your school or community. I will use pseudonyms instead of real names for all participants. **Confidentiality** is guaranteed.

This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, books, and my thesis. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed.

Here is an estimate of the **timeline** of the research. I plan to conduct interviews and participant observation during the spring of 2004. I will assign the folder work at the beginning of the research period, which will begin during the spring of 2004, and will run to the end of the research period, which is estimated to finish during the spring or summer of 2004. I will collect writing folders at the end of this process. Following the analysis of the data, which I plan to undertake during the summer of 2004, I will make available a draft of the analysis available at the end of the summer of 2004.

I do not foresee **risks** of your participation in this research. Your participation is entirely **voluntary**. You are not obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable, or to submit any writing folders that you do not wish analyzed. You are free to withdraw from the study without offering any reasons at any point, with no effect on your standing in school, and you may request removal of your data, in whole or in part.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me, Rebecca Stroud at [REDACTED] or rebecca_las@yahoo.ca For verification of the study, please contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Magda Lewis, at 613 533 6000 (extension 77277) or lewism@educ.queensu.ca For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Queen’s University, Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofré, at 613 533 6210, or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Queen’s University, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at 613 533 6081.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Stroud, B.A. (Hons), B.Ed.

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR EXPERT ARTIST

Consent Form for

(print name of informant)

Concerning Thesis Research of **Rebecca Stroud**
Faculty of Education, Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Proposed Title: Action theatre: A case study of a group that collaborates to use performance arts as a social tool

I have read and retained a copy of the letter of information concerning the above study and all questions have been sufficiently answered. I am aware of the purpose and procedures of this study, and I have been informed that interviews will be recorded to audiotape. I have been informed that the researcher will transcribe interviews, after which she will erase the tapes. I understand that I may have my real name changed to a pseudonym at my request. The researcher promised to store data in a locked cabinet in her home and she guarantees **confidentiality**.

I have been notified that my participation as an informant to this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point during the study without any consequences to myself. I have also been told the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all information.

I am aware that if I have any questions about this project, I can contact Rebecca Stroud at 001 [REDACTED] or rebecca_las@yahoo.ca. I am aware that I can verify the study by contacting her thesis supervisor, Dr. Magda Lewis, at 001 613 533 6000 (extension 77277) or lewism@educ.queensu.ca. I am also aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, I can contact the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofré, at 001 613 533 6210, or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Queen's University, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at 001 613 533 6081.

Informant's Name:

Signature:

Date: _____

Please write your e-mail or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study.