Holistic Education: The Flow and Pulse of Learning

by

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Abstract

Situated in the holistic education field, this research explores the mind/body experiences of six youth who remained in a drama group from the time they were children to their late adolescence. In the first phase of this research these participants reflected on their experiences of the imagination, thought and felt sensation as they engaged in meditation and mind/body warm-up exercises during the drama years. The participants applied their understanding of mind/body awareness to a question posed by Vivian Darroch-Lozwoski; what happens when we attend to nature feelingly? Over the course of one year, the youth explored the above question, individually and collectively through dreaming, reveries, the imagination, experiences of energy and as they wandered in nature. The inquiry directly addresses the existential, ontological and epistemological implications of holistic mind/body development and outlines approaches for gentling the mind and body to nature.
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Dedication

A dedication to Nature
Chapter 1: Introduction

“What happens when we attend to nature feelingly?” (Darroch-Lozowski, 2006). What happens when we attend to nature and allow the flow of the imagination and the pulse of sensation to move through our awareness? For twelve years six youth remained together in a drama group and learned to explore mind/body awareness through meditation and movement. These youth participants also agreed to explore the above question in connection to how they recalled practicing mind and body awareness while learning to be present to the moment as young actors. After recalling their childhood and adolescent experiences with mind/body awareness, the youth agreed to attend to nature as it emerged in their daily lives and as they wandered in nature together.

The ideas that inspired me to expand this research inquiry’s context beyond the drama classroom to nature were presented in the article titled, “Re-Patterning Global Warming” which appeared in the journal, *Environmentalist*. The journal, *Resurgence* posed an open question, “can spiritual values combat global warming?” (Darroch-Lozowski 2006, p. 195). In response to the question, Darroch-Lozowski posits that the spiritual is the unending source that is, “prior to time, space, and matter” (p. 198). From the spiritual realm consciousness is drawn and, “possibility and probability waves unceasingly are interacting” (p. 198). These waves are also understood as waves of consciousness and do not necessarily arise from the individual’s mind (p. 196). While exploring the notion that our source of awareness surrounds us and penetrates our beings, I will show throughout this inquiry how science is continually discovering, within the field of quantum physics, cell research, even through the more recent discovery of DNA resonance that energy moves through and informs all living things (Lipton, 2010). Energy is the bridge between mind and body, humans and earth.

Darroch-Lozowski (2006) explains that using spiritual values to combat global warming implies a separation between the spiritual and the physical, “We are within global warming, not outside of it” (p. 195). We are also now faced with a barrage of information and knowledge. How is it possible to sort though the complex issues that arise from our environmental crisis? Darroch-Lozowski’s simple answer is to gentle the mind and body to the experience of resonance. Resonance aids us in sorting through the continually expanding universe of thoughts, ideas and bodies. Resonance is an energetic phenomenon. Feeling this phenomenon is also a
responsibility. To allow its emergence, staying open to felt sensation and the imagination are required. Resonance is not simply appreciation, “it is the heartbeat of shared existence” (p. 195). A re-patterning of global warming is possible, “being resonant with us, it can be re-patterned into another resonance of life with matter” (p. 190).

Darroch-Lozowski proposes that attending to nature as it spontaneously appears in our every day existence is an integral beginning to the gentling process. Breathing with what appears, for example, a bird or tree, allowing felt sensation to be present, and freeing the imagination are key aspects to the type of attentiveness that is being explored in this work. Phenomenology forms the methodological foundation of this research as its inquiry practices acknowledge the relationship between the pre-conscious, the intellect and the imagination while exploring phenomena within a spirit of curiosity and wonder. The participants have entered into an inquiry process that brings forward the ontological, existential, developmental and epistemological implications of attending to nature.

I followed the participants’ descriptions of mind/body awareness from the time they joined the drama class, which for some of the members was from the age of 7 to the present age of 23. I wanted to understand how some of the exercises explored in the drama class helped the student to feel open and receptive. It was also important to gain their insights into how felt sensations and the imagination came into play during the exercises. The mind/body exercises included breathing, meditation, visualization, tai chi, yoga, energy play and the use of Tibetan Singing Bowls. Mind/body warm-up exercises were implemented to increase calmness and focus, to foster creative flow and enhance the living pulse of the classroom.

The inquiry is divided into two phases. The purpose of the first phase was to construct a history for each participant that expressed a detailed understanding of their ontological development within the context of their body/mind learning experiences in the drama group. The purpose of the second phase was to further explore each participant’s distinct approach to mind/body awareness as they attended to nature. Some participants kept a journal throughout the year, reflecting on memories, their dreams and their lived experiences. Others found the group discussion the best vehicle to convey their ideas. The group met six times throughout the year, on the summer and winter solstices, the spring equinox and two extra times in the fall and summer. During our inquiry meetings we practiced the meditation and movement exercises that were described as being significant to the participants during the drama years.
**Research Questions**

I have adopted Darroch-Lozowski’s (2006) question as the overall research question, *what happens when we attend to nature feelingly?* The sub-questions are:

1) How do the six youth participants articulate their experiences of mind/body receptivity or openness?
2) How do the participants describe the relationship between the felt body (energy) and image?
3) How does mind/body consciousness and an attention to nature relate to the youth’s understanding of place?
4) What holistic curriculum insights can be drawn from an ontological understanding of development?

**Overview of Chapters**

Chapter 1: This chapter provides a review of literature that explains the need for a shift in consciousness that fosters a reconnection to the earth. I propose that education continue efforts to root teaching and learning through nature as opposed to culture. I then provide research that shows youth’s engagement with nature, spirituality and their desire to explore their own consciousness. The researcher’s biography situates my own experience with energy and the imagination in relation to the aims of this study by examining an encounter with spiritual emergence. A brief narrative of a drama production in nature highlights one emergent and collective encounter with nature.

Chapter 2: This chapter expands on the notion that consciousness is a wave, by exploring the recent discoveries in holistic science that acknowledge energy as integral to not only the birth of the universe but to cellular function. Key teaching and learning concepts from holistic education are explained and connected to the mind/body exercises that were recalled by the participants.

Chapter 3: Chapter three introduces phenomenology and alchemical hermeneutics as the two complementary interpretive approaches for this research inquiry. I provide a poetic description of an encounter with an owl that illustrates the ontology of the wandered and shows the poetic process through which the emergent patterns arose.
Chapters 4-9: These chapters provide descriptions and emerging insights into each participant’s response to the mind/body exercises and to the overall nature inquiry question.

Chapter 10: Chapter ten presents the findings as emergent patterns and engages in a discussion.

Chapter 11: Chapter eleven directly addresses the research questions, provides a concluding discussion and outlines the implications of this research.

Environmental Crisis and Education

Facing the effects of global climate change in rising sea levels, green house gas emissions and the rapid and continuous loss of numerous species, the importance of the following statement, “All education is environmental education” (Orr, 2004) is becoming crystal clear. David Orr suggests that one way to shift the misalignment of higher education towards attuning to the needs of the earth, is to re-root education through self-mastery as opposed to mastery over subject matter. In the Holistic Curriculum, John P. Miller (2008) maintains that holistic education orients its core learning principles to reflect that humans live on the earth as a part of an interconnected web of beings. This research is not only dedicated to orienting the student to the knowledge of their place within this web of life but aims to understand how each participant cultivates a feeling of place.

How do all the issues and concerns in education, even legitimate and urgent concerns over how to teach and learn in ways that are fair and equitable and in ways that power is not abused, how do these issues weigh in within the knowledge that our earth is dying? Is it possible that the answers we seek regarding knowing how to live in a just and human world lie now buried in our forgotten relationship to our bodies, our wild imaginations and the cosmos? Orr also poses evocative questions regarding the source of human intelligence, “Could it be that the integrity, stability and beauty of nature is the wellspring of human intelligence? Could it be that the conquest of nature, however clever, is in fact a war against the source of mind” (Orr, 2004 p. 51)? Both Orr (2004) and Thomas Berry (2004) insist that a new conception of intelligence is required to address the needs of our environmental crisis. While new thinking will inevitably emerge as we continue to let go of habits that cannot sustain the environment, I put forward that it is not a new way of thinking that warrants our primary focus. Education has placed far too great an emphasis on the act of thinking without permitting students to understand how they feel
within themselves and the world around them. Following Darroch-Lozowski’s (2006) discussion on global climate change, I propose that it is a way of being, a way of living energetically, within an interconnected cosmic reality that should be a new emphasis in curriculum development.

Directly addressing issues in environmental education, David Orr (2004) claims that in order to, “bare earth in mind”, it is not only the source of intelligence that needs to be examined but also, a different conception of intelligence needs to be explored. Orr posits that education interprets intelligence as cleverness. Cleverness relies on the accumulation of fact and the knowledge of facts alone cannot ameliorate the global climate crisis. Orr proposes a new meaning for intelligence that includes wisdom, a subtle understanding of cause and effect and a desire to examine more fully why we as humans are doing what we are doing and in what direction our intentions are turning.

In recent years, as a result of the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind act, education began to focus classroom curriculum on test driven learning. Shaping classroom-learning activities so that the student accrues the skills to achieve higher test scores has had a devastating effect on inquiry and process learning. Along with Orr, Bill Plotkin (2008) critiques education’s emphasis on standards that are dictated by the requirements of culture. Plotkin insists that a better balance between nature and culture in education will produce individuals who will mature into being conscious stewards of this planet. Orr (2004) and Plotkin (2008) agree that education needs to primarily foster a student’s relationship to place as opposed to career. A career is chosen by developing a set of skills to fit a role that has been shaped and defined by the needs of economy. Place includes the notion that an individual feels a sense of being called or drawn forward into fulfilling their responsibility in the world. A calling also issues from an individual’s connection to their unfolding authentic nature. Orr explains that restructuring education to incorporate the urgent needs of our environmental crisis relies on a breadth of studies; environmental, ethics, economics, knowledge of thermodynamics, energetics and any subject matter that addresses ecological illiteracy.

Reconnection Through Interconnection

I would like to expand the context of this discussion by broadening the scope of literature that supports the need for humans to reconnect to the earth. Various educators echo the need for humans to understand interconnectedness as a truism (Abram, 1996; Bache, 2008; Darroch-Lozowski, 2006, Miller, 2010). Thomas Berry (1988), Joanna Macy (2007, 1998) and Bill Plotkin (2003, 2008) also reiterate this message. Interconnectedness is carried within an
invitation to honour and love the earth and its beings. In *The Dream of the Earth* eco-theologian Thomas Berry (1998) joins with other voices in ecology to suggest that we need to resurrect a forgotten connection to the earth. Berry’s understanding of interconnection is expressed in the notion that the world is not comprised of a collection of objects but a communion of subjects.

Our alienation from nature is directly related to how we have pillaged the earth’s resources in service of technological and economic progress. Berry further explains our separateness, “We find ourselves in an autistic situation. Emotionally we cannot get out of our confinement, nor can we let the outer world flow into our beings…we cannot hear the voices speak in response” (p. 17). Darroch-Lozowski (1999) draws vital connections between language, body and nature, “…union is conceived not without body but within body. Come into body. It is in body we hear language” (p. 53). Berry also identifies the need to connect through feeling, “Our difficulty in appreciating the earth community as primary educator is that we do not have a sense of or feeling for the natural world in its integral dimension” (p. 90). A feeling connection also relies on enlivening the image of the earth in our own thinking. Ancient epistemologies and scientific inquiry now converge to reveal the earth and cosmos as a living organism (Abram, 1996; Berry 1998, Berry&Swimme, 1994; Lovelock 1979/2009; Macy, 2007; Tarnas, 2006). James Lovelock’s (1979/2009) Gaia theory presents the idea that the earth is a living organism. Lovelock’s research underlines the need for a perceptual transformation that begins with the notion that the earth holds an intelligence and identity of its own.

A regenerative relationship between humans and the earth involves a dynamic that is formed through rhythm and not through the intellect. This dynamic is also a creative act. David Peat (2000) characterizes creativity as, “1) Making some thing new, original, or unexpected 2) Renewing and sustaining what already exists 3) Healing and making things whole” (p. 21). A regenerative relationship to the earth is possible when we understand ourselves as one species within a plethora of many species. Berry (1998) insists that for the consideration of our earth challenges, “We need not a human answer to our earth question but an earth answer to our earth problem” (Berry, 1998 p. 35). Berry reminds us that what is required is deep listening to,” what the earth is telling us” (p. 23).

*Joanna Macy and the Great Turning*

Eco-philosopher Joanna Macy’s (1998, 2007) message resonates throughout on a similar tone; a reconnection to the beings of this earth is immanently important to our survival. Macy believes that our world is in the midst of a shift in consciousness where primal meaning is being
reoriented within the relationship between living organisms and the environment. However a grievous truism is also visible. The predominant need for corporate profit and a focus on economic growth remain the main vehicles for domination, resulting in a collective disconnection from the need to sustain the earth’s livelihood and a hording of economic resources. David Korten (2006) refers to this imbalance of power as an archaic expression of empire politics. *The Great Turning*, a phenomenon identified by Korten, signals a shift from empire politics to politics driven by sustainability. There are features in our current era that mirror the agricultural and industrial movements. It is impossible for the present system, which has been forged by the industrial movement to balance the needs of the whole.

However, Macy (1998) insists that *The Great Turning* has begun. Macy outlines three dimensions to *The Great Turning*. The first dimension focuses on environmental actions. The second focuses on structural change. The third dimension claims to initiate an awakening, a fundamental shift in consciousness. The shift includes eco-feminism, Gaia theory, living systems theory, eco psychology and the voluntary simplicity movement (p. 146). This research inquiry is situated in the third dimension. Macy (2007) and Darroch-Lozowski (2006) also point out that some fields of science such as quantum physics provide evidence for the interconnectedness of life. Reconnecting to the earth in Macy’s view begins with the Buddhist approach to detaching from egocentrism. Numerous others in the field of consciousness studies agree that the ego alone cannot negotiate a shift to wholeness (Goswami, 1993; Miller, 2000; Nakagawa, 2006; Plotkin, 2008, 2003; Romanyszyn, 2007; Tarnas, 2006, 2009). A shift also depends not only on the realization that the earth is a living organism but that the earth is a lover. Relating to the earth as a lover frees the individual to feel, “embraced in the primal play of life” (p. 23). This transformational dynamic centres on a certain type of consciousness that derives its roots from mysticism. Macy believes that it is the erotic mysticism of Hinduism, Sufism, the Kabbalah and Christianity in bridal mysticism that provides approaches to negotiating changes in consciousness. When an individual understands the world as self within this erotic interplay, Macy maintains that it is inevitable that the individual continues to fall even deeper into the self.

*Cosmos and Psyche*

In *Cosmos and Psyche*, Richard Tarnas (2006) constructs a similar argument for learning how to reconnect to the cosmos. Developing his ideas within the field of depth psychology, Tarnas explains how the modern mind has been schooled in the habit of separating subject from object. Within this act of separation, the world and cosmos are, “entirely impersonal and
unconscious” (p. 17). Tarnas invites the reader to imagine themselves as the cosmos, a “deep-souled cosmos” who is presented with the option of choosing between two suitors, “Which suitor would an ensouled cosmos such as this open to, the one that views the cosmos as epistemologically empty or the one that views the cosmos as alive and responsive?” The suitor to which the soul is drawn “desires to liberate that which has been hidden by the separation between the known and the unknown. His ultimate goal of knowledge is not “mastery, prediction or control” but “imaginary vision” and “empathic understanding” (p. 40).

Tarnas (1991, 2006) outlines how worldviews shape realities and how the modern worldview does not present the world as interconnected. The primal worldview contrasts with the modern one, revealing the world replete with meaning that is simultaneously cosmic and human. Humans are also intimately connected to all beings, a dynamic part of a whole and living matrix. Tarnas writes, “The primal world is ensouled” (p. 17). Tarnas posits that the postmodern era offered an introduction to, “the multidimensional complexity of reality and the plurality of perspectives needed to achieve it” (p. 28). A collective appreciation for complexity and diversity was borne out of the postmodern era as dualities were explored, “long-standing schisms: between human being and nature, self and world, spirit and matter, mind and body, conscious and unconscious, personal and transpersonal, secular and sacred, intellect and soul, science and the humanities, science and religion” (p. 27). Tarnas also asserts that an, “appraisal of the scientific worldview” rendered an awareness of how epistemologies had been bound within an objective relationship to reality.

Tarnas (2006) critiques an education system without the cosmos, “Humanity’s ‘progress’ of knowledge and the ‘evolution of consciousness’ have too often been characterized as if our task were simply to ascend a very tall cognitive ladder with graded hierarchical steps that represent successful developmental stages in which we solve increasingly challenging mental riddles” (Tarnas, 2006 p. 487). The imagination, the unconscious, the symbol, metaphor, synchronicity and archetype can be called upon to negotiate a new relationship between subject and object. While within the postmodern discourse many schisms have been identified and critiqued, a stubborn vestige of the modern worldview continues to escape the critical lens. The notion that the cosmos is an unfeeling surround of disinterested material, vast, unknowable and irrelevant is the final cornerstone of the modern worldview and this requires our curious attention. Sapping the cosmos of its character and meaning has lead to the colonization of the “collective imagination” and has continued to drain the cosmos of its depth and power.
Going Back to the Beginning: Cosmic Energy

The birth of the universe was at its essence an energetic phenomenon. Originating power brought forth the universe. All the energy that would exist in the entire course of time erupted as a single quantum—a singular gift-existence. If in the future, stars would ablaze and lizards would blink in their light, these actions would be powered by the same numinous energy that flared forth at the dawn of time. (Berry & Swimme 1992, p. 17).

Energy is the foundation of existence and as humans; we are admixtures of the diverse energies that were present at the first flare.

Approximately 15 billion years ago, the universe began “as a stupendous energy” (p. 269). The forces revealed in that moment have been identified as electromagnetic, strong nuclear, weak nuclear and gravitational. The universe’s particles, “before a millionth of a second has (had) passed,” were born. In *The Universe Story* Berry and Swimme (1992) explore the history of the universe and propose there is a sacred connection between the cosmos and lived experience. Berry and Swimme (1992) poetically describe how the human body was born from a sea of light. The components of our bodies made their first appearance as primary elements. The story of the universe is not a story that exists separately from us,

Nothing is itself without everything else. Each member of the Earth community has its own proper role within the entire sequence of transformations that have given shape and identity to everything that exists (p. 268).

Swimme (1998) argues that the next critical stage in human evolution is to understand that we are a mode of the whole, living universe. Swimme and Berry critique how education has separated scientific and humanistic concerns as if they bare little influence on each other. To understand the cosmos is to be present to life as a process. It is to be present to the myriad of connections and patterns that are interwoven into our lived realities. Knowing the genesis of the universe, Swimme & Berry (1992) claim is the beginning of the meaning of presence. According to Tobin Hart (2001), presence in the philosophy of Tulku means being mindful and honest with every moment. Nhat Hanh explains presence as staying alive to what is going on in the here and now (pp. 146-147). Swimme defines presence as the awareness of our connection to the universe.
The Focus of Holistic Education: Relationships

The universe story reveals how everything is tied to relationship, “Cosmogenesis is organized by communion. To be is to be related, for relationship is the essence of existence” (Swimme&Berry, 1992 p. 77). Once relationships are established, transformation continues to occur, thereby creating new relationships. The universe is constantly changing and transforming, “Alienation for a particle is a theoretical impossibility” (p. 77). Nothing in this universe lives in isolation. The future of even one of the one hundred billion galaxies relies on other galaxies and other particles. The sun itself was born from the creative energy of a plethora of beings-its birth has unfolded within a “pattern of interconnectivity” (Berry&Swimme, 1992 p. 77).

John P. Miller (1996) suggests that one approach to ameliorating fragmentation in education is to focus on a very simple yet profound ontological task,

The focus of holistic education is on relationships: the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships among various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and the community, the relationship to the earth, and our relationship to our souls. In the holistic curriculum the student examines these relationships so that he or she gains both an awareness of them and the skills necessary to transform the relationship where appropriate. (p. 13)

Establishing relationships during learning is a curricular expression of the interconnectedness of reality. Underlying this definition of holistic education is an implicit suggestion that the ways of knowing that arise from forming relationships are flowing and continually transforming.

The Self-Aware Universe

Why is the principle epistemological and ontological emphasis in holistic education focused on the curricular task of making connections? The notion of an objective reality has been greatly undermined by holistic thought. The messages of Berry, Macy and Tarnas turn this discussion to how consciousness is “intimately connected with reality” (Goswami, 1993, p. 5).

Amit Goswami begins his book titled, The Self-Aware Universe by introducing the perplexing quandaries of consciousness, through a fictitious character that appears intermittently to ask questions pertaining to wholeness. The character’s principle desire is actually to recover his wholeness. Goswami claims that consciousness is the ground of all being and it is through contact with this ground of being that the rigid wall between subject and object begins to disappear.
Depth psychologist Robert Romanyshyn (2007) maintains that it is Amit Goswami’s (1993) explanation of the wavicle that illustrates important understandings regarding how quantum theory relates to thought and matter. Goswami offers the example of light photons, “Depending on the experimental procedure light shows itself as either a wave or a particle” (Romanyshyn, 2008, p. 31). Before light shows itself as either wave or particle, what is it? Light is neither wave nor particle. Goswami describes this as a Bohr’s complementarity principle. Bohr’s principle indicates that the authentic nature of an electron “transcends the notion of the wave or particle” (p. 43). Quantum theorists contend that before a moment of attention, light photons exist as quantum potential. As Goswami asserts, the need for objective or materialist science to understand this point is integral in many respects to our survival. The fundamental point, most relevant to this research inquiry is that an observer cannot separate himself or herself from an object; our attention co-creatively and literally shapes reality.

A quantum object (for example, an electron) can appear in more than one place at the same time (the wave property). To further illustrate the non-local dimensions of the quantum reality, Goswami explains that a quantum object cannot exist in our spacetime without an observer. A quantum object disappears and reappears a distance away, without having moved through space. A quantum object that has been affected by another quantum object also simultaneously affects its correlate. Non-locality reveals that at a fundamental level of existence objects share a relationship with each other that transcends time and space. Goswami overturns cognitive psychology’s approach to consciousness, which views the brain as a central processing unit. Additionally, Goswami critiques neurophysiology’s view that consciousness is an emergent quality in the brain. Reality is interconnected and turning one’s attention to phenomena as it arises actually places the observer in an act of co-creation. The central task in holistic education of creating and establishing relationships during learning is consistent with the philosophy of holism.

Youth

For centuries mystics and spiritual seekers have believed that prayer is also a devotional activity that opens to the principles of non-locality. Tacey explains, “Spirituality seeks a sensitive, contemplative, transformative relationship with the sacred, and is able to sustain lives of uncertainty because respect for mystery is paramount…The ecology of the soul and the ecology of the natural world are intimately related” (p. 220). Activating the analogy of flowing water, Tacey maintains that fundamental spiritual principles are not about force but about flow,
“spiritual waters flow in places that men reject” (p. 52). Tacey’s (2004) discussion on the nature of spirituality not only rings true with Darroch-Lozowski’s use of water as an analogy for the movement of spirituality, but also explicitly aligns with her notion that cultivating relationship to the sacred other should be our most immanent global concern.

Taking into account youth’s increased interest in spirituality and their desire to be connected with nature, Tacey maintains that there is a lack of research on youth and eco-spirituality. Tacey’s (2004) research also shows that universities need to wake up to the interests of students in relation to spirituality and significant existential questions. Youth spirituality is compared to an underground stream that no one takes the time to notice. Tacey claims that when he opened a class devoted to spirituality, the students just seemed hungry,

If research can show that spirituality and vitality and aliveness can offer significant benefits, for instance a reduction of the disorientation or alienation, or more secure sense of personal identity, or compelling sense of love of life that makes us less likely to pragmatic societies, youth may turn to spiritualities with renewed interest. (p. 57)

As Tacey examines student journals, he notes that an increasing number of his students are describing transcendent experiences in nature.

Research on spirituality is a rapidly expanding field that primarily shows spirituality has a positive influence on health and quality of life (Elkins, 1988; Rich&Gali, 2007). Most of the research on youth and spirituality focuses on religious experience (Rich&Gali, 2007; Tacey, 2004). Tacey writes that although the students are not rejecting ties to religious institutions altogether, their spiritual experiences are steadily becoming less reliant on traditional belief systems. Rich and Gali (2007) agree, reporting on Arab and Jewish youth. In their study youth’s interpretation of spirituality is primarily directed towards the search for meaning and transcendence. Several years prior, David Elkins (1988) had set the tone for research on spirituality, concluding that sacredness, transcendence, meaning and fulfillment were commonly associated with spiritual experiences. Youth in their late adolescent stages also experience a convergence in their identities and their perceptions become more nuanced (Rich&Gali, 2007).

However, as Rich and Gali posit youth spirituality is primarily reported on in relation to the positive affect derived from developing one’s own practices and insights. This research examines the relationship between spiritual body/mind practices and perception.
Working with the Field

In *The Living Classroom*, depth psychologist Christopher Bache (2008) adeptly draws the discourse of teaching and learning within a collective and interconnected field of consciousness in his undergraduate psychology classes. Although Bache includes spirituality in his course, his central concern is to offer his students the opportunity to create their own modes of making meaning within a depth psychology context. Bache claims that fifty percent of his students do not choose to explore deeper levels of consciousness or grapple with the bigger questions of their lives but the other half of his class responds by exploring their consciousness in connection to a sense of mystery and moments of resonance.

Bache explains that moments of resonance are associated with intuition, synchronicity and creativity. Resonant experiences arise spontaneously and initially appear merely coincidental. Bache gives examples where he outlines a theoretical position and uses a lived experience to illustrate his point. During moments of resonance a word or situation from his explanation rings true and bears an uncanny correspondence to an event in his student’s life. Bache explains synchronicity in terms of Carl Jung’s explanation, “Synchronicity is the idea that events can be meaningfully connected even though they are not causally connected by any physical medium that we have identified” (p. 22).

Bache provides research from quantum physics that supports the existence of a unified field. It is from this unified field that Bache believes experiences of resonance and synchronicity emerge. Both Darroch-Lozowski (2006) and Bache (2008) provide explanations of the Global Consciousness Project to offer evidence for the interconnectedness of consciousness. Bache elaborates on this worldwide consciousness experiment. Random Number Generators (RNG’s) are influenced by the behaviour of a group of people and have been strategically placed around the world so that they can measure group reactions to conferences, performances, rituals, and various other community occurrences (p. 87). The collective intensity of feeling during these events seems to correspond to cohering the otherwise random output of the generators, “If we assume that mind and matter are related, then when one side of mind---matter relationship changes by becoming highly ordered, the other side of the equation should show unusual forms of order as well” (Bache, 2008 p. 87).
**Researcher Biography**

Theories in the field of transpersonal psychology offer the psychological context for holistic education. The transpersonal field avoids fragmenting the human psyche while adopting the humanistic vision of holism. Transpersonal psychologist Stanislav Grof (2010) elaborates on the evolution of the transpersonal, “The behaviorists’ exclusive emphasis on determination by the environment, stimulus/response, and reward/punishment was replaced by emphasis of the capacity of human beings to be internally directed and motivated to achieve self-realization and fulfill their human potential” (p.1). Transpersonal psychology is the field of psychology that acknowledged and developed the relationship between spirituality and psychology. Grof refers to transpersonal experience as an, “Expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the usual boundaries of the body ego and beyond the limitations of time and space” (Grof, 1988 p. 38).

The following is an autobiographical exploration of my own encounter with emergence, which was brought on by a phenomenon first identified by Grof (1990). This form of spiritual crisis, Grof referred to as *spiritual emergence*. Grof explored this unusual phenomenon after noting that an increased number of individuals reported experiencing uninvited spiritual encounters. Formerly, Grof’s research had involved inducing non-ordinary states of consciousness but he began to discover that individuals were coming to him claiming that similar states of consciousness were being encountered without any from of therapeutic intervention.

I encountered such an experience. Spiritual emergence can be triggered by lived experiences that hold the power to shake a person to their core. It was a warm day in July of 2000 when a close friend and the principal of the private school where I was employed as a drama teacher told me that her live-in partner had committed suicide by jumping from a renowned bridge, a bridge that is rated in the world as the second largest suicide magnet. I sat in a chair in the backyard, feeling frozen and shifted my gaze to the movement of the wind in the willow tree to quell the feeling that some unknown terror was beginning to press up through my body. It was just a few days later that another friend, a drama colleague called to say that she had just lost her son to suicide and that he had died only steps away from my friend’s partner and on the same day. These two deaths were tragic synchronicities. Grof (1990) describes synchronicity as an event that defies the law of probability. Jung also explained that every day experiences usually occur within spacetime whereas synchronicities take place outside of spacetime (CW 8).

When a synchronicity emerges it is time to open to receiving the message from the unconscious that is trying to rise to awareness (Bache, 2008; Grof&Grof, 1990). Several
circumstances from these two deaths aligned with each other. Both friends worked for one of the educational institutions where I was employed as a drama teacher. Both men were extraordinarily accomplished artists; one was an award-winning author, the other was a violinist. Both men were affected by mental illness. Three symbolic similarities emerged; education, creativity and well-being. At the time though I was still lost in the grief of what had just occurred and was trying to make sense of these events. My psychological self and religious devotion to the church continued to disintegrate. Relationships became heated and in some cases untenable as I tried to replace the feeling of my fragmenting self with something that was more comfortable, more purposive, anything other than what seemed to be arising in my soul.

The world began to vibrate with an ominous feeling. Attending church no longer felt edifying, which was disconcerting, as I had lived for ten years as a member of a church community. Lukoff (1998) describes a dimension of spiritual emergence, “spiritual problems involve distress associated with a person's relationship to a higher power or transcendent force that is not related to a religious organization” (Lukoff, 1998). Repressing emerging thoughts during the onset of spiritual emergence as Christina Grof (1990) writes, only serves to exacerbate the turbulence of spiritual emergence. I could not coax the moral part of me to have a constructive dialogue with the emerging feelings and images that kept rising to my awareness. Throughout the chaotic moments, “a feeling of fear, loneliness, insanity, and death can appear sometimes simultaneously when one encounters specific memories or experiences from the transpersonal realm…” (Grof, 1990 p. 47). Robert Romanyszyn (2007) describes how the ego falls through a wound. My ego, understood in Freudian terms, as fulfilling the executive role in the personality, was shaken from its sure position. Falling is an apt way of describing how to move through a rapidly fragmenting psyche. Every now and again I had the wisdom to just let go, grieve for what had been lost and allow myself to continue to fall from habitual ways of living and seeing the world.

Like others who have encountered spiritual emergence, I began to see visions and experience strange sensations (Grof&Grof, 1990). These physical sensations, sometimes cool, sometimes hot swept throughout my body at unpredictable moments. Was it wind or electricity? I did not know. Images and archetypal figures kept appearing in my imagination. A new way of seeing and feeling emerged where I began to sense that my dreams were revealing something meaningful and were not just a series of random unrelated images. As a child I was taught that being psychic, when it came to seeing images or making predictions about the future was, as
extreme as it seems now, evil- and so it was distressing to begin to catch glimpses of images in my waking and sleeping dreams that revealed the future. Another concern was that my imagination was so active that sometimes I was afraid that the ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality was slipping from my rational grasp.

Archetypal Figures

Freud referred to dreams that reveal collective themes as “archaic remnants” or thought forms. Jung explored and elaborated on this concept, referring to archaic remnants as archetypes. Archetypes originate in the collective unconscious and are explored through myth, fairy tale, dreams and every day occurrences. Jung referred to the archetypes as animus and anima, mother and father, the crone, the child, the fool, great mother and so on. Archetypes are energies that exist in the unconscious and constellate in lived experience. Sometimes referred to as “forces” they function like a magnet to the conscious mind. Jung explained that archetypes could be understood as mythological animations of human instincts. They are not just living images they are, “living entities that make up the greater part of the psyche” (Jung, 1954 p. 260).

Christ and Mary were the principle archetypal characters that repeatedly appeared in my imagination as the visions continued to intensify. Weeping usually accompanied these visions; the experience carried with it a profound need to let go. During one reoccurring vision I was merging with the crucifixion scene and experienced at separate times, during separate visionary instances, Christ dying on the cross. There I found myself sometimes at the feet of Christ and at other times looking down as if becoming the crucifixion itself. Symbolically, I was merging with the Eros of surrender, the feet of the divine and death and rebirth. In the beginning the electric sensation that coursed through my hands, up through my arms and back down into my feet seemed like a wild river running through my body. I learned that this type of spiritual experience has also been referred to as a kundalini awakening (Grof, 1993).

One day I saw dark earth over which was strewn millions of bones. There were so many bones that not an inch of the vision was without a skeleton. At the time I did not realize that a part of me was joining with a collective story of death and rebirth. What was dying? Something in my way of connecting to the world was dying. Now I understand how this way of connecting to the world was tied to a way of seeing the world. Feeling began to press in on me and challenge the emphasis I placed on what I saw. My gaze no longer drove my attentiveness, something internal was rising and passing through me. Spiritual emergence not only unleashed anger that a predictable and safe reality had been lost but a feeling of profound and powerful love. It was
simply paradoxical. The line between the real and the unreal continued to soften, which meant that I could be anywhere and an imaginal experience could seep through my conscious mind. An intensity of feeling would press in on me and if I gave myself to the feeling I would be consumed by another state of consciousness.

If I tried to pour my energy into being rational and normal in order to shut down this pulsing energy and the flow of imagery, I became physically ill and conflict would reappear in my intimate relationships. Trying to interrupt the flow was not constructive, but choosing what to focus on and how to make connections between the imagery and lived experience helped to bring some understanding to the images and sensations. However, any encounter with a dream like consciousness shows how meaning arises in its own time and forcing or pushing understanding undermines the emergent aspect of the experience. I also learned that it was possible to slow down the experiences for the sake of my psychic well-being.

During one vision, Christ beckoned me into a raging fire. As I write now I know this invitation meant that being an observer or witness to transformative fire was no longer possible. I had to learn to live within the transformation. Darroch-Lozowski (2006) compares the symbol of fire to the gradual heating of the earth and insists that we need to understand how to live within global climate change. Although a type of primal energy that I could not name was consuming me, other energies could hold and guide the fall as well.

For instance, the Taoist master, Lao Tzu appeared in my imagination during another vision and conveyed the importance of examining lived experience in detail by showing a slow and methodical sorting through of tiny seeds. Another vision began in the clouds, with Elijah descending on a chariot hovering above a landscape of swirling movement. Parts of plants, trees and mountains morphed into scrolls. From their limbs the plants held scrolls that in turn unfurled and revealed words. The words flowed from the scrolls and whorling movements seemed to emanate from every living thing. Now, as I write I think that it was logos and Eros moving through the earth. And it meant that the more than human world was continually translating this language of Eros and logos. This transformation progressed over several years and was nurtured by my interest in the work of Carl Jung, Wilhelm Reich, Spiritualism and the active imagination. *Surviving Spiritual Emergency*

Living beside a Brahma Kumaris meditation centre made it simple and safe to learn Raja yoga, which is a form of meditation for the mind. It was safe because sometimes meditation felt like deep sea diving and walking after a meditation session felt like trying to regain the use of my
land legs. The practice involved sitting in a comfortable position. The meditation teacher and I would begin by simply holding each other’s gaze and listening to calming music. Eventually we sat in silence. After the meditation we would discuss the experience for a few minutes. Living in close proximity to the centre was essential. After the meditation session I would return home and gradually come back to a clear lived space within myself as I simply did the dishes, worked in the garden or fulfilled other household chores. It is essential to learn a meditation practice that is calming. Kundalini yoga practices and primal work can unleash tremendous power, but are dangerous if the individual does not know how to return to a state of equanimity. What I am really saying is that I am grateful to the Brahma Kumaris for their devotion to world peace. My inner world was so fraught with chaos that their collective intention for internal peace and world peace was the energy that was required to teach me how to regain a feeling of balance.

Seeking a deeper connection to my body, I practiced Hatha and Kundalini yoga on my own. Three years of movement training during my schooling as an actor and singer brought some awareness to the knowledge of how to live inside of my body. I had learned the basic principles of the Alexander, Laban and Feldenkrais movement systems. Countless hours spent practicing singing in a church while moving my body helped me to understand resonance. The development of a regime that fit with my need to attune to surrounding energy evolved over time. I began a transformational process described in a book titled, *The Life We Are Given*, by Leonard Murphy (1995/2005). This book supports the need for gradual change and includes exercises for spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing. For example, in the morning I would meditate for approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. I also would record my dreams and any visualization experiences that occurred during the meditation. Personal challenges, relational, professional or otherwise were also noted. Then I would take a walk, attend to an element of nature in the park, do yoga or tai chi, and come home to note the imagery and bodily sensations. I was attempting to gain insight into the ways in which the various states of awareness, for example dreaming and movement flowed together in my consciousness.

But there was more, and that was the curiosity I felt towards connecting to and looking into nature. I had hiked hundreds of miles on trails, with my backpack when I was in my early twenties. I had hiked the Alpine Pass Route in Switzerland and I have had the arresting privilege of hiking the West Highland Way in Scotland. However, my feeling of being drawn towards nature occurred gradually, in small increments and it was different than immersing myself in nature. I simply started to make a practice of looking into the sky. Day after day I would gaze
into the horizon. At first I experienced a sense of wonder in response to the light shining through the clouds, the birds that flew overhead and the changes that occurred from moment to moment. After awhile I began to look differently, desiring to see the arcing sparks that Wilhelm Reich (1973) said appeared in the atmosphere. I saw other shapes as well and knew that my imagination was beginning to integrate with my gaze. I had heard of hydromancy but looking into the sky was something new. The shapes were comprised of small arcs, triangles and crosses that appeared as if they were made up of smaller spheres. They moved throughout the atmosphere, sometimes rising and sometimes falling. Sometimes they would appear and sometimes they would disappear. In moments like these, it felt as if I was attending to a dream image. What was this new way of attending, where my bodily and imaginal energies seemed to intermingle to the extent that reality became as Rilke suggests, a living question (Hunt, 2010)?

Teaching through the experience of spiritual emergence required surrendering to mystery. I also learned to cultivate my trust in the larger whole. I mean that I began to trust in the energy of the class as a whole. Some of my most potent teaching moments occurred with this drama group during spiritual emergence and the potency of the classroom experience was largely due to surrendering to something that seemed to possess a different intention than my own. While mystery continually pressed in on me, trusting the larger whole needed to be cultivated. Trusting in the larger whole meant trusting that the students possessed the wisdom to continue rehearsing and exploring with openness. I was oftentimes exhausted and had to direct the rehearsals seated in a chair, having formerly always taught, with a hovering and dominant energy, on my feet. But the students seemed to gather within their own collective enthusiasm. Their energies began to drive the class forward, whereas I had thought that it was all up to me to expend every drop of energy I had as a teacher. My surrender seemed to turn into their opportunity to be free in a way that had not formerly occurred. This is also when I became aware of my love and gratitude towards this drama group. I could be who I was, within the transformative process that at times made me look like an odd duck in other circles, but with this group, we seemed to carry on with less judgment. Perhaps it was a fluke that I did not catch them looking at me strangely or that they did not take advantage of my psychic weakness. I am not sure. I am sure that I made mistakes, revealed my inadequacies as a teacher, lost my patience but something began in this unique dynamic. I think that that something boils down to two simple things: grace and love. That is what emerges from surrendering to the larger whole, to surrendering and believing in the students as a whole group.
As I write these words a cool wind gathers in my head and pools around my eyes. I do not know why it gathers, just as I do not know why the wind is blowing through the tree outside my window. It is an enlivening experience that makes me think of WO Mitchell’s, *Who Has Seen The Wind?* In this novel, a boy, living on the Saskatchewan prairie experiences the wind in the way that I am referring. And so it was that I experienced energy as it coursed through me like a river but I also felt energy as a wind. The following section is a description of a production, which occurred shortly after the onset of spiritual emergence. This production was conceived as a way to intermingle with nature as well as to cultivate a sense of community during performance.

**Drama Group Background**

Playing the role of Prospero in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Gwendolyn gripped a wooden staff in her seventeen-year-old hand and held it out over the audience’s upturned gaze. Prospero’s gold cape swirled and swooped in a gust of wind. Gwen gathered her focus while standing firmly rooted on a four-foot tall rock. It was evening and dusk was falling on the three hundred onlookers who had gathered to watch this performance at a city park in the summer of 2004. Thirteen students from the intermediate and senior drama groups had spent approximately one hundred and twenty hours rehearsing the play over a six week time period. Gwen had performed the role of Ariel in *The Tempest* four years prior. When we mounted that version of *The Tempest* it was our first attempt at performing Shakespeare and it was staged in a theatre, with lights, sound and all of the various accoutrements of the theatre.

Staging this play amidst a natural landscape became an experience of confluence, on so many levels. I am sure that many of us, meaning student actor, designer, stage manager and myself suspected that there might be some form of surprise, some unpredictability, after all outdoor performances are vulnerable to unpredictable weather. But there was a streaming of energies on that night, an admixture between humans and nature to the extent that for very fleeting moments this confluence seemed to guide us into what I believe William James meant by feeling one stream of experience.

On the back page of the playbill was a map of the island that Prospero had been shipwrecked on for twelve years since he had been sent out to sea with his young daughter Miranda. They both were pushed out to sea on a less than sea worthy raft by the men who had usurped Prospero’s position as duke. During the past twelve years Prospero had learned alchemy
so that he could draw the usurpers back to the island, forgive them and return to reclaim his dukedom. Each space in the park was designated to host a different scene. After each scene, the audience, ranging from the elderly to small children, traversed across the grass and followed the meandering paths to the next scene. A wave of transformation passed over each setting as actors were discovered frozen in tableaus and hidden amidst trees, tucked behind a stonewall or lost amidst the flowers. The gazebo at the entrance of the park became a sinking ship, tossed on the green churning sea. The rocks in the centre of the park, shape shifted into Prospero’s cave. The sound of the waves from the lake below lapped up against the shore. The caw of a crow, the flapping of gull’s wings provided a fitting soundscape for this imaginary island. The substantial and insubstantial rippled together in a way that seemed to disrupt our notion of scene and backdrop.

Nature and The Emergence of the Unexpected

While planning the curriculum for the performance in the park, I wondered what would happen when we set the play within a natural landscape? We did not imagine that the squirrels could be coaxed into the scene. We did not know that children from the audience would wrap the boughs of trees around their faces and stand agog while they watched Ariel. What would happen if we surrendered predictability to the elements? The butterflies and squirrels that hopped and flew through our rehearsals reminded us of the more sentimental and comforting aspects of being in nature. However, the immanent stress of relentless rain, the suffocating heat of summer, all of these factors bore on our experience prior to the performance date. Yes, perhaps I thought we were clever to work with the tamed elements of this beautifully manicured landscape.

The final scene brought forward something that our cleverness did not predict. On that night, the pounding of the drum intensified as all the onlookers and actors gathered around the circular stage. The elements were also gathering. A glowing full moon slowly rose behind Prospero. The lake began to glisten a pathway that led to the horizon. A hushed awe moved through the audience. Lightning began to flash across the slowly darkening and purple sky, first on one side of the moon and then the other. Gwen was not only cloaked in her theatre attire, something else moved to surround the audience as well. We seemed immersed in another kind of energy. It was as if a mysterious field wrapped around us all as Prospero began to call forward the nature beings that would help him to draw together the men he was ready to forgive.
Grass Roots Groups

In *A Blessed Unrest*, Paul Hawken (2007) provides a list of hundreds of grass roots organizations that are working towards addressing the needs of globalization and global climate change. Hawken’s list includes organizations that connect young people to their communities by giving them the opportunity to learn leadership skills in preparation for environmental or social justice work. The members of the senior group became mentors for the intermediate and junior classes and became crew members for the junior productions. Various experts in the fields of art and costume design also mentored the senior drama students in costume and stage design during the production periods leading up to the plays. A few businesses in the immediate area gave us modest donations. The students formed their own fundraising group and raised a large portion of the production costs for at least two of the major productions. With the aim of making their artistic work accessible to the community, performance venues ranged from the arts centre theatre space, to the community centre, city parks, backyards, grocery store parking lots, street corners, churches and public schools.

Teaching these classes differed from my experiences in private and public school settings. I was permitted within this unique context to integrate the mind/body practices experimentally. In the beginning months of the term the warm-up took as much as a third of the class. An inquiry model allowed us to follow questions that arose during the class time. Deepening of the body/mind experience, I believe was due to class size (between eight and twelve) and the familiarity of the students with myself and with each other. The understandings derived from our explorations in the class were applied to my drama teaching in other school settings. Approximately ten years ago I began to introduce meditation circles in this drama group. The students sat together in a circle, held their hands palm-to-palm, closed their eyes while listening to Robbie Robertson’s music or shaman Norman Gentile’s rendition of Hildegard’s music and allowed their imaginations to travel. Similarities in the student’s experiences occurred frequently.

Teachers working in alignment with ideas within the holistic education field, practice various modes of meditation. Miller (2010) cites the following three studies that show the benefits of contemplative practices. Michael Murphey (1992, 1997) outlines the benefits of meditation for heightening perception, deepening empathy, reducing anxiety, improving memory and the ability to learn. Gina Levete (1995) reports that research on meditation with boys in the Middle East showed an increase in their academic performance. Gavin (2003) indicates that
African-American students who practiced transcendental meditation, “reported increases in positive affectivity, self-esteem, and emotional competence” (cited in Miller, 2010, p. 106).

Curriculum and Resonance

Osho (2001) notes that the first step to recovering balance in one’s life is to cultivate awareness. This awareness is fostered through an attention to the present moment and it also rests on attending to the felt sensations of the body. Resonance has already been introduced as a means to sort through information (Darroch-Lozowski, 2006). Tobin Hart (2003) outlines a curriculum that includes resonance, “Our bodies can become a resonance chamber in which all sorts of feelings and thoughts can vibrate within us” (Hart, 2003 p. 245). Cultivating a capacity for feeling in children can begin with asking them for a simple description of felt sensation as they move through various moments in their day. Emotion, Hart maintains carries with it an important bodily feeling. A child can learn to pinpoint the area of greatest sensation, imagine a colour that accompanies the feeling or simply allow an image to come to mind.

The drama students reported feeling tingling in their hands and energy passing through their palms. Students also seemed to show an evolution in their imaginal experiences. They would begin by seeing colour, then shapes and then various symbols and stories would emerge. Isabelle began to experience more complex visions and began to write the experiences down. Others in the class were also encountering detailed imaginal experiences in the circle but Isabelle showed interest in understanding the meaning of her visions. I did not know how to offer her an interpretive approach. It was through a feeling of pedagogical uncertainty that I began to realize that the significance of what we were doing had to be explored and carried forward within a larger educational milieu.

The following is an example of one of Isabelle’s visions,

I was running through a damp forest. I came to a cave and entered. The cave was large. I scampered along some rocks and came to a big waterfall. I wanted to be at the top of the waterfall, so I climbed up some more rocks beside it. I stood on some rocks just beside the top of the waterfall for a few seconds. I then left the cave (can’t quite remember the specifics of the exit).

I found myself in a desert-like land, very barren and dry. I began running again. I came upon on old lady, dressed in rags, who was obviously poor. She rose up (in a standing position) about two feet off the ground her levitated body then went into a horizontal position. She was alive but also at peace hovering in the air, there was an ambience of calm about her. I kept running.

I came to another entranceway of some sort. Sort of like a cave but not the one I had just been in. I entered and there before me was not a waterfall but a large
cylinder shape of a substance. The substance was neither air, nor water but somewhere in between. (It was not at all mist or fog though, but a unique substance of its own.) Inside this cylinder of air/water (which by the way was completely transparent) was the little girl that I have seen in my head at night. (The very young girl that I’ve seen lying in fields, running, or with sheep.) Anyhow, she was trying to say something to me. Her lips were moving but I couldn’t hear her. I became really agitated, I wanted to hear what she was saying but I couldn’t make it out. I could feel my body responding to this grievance, I really wanted to know what she was saying.

It was the first time in a meditation that my physical body was affected by something that I was seeing/feeling in the meditation. I was distressed that I couldn’t make out what she was saying. (Isabelle Meditation, 2006)

The beginning of this vision resonates with the story of Plato’s cave. The first space is the mind, or interiority as it receives the flow of imagery. Outside in the desert air a crone’s body hovers in space. The second space is the exterior space as it is evidenced in the symbol of body and the desert environment. The third space is again an interior one, a different interior space in which Isabelle views a child emerged within a column of water and air. I believe this image represents the etheric body and “the archetype of the divine child” (Lorentz, 2006, p. 13).

Lorentz (2006) describes Jung’s stages of alchemy as 1) The first stage involves the encounter with the shadow, a “stripping off of the veils of illusion” (CW 14, par. 739). This stage introduces a downward pull. 2) The second stage is a radical transformation between self and world as a result of sorting through imagery, symbolism and what is synchronous or emergent in the environment. 3) Knowing is constantly evolving through a field of relatedness and the individual undergoes a mystical union with the imaginal field of possibility. The archetype of the divine child helps in connecting the individual to receive and make sense of the material that emerges from the collective unconscious. The vision as a whole moves between the interior and exterior ways of knowing and also represents a rising and falling in the symbol of the fountain and levitation. Inside the cylinder is a child that Isabelle meets repeatedly in her own meditations.

The central aim of this chapter was first to show the immanent need for a shift in consciousness that fosters a re-connection to the earth as a living organism. The implication for education is to re-root the aims of education through nature and self-mastery as opposed to the needs of culture. The shift in consciousness involves cultivating a nuanced awareness to spontaneity, emergence, the imagination and felt sensation. Connecting these ideas to youth ontology, I have reviewed literature that highlights youth’s interest in eco-spirituality and their
desire for meaningful undergraduate curriculum. My biography and a brief narrative of a drama production in nature reveal various features of emergent experience.
Chapter 2: Holistic Education

Nature is our natural world of visible and tactile things. Our natural world is also a great creating Nature. She birthed us and she gives life to everything on the earth, infinitely vast or infinitely small. Science has shown that we are forever and crucially connected with all life through a vast invisible, but measurable, field, called ether that is affected, influenced, by the DNA of all living things.

Vivian Darroch-Lozowski

This chapter is dedicated to the spontaneous proclamation of a grade one-drama student who empathically stated that the whole world was singing, the clouds, the trees and even the buildings. Since then I have come to know what everything means. It means the whole universe, every star and every galaxy. Sounding out this song is also every cell and every quantum.

Everything visible and invisible sings.

While asking to free the wild imagination for this work,
I dreamed about a beautiful blue primal bird
Before entering a large arena
I chose instead to stay with the bird
Now I see that blue bird in my imagination
It touches its shoulder to the surface of the earth
And I hear, “Healing is a re-verse all”

Throughout this chapter I will show the curriculum activities that were designed to activate the imagination and cultivate sensitivity to energy in the drama classroom.

Phenomenological studies do not provide extensive literature reviews that support an argument, or legitimatize a lens through which the researcher interprets what she or he experiences. Instead, a phenomenological study shows through various modes of writing how research is an unfolding emergent process (van Manen, 1997; Darroch-Lozowski&Silvers, 1982; Romansyhyn, 2007).

Unity can only be expressed in language through continuous, authentic and truthful acts of revealing (Darroch-Lozowski, 1984).

Key principles from holistic education are introduced, placing a specific emphasis on the transformation curriculum perspective. I then articulate ways that holistic science has re-conceptualized consciousness through providing an explanation of the recent discoveries in epigenetics and energy medicine. I will show how energy is now understood to transmit messages throughout the body. Presenting my pedagogy in the drama class as an alchemical
poem, I thread relevant concepts from Carl Jung’s (1967, 1960, 1997; Romanyshyn, 2007) understanding of the imagination and Wilhelm Reich’s (Corrington, 2003; Reich, P., 1973; Sharaf, 1983) research on life energy to further explain the ideas that were at play during the drama years.

**Holistic Education: The Key Principles**

This research work finds its educational home in the theory and practices of holistic education (Miller, 1994, 2000, 2006, 2008, 2010). Key principles, such as wholeness, spirituality, living within the body and transformation are integral to holistic curriculum development. The relationship between spirituality and learning has been widely researched within the holistic education field (Bache, 2008; Forbes, 2003; Hart; 2001, 2003; Miller, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2006; Moore, 1992; Palmer, 2000; Tacey, 2004). While the research on spirituality and learning continues to evolve and expand, empirical research with the aim to integrate multidimensional aspects of consciousness, for example dreaming, reveries, feeling and the imagination, while attending to nature has not been done.

In *What Are Schools For?* Ron Miller (1990) suggests that the term holism as it is embodied in holistic learning refers to how the inner qualities of human life are integrated with the outer physical, social and natural world. The perennial philosophy provides the philosophical context for holistic education. The Taoist yin yang symbol embodies the elements of wholeness and balance. The symbol captures the dualism of the light and the dark. The wave like pattern suggests that balance occurs during movement. The rise and fall of the breath is one of the body’s most primal forms of movement. On the light and dark sides of the symbol, a small circle containing its opposite appears, indicating that not only is there an admixture of energies but that one energy exists within the other.

Ron Miller (1996) and John P. Miller (2008) agree that holistic educators aim for a balance between the light and the dark, the feminine and the masculine, feeling and thinking, the imagination and knowledge, content and process and between the individual and the community. Inward/outward knowing, or, *eknosis* (Darroch-Lozwski, 1999) is rooted through awareness as it is occurring in the moment. Eknosis can also be initiated and further cultivated through rhythmic activities, for example, meditation, movement, mindfulness, an attention to the breath and dancing.
Holistic Teaching: Balance, Connection and Inclusion

To implement a holistic pedagogical approach in the classroom, Miller (2008) maintains that three core principles shape holistic teaching and learning: connection, balance and inclusion. In the first chapter I have already referred to the centrality of making relationships in holistic education. Inclusion is explained in the following section in terms of curricular perspectives. Three curricular perspectives create a framework for holistic curriculum practices. Transmission is a knowledge delivery approach where subject matter flows in one direction, from the teacher to the student. The teacher transmits information in the form of facts. This perspective is acknowledged as a viable approach for subjects that are centered on developing skills and has been applied in all levels of education but most widely used in university settings in the form of lectures. The underlying psychological context for the transmission approach is behavioral psychology.

Transaction is a problem solving or inquiry-based learning approach where knowledge is shared. John Dewey’s research in education emphasized this curricular perspective (Miller, 1983). Transaction initiates a flow of interaction between the student and teacher, or between one student and another student. This perspective is a useful approach for problem solving and inquiries. The transaction perspective is contained within the conception of thinking in the cognitive field of psychology.

The Transformation Perspective

In Information to Transformation, psychologist Tobin Hart (2001) asks, “What would education be if we derived our practice from the deepest view of human nature and culture?” (p. 5). Hart puts forward the notion that education’s commitment to knowledge as a collection of facts needs to give way to knowledge as transformation, as a living process that moves towards wholeness as well as uniqueness. Transformation involves freedom, creation and “a revealing of what truly exists” (p. 150). Hart writes that transformation also involves disintegration and derives from “earthquakes in our worldview” (p. 151).

According to Miller (2008), the Transformation perspective engages the whole student and most importantly in this research Miller refers to the student as a whole being. The curriculum and student are integrally connected, overlapping with or embedded within the teacher and student, “The aim of the transformation position is the development of the whole person” (p.11). When I taught drama I felt that the unique difference between the transaction and the transformation positions was the concept of wholeness and mystery. Transformation learning
approaches unfold within the unknown and open to moments of emergence and spontaneity. One of the distinct features of the transformation position is following the feeling of the emerging unknown as a means to guide the learning process. In the transformation position, the relationship between the curriculum and the student is established through curricular activities such as the arts, meditation and creative problem solving. Miller (1981) writes that transpersonal psychology creates the epistemological orientation for learning that is conducive to this curricular perspective.

*Mind/Body Connections*

In *Whole Child Education*, Miller (2010) explains that nurturing a child’s inner life includes engaging the body during learning so that a child is given the opportunity to make connections between his or her body and mind. Holistic curricular practices provide body engagement through meditation, movement practices and the arts. Gathering the reflections of holistic educators, Miller highlights the benefits that yoga and mindfulness meditation has on a learning atmosphere. By using yoga, tai chi and breathing exercises in the classroom holistic educators are making a tremendous shift towards understanding how living within the body can have a calming and focusing effect on learning. Miller (2008) writes that Gandhi (1980) captured a description for holistic learning that acknowledges the body, mind and soul as equal partners in learning,

I hold true that true education of the intellect can only come through the proper training of the bodily organs, e.g. hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be lopsided? By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it precedes pari passu with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. According to this theory therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another. (p. 138)

According to Eastern philosophy, a primary emphasis on the intellect is synonymous with cultivating competition and egoism. Taoist philosophy maintains that the intellect cannot comprehend the whole (Wong, 1992). Not only is spiritual practice, the activation of the imagination and the intuition central to holistic education, but learning through the body is not considered a mere support to brain development, but a necessary dimension to learning.
Transformation Through Feeling

The emerging unknown and the engagement of the body during inquiry are, as I have mentioned, key concepts in this research. The overall research question asks, what happens when we attend to nature feelingly? Darroch-Lozowski (2006) argues that feeling includes felt sensation and clarifies different aims for emotion and feeling, “Emotions can lead to action for the sake of conserving ‘self’ and ‘other’. Feeling always leads to harmony” (p. 197). Darroch-Lozowski (1999) also posits that the vegetal (the proprioceptive region) is the fundamental connection to the uncoded or spiritual world. Awareness to feeling is integral to making body/mind connections. Feeling is a function of consciousness that can be subsumed by the need to label an emotion and like the presence of emotion, the fullness of the experience of feeling can quickly be silenced by the intellect’s rush to name, categorize or analyze the experience. Feeling is also the function of consciousness that attunes to the in-between (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999; Romanyshyn, 2007).

Antonio Damasio (1999) maintains that the mysteries of human consciousness are buried in the body/mind problem. Damasio (1994) posits that the relationship between emotion and feeling is complex and problematic. He makes an important distinction between emotion and feeling, “All emotion involves body feeling, but not all bodily feeling involves emotion” (p. 130). A feeling refers to, “What process of continuous monitoring, that experience of what your body is doing while thoughts about specific contents roll by” (p. 145). References to emotion and feeling are often conflated, resulting in the predominant interpretation that a feeling means an emotion. However, Damasio draws forward the role that an awareness of the body plays during moments when an emotion cannot yet be identified.

Why are opportunities to cultivate mind/body consciousness important for holistic education? Douglas Sloan points out that an emphasis on cognition in curriculum is inhibiting sensual awareness (Sloan, 2005). Sloan presents research on a longitudinal study that shows a steady decline in children’s spatial awareness. Their ability to hear specific sounds also radically diminished over time. Distorted thinking and a diminished capacity for clear decision-making arise when the primal elements of perception begin to atrophy (Sloan, 2005).

Curriculum approaches that do not cultivate awareness to emotions and feelings foster anxiety related health problems and learning difficulties (Lynch, 1985; Robinson, 2001; Sylwester, 2008). Miller (2008) explains that psychosomatic disorder called Alexithymia is steadily gaining attention. The research on autism, alexithymia and asberger’s reveal that an
individual who suffers from one of these diseases cannot easily make connections between their imaginations, their bodily sensations and their feelings. Fitzgerald and Bellgrave (2004) explain, “Alexithymia is characterized by an inability to express emotions verbally and by impoverished fantasy and imaginal life. Individuals so affected may also experience difficulty in distinguishing emotional states from bodily sensations” (2004, p. 1). Psychosomatic researcher James Lynch (1985) reports that it is not only a lack of awareness to emotions and feeling in curriculum planning but it is how the student is engaged in the curriculum that can raise anxiety and cause a disconnection between thinking and feeling.

As the leader of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dali Lama has challenged mind/body researchers to continue to explore the relationship between science and human consciousness. Cognitive psychologist Paul Ekman (2005) took up this challenge and compared the approaches to consciousness that psychology and Buddhism adopt. Ekman echoes Damasio’s interpretation of emotion, stating that psychological interpretations of the emotions tend towards analysis and appraisal. On the other hand, the Buddhist approach to sukkha (a state of flourishing directly related to mental balance) is one that concentrates instead on an awareness of an inner state. Ekman maintains that neuroscience is affirming what Buddhism has taught for over two thousand years, that cognition and affect are intertwined, making it problematic to trace their separate functions.

Energy
Ron Miller (1990) suggests that holistic education considers the relationship between matter and energy within a non-reductionist scientific framework. Science in a holistic context dissolves the Newtonian interpretation of reality, which supports the belief that reality can be reduced to the sum of its parts. Holistic science is explored in relation to the principles of wholeness and interconnectedness (Beauregard, 2007; Bohm, 1980; Capra, 1975; Miller, R. 1990, Talbot, 1991). In the field of holistic science, Wilder Penfield (1975), Candace Pert (1987), and Maurice Beauregard (2007) maintain that the brain does not generate the mind.

In this section of the discussion I explain how energy has experienced a resurgence in the field of epigenetics and energy medicine. At the turn of the twentieth century, energy was explored in the field of physics and through the libido theory in the psychoanalytic field but was not being explored in cell research until after the 1950’s. Most importantly, the experience of energy has been with humans for thousands of years and it has also been acknowledged as a healing force. Numerous cultures have developed theories on life energy that have evolved over
time. In *Creative Energies*, energy psychologist Dorothy Hover-Kramer (2002) writes that Hippocrates claimed that energy is, “a force of flow from the healers hands” (p. 12). Restoring vital life energy has been a consuming interest of shamans. Shamans utilize the imagination and altered states of consciousness to restore balance in individuals who experience a weakness of body and spirit (Nigh, 2006). Hover-Kramer posits that Tai Qi, Qi Gong and acupuncture are Eastern practices that help to loosen energy blockages and restore flow. Ayurvedic medicine practices another approach to restoring energy flow through herbal remedies and diet. Energy healing is steadily integrating its practices into Western medicine and its most fundamental concern is regenerating the body and restoring it to a healthy balance.

Two well-known energy systems from China and India are considered examples of the integration of health and spirituality. Qi passes through meridians that have been established by Chinese acupuncture. Within the yoga traditions the human aura supports the inner flows of Prana (India) and its energy vortices, known as chakras (p. 15). Biofields, chakras and meridians comprise three basic energy systems in the body. Hover-Kramer acknowledges Donna Eden’s (2001) system of the, “basic grid, seasonal flows, and radiant circuits” (p. 65). An analogy illustrates how the three main energy systems interact; “the biofield is like the glow we see at night around a metropolis; the chakras resemble the districts or sections of the metropolis that integrate the whole city and its communication systems; the meridians are the streets, streams, and highways that allow the local transportation of energy” (p. 65).

While there may be maps that show the flow of these energies throughout the body in these ancient systems, cultivating awareness to energy flow is also vital. Inner/outer awareness is evidenced in Taoist energy practices. Inner alchemy in Taoism is a form of alchemy that acknowledges that, “mystery itself is the gateway to perception” (Wong, 1992, p. 24). Knowledge flows between the exterior and the interior world of the individual. Taoist alchemy specifically develops inner and outer practices for alchemical transformation. Outer alchemy includes using plants and herbs that hold certain properties that remedy illness or promote health. (p. 3). Inner alchemy involves cultivating an awareness to three forms of energy: 1) Generative or reproductive energy 2) Qi, which is a life force or vital energy 3) Shen as a spiritual energy. Awareness to the movement of these internal energies is fostered through stillness (p. 25).
Energy Medicine

In a book titled, *Energy Medicine*, Donna Eden (1998) proposes that introducing energy exercises in the classroom could radically affect a student’s ability to focus during learning. Also writing within the field of energy medicine, James Oschman (2000) outlines the scientific basis for energy in the body. The field of energy medicine integrates the claims of therapeutic touch healers with research that forms a scientific rationale for the felt experience of energy. Oschman claims that now it is possible to measure the vibrating energy fields surrounding the body. Notably, “electricity, magnetism, heat, light, electromagnetism, kinetic energy of motion, sound, gravity, vibration, elastic energy are all known energy forms” (p. 38). Still, just how “charge, mass, and gravity arise” remains a mystery (p. 38).

Since energy is considered the most basic aspect of our being and since at the energetic level of existence thoughts or words may not easily be accessed, energy can be accessed and worked with to gain awareness and focus. While Oschman outlines the scientific basis for energy (energy had formerly been discussed as a spiritual phenomena), Eden (2006) and Brennan (1997) also integrate scientific evidence with their descriptions of exercises for spiritual healers who are learning to work with and read energy fields. Eden suggests that activating the flow of energy through the meridian points by simply tapping along the pathways is an effective way to initiate energy flow. Fred Gallo (1999) also proposes that tapping along the meridians has become an effective technique for interrupting repetitive, negative thoughts and blocked emotions. Gallo (1999) quotes Young, “Since energy operates at the speed of light and thus within the realm outside of time (Young, 1976a), it also poetically follows that energy is timelessness as yet to be frozen into matter” (cited in Gallo, 1999, p. 11). Although electricity and various forms of energy can be measured there are many subtle forms of energy that cannot yet be scientifically detected (Brennan, 1993; Eden, 1998; Oschman, 2000).

Robert Becker’s research into cellular regeneration revealed that a “current of healing energy” runs through the body. Becker understood this regenerative energy to be electromagnetic energy (Gallo, 1999 p. 11). However, Brennan believes there are more energies yet to be discovered, that science cannot yet fully measure the healing field that yogis and mystics have worked with for centuries. Energy fields surrounding the body have been tested at UCLA’s Energy Fields Laboratory by neurophysiologist Dr. Valerie Hunt (Brennan, 1993; Eden, 1998). Oschman calls the field surrounding the body, a pulsating magnetic field, which is also present in the geomagnetic waves from the ionosphere. Medical clinics are using these fields to cure bone
and nerve damage. In the energy medicine field science and spirituality combine to provide
explanations for sensations such as flow, pulse and waves.

Physicist and spiritual healer, Barbara Ann Brennan (1987) has outlined one subtle
energy system that describes the flow of energy as it falls through the chakras and through nine
subtle bodies surrounding the physical body. According to Brennan, these chakras function like
mini whirlpools that spin at certain frequencies and specific directions. I will offer a summary of
the chakra energy system, as it was drawn from Brennan’s work and introduced to the drama
class. The root chakra, shown as red, is located at the sacrum. The second chakra resides in the
lower abdomen and is depicted as orange. The third chakra, typically shown as yellow, resides in
the lower chest. The fourth chakra is situated in the heart region and is characteristically depicted
as green. The fifth chakra is blue and surrounds the throat region. The sixth chakra is purple and
is located between the eyebrows and has been referred to as the third eye. The seventh is either
indigo or white and is understood to rest at the crown of the head. The drama group
experimented with Brennan’s adapted energy system, first as a means to understand colour in
relation to energy that surrounds and penetrates the body and later to work with the notion that
these vortices open and close.

Brennan has drawn from Eastern and Western spiritual practices to construct her own
energy system. Either these energetic whirlpools draw energy in through to the interior of the
body from the atmosphere or stream energy out toward the external world. Drawing from
spiritual texts that refer to energy, such as Prana, Chi, the Tao, (Eden, 1998; Markides, 1985;
Steiner, 1999), Brennan and Eden propose ways in which an individual may cultivate
sensitivities to subtle energy. All of these approaches combine visualization, playing with the
intuition and heightened sensual awareness as key approaches to experimenting with energy
fields.

**Epigenetics: Cellular Consciousness**

Epigenetics is a field of biology that examines the effect of the environment on cellular
behavior. Bruce Lipton (2010) describes epigenetics as, “control above the genes”. It is a field of
science that undermines the view that the universe is a machine that can be taken apart, examined
bit by bit and that its parts only possess a causal relationship to one another. According to Lipton
(2010), Einstein, Planck and Heisenberg made fascinating discoveries in quantum mechanics that
indicate a profound holism flows through the material world. The universe “is derived from a
holistic entanglement of immaterial energy waves” (Lipton, 2010). These energy waves not only flow through the universe but energize the body as well. What types of energies flow through the body according to the field of epigenetics?

A misallocation of research dollars reoccurred during the 20th Century, sustaining the body in its role as a biochemical machine (Lipton, 2006; Kay, 1993). Lipton posits, however, that genetic determinism impacts the way in which we conceptualize intellectual development. Lipton provides the following argument to undermine the misconception that genes play a deterministic role in the body; “Some diseases such as cystic fibrosis and Huntington’s chorea may be blamed on one faulty gene but cancer and heart disease arise as a result of a multiplicity of issues, multiple genes and environment” (Lipton, 2006, p. 51). H.F Nijhout also claims that genetic determinism has not been proven, it is still an hypothesis and that many of the recent discoveries in biology are undermining this belief, “When a gene product is needed, a signal from its environment, no emergent property of the gene itself, activates expression of that gene” (cited in Lipton, 2006, p. 52).

Recent research on the cell membrane indicates that energy, behaving similarly to sound waves instigates the conformation of cellular protein (Lipton, 2005; CBC, 2007). Through examining the cell membrane (plasmelemma) scientists have discovered that the cell membrane performs as if it was the brain of the cell. Formerly the nucleus of the cell was understood to function as if it were the brain. Lipton maintains that the secret to life can be examined through the plasmelemma, it is “the mechanism by which your body translates environmental signals into behavior” (p. 76). This fact has guided more researchers to focus not only on how the emotions influence cellular function but also how beliefs and thoughts relate to cellular behavior. Bruce Lipton writes that energy, formerly ignored and overshadowed by research on genes and chemicals plays a significant role in cell function,

In fact survival is directly related to the speed and efficiency of signal transfer.

The speed of electromagnetic signals is 186,000 miles per second, while the speed of a diffusible chemical is considerably less than 1 centimetre per second. Energy signals are 100 times more efficient than physical chemical signaling (Lipton, 2005 p. 112).

Each bit of matter, its structure unique, sends out an array of energy that Lipton claims is a “…unique energy signature” (p. 100). Lipton continues, “The energy signatures that pass through our bodies travel through space as invisible waves that can be imagined as ripples on a pond. The
rippling effect appears like, “energy waves passing through the water” (p. 115). The waves that surround us in the atmosphere are either building through attunement with one another or cancelling each other out,

Dropping two pebbles of the same size, from the same height, and at exactly the same time, coordinates the wave action of their ripples. The ripples from each pebble converge on each other. Where the ripples overlap, the combined power of the interacting waves is doubled, a phenomenon referred to as a constructive interference, or harmonic resonance. When the dropping of the pebbles is not coordinated, their energy waves are out of sync. As one is going up, the other is going down. At the point of convergence these out of sync energy waves cancel each other. Instead of a doubling of the energy where the ripples interfere with each other, the water is calm…there is no energy wave. This phenomenon of cancelling waves is called destructive interference (p. 116).

According to quantum theory there is a unified field, which is “a heaving sea of energy”. The unified field is a place of information exchange so packed with energy that one cubic square meter could effectively boil all of the oceans in the world. Lipton (2010) also advocates for a field of science he refers to as noetic science. Lipton identifies various fields that take into account the new discoveries in quantum physics: energy physics, vibrational chemistry, epigenetics, energy psychology and noetic science, “Noetic science emphasizes that the structure of the universe is made in the image of its underlying field”.

McTaggert (2002) describes a field as, “a region of influence” (p. 22). McTaggert agrees with Lipton. As humans we are not only comprised of an admixture of chemical processes but an energetic exchange. McTaggert adds, “The Zero point field is a repository for all fields and all energy states and all particles –a field of fields” (p. 23). Spontaneous healings, psychic phenomena and amazing feats of strength challenge Newton’s paradigm (Bache, 2008, Lipton, 2005). McTaggert’s explanation of the unified field explains how E=MC² actually means that matter is not the fundamental basis of everything and that the equation points to how much “energy is necessary to create the appearance of mass” (p. 33). In other words this is not an equation that addresses equivalency, it is an equation that states that mass is energy. The implication is that everything on the quantum level is connected and in some way seeks attunement, “The Field demonstrated that the currency of the universe –the very reason for its stability is an exchange of energy” (Lipton, 2005 p. 36).
Quantum physicists discovered that physical atoms are made up of vortices of energy that are constantly spinning and vibrating, each atom is like a wobbly spinning top that radiates energy. Because each atom (molecules) collectively radiates their own identifying, energy patterns, so every material structure in the universe, including you and me, radiates a unique energy. (Lipton, 2005, p. 100)

Lipton echoes Amit Goswami (1993), “The universe is one indivisible whole in which energy and matter are so deeply entangled it is impossible to consider them as independent elements” (Lipton 2005, p. 102).

An Alchemical Poem: A Vegetative Pedagogy

The following poem is written in a similar style to an alchemical poem written by Vivian Darroch-Lozowski,(1990) in her book titled, Antarctica Body. The purpose of the poem is to present the mind/body exercises as they were introduced in the drama classroom.

OPENING THE CIRCLE

The six came as children
To learn the acting craft
To play with the act of becoming

THERE was a child went forth every day;
   And the first object he look’d upon
      that object he became;
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for many years,
   or stretching cycles of years.
A little child went forth (Walt Whitman)

Bill Plotkin (2008) proposes a soulcentric approach to the maturing process. Moving away from the cognitive developmental model, Plotkin's model draws from the eco-psychology field. Plotkin has identified three archetypal energies that accompany the developmental stages that are relevant to this research: The Explorer, the Thespian and the Wanderer. I will elaborate on Plotkin’s model later, but these three archetypes provide developmental focal points for the energetic shifts in these drama students over time.

EXPLORER

Trying on a character
Is “fun and bouncy”
Trying on someone else
Means you can blame the weirdness and the silliness on the character and “Enjoy the humor values”

Explore together
Try something that “goes wonky”
Then try something different
And learn to overcome as a group
If you “get over this you can get over that”

**Dress up**
Walk like the character, gesture like the character, dress like the character
Find the Rhythm, Voice and Emotion
You can become anything that “you imagine about”

**Walk into the Centre**
Look at everyone who stands at the edge of the circle
One at a time
They look back
A silent pathway is forged
Quite simple
A community of witnesses

Osho argues, “The whole Eastern methodology can be reduced to one word: witnessing. And the whole Western methodology can be reduced to one thing: analyzing. Analyzing you go around and round. Witnessing you simply get out of the circle (Osho, 2001 p. 68). Osho goes on to explain that consciousness is unconditioned, meaning consciousness is pure.

**Breathe,**
Lay down on the ground and picture colours
Become an artist in your imagination
And mix the colours
Then sigh out that colour
Inhale another colour
Let the hands on your stomach rest
On the rising and falling

Make a sigh and sound an AAAAAahhhhh, an EEEEEHHHH, an OOOOHMH

Henri Bergson (1910/1983) wrote that colour was the bridge between mind and body.

**PLAY Follow the Leader**
Follow the sound and gesture
Move like a chorus
The chorus moves and sounds like one
Then someone suggests a different sound and gesture
Listen for a new sound and movement as it is proposed
Fill the space with new movement and sound
Then someone changes the sound and gesture again
Anyone can do it
Listen for and follow the emergent leader
Together
Let the body lead and don’t think
That means don’t think, “I will quack like a duck and then quack like a duck”

*Mimic the mask character*
Walk like Pantalone searching the ground for loose change
Your greedy searching, mimics the movement of a chicken
All by yourself but with the others too
“Alone and together”
Wander in the space
Take it to a wild extreme

*Waiting for the bus*
Become a clown
Learn to connect to an audience the way a clown does
Because there is something
Beautiful and vulnerable that needs to be seen
Something endearing arises
The essence of self appears
Just doing nothing and waiting for a bus
Receptive waiting
Primal being

We watch and the clown waits
Energy builds in his/her body
Some strange impulse takes over his/her arm
And the left knee begins to vibrate
A sound accompanies a full body spasm as the building energy is released
The clown recovers and is overcome by the moment
Another clown comes to stand at the bus stop
Now two strangers at the bus
But the impulse takes over the first clown again
And then the second clown has a problem with energy building and wanting a release
And then cannot contain the spasm
A line up of clowns that wait for the bus grows,
Each having their own unconscious expression
One at a time
A rhythm
A class of clowns
WEAR A CLOWN’S NOSE

Freud wrote that the ego acts as the executive of the personality (Hall, 1954). Executives can be strong leaders but sometimes they need to learn to join the Others at the table. Jung believed these Others were more than just the id and the superego, they were archetypes (Romanyshyn, 2007). The Clown is an archetype. The Fool is an archetype. The Self is an archetype. Others have certain things they need to say. The unknown has something to say—the language for the unknown is not so certain. The language of the unknown is carried through a felt sensation, a gesture, a colour, symbol, a dream or an image—or a mistake.
The Commedia dell Arte Mask
Calls the student
Further down into the body
Oracular and facial energies come down into the gut
The mask teaches the student to BE IN BODY
Hands want to say something because face cannot
Body gestures greed and self-interest.
Body shows drive and emotion
Body reveals APPETITE

Discover the weight on the feet ...the how of walking like the character
I want to possess something walking
Excited walking
Slow, stuttering, tripping walking

THE THESPIAN ARCHETYPE
FELT SENSATION AND IMAGE
Then there is another act of adolescent becoming
Passion enters the body
I like this play/not that one
“I just want to be loved”
I am depressed/I am cool/I need my friends "they like me and I like them"

The group performs
*The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*
Enter the Cosmos
*Alice in Wonderland*
Enter the Rabbit Hole and the Archetypal child
*Good Night Desdemona, (Good Morning Juliet)*
Enter the Hermaphrodite

Other is poor/Other is me
Sacred other

Wilhelm Reich (1973) claimed that he wanted to feel the world and let it flow. Loosen body armor, he said, as he pressed his hands into the musculature of his patients. Release emotions by pressing into rigidity and make a sound-release. Press into the mind and body relationship.

The Meditation Circle
The Thespian creates the Oasis
With subtle energy
Hands held palm to palm
Students seated in a circle
Eyes closed
Energy travels
Tingles
Images shared and mirrored in the circle
Images flow/Energy pulses
Sometimes see a colour
A kaleidoscope of shape and colour
A crone appears in a cave
Sometimes a purple wizard
An animal perhaps a tiger
A whale would swim through the sea
The joining creates the subtle currents
Would the symbol sail across the circle
To be received by another?

The circle is not just a reflecting pond
The images down there are really up here as well
A dream is not one's own
A dream is shared existence
A circling collective dream
We were not interpreting as much as receiving

More plays –, *The Tempest*,
Now images speak to the creative work
Images lift from the circle
Images speak to the self and walk through the work
Synchronicities emerge-you experienced that too
Why did I think what you thought?
Did I catch a piece of you or did you catch a piece of me?

Jung believed that a symbol could both bind and release energy (Conger, 2005). Healthy psychic development requires the symbol for the transformation of energy, “What to the causal view is fact to the final view is symbol” (CW 8 par. 47). Jung continues to explain that the symbol’s, “value quantum exceeds that of the cause” (CW 8 par. 47).

The unconscious sends images to the conscious mind. Dreams, reveries, visualizations and waking dreams such as the meditations described above provide opportunities for the imagination to work with the symbols that are trying to arise from the unconscious. By studying the images of his patients, Jung thought images also came from the collective unconscious and thus he established a second tier to the unconscious.

Archetypes function like magnetic forces and are energies that carry with them intense feeling and emotion. How these archetypes and symbols reach the conscious mind relies on the energetic force behind them and no one knows why the image or archetype comes to the light of consciousness or why they fall back into the unconscious. Jung argued that messages from the unconscious need the aliveness of the feeling function of consciousness. Receiving a symbol signaled a coming together of the mind and body. Perhaps symbols that come from the collective unconscious are also guided by the collective energies of a group.

**THE WANDERER IN THE COCOON**
Attend, allow and watch
The circle of witnesses
Who do not always know
Explore/try on/watch/absorb/experiment/question/incubate

Transformations
Another sacred act
Transform a sound and a gesture
The actor is alone, in the middle of the circle
Start with grotesque sound and movement
Can you accept that ugliness?
Follow your body and not your mind
You are not alone

We as witnesses are present in the moment when you want to give up
When you cannot hear/sense where body wants to go next
There are no judges
No one will judge you when you reach the divide between mind and body

When the wall appears surrender to it
We will all face it with you
We are there and in invisible ways
It is like a sacred prayer
You may move through that wall
Because we are there in that moment with you
You must draw from your experience at the wall
So that the wall can become a well

"Transformation happens when you put your total energy into it. When you are boiling at a hundred degrees centigrade, then you evaporate, then the alchemical change happens. Then you start rising up...Have you not watched?-water flows downward but vapor rises upward" (Osho 2001, p. 14).

Breathing, making sound, not jumping to meaning too quickly and bold, sometimes wild expression, those acts signal a coming together of mind and body, according to Wilhelm Reich (1973). Life energy, or “orgone” could be felt and heard as streaming after muscles were loosened and blocked energy released. People who practice Reichian therapies see orgone energy as arcing sparks in the atmosphere (Reich P., 1973). Orgone is cosmic energy, a medium through which all life energies pass. For Reich, feeling and loosening rigidity in the body meant that the individual was opened to the regenerative energies of the living cosmos.

“The physiological and the psychological come together in the vegetative nervous system” (Reich, 1982 p. 129). Excitation amplifies energy and sends it to the peripheries of the body. Anxiety causes energy to contract. Anxiety fosters a movement away from life. Contraction, or shrinking is compared to a dying process, while not being identical exactly to death. The sympathetic nervous system dominates nervous reactions and the parasympathetic controls sexual gratification (Reich, 1982 p. 31).

Darroch-Lozowski (1990) offers a somewhat different possibility for transformation, "Transformation as alternation" (p. 17).
Jung also maintained that the libido energy included a form of regressive energy that he described as possessing a, “…a nutritive and digestive function”. The idea of the regressive function would stretch the libido theory beyond the sexual, to a deeper layer of the unconscious and one that could access the collective unconscious (Conger, 2005 p. 73).

I wanted to show through these excerpts how the body possesses a way of knowing.

_Belle Moral: A Natural History_  
Enter Luminiferous Ether

_Energy Inquiry_  
Run hands over the energy field when you freeze during a transformation  
How do you feel?  
How did I feel?  
How does the room feel?  
It feels hot/cold/prickly

Soften the gaze and look for a white cloud around the fingers  
What about around the body?  
Can you see soft colour shadows around the body?

_Energy play_  
Palm to palm, draw your hands together, back and forth until you  
Imagine an energy ball  
Cup your hands  
Place them palm-to-palm  
Draw them together slowly and then apart  
Back together  
Feel an energy ball

_Elemental Voice_  
Rounded arms picture earth, make an OOOHHHH  
Falling arms picture water AAAAAHHHH  
Arms fly up to the sky and stand on tiptoes picture fire EEEEEHHHHHH  
Arms fall again AAAYYYYYYY for air  
Are you earth/water/fire/air?

_The Singing Bowls_  
Press the wand around the bowl  
Encircle and press  
Resonance travels up the arm  
The bowl and body begin to sing  
The song of the cosmos  
Travels up the arm  
Can it reach your heart?  
Become a singing bowl  
The sound is like home  
Place your hand on your heart-can you feel your heart?
Can you talk/sing from there?

*Tone* on one note
Imagine the colours of the chakras- sing a note on red
Class sings the solitary note
Stagger the breath-elongate the sound
Travel around the circle one at a time
Propose another note on orange, yellow, green, blue and purple
Feel the vibration, the resonance, the flutter
Between stillness and sound
A body of collective experience

*Nature*

What happens when we attend to nature feelingly?
A slowing, a new hearing and seeing, a transformation, a dream, a reverie, an energy experiment, a poem
Last night I asked my dreams for a freeing
A transformation message
This morning I dreamt of my history-people, places and times
An old church community space revealed a new window to the west
Through the window
I could see an open space
A white snow crystal path- open and clear and pristine
Evergreen trees thickly lined the path

For months I had been dreaming of overcrowded spaces

Then in the morning I walked in the park
And stood there in a gathering of trees
Arresting-they had a friendly gathering feeling
My eyes began to pulse
It was like seeing underwater
And in this stillness my heart began to pulse too
And I became the water that for so many days I had gazed on

To gentle yourself to nature, you will need a tree, a bird, a rainbow
YOU WILL NEED TO BREATHE/PAY ATTENTION AND IMAGINE
You may become fire earth air or water
Or a tiny drop of rain, a spark, a garden, a breath of wind, a spider

In contrast to Freud’s ideas on the unconscious, Jung held a socio-cultural, biophysical and transpersonal-spiritual view of the unconscious (Conger, 2005; Caputi, 1984). Knowledge is formed according to how information flows through the unconscious to consciousness. Jung disagreed with Freud with respect to numerous perspectives on the unconscious and primarily their conflicts surrounded the centrality or importance of symbols, spirituality and nature. Freud believed that healthy psychic development involved moving away from nature and conforming to culture, as nature was understood to hold a wild, destructive influence on the developing
psyche. Jung believed nature held a regenerative pattern for wholeness. Freud understood the unconscious as a “phenomenon of repression” (CW 18 par 1148). Jung believed the unconscious to be a source, a wellspring.

Jung’s reason for working with symbols that arise from various states of dreaming, working with archetypal energies and the active imagination was to engage the individual in their own evolution towards wholeness. The unconscious, later referred to as, “the shadow” (von Franz, 1974) comprises the largest portion of the human psyche. Inspired to research synchronicity by Einstein, Jung believed that synchronicity represented an important evolutionary step in human consciousness (Cambray, 2009). Synchronicity originates in the acausal realm and “forms a counterbalance to” the causal realm. Jung described synchronicity as “meaningful coincidence” (CW 8 par. 969).

Although Jung posited that it is integral to pay attention to archetypes, he began to focus on the active imagination as a means to transform and release the information he gained from working with the archetypes (Romanyshyn, 2007). Jung’s conception of the imaginal realm compares to that of Sufi mystic Henri Corbin (1969). According to Corbin, the imagination lies between the intellect and the senses in the domain of soul. In Analytic Psychology (1968) Jung described an analysand’s experience with cultivating the active imagination. Using a painting as inspiration the analysand began to focus on the painting until the images became animated in his imagination. He then began to interact with these images by asking that they perform certain tasks.

**Nature and Holistic Education**

In the Holistic Curriculum, John P. Miller (1996) echoes the tone of urgency in the messages of eco-theologian Thomas Berry (1988) and depth ecologist Joanna Macy (2007), “If nature is dynamic and interconnected and our education system is static and fragmented, then we only promote alienation and suffering” (p. 3). Being in nature teaches the relationships that are fundamental to holistic learning. Allowing students the opportunity to attend to nature with the aim to cultivate a sense of wonder and awe, balances critical forms of thinking, “…a sense of awe and reverence for the life that arises from our relatedness to something both wonderful and mysterious” (Miller, 1996 p. 2). It is the discourse on the human soul that provides various ways in which the body and mind are gentled. The following is one example of an emergent experience in nature.

At the edge of the bluffs overlooking the lake, a small red fox appeared from the hillside below. The fox sat down and we looked at each other. She gently opened and closed her eyes. From within I heard a voice that said, “Become the fox”. What part of my awareness translates the invitational gaze of a fox into a voice that speaks? My invisible self traced the contours of the fox’s body and entered into the space that awakens at the thought that unity is possible and that
the fox’s body and mine might both be bodies in the act of becoming. The fox looks again, still opening and closing her eyes.

She languidly walks closer. My invisible self walks with her, attuning to her careful rhythm. She stops by the small metal writing table that also sits close to the edge of the cliff. It seems as if I am gliding on the surface of this shared experience while continuing to look into her green eyes. A subtle pouring sensation is felt. She too gazes back seemingly without a blink and now, I feel a streaming between our gazes. Moments later, the fox and I break the gaze— I am not sure why, perhaps the exchange met a level of intensity that could not find an inner landscape through which to flow.

Sri Aurobindo explains the act of becoming,

We have to see all becomings as developments of the movement in our true self and this self as one inhabiting all bodies and not our body only. We have to be consciously, in our relationships with this world, what we really are—this one self-becoming everything that we observe. All the movement, all energies, all forms, all happenings we must see as those of our one and real self in many existences. (cited in Grof, 1993 p. 90)

This research is not aimed to highlight only transcendent, emotional or spiritual experiences in nature. The questions have been generated to explore the imagination and the energetic sensations that accompany moments of attentiveness to nature. The primary purpose, if it must be stated is to remain open to what might happen. The secondary aim is to be attentive to what arises. Quoting Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetic reflection from Fragments en Prose, Gaston Bachelard (2002) acknowledges various possibilities for being within a feeling relationship to nature. This excerpt illustrates Rilke’s expression of the relationship between felt sensation and dreaming in nature,

It was as if almost imperceptible vibrations came from the inside of the tree and passed over into his body…he felt as though he had never been moved so gently, as if his body had been in some way treated like a soul and prepared to receive an influence whose degree, in ordinary clear-cut physical conditions, would not even have been perceptible at all. To this impression was added the fact that for the first few minutes he could not determine through which of his senses he was receiving this subtle, yet pervasive message. Moreover, the condition that this contact produced in him was so complete and consistent-different from any other, but impossible to imagine as either a reinforcement or a reaction to previous events in his life—that despite his fascination, it could not be called pleasure. No matter. Endeavoring to become aware of the slightest of these impressions, he wondered over and over what had happened to him, almost at once, found an
explanation that satisfied him. He told himself that he had been carried to the other side of nature. (cited in Bachelard, 2002 p. 208)

In this passage Rilke beautifully illustrates the poetics of subtle sensation. Rilke shows how a patterned response to subtle sensation can draw the attention towards emotional states of being, such as pleasure. However, Rilke rejects interpreting the experience as merely emotional or pleasurable. By following the imperceptible vibration the character felt carried, “to the other side of nature”. This experience shows the spatialized characteristics of a feeling attention and it explains the unique line of questioning that may arise while following a feeling of subtle resonance. The integral question that arose for Rilke, is one that includes the imagination, feeling, movement and location.

Ontological Perspectives

I am proposing a holistic developmental perspective in this part of the discussion that is founded on energy and the imagination. I will introduce and describe a conception of soul, however, students come from a diverse array of religious and cultural backgrounds and in the interest of offering an inclusive approach to inquiry that does not rely on ideology or belief, I am suggesting an ontological perspective that includes but does not demand a belief in the human soul. Neither does this perspective negate the existence of the human soul. The reason that I am doing this relates to the fact that half of the participant group does not include soul in their language or belief system. The other half of the group believes in the existence of the human soul. However, there was unanimous agreement amongst these young people that an individual possesses an essence, or core self.

Elkins (1995) differentiates the movement of the soul from the movement of spirit. The soul tends to move downward into the depths of being and the spirit is drawn by an upward movement, towards transcendence. Miller describes the soul as a, “a vital mysterious energy that can give meaning and purpose to our lives” (Miller, 2006, p. 5). The soul is drawn to a sense of place, which is likened to a safe harbor, “Each thing occupies a unique place, a particular place, a particular node in the web of life” (Romanyszyn, 2007, p. 31). The soul is animated in-between the corporeal and incorporeal nature of body and spirit. The soul moves within and beyond time-space, and our taken for granted sense perceptions.

Vivian Darroch-Lozowski (2006) provides an explanation for reading ontologically, which includes letting go and emptying former ways of interpreting experience,
To read ontologically...one must let go of all other readings...This allows arriving at a knowledge of relatedness that takes over from material places and subjects. It is a knowledge founded on an awareness of the limits of one’s self and culture and which places these in a conjunctive relationship with another realm. When we are reading ontologically we are reading from a source that resides within us in a different place from our usual experience of identity. (Darroch-Lozowski, 2006 unpublished paper)

More importantly, this excerpt reveals the different conception of identity that may arise when identity is considered within “a conjunctive relationship with another realm”.

In the Uncoded World, A Poetic Semiosis of the Wandered, Darroch-Lozowski creates a liminal being that moves between the coded and uncoded world. The book was written to explore a “conception of an uncoded world” and to “bring the physical and oracular energies of the body and eros (eros defined as a deep knowledge buried within the body) into the semiotic discipline” (p. 1). As a way to further support what I mean by being surrounded by mystery, I have drawn some key assertions from this work,

- We must be aware of that which is called “nothing”.
- We as “witnesses” do not know.
- It is impossible for our awareness to evolve beyond the subjectivity of the “I”.
- The uncoded world is not a figure of speech, now and again, we do see it.
- The genericity of the uncoded world is vegetal. Further, we all have vegetal mutant nuclei within us from which we can benefit if we do not stuff these mutant nuclei into drawers of meaning.
- The distortions and storms of present time are collecting us and, potentially, convalescing us, but we need to walk face-forward into the future.
- There are millions of individuals, living today, whose felt-sense of themselves does not depend on ontology tied to history (as it is commonly defined). That is, their identities do not depend on their location within a named culture (p. 119-120).

Eco-Psychology: A Developmental Model

In Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness in a Fragmented World (2008), Bill Plotkin creates an alternative developmental model that addresses the ecology of soul and nature, “This book asks the question, “What do the stages of modern human development look
Plotkin’s criticism of western society is that it has collectively stagnated at a patho-adolescent developmental phase, a phase whose stagnation is fed by narcissism and a sense of entitlement. Plotkin contrasts an egocentric society with a soulcentric one. An egocentric society is characterized by materialism, competition and greed. There are five archetypes that inhibit the maturing process in an ego-centric society; the Impersonator, the Conformist, The Rebel, the Victim, and the Prince or Princess. The ego, defined as a person’s everyday consciousness, is not blamed for being fully responsible for narcissistic behavior but without a full activation of the soul in its function as guide and with the ego left to its own interpretive devices, the ego succumbs to self-interest and remains within one of the archetypal energies mentioned above. However, developing a healthy ego is the aim of Plotkin’s developmental model, “…it is primarily the ego that develops through life. The map is soulcentric ego development” (p. 43).

A soulcentric society’s primary educational system focuses on cosmology, myth, cultural artistry and eco-education. A soulcentric community acknowledges that an individual’s transformation occurs within a consistently evolving universe. Without soulful experiences there are few opportunities for the young person to mature into his or her place. The model is conceived differently from a model that relies on a linear theory of development. The model identifies specific psychological and spiritual tasks for each stage. Plotkin explains that the soul is pre-cultural and pre-linguistic and thus holds the capacity to attune with nature. His developmental wheel is divided into eight stages, beginning from birth, 1) The Innocent in the Nest 2) The Explorer in the Garden 3) The Thespian at the Oasis 4) The Wanderer in the Cocoon 5) The Soul Apprentice at the Wellspring 6) The Artisan at the Wild Orchard 7) The Master in the Grove of Elders 8) The Sage in the Mountain Cave.

*The Wanderer in the Cocoon*

Plotkin maintains that the Wanderer is the archetype of late adolescence. It is within this stage that I am situating the nature phase of this research. This stage invites the late adolescent into the darker mysteries of life and also introduces the task or need to uncover the authentic self. The adolescent leaves the warmth of home and begins to detach from the familiar, especially in terms of family and social roles. The young person may feel the need to leave the physical home, to travel, through foreign cultures and landscapes or through the many ideas that capture their attention. Ironically the stage invokes a withdrawal from the social role that the individual has worked so hard to establish in early adolescence. Life then is free to become a riddle, steeped and
rooted through mystery. This stage involves surrendering to nature in order to establish place and “radically simplify life” (p. 237). Plotkin insists that there needs to be elders in the community that are capable of exercising their wisdom and intuition to guide the adolescent through a time of confirmation. Healthy soulcentric communities have elders capable of recognizing that an individual needs to shift from their social identity to the mystery of the unknown. Enacting rituals that mark the timing of this departure from home is a necessary support so that parents can let go and affirm that their child is ready to take up the fullness and responsibility of their own lives.

The wanderer is understood as one who crosses borders, who is willing to live at the edge of thought and feeling, as well as immerse themselves in their dreams and reveries. Moments are bathed in the numinous, “you are drawn down into currents that lead to never-before-seen-places” (p. 247). Leaving the predictability of everyday life, the wanderer follows the seduction of his or her soul and surrenders to emergence. It is a stage where emergence is embraced in order to balance the patterned behaviour brought about by plans and agendas. Two more tasks are presented in the wanderer phase; letting go of the past and a preparation for the new stage.

In conclusion, I have provided an overview of the key principles of holistic education, placing particular emphasis on the transformation curricular perspective. Combining spiritual and scientific explanations of energy from the field of energy medicine, I have also outlined the recent discoveries in epigenetics that affirm the existence of life energy and its movement through the cell. This information I believe supports the need for educators to sensitive students to life energy, for the health of their bodies and as a complementary approach to activating their imaginations. Through the alchemical poem I have conveyed the pedagogy that I used in the drama class to engage the vegetative regions of the body. Similar body/mind curricular approaches were initiated in the nature phase. The nature section of the discussion highlights the various potential experiences these students may encounter while attending to nature. Finally Bill Plotkin’s *Nature and the Human Soul* provides a framework for a holistic developmental model.
Chapter 3: Interpretive Approach

Our attempt is not an accurate reporting of what happened, but a skilled version of our understood meaning of what occurred.

(Vivian Darroch-Lozowski)

After decades of qualitative research in education, few would challenge the view that a qualitative research inquiry allows for a more reflective, nuanced and less dualistic understanding of phenomena (Ahmed, 2006; Rich&Gali, 2007; Cooper, 2009). While there are various researchers in the psychology field who have explored and developed the use of phenomenology as a research methodology (Giorgi, 1975; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 1993), these approaches do not directly incorporate ways to include perspectives on soul, the unconscious (Romanyshyn, 2007) or felt sensation (Darroch-Lozowski, 2006). Van Manen’s (1990) valuable contribution to the application of phenomenology in educational research indicates that phenomenology does not set out to solve educational problems. Phenomenology can, as an interpretive approach that includes the imagination and felt body, become a provisional expression for the emerging consciousness of this time. As this discussion unfolds I will outline phenomenology and alchemical hermeneutics as complementary research approaches (Romanyshyn, 2007). I will show how the methods used in these approaches are relevant to the holistic field of teaching and learning and how they connect to the lived experiences of these six participants.

Phenomenology: An Overview

Doing phenomenology involves cultivating stillness, attention, perception, an awareness of movement and pattern, inquiry and writing (Darroch-Lozowski, 1984; van Manen, 1997; Romanyshyn, 2007). Epistemology flows through body, space and time (Rabil, 1965; Merleau-Ponty, 2004). There are distinct features and tones to a phenomenological inquiry. Sarah Ahmed (2006) describes phenomenology in terms of orienting relations, “Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready at hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (p. 2).

During the processes that led up to identifying the phenomena of this study, I outlined some presuppositions, which expressed a notion of how the study might unfold. After a time I set
aside much of the early writing that had been done to propose and frame the study. A continuous
letting go of these ideas in the form of theoretical framings at critical points in the inquiry
process was necessary. Reorienting myself to the participants after being separated from the
group, required a setting aside of who I thought they were and who they were becoming in order
for a new relation and a new line of inquiry to emerge. For example, I was no longer their
teacher. They were no longer the student. My position in their life had changed and so it was that
I needed to continually attempt to lay aside my former perception and role in order to rediscover
a new relatedness to their lived experiences. I also hoped that in so doing the inquiry could be
approached with openness (Sallis, 2000) and a myriad of possibility (Gadamer, 1975).

Max van Manen (1997) explains that the term methodology refers to the philosophic
framework for the methods employed by qualitative research. According to van Manen,
methodology is the “theory behind the method” (p. 27). Although there are various
methodological arguments that support methods used in a qualitative research inquiry, I am
adhering to the words of Ron Silvers in a chapter on phenomenology titled, “A Silence From
Within Phenomenology”. The very notion of methodology invites a paradoxical relationship to a
research process, when the researcher’s aim is not only to follow the intention of answering a
question, but also to allow the unfolding emergent patterns in answering that question to appear.
Holding the tension between emergence and intention results in the development of research
practices that, “are not prescriptive but scriptive and they are considered within the relationship
between the researcher and the recipient” (Darroch & Silvers, 1982 p. 236). Silvers goes on to
explain how the imagination can be repressed if a rigid adherence to method is applied, “To
really represent phenomenology in methodological terms (as a series of methods) is to undermine
the imagination and the place through which the imagination lives in the human psyche” (p.
236).

**Mapping Phenomenological Thought**

Following the example of David Abram (1996), in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, I trace the
evolution of phenomenological thought through the philosophical discussions of Edmund
Husserl (1913/1969) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/2004). Merleau-Ponty wrote that
phenomenology is a way of being and thinking as opposed to a system of philosophy
(Romanyszyn, 2007). However, philosophical phenomenology reveals important evolutionary
moments. For example, the intention for a conscious relation to the world evolved from
consciousness aimed towards the transcendental sphere to consciousness that involves a
continuous flow of feeling between the pre-conscious, the imagination and the intellect. To illustrate Silvers’ point regarding method, as the chapter progresses, I articulate my own understanding of phenomenology while exploring the lived experience of the wandered (Vivian Darroch-Lozowski, 1999). Imaginal inquiry and alchemical hermeneutics are reviewed in the work of depth psychologist Robert Romanysyn (2007). By the end of this chapter, I want to make clear the specific practices necessary to do this research inquiry.

*Phenomenological Inquiry*

Ron Silvers (1982) explains that phenomenological research requires a retrospective as opposed to a prospective procedure, “Retrospective accountability as a research practice does not furnish, in the matter of a prospective design, a methodology, for it cannot provide what procedures should be used, but only as used provided for the results” (p. 236). Silvers explains, “…topics are not established prior to and projected forward to research, but evolve from and are clarified within the conduct of research” (p. 239). Two essays, written by Ron Silvers and Vivian Darroch-Lozowski (1990), share similar sentiments with respect to social and psychological perspectives in phenomenology. Phenomenological inquiry is a reflective practice that attends to relationships, the movement of thought and the location of the researcher in relation to the participants. The task therefore of the researcher is to authentically articulate moments of synthesis, and to establish practices conducive to the continually transforming understandings of researcher and recipient.

*Husserl and Merleau-Ponty*

At the beginning of the 20th century, psychology and the natural sciences had begun to approach the human psyche as a quantifiable object (Husserl, 1969; Merleau-Ponty, 2004; Langer, 1989; Abram, 1997). Concerns multiplied as the aim of materialistic science to exclusively study phenomena that could be measured, began to impact not only the types of research conducted but also the relationship a researcher could establish between herself and her subject. At this critical time in the development of research and thought, Husserl believed that views on perception began to narrow to the extent that if a perceptual ability could not be measured, an inquiry on that aspect of human perception was not worth pursuing (Abram, 1997; Husserl, 1969). Notions of reality were critically impaired by this view. Husserl insisted that the “world our science strives to fathom-is not a sheer “object”…rather it is an intertwined matrix of sensations and perceptions, a collective field of experience lived through different angles”
(Abram, 1997, p. 39). Along with a complex and fluid view of reality, Husserl believed that the inquirer’s relation to the question or object needed to be one infused with curiosity and wonder.

Husserl also described reality as the unity of sense and attempted to direct attention away from Hegel’s ultimate sphere of understanding, the Absolute. An emphasis on thinking and mind in Hegel’s notion of the Absolute separated the observer from his or her senses. Husserl brought phenomenological discourse back to consciousness of the things themselves with the idea that things, or objects carry their own meaning structure and that pre-conscious states of being are an integral part of the consciousness process.

Perception is primary to human consciousness and in this inquiry it is through perception that flow and pulse are experienced. Although it is acknowledged that cognitive thought processes are not separate from felt sensation or the imagination, cognition does not hold the primary relationship between subject and object (p. 39). Science has recently shown how the concept of synesthesia reveals the unity of the senses. The senses are no longer conceived as five separate functions traveling to five separate centers in the brain (Abram, 1997; Nigh, 2006). Synesthesia shows how human perception operates within a unity of sense. Seeing sound and hearing colour are two features of synesthesia, but initial moments of attention also demonstrate how the senses cannot be delineated. In order for thought processes to integrate with the whole being, awareness to sensual aliveness requires continual activation, attention and cultivation.

The pre-conceptual remains the ground from which understanding is approached. The phenomenological view considers the pre-conceptual ground as the ground of being. Another aim of a phenomenological inquiry is to ensure that the intuition remains involved in the inquiry process, “Intuition implies that subject and object are present to each other on the same level” (Abram, 1996 p. 30). Playing with various manifestations or readings of the object functions as a means to expand the object’s potential meaning and to establish its essential nature. Husserl wrote that every act of consciousness involves intention and that intentional analysis is constitutive. Making a moment in consciousness constitutive means that the cognitive process flows from an awareness of the senses and then proceeds to address how meaning is constructed.

**Stages in Husserlian Phenomenology**

One of Husserl’s initial stages of inquiry is referred to as the epoch. The epoch begins with an identification of pre-suppositions. The inquirer identifies and then sets aside or brackets these pre-suppositions in order to approach the phenomena with an open feeling. The bracketing stage does not negate the knowledge that is held towards the object or question, but suspends or
distances the inquirer from any taken for granted assumptions that surround it. It is then possible to approach the object within the pre-conscious field of awareness. The inquirer seeks a thick description of what is being observed.

The aim of the next stage, which is the eidetic stage, is to assist the inquirer in identifying the essential qualities of an object. By allowing moments of phantasy to arise when considering phenomena, relationships between its many potential manifestations and the thick description are considered and later analyzed. Patterns are observed by going back and forth between what may be considered a fact and what is an imagined phantasy. Husserl maintained that the phantasy stage also bore the potential to return the phenomena to a field of potentiality. As I mentioned, the researcher attempts to shift from knowing the object as a collection of facts to knowing its essential nature. Max van Manen (1997) also writes that the primary aim of phenomenology is to shift from facts to essences. Husserl equated essence with sense and also essence was the ideal. Essence is a complex notion, which underwent a confusing metaphysical and philosophical debate. Essence, according to metaphysical discourse can be synonymous with soul. In the case of Sartre’s existentialist phenomenology, the pervasive concern was to break from a deterministic relationship to essence. Sartre’s understanding of essence for example, was that existence precedes essence. This reversed Hegel’s and Husserl’s approach to essence by highlighting the importance of human choice (van Manen, 1997).

*Subjective Experience*

If phenomenology also aims to reveal the unity of life through patterns and relations, how does one person’s subjective experience interact with another’s subjective experience (Abram, 1997)? Husserl began to direct the inquiry process back into the body. In order to establish the body as the initial point of contact with other bodies, the body is conceived as the locus for intersubjectivity. While Husserl’s theory of inter-subjectivity introduced the body as the ground of relatedness with the world, the complex relationship between subject and object persisted. A basic conundrum kept emerging. How does a subject self relate to the existence of the other? Husserl considered the movement of exterior bodies to have some resonant relation to the movement of one’s own body. While the world of materialist science gained force with establishing reality as objective and mechanistic, Husserl attempted to conjoin the interior and exterior experience with his theory of inter-subjectivity (Abram, 1997).

Merleau-Ponty maintained that the problem of the transcendental ego and the separation of the body that ensued as a result of the transcendental pursuit were never resolved by Husserl.
In the transcendental sphere the realm of being becomes once again subjugated to the ideal. Merleau-Ponty explored an indeterminate perceptual field where the primary concern became the organic relationship between consciousness and nature. Merleau-Ponty’s groundbreaking statement, “I am this body”, revealed that the experience and comprehension of unity occurs through perception (Abram, 1997). Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the attending body suggested that this body is aware of the ambiguity of meaning; it is motivated by indeterminacy and creativity and understands the difference between sensual awareness and judgment. Merleau-Ponty reconnects the experiencing subject within the lived experience of the body. No longer is the aim of an inquiry to construct an objective reality but to, as Abram (1997) and Darroch-Lozowski (1999) communicate, regenerate an organic and vegetative connection to nature and the body. Abram (1997) poses a question, “Does the human intellect, or ‘reason’, really spring us free from the inherence in the depths of this wild proliferation of forms. Or on the contrary, is the human intellect rooted in, and secretly borne by, our forgotten contact with the multiple nonhuman shapes that surround us?” (p. 49).

**Vivian Darroch-Lozowski: Living as the Wandered**

I want to show by presenting the idea of the wandered, how an ontological location in the body opens to a confluence between the visible and the invisible. Merleau-Ponty (1962) identifies the unknown as the invisible in his final book, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the chiasm points to how, within the subject and object interaction there is a gap where the dualistic idea of mind and body converge. In the *Uncoded World: The Poetic Semiosis of the Wandered*, the author challenges the semiotic discipline with the “knowledge of the body” (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999 p. 12). Darroch-Lozowski articulates her intention for the book, “In addition to exploring the conception of the uncoded world, my primary interest in this writing is to bring the physical and oracular energies of the body and Eros (Eros defined as a deep knowledge buried within the body) into the thought of the semiotic discipline…I want to bring forward a future context in which vision-logic is part of a deeper whole” (p.i). A female model, living through a threshold body, wanders throughout the text. The coded world is comprised of symbols, signs and all wordless sounds and gestures that express our living. The uncoded world, the author writes, pervades and holds our existence. This uncoded world, rarely spoken of and often considered as “nothing” connects us to the possibility of global consciousness.
A threshold body is a “vehicle of communication” between the coded and uncoded dimensions of our awareness. Thresholdness can be initially understood as dream like consciousness. Thresholdness is inherent and according to Darroch-Lozowski, it is deeply feared by many, “If we could accept thresholdness as an inherent within us, with experiences of attention, memory, will, imagination and reason, it would gain in subtlety and influence upon us. Thresholdness is “always the place of eros” (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999 p.128). The effect of living in a threshold body is that “we can close the ontological gap between mind and body” (p.128).

Bodyness is described as an “intermediary subject between the dualism of the corporeal body and body’s metaphysical presence” (p. 39). The author describes the bodyness of the uncoded world,

...because its bodyness is a fragmentary body softening, and dissolving as if it were assisting the birth of itself into an immense fragile synthesis, into an immense ‘real’ and whole world. In other words the kind of fragment to be associated with the uncoded world is a fragment inside which the whole exists and a fragment which simultaneously is a part of the larger whole. (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999 p. 46)

In relation to the uncoded world’s presence surrounding us, Darroch-Lozowski maintains that the awareness required to live from within the whole relies on the sensibility of the wandered. In the previous chapter I outlined Plotkin’s (2008) description of the wanderer as the last archetype of adolescence.

*The Wandered*

What does the wandered do? Like Plotkin’s description of the wanderer, the wandered crosses borders and allows her one foot to remain in the uncoded world. Darroch-Lozowski (1999) writes that the wandered stops to pick up things, she examines them; perhaps she tucks these objects into her pocket, perhaps she does not. And then the wandered will wander again. This wandering, Darroch-Lozowski claims, is walking and most importantly, movement is understood as awareness. Becoming the wandered allows us to accept the world as given and as an “a mazing grace”. Darroch-Lozowski clarifies that the figure does not wander to possess anything or to make a territory anywhere. She is not a nomad as she does not necessarily move in order to survive. The wandered apprehends the world with *eknosis*, an inward outward knowing that moves in attunement with a living pulse.
A Slowing Awareness

Darroch-Lozowski (1999) refers to the type of attentiveness required to become the wandered as one of attention/array as opposed to one of choice and intention. Aware in the Japanese language translates into a feeling, which “hovers between beauty and compassion” (p. 128). Aware and Eros are not separate; they are interwoven together. This awareness is an awareness of nuances and involves patience to absorb these nuances before categorizing or prematurely compartmentalizing meaning. A penetrating question, posed by a Chinese student, “when will the chaos end?” Darroch-Lozowski responds,

To respond to nuances we must remember that all the particulars of our lives, which we notice, have fine and intricate possibilities, which we do not see, and which we probably do not fit into our usual categories and many signs. However if we are willing to wait upon them and are willing to absorb them without naming them then sometimes we can sense these incipient, forming “things”.

(Darroch-Lozowski, 2000 p. 62-61)

An Example of Lived Experience: A Biographical Showing

Early on in this research process I understood that the participant group would be comprised of my former drama students. In order to begin to open to what they had to say about their drama experiences, any tendency to judge youth development had to be acknowledged and set aside. I believed that materialism and egoic forms of thinking were distancing young people from a connection to their beings. While the previous statement might bare some truth I wanted to avoid continually directing my analysis back to this judgment. However, there was relentlessness in my critique of youth culture, and it played out in numerous instances. Every news event and various moments with my own adult children would ignite a new-impassioned rant. I could not slow the repetition of these thoughts. I was in fact inhibiting contact with my own existence and curiosities, creating a solipsistic habit of thinking. The solipsistic egoic circle continued to close around me. I could no longer feel empathy towards the challenges that face youth as they attempt to reconcile their place in the world. Living through the ontological movements of the wandered in a nearby park offered a glimmer or flash of what it meant to open to a felt experience with nature.
Becoming the Wandered

During this time of heightened judgment I wandered in the park near my home, which is also situated on the edge of a stretch of sandy cliffs, typically referred to as the bluffs. These bluffs overlook one of the Great Lakes. Just what does the wandered, a liminal being do to begin to shift her awareness from seeing to feeling? The trees, rocks, water and clouds, of this area soon became a solace, a space in which I was at least somewhat comforted, a space where I could imagine myself holding firm while attempting to let go.

I began to practice bodily presence through tai chi movements and through paying attention to the breath. I also practiced self-guided visualization. During experiences of deep and sometimes painful solitude a sigh was released, a grunt, or a lament was carried to the line on the horizon. As my voice floated to that dim almost imperceptible line I realized some current was carrying me there too, “A wanderer allows themselves to be carried by the wind” (p. 101). Gazing at the movement that surrounded me, responding to and feeling the wind also became a new form of witness, “…and the reality in which a wanderer submits is spherical and so lives in rounded aperspectival space time” (p. 101). I had learned to spatialize my awareness in movement and acting classes and during moments of meditation, but this feeling was different and remained for a long time, indescribable.

There are two pine trees that stand on a slight incline, overlooking the lake. The ground underneath them possesses an uncanny way of staying green for the longest period of time before deep winter snow finally covers their roots. Standing, with back leaning against the trunk of one tree I gazed into the blue water, watching how the wind rippled the lake. Many days passed where I would wander in the park and return to this spot. I experienced only brief moments of wonder while watching golden light array through drifting clouds, birds pumping their wings in flight at the edge of the cliff.

I had experienced a different shift in perception four years before. That inquiry might be described as a meeting between my bodily and imaginal energies during an intuitive inquiry into the element, air. But that was four years ago and the focus then was to look into the sky and allow my imagination to take flight. However, it seemed that nature refused my desire to repeat the experience. Still stubbornly I waited for something, perhaps with too much raw emotion.

Under the tree I practiced self guided visualizations. I visualized energy moving or streaming through an invisible root system that covered my body. These exercises, conceived to cultivate a feeling of flow and empathy, rendered small effects, subtle feelings of energy moving
throughout my body but no real permanent emptying or release from the rigidity of my thoughts. I ran my hand along the bark of a tree, seeking the sensual connection that a child might experience—just the rise and fall of the rippled tree bark. Then sometimes I would try to focus more keenly on the patterns of light that were cast from the trees or try to listen to the weightier messages of a rock.

*Encounter with the Owl*

At this time of trying to set judgment aside, a feeling of mourning pervaded my being. The depth and intensity of this sadness did not seem to hold any rational basis. One day during my usual wandering, I was introduced to a screech owl that was hidden amidst the branches of a small pine tree. An experienced birder hobbled over to a small tree to explain the creature’s life history. It was a penetratingly cold and damp November day. The clouds were threatening snow. The ground was hardening. The birder began to tell the story. His expert finger pointed to a hole high above in a not too distant maple tree. It was there that he said the owl, his mate and two offspring resided safely. One night, a raccoon climbed to the hole in the tree that was the owl family home. After reaching this awesome height the raccoon killed the mother and two baby owls. Now the father, who was the owl that stood before me, returned to the small pine tree to pass the days alone.

The birder hobbled off to allow me some time to be with the bird. The owl’s eyes were closed. Only momentarily did he open them a silver moon sliver, a hair’s breadth so that a spark of mirrored light flashed to signal his almost wakefulness. He stood covered in his hood of speckled brown feathers. His wings were tucked at his side, wrinkled feet curled around a young branch. The owl was balanced while his body responded to the movement of the wind.

After hearing the story of the owl’s loss, an aching stir in my heart triggered a feeling of empathy for the owl’s lost love, for the act of waiting and for the months that the owl had passed in solitude. I returned the next day to try and see the owl again, hoping to read some form of symbolic direction from an experience with the owl. Calling on my understanding of the openness of a child I stood again in front of the owl’s tree. But connecting to nature as an adult relies on much more than a remembrance of child like awe. Intuitively I initiated a bodily awareness, in which an attention to filling the energetic space envelops or precedes (I am not sure which) rational thought. This is facilitated through the breath, through an awareness of the soles of one’s feet and their relationship to the earth. Something fills and something empties. This is how I understand concentrated awareness and the type of gaze, which is referred to as
attention/array (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999). Reaching a place within this awareness I glimpsed flashes and fragments of a sphere that surrounded us, tree, owl and I at a circumference of approximately four feet. What was the exact moment of shared existence? I am not sure. The owl opened its eyes wide only momentarily and seemed to return my gaze. I felt a sharp looping motion in my heart like the jerk of a fish tail in propulsion.

Could I feel a pulse? Yes, from the beginning I felt a rocking motion, ever so slight and then growing in intensity. The peripheral image of this sphere remained as my body was taken by something I could not explain, the currents of an ocean, or wind I do not know. In the corner of my gaze I could sense the many concentric disappearing and reappearing circles of the sphere I have already mentioned.

Several trips to the park to watch this owl rendered a different experience. Four encounters followed a progression from an experience of shared existence to a full release into the wild imagination and to empathy towards the sacred other. In my thoughts I still experienced a residual consumptive and naïve desperation. Would this owl show me a way? Will this energetic and imaginal exchange turn to alchemical gold in my life and relations with others?

Perhaps these questions echo what Darroch-Lozowski (1999) indicates are questions of location, “Where am I and what time is it?” Merleau-Ponty posits that there is a secret knowledge that underlies the above questions; this type of ontological questioning facilitates a relationship to wild being. Now I understand how “…wandering conjoins us with Wild Being” (p. 99).

On the second last meeting with the owl, standing again before the tree and reorienting my internal energies to that of the wandered, I was drawn into a waking dream. Clouds of red smoke billowed from the owl’s belly. On a different day I stood before the owl and experienced another waking dream. In my imagination, I flew with the bird, through the night air and passed a church steeple that was framed by a moon. Entering a house with a young girl who lay on a couch, her blond hair stuck to the side of her head from the sweat of a high fever, I laid my hand on her forehead. The waking fantasy was then over. Two weeks later my blond haired niece fainted with migraine pain. When I heard this I flew again with the owl in my imagination and placed my hand on her forehead.

On the last day I went to see the owl, I walked with the hurried steps of one who wanted to replace the experience of my lived reality with fantasy. Darroch-Lozowski (1984) writes in the
book titled, *Voice of Hearing*, …my in tention (s) were intruding on my perceptions(s) of what is”. Upon approaching the tree I heard “the voice/s of hearing”. I heard, “It is finished”,

Spontaneous aesthetic resonance is the pure-in heart’s response to the un-kept (=un-kempt=anti-personalized strew) as opposed to the scatter of parts and colonies (wings and bones, plants and moss) showing a range of life traces in a naturally adequate ratio, space: object: action. And spontaneous esthetic resonance here is dependent on synaesthesia: a subjective sensation or image of a sense (as of colour) other than the one (as of sound) being stimulated. (p. 97).

I came home to write about this experience in order to understand how to give birth to a creature that has never been through writing words that appeared in my consciousness. I wanted to try and understand what kind of metamorphosis took me, what form of eros wooed me into this form of existence. I do not know why I saw red clouds of smoke except that I saw this red smoke rising from the lake one day in late summer and I saw it surround the moon during a lunar eclipse. A lasting impression of this experience is a hand reaching out to rest on a fevered forehead.

*Listening and Writing through the “Voice/s of Hearing”.*

Van Manen (1997) and Romanyszyn (2007) have described writing as a method in phenomenological inquiry. However, it was the above-mentioned book that guided me through a process whereby I could allow images and words to flow together. Situated within the field of philology, Darroch-Lozowski (1984) explores the “bringing of a living body through images and into words”. Each one of us searches for their own ontological language, “if we are to discover the source and the destination ontologically of what we may be” (p.ii). The text explains metamorphoses and follows a phenomenological approach to writing in that the author explores the images that arise from fantasy and presence in body. At first it was felt that the writing was a “record of dispossession” but later the writing shows integrally a *holding firm*…“in the face of images and sounds and bodies in the world”. The process is slow and combined with longing. When words are heard, it is not *the what* of the meaning that is sought, it is “…how I will receive and live through what the words say to me” (p. 2).

*Receiving and Living Through the Experience with the Owl*

To create a representation of this experience, I have expressed the encounter with the owl in poetic form. I did this after expanding on each movement with symbol and metaphor. I have distilled the experience into four movements,
The Screech Owl

Rising and falling the owl rocks on a branch
The woman also rocks back and forth in time

  Invisible winds and visible branches
  Cycles in concert
  A thin skin forms over a tight yet lucid sphere
  Owl tree and woman
  This moment shaping for another moment
Inside disappearing reappearing translucent circles

A flash of reflected light
Then the woman is born in the billow of a red cloud

Seeing red now plays upon her like soft silk
Eros and a gathering aware cannot be divided
Imagination birthed through the belly of a real owl
  Play on me the woman offered
  I have been the one who won’t be taken

How to prepare?
Mysterious mourning and the emptiness prayer
A vision of a sylph over the water pressed into a seed shape for birth
And then following the bird that flies in the dark night
  To the silver moon over the cross steeple
  To the house with the sick girl
Hands laid on forehead… simple imagination…simple belief …simple healing

Then the small screech owl spoke the language
Of death and endings,
“It is finished” the Owl said.
The woman remembered the wounding on the feet of him who said that too
Something dies and is reborn
  A new waiting
Essence of experience
Rocking/Eros/Healing Flight/Rebirth

Doing Phenomenology and Alchemical Hermeneutics

In educational research the phrase, “The research of lived experience” constructs a straightforward pathway to understanding phenomenology’s basic orientation (van Manen, 1997). Turning to a phenomenon that has been taken for granted, such as thought and felt sensation relies on the challenge of searching for the right word to describe lived experience. The practice of writing up a phenomenological text is considered a “poetizing activity” (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999; Romanyshyn, 2007; Van Manen, 1997). Since learning relies fundamentally on perception, van Manen maintains that phenomenology is an appropriate methodology for educational inquiries. van Manen claims an integral phenomenological question asks, how does this experience feel? And, what is the nature of this experience? Another connection to holistic education is the discourse on unity and holism, this contributing to the overall “fit” between this methodology and this research.

The Problem of the Essence

Quoting Merleau-Ponty, Max van Manen (1997) also writes that phenomenology is the study of essences. van Manen explains the etymological roots of the term essence. The Greek word ousia, refers to the being of a thing, to interior being. Essensia means “to be” in Latin. Van Manen explains that in Plato’s dialogues, essence means the nature of a thing. One of the drawbacks of this term is its philosophical complexity. For example, existence is spatiotemporal and essence is beyond space-time. Ethical tensions occur when researchers attempt to create essences from roles, for example, roles like student or teacher. Problems arise when the research attempts to translate an essence into a universal principle or truth that is applied to teacher, student, child and so on. This practice leads to marginalization (van Manen, 1997). van Manen warns against becoming mystified by the term essence. When a phenomenologist inquires after the essence of a phenomenon, it means both the ontic (concrete) and the ontological (essential nature) are held in balance (p.40). Describing the essence of experience does not mean that the study’s assertions or findings should translate into findings that point to universal knowledge.

The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind

David Abram (1997) posits that extracting the living pulse from what we choose to study ensures that the existence of the object or person, for us, most certainly will be lost. It is not only
the felt rhythm of lived experience in relation to thought that constitutes the dimensions of consciousness necessary to do this research, but an understanding of how the imagination and the felt body come into play during moments of phenomenological attention. Robert Romanyshyn (2007) explains how the soul calls the inquirer to deepen their connection to interiority, “Research with soul is about erotic mutual seduction, a loving engagement with the work” (p. 272).

Beginning with the willingness to acknowledge a personal wound, the grieving process permits the soul to express a rare voice in the dualistic tension that is felt by the inquirer. The soul then begins to guide the inquiry process, with a downward glance, attending to the emptiness that now becomes visceral. At the point where the ego remarks that there are few available solutions, the need for further surrender takes over the ego’s aim to control the desired outcome and the inquirer then falls from his or her habitual places of knowing. In order for the work to expand beyond the wound or complex of the researcher, the researcher acknowledges his or her loss of sight and identification with the rational. Romanyshyn writes, “Perception is not a photographic process. We perceive the world through the dark-light of the soul’s complex and archetypal dreams, fantasies, memories, and imaginings” (p. 265).

Research with Soul in Mind: Romanyshyn’s Active Imagination

Depth psychologist Robert Romanyshyn’s (2007) approach to imaginal inquiry derives from Jung’s writing on the unconscious and the active imagination. In the Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind, Romanyshyn (2007) explains that one of the central functions of the human soul is to feel and to grieve for what is missing. The soul will also gaze into the gap between what is here and what is not yet known and create the space for the future to come forward. The soul balances the individual’s egoic needs with the needs of the larger whole, “At the deepest level of the unconscious, the unconscious is nature” (p. 38). Within the Jungian typology, feeling is one of the four functions of consciousness. The other three functions are sensing, thinking and intuiting. Romanyshyn claims that Jung describes feeling as “a process that takes place between the ego and a given content, a process that imparts the content and a definite value in the sense of acceptance or rejection” (cited in Romanyshyn 2007, p. 283). According to Jung, the feeling function asks who is feeling, where as emotion leads to the act of analysis, the need to label what emotion is felt and what needs to be responded to.

While the active imagination can be used to inquire into an individual’s personal challenges, Romanyshyn has applied the active imagination to research inquiries. Imaginal
inquiry invites the voices of archetypes, ancestors, animals, family members who have passed on, and beings from nature to address a soul challenge or research question. Romanyshyn poses the following questions to his graduate students in order to help them stimulate their active imaginations and apply what they discover to their research projects. The following questions were posed to the participants during the spring inquiry meeting,

- Personal: Is there anyone from my family, my history and my biography who has something to say about the work?
- Cultural-Historical: Is there anyone from another gender, race, class, culture, and/or different historical time who has something to say about the work?
- Collective-Archetypal: Who are the guides of this work? For whom is this work done?
- Eco-Cosmological: Is there anyone among the other creatures, which I share this planet who has something to say about the work? Do the trees, animals, etc. have something to say? (p. 248)

These questions have pervaded this research process. Before going to sleep I have also asked for dreams that relate to these questions. Romanyshyn also suggests that a state of reverie can evoke the active imagination.

Alchemical Hermeneutics

The separation of the sciences into natural and human has born an unfortunate separation between nature and mind. It is this separation that Romanyshyn (2007) claims lies at the root of our interpretations. Hermeneutics, under the guidance of Hermes, aligns itself with an imaginal approach to research. Hermeneutics refers to “the act of understanding and interpreting symbolic texts of any kind” (p. 220). Hermeneutics is a tradition that acknowledges the interpretive dynamic between reader and text. Hermeneutics picks up the thread of ambiguity highlighted by the phenomenological inquiry and weaves it into the interpretive process. An invisible circle gathers that has not yet been coded in our understandings and then though interpretation transforms into a moment of coherence. This research will attempt to capture the depths of soul at the intersection between language, mystery and what refuses to be named. Alchemical hermeneutics makes space for the emergence of the unconscious and the symbols that arise from dreaming, reveries, visions and the imagination.

For centuries alchemists have been searching, “for the marvelous stone that harboured a pneumatic essence in order to win from it the substance that penetrates all substances” (p. 297).
Alchemical hermeneutics is an interpretive method that marries hermeneutics with Jung’s study of the unconscious and the various stages of soul transformation in alchemy. Jung has identified various texts that point to a direct correlation between thought and natural process. The alchemist relied on imaginatio and believed that without the true imagination the work cannot be completed.

*The Gnosis of the Heart*

Alchemical hermeneutics also evokes, “the gnosis of the heart” and non-ordinary states of consciousness (p. 266). Meditation, the imagination, creativity and as I have already mentioned symbolism, are interwoven into this method. This interpretive method is based on the concept of *Ta’wil* explained by Henry Corbin (1969), “*Ta ’wil* is a method that saves appearances (the exoteric) by returning them to their original form (the esoteric) (p. 266)”’. Romanyszyn continues,

> We might say that in practicing *ta ’wil* the topic is continuously drawing the researcher beyond his or her intentions more deeply and thoroughly into the source of the work, to its archetype, its angel, its imaginal history, its subtle essence, moving both researcher and work from the personal through the cultural-historical and collective-archetypal into the eco-cosmological and imaginal depths of the work” (p. 267).

**Methods**

The study will follow (1) conversations that review our history together as we engaged in body/mind activities (2) our experience now as we prepare to inquire about energy in nature, both individually and as a group (3) our gaze forward as we imagine how these experiences might impact the future. I refer to “we” and “our” in acknowledgement of my involvement in the reflection process as well as my subjective presence as an interpreter of the participants’ experiences.

**Participants**

The participants were invited to be a part of this research prior to the completion of the doctoral proposal. First I emailed a brief overview of the research and initial questions to approximately ten former students. In the email I also explained how I thought the project might unfold. Then the students were asked if they would like to take part in an introductory meeting. Seven members responded and agreed to attend an early spring (2008) gathering. It was my intention to present the ideas that support the research project and to invite the attendees to
consider whether they would like to dedicate their time to two or three one-on-one interviews, four group inquiries, optional journal writing and follow-up interviews.

When the ethics proposal was completed, I emailed the protocol to the six students who had indicated that they would be interested in participating in the inquiry. When we met for the first interview I gave the participants a hard copy of the protocol and gave them the opportunity to ask questions. I reiterated that they might withdraw from the project at any point. They were given the choice to participate in only the first phase of the research if they so chose. All of these six former students agreed to participate in both phases of the research.

Phase One

The aim of the first phase is to ask these former students to reflect on their experiences in the drama class over the ten years that they were involved in the drama group. I was interested in their perspectives on how the mind/body exercises may have fostered an open feeling to creative work. One primary method for interrogating the experiences of these youth was the use of open-ended interviews. Since perspectives on interviewing have evolved in qualitative research to acknowledge that the researcher is not a neutral party in the dialogue, the interview is now considered a negotiated text (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Fontana, 2002). It is not a pathological diagnosis of these participants; rather the interview is conceived in alignment with Fontana and Frey’s (2005) notion of an empathetic dynamic through the exchange of emergent ideas.

Topics of interest during these open ended interviews included asking each youth participant how they were drawn to take drama, questioning the light and dark feeling of specific characters and plays, the experience of mask work, their lasting relationship to different characters and their recollections of the mind and body warm-up exercises. I applied a light touch to these interviews, given the length of time that we had not seen each other. I allowed the participant to wander through their memories of the drama years and to convey the tensions of their present lived challenges. The interviews were taped and transcribed. One of the interviews by the lake was not recorded and was explored through poetic writing.

Phase Two

The second phase’s primary aim was to apply the mind/body awareness of the first phase to nature, to allow the imagination to run free and to attend to felt sensation. When considering how to plan for the group gatherings, I knew that it was important that the atmosphere of our meetings remain playful, exploratory and connected to body/mind activities. The energy of the inquiry meeting was also communal, in the sense that we shared meals together. It was
conversational and inquisitive. Finally, there was an element of ritual, which we enacted through the notion of opening and closing the project. We gathered during the solstices and equinoxes. Most of the students were unable to attend on September 22, 2009 because they were away at school or already committed to school events. We waited until Thanksgiving to celebrate the fall season and to officially open the inquiry. To honour all of the group’s interest in nature we chose to explore areas that are on the boundaries of the city. One of our members emphatically stated that they were not comfortable in deep nature. The parks where we wandered are situated on the edge of the bluffs, overlooking the lake. Another wilder portion of conservation parkland follows the lakeshore and is rarely visited by city dwellers.

Participant contributions included: 1) reflections written during the group inquiry, meditations and wandering in nature 2) journals exploring lived experience, for example, synchronicities, dreams, emergent happenings and symbols 3) telephone conversations 4) emails 5) the exploratory writing of the researcher, journals of dreams, synchronicities, imaginal inquiries and lived experiences.

**Sorting through the Participant Contributions**

Writing is acknowledged in phenomenology as the primary sorting method (Darroch-Lozowski, 1984; Romanyshyn, 2007; van Manen, 1997). Each participant had a binder where I placed all of his or her journals and interview transcriptions. I selected statements in the transcriptions that corresponded to the overall research interest. At times a feeling of resonance emerged, accompanied with a felt sensation or feeling of symbolic significance. I would draw from dream images or the active imagination to work with the phantasy stage as well as explore various moments through poetry. Attempting to create an attunement between my feeling, the words of the participants, my journal reflections, synchronicities and dreaming I wrote various drafts of each participant chapter. To create the final chapter I gathered comments that connected to the research questions and organized them into a chart. I also sketched numerous mandelas that symbolized, connected and compared the reflections of the participants.

**Group Inquiries**

The group inquiry activities were selected and guided by the researcher in response to the reflections of the participants. The fall inquiry was comprised of a group discussion, wandering outside and a group meditation circle. The participants requested the meditation. The winter inquiry began with a group discussion and then moved to a silent meditation, toning and experimentation with the Tibetan Singing Bowls. We then moved outside to attend to nature. The
spring inquiry was designed to play in nature and featured a follow the leader game with a voice exercise that embodies the four elements. To include a ritual beginning to spring I asked the participants to silently listen to their inner voice and to work with Romanysyn’s four imaginal inquiry questions listed above. The group then wandered and attended to nature. In summer we enacted another ritual at the lakefront where after attending to whatever element in nature the participants were drawn to pay attention to, the participants and I joined together as a group at the edge of the shore to tone and then silently gaze into the horizon. The final nature inquiry began with a transformation exercise, a brief wandering time and ended with a group discussion.
Chapter 4: Isabelle

Plays
Flying Doctor
The Precious Maidens Ridiculed
Romeo and Juliet
Gamma Rays
Seventh Year Review
Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)
The Tempest
Alice
Monologues
Belle Moral

Roles Played
Gorgibus
Jodelet
Gregory/ Lady Capulet
Tillie
Juliet
Constance Act II
Trinculo
Alice
Juliet/Joan of Arc/Chorus (Henry V)
Dr. Reid

This is an attempt to acknowledge the importance of differentiation as the basis of selfhood because when self is reduced to its very last essence it is still found to possess the individuality that differentiates it from everything else in the universe. Indeed, this basic difference is its reality in fact and this difference inherent in every self is the tie to divinity.

Marc Edmund Jones

Background
Isabelle is a twenty-two year old young woman who has lived for most of her life in a three-bedroom house on a suburban neighborhood. Isabelle lives with her parents and two other siblings. Her father Phillip is an ordained minister and employed by the church head office. Her mother Susan is a neo-natal nurse practitioner. Phillip possesses a vibrant appetite for popular culture, attends rock concerts with his children, plays in a band and enjoys a variety of outdoor adventures. Susan works as a nurse in a neo-natal intensive care unit. Philip and Susan own property on an island where they hope to have a small farm one day. They also host a trip to a national park every year for their children and friends.

Isabelle currently works on contract for her church’s central office as an archival research assistant. The job entails gathering data from the church archives for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The following statement describes the aim of the commission, “The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy is a sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing”
Passionate about the consistent injustices acted on the nation’s indigenous people, Isabelle has considered doing her MA in social studies. Isabelle also recently volunteered as a swimming instructor for a program run by a renowned swimmer who has crossed the Great Lakes numerous times. Held at a community centre the swimming program was created to give one-on-one instruction to young people with mobility challenges. These are two interests that inspired Isabelle to apply to several occupational therapy programs.

Education

During the final year of high school Isabelle auditioned for three university theatre programs, but was not accepted in a theatre program where she could study drama as her major. Isabelle’s second choice was to complete a psychology degree with a minor in drama. She was accepted into the psychology program and finished her BA in the spring of 2010. Throughout her degree Isabelle struggled with the tension between gaining research experience in the clinical psychology field and furthering her passion for the theatre. In the final year Isabelle chose to devote her extra time to her theatre passion by participating in as many university drama productions as she could handle with her course work.

Isabelle was thrilled to play the role of Curio in Twelfth Night in the fall of 2009. It was the first production she had participated in for several years. Acting affected her so profoundly that she decided to audition again for acting school. In the late spring of 2010 Isabelle prepared and performed two monologues for her theatre school audition. She was disappointed six weeks later when she was not accepted into the program. Living at her family home again and contemplating her new career direction, Isabelle has decided to travel through Europe for a few months until she receives a response from her graduate school applications.

Isabelle’s Drama Archive

While compiling the artifacts for this chapter, Isabelle handed me a large binder with a collection of memorabilia from our drama classes. The binder contains a titled section for every year, beginning with the first drama class and proceeding through every season that the drama group gathered since 1997. Each section includes the fundraising activities, productions, play texts, rehearsal schedules, performance dates, programs, tickets, scripts with blocking notes, posters, pictures and photomontages for the theatre project of that year. Also included are original sketches and notes from the set and costume designers.
What was at Play?

At the age of eighteen, Isabelle responded to a questionnaire I had sent out to all the students regarding the breathing, colour and meditation exercises. At this time she also asked if I would help decipher the visions experienced during our meditation circles. Many complex feelings arose in response to this new teaching challenge. I began to feel as if the meditation practice had initiated questions that I was unable to answer. There was also transference between Isabelle and I that involved a tension between her singular desire for meaning and my rigid or unrefined belief about energetic presence in the body. I hoped Isabelle would settle into a deeper understanding of felt sensation and Isabelle hoped that I could provide her with more answers as to the meaning of her visionary experiences.

Isabelle expressed her desire to understand both the meaning of the group and the meaning of her experience in the meditation circle. Her impassioned interest in unraveling these questions began when she was sixteen years of age. When she was eighteen, Isabelle wrote down her meditations and sent them to me. An acceleration in Isabelle’s imaginal activity occurred at the age of eighteen when her meditations became detailed, storied, elemental and archetypal. It was during these Friday night meditation sessions that Isabelle began to describe a substance that she explained was a mixture of air and water.

During the inquiry year (2008-2009) Isabelle would ask if we could get together to discuss her thoughts. She wrote journal entries that grappled with making sense of the drama group, energy and the ways in which she encountered nature. Isabelle was fairly pensive during the inquiry group discussions but continually surprised me with her ability to articulate the meaning of her drama and nature experiences during our interviews.

**Phase 1: Drama**

Walking into the centre of the circle under the watchful eyes of the rest of the class is an activity that can prove to be intimidating for new students. The following paragraph is an imaginal recollection of Isabelle’s first attempt at this exercise. Isabelle’s stride was different now as she left the comfort of her still and silent classmates. Isabelle was furtive; her feet touched the ground less knowingly and more fluidly. When she arrived at the centre, her eyes softened while she quietly attended to maintaining the gaze of each student. She slowly turned around in the middle of the circle, patiently connecting to each classmate. Having completed the task, she introduced herself without attitude, affect, or giggle. “Isabelle”, she said and then
smiled, her voice seemed to follow the silent pathways that she forged through her careful gaze. She turned to leave the centre of the circle a little hesitatingly, with a slight sideways glance as she walked more determinedly towards her space at the periphery of the circle.

*Breathing*

Isabelle felt comfortable with the breathing exercises, “When we started the breathing and the colours, I didn’t mind it” (Interview 1 p. 1). Having studied voice in a former drama class, Isabelle felt as if she could experiment without feeling self-conscious. In response to the questions regarding the experience of these breathing and colour practices the eighteen-year-old Isabelle wrote, “I have learned that you can feel colours in different parts of your body as a slight temperature difference. I also find breathing into different colours calming at different times” (Questionnaire, August 2006). Attempting to sing the note that corresponds to each chakra colour (Andrews, 1992), we experimented with the relationship between sound and colour.

*Isabelle’s Response: Then and Now*

At the age of 22, Isabelle reflected on her childhood experience of the breathing exercises, remembering her enjoyment of the activity but concerned that she would not capture her experiences accurately,

> I always really enjoyed the breathing exercises. If you are looking for a child’s perspective of what I felt then… well that is very… that is very hard to differentiate because we have been doing it for so many years and I have evolved with it. It is hard to differentiate how I first felt versus how I feel now and what the breathing exercises brought me in the past ten years. (Interview 1 p. 4)

Isabelle’s response reveals her concern with remembering and expressing accurate or exact descriptions of her experiences. However, there is an important synthesis between the dialectic of now and then through Isabelle’s awareness of her own evolution. The two responses to the breathing exercises also show how Isabelle’s thinking shifted from describing how the exercise felt in the body to more abstract thought processes and analysis. All of the above concerns informed the transformation of my thoughts as I attempted to understand that I am not capturing accurate descriptions of the drama experiences but attempting to pinpoint moments of resonance between the participant’s memories and my own memories. This process also relied on my ability to listen, interpret and compare some of their emerging insights with the literature. I began to realize also that there was an important question regarding how the participants would remember their body/mind experiences in drama.
Isabelle also pointed out how moments of insight can happen spontaneously. Isabelle responded to my question about what drew her drama, “I just needed to do it…yeah I don’t think I recognized it at the time, that it was something that I needed to do. I guess I see that now, looking back with an adult perspective. It was always something I wanted to do and that is what drew me to it” (Interview 1 p. 2).

_Commedia delle’Arte: Fun Juicy Stuff_

When describing the experience of putting on a commedia mask, Isabelle recalled the freedom to explore,

One thing I liked about the commedia characters was that the script was not preordained. So you had an artistic license to create the character but still had the guideline as to what the character was like, his or her mannerisms and such. I really liked having the guideline knowing that Pantalone is a rich miser and yet still being able to create the story. And I guess it just …with a character like that you are able to explore so much and discover the character for who it is and or who you interpret it to be… I think being given a mask and being given a quasi script and being told, “OK, make this your performance”… really gave me the artistic license to explore. (Interview 1 p. 3)

Throughout the reflections on her early experiences in drama classes and directly relating to the question of openness, Isabelle repeated the word, explore. Isabelle explains how the actor frees the character from their initial textual definition; the commedia performer then creates a resolving tension between his or her notion of the objective reading of a character with their subjective interpretation.

Isabelle claimed the commedia helped her to explore the darker elements of human nature. When I refer to these darker elements I mean unbridled acts of selfishness, or aspects of a character’s actions that are solely tied to self-preservation. Isabelle states, “the fact that it was comedic made it easier to physicalize these dark aspects…” (p. 3). Isabelle elaborates on the opportunity to embody these dark attributes,

Greed…being self absorbed, cheating, lying deceiving all that fun juicy stuff that you don’t- it is not socially acceptable to explore that stuff like that, in and of itself. When you are given a character, it was just so much fun to explore…I love taking a look at all of that and being able to see the ironies, I guess, of the human condition; being able to see different sides of people and to explore them as opposed to reading about it in a book…or even seeing a production yourself. When you are actually acting the character you get to understand the feeling so much more and I guess what that entails and the consequences of those feelings. This leads to a sort of deeper understanding of people I guess. I am not exactly sure… (p. 3)
Isabelle highlights an integral aspect of learning to embody a commedia character; to explore the unacceptable, in the sense that she could “understand the feeling” and the “consequences of those feelings” (p. 3).

*Freedom in the Body*

Isabelle appreciated the freedom to experience a connection to her body that was not instrumental or competitive,

…I just enjoyed the freedom that the Commedia dell’Arte gave me to explore body and movement in a less conventional way. I was never prime athlete in gym class, to say the least. I took a year of ballet and it was a complete disaster. I am not graceful in that respect. The Commedia dell’Arte gave me dramatic license to explore my body without thinking about being the number one basketball player or being the best dancer or being the most coordinated. I think looking back that is something that really helped me grow. I think that is one of the reasons that I enjoyed commedia so much (p. 4)

Throughout Isabelle’s childhood it was very important for her to do well at everything she set out to do. Not overly competitive with her peers, she held high standards for her academic and extracurricular activities,

Isabelle expanded on how she views competition in relation to personal achievement,

There is so much emphasis on competition unless you have that really competitive drive it is so much harder…without that competitive drive I think that I could explore… I think I was able to explore Commedia more because I was not focused on being the best or getting the part. (Interview 1 p. 4)

Isabelle emphasized one critical dimension of drama by articulating its capacity to foster an awareness of the body that is more exploratory than competitive. There are often complex power dynamics within learning environments but Isabelle identified that within this type of creative exploration, competition is not a primary focus and a more nuanced understanding of what it is like to embody instinct can emerge through creative exploration.

*Over Our Heads*

Isabelle identified a shift from a highly physical theatrical art form like the Commedia dell’Arte, to William Shakespeare’s plays, “I remember being really fascinated with the text…getting to know the iambic pentameter was something that harbored the creative process” (Interview 1 p. 8). Various physical exercises were implemented to teach iambic pentameter, such as galloping across the room while speaking the text and staying with the five strong beats of the iambic. Isabelle did not recall these exercises.
Years later, during the *Seventh Year Review*, Isabelle chose to perform Juliet’s monologue from the scene just moments before Juliet drinks the potion (Act IV iii). Isabelle claimed, “I was drawn to it…I wanted to be Juliet in the first production…(bird sounds) …I was attuned to her passion, the passion…the intense passion, the double edged sword, the extreme love, the extreme violence and how that plays into a person who just wants to love somebody” (Interview 1 p. 9). Her desire to feel or visit such extreme passion at the age of fourteen points to not only her desire to play the role she never had the chance to play, but signaled a powerful connection to the emotion and the body. Plotkin (2008) suggests passion is an integral part of being connected to the Eros of the body and the individuation process in the young adolescent. 

*The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*

The play *Gamma Rays*, with a story that follows the cosmos and human psychology presented issues pertaining to education, science, alcoholism, poverty and emotional abuse. Balancing the human relational turmoil with scientific inquiry, author Paul Zindel animates the young female character through an experience of cosmic wonder. During one monologue Tilly describes the exquisite beauty and interconnectedness of the cosmos. Isabelle claimed that she had trouble connecting to both Tilley’s love for science and the cosmos. Isabelle’s own search for beauty and passion were, as she states “more abstract” and related more to her future interests in the field of psychology, “…it is easier to relate to depression or joy than it is to relate to an atom in the universe” (Interview 1 p. 8).

*Insight Into Transformations*

Isabelle remarked that a student’s first experience of this exercise usually involved a feeling of trepidation or fear. After the exercise was completed, I would invite the students to identify whether they could feel the body or the mind guiding the movements. Isabelle expressed her understanding, “I think it was a feeling of letting go and not thinking about it” (Interview 1 p. 19). Isabelle provided a holistic overview of the exercise, again, relating the experience to the group’s development,

It was definitely hard but I think the transformations were like the microcosmic representation of the work we did over several years with the group. What it gave me personally was a huge transformation journey throughout my entire adolescent and late childhood. I think the transformation exercise was being able to see the transformation of the individual which was kind of a sneak preview of a snapshot in time of the reality of what the group was—which was simply the transformation
of the person into the transformation that everyone goes through in life but it was represented in a moment. (Interview 1 p. 20).

Transformations became a metaphor for Isabelle’s conception of individual and group life change, “Also with transformations you have the excitement of doing something completely different and stepping outside of your comfort zone. You can push yourself further than you have ever pushed yourself” (Interview 1 p. 19).

In terms of witnessing the other student’s experience in the middle of the transformation circle, Isabelle responded, “…I think when people first started doing them, the mind was present”. Isabelle admitted that it was terrifying to, “make a sound and movement and see where it takes you…I think after people became more comfortable with the exercise you could start to see when the body emerges and the mind kind of takes a step back…it definitely had to do with comfort level and being able to just let go” (Interview 1 p. 19). Isabelle identified some key principles of this intense body/mind practice; the potential for the exercise to teach something about life as a transformational journey, how a student can learn to expand to the outer limits of their boundaries, trust the body’s way of knowing and learn to let go.

*Pushing Boundaries: Letting the Shadow Speak*

Isabelle elaborates on how the class pushed her boundaries, “From the first class to the last class…it always pushed me”. There were times that Isabelle considered quitting, it was too much work. Confusion and gnawing, seemingly unanswerable questions emerged from our creative explorations. In her more frustrated moments she repeatedly thought, “I have no clue where this is going” and, “Where does this fit in?” Isabelle offered her own understanding, “…It is quite abstract I think. I mean the obvious one is I over thought things and I guess that sometimes made me hesitate or almost withdraw” (p. 19). Isabelle identified another struggle, as she articulated a gap between her family’s artistic experiences as musicians and her experience as a member of the drama class,

But I guess one of the struggles was that everything was so new …all the work we did was something I had never really experienced before or heard of very many people experiencing. I had grown up you know with everyone taking music lessons or playing a sport or singing in a choir or playing an instrument, that sort of creativity. But voice and movement exercises and visualization exercises were something that was very new. (p. 5)
Our explorations continued to feed Isabelle’s struggle to reconcile whether these imaginal experiences and a connection to body bore any relevance to putting on plays. While writing this chapter I wondered if Isabelle was trying to express the fear of imaginal experience and presence in the body. Isabelle continued to express her passion for acting and for being in a play, “I still struggled. It was so different that I was not sure that people would understand exactly what we were doing in the class” (p. 5).

Isabelle articulated the difference between her family’s approach to lived experience and the drama group,

I come from a very kind of anal goal oriented driven family. For example, “OK, we are going to go to this destination”. And so we are there five hours later on the dot. The class seemed to foster a different way of approaching a group endeavour. This kind of thinking and creativity didn’t foster the same kind of achievement and goal oriented ways of thinking and experiencing the world the way I was used to. (Interview 1 p. 6)

The tension between goal oriented ways of approaching a task and the creative approaches of the class initiated a new approach to locating the value of the drama experience,

Of course the irony was that years later I came to understand that it was not necessarily the point to set out to achieve a certain end that was amazing that would get you somewhere. It wasn’t like get from point A to point B- yet looking back we got so much further than point B that I couldn’t really even attempt to say where point B was. But it felt as if we got way past that, because we weren’t looking directly at that …I mean like this is in a very, very broad, broad sense. Obviously we put on a play and our goal was to get to the production… but it what was really point B that we set out to achieve- it was really much more than just putting on a play. (Interview 1 p. 6)

Isabelle continued to explain that what we were doing was somehow not only new to her but also not as conventional or common as she was used to in other learning environments. Isabelle eventually came to an understanding,

…I mean like this is in a very, very broad, broad sense. Obviously we put on a play and our goal was to get to the production… but it what was really point B that we set out to achieve- it was really much more than just putting on a play. (Journal 10/28/09)

Robert Romanyshyn (2007) argues that the soul inhabits the gap between the known and the unknown and possesses the ability to identify that there is something missing but cannot always articulate what it is that is missing. Isabelle said that our creative approach fostered a different worldview, a whole perspective,
It is just sort of a different way of looking at the world and a different way of thinking. Sort of a different way of seeing how your life is set out from what you want to achieve. It is almost like taking a step back and looking at the whole picture as opposed to you know the one project or the one assignment or the one interaction or the one person or the one moment that you are trying to focus on. You are able to kind of take in the whole picture. (Journal 10/28/09)

**The Meditations**

This is Isabelle’s response to the questions I posed in an email that asked the drama students to answer questions about the meditation exercise. Isabelle was 18 years of age, Meditation makes my body feel a little different each time depending on what it is we are doing, ie: yoga, breathing, toning, group meditation etc. It depends on how I'm feeling going into the meditation, and what the work brings. More specifically, the toning, breath work and yoga always have a relaxing energy and almost a power to search for what is on your mind and ease things that could be troubling. However, physically speaking I can't at this moment put it into words. In terms of the group meditations the feeling often varies depending on the imagery. (Email, August 2006)

Isabelle remembers the first meditation that created what she referred to as a shift, “The meditation exercises prompted a shift…it lead me to question so much of what was going on in my life…” (p. 12). Isabelle began to question the relationship between what was going on in her life, acting and the meditations, “I think that is when I started to realize that this wasn’t just an acting class because so much of what we were doing was connecting to who I was as a person in my development. The meditations really triggered that” (Interview 1 p. 12).

Isabelle went on to explain that the meditations continued to trigger confusion, “I guess I was searching for insight into what was going on and I kept getting these images and these feelings and it is something that I’d never experienced through any other type of setting in my life. So I was wondering what the heck was going on”? And, “What do they mean?” (Interview 1 p. 12). She continued to reconcile her confusion only to reiterate again, “I always knew that there was some deeper level to the meditations…but as a child I was always caught in the mystery of
why we were doing this”. Isabelle understood that the images she observed in her imagination during the circle “were not negative” but they were “intense” and sometimes they made her feel uncomfortable because she did not know what to do with them. Isabelle explains, “I guess the images were my way of therapeutically trying to sort out what the heck was going on” (p. 16). Isabelle believes that epiphanies with respect to meaning and significance did not appear over night and that now she “understands them in relation to who she is as opposed to the significance of each symbol” (p. 16). Isabelle acknowledges that the practice is something that has developed over time and it is continually evolving.

Accompanying the meditations were physical feelings, mainly gut feelings, which were amplified throughout the experience. At times an uncomfortable emotional or antsy feeling occurred prior to the meditation. She enjoyed the palm-to-palm contact and felt it brought the group closer together. Isabelle reveals that her meditations were, “Much more meaningful and much deeper than was ever conveyed in the group” (p. 16). Isabelle could not see the purpose in revealing her imaginal experiences. As we developed the practice Isabelle felt that she could write her experiences down and share the images with other group members.

Reoccurring emotions emerged but Isabelle claimed that she could not really see much of a pattern, “but there are a couple of things that were sort of …were imprinted in my mind forever” (p. 21),

I always remember the meditations. I felt they were very connected to the darker aspects of myself and my life yet the meditations themselves I always enjoyed doing them …I always wanted to do them because it was almost as if I was going to learn something new and I was going to understand something and although seeing the images and experiencing them was sometimes quite hard I always wanted to do them. I wanted to see more I wanted to find more because I felt that if I figured out what they meant I would figure out a really important part of myself and the work that we were doing. And I had a lot of trouble kind of figuring out which part of the meditation was actually supposed to be a meditation and which was part of the drama class …which part of the meditation was like Isabelle’s life class …(laugh) and drawing that line and should that line be drawn and where should it be drawn? (Interview 1 p. 21)

Isabelle raises some important points with respect to the meaning of the meditations and their overall relevance to acting.

*Ontological and Spiritual Understandings*

Isabelle described how she understood spirituality as she was growing up, “I think it was the presence of something comforting and being connected to the world in ways that you
couldn’t perceive…through the conventional five senses”. As a child Isabelle was aware that “there was something important guiding me along. I don’t think I really saw it. I just kind of knew it was important and I knew that it was good” (p. 10). Isabelle continues to meditate and experience her images; “I guess I am going to see my meditations as a looking glass into how I see the world on a spiritual level” (p. 11). She considered the imagery, her ontology and the meaning of the group intertwined; “It was like delving into the mystery of who I am as if God were showing me a part of myself in a world of symbolism” (Journal, 10/28/08). Isabelle’s letter of intent for a university application summarized her learning in the drama group, “Through acting, voice and breath work, meditation and exercises that help an actor to be more in the body, I have gained a self awareness that I believe I could never have achieved by other means” (Letter of Intent, 2006).

**Phase 2: Nature**

**Fall**

It was late fall, Sunday October 29, 2008. I wrote in my journal notes after a telephone conversation with Isabelle that, “I experienced a strange sensation as if a circle was pressing into my heart” (Nigh, Journal 2009). In a tone of child like wonder, I told Isabelle that a blue jay had lit on a flower basket only a few feet away, but Isabelle did not wish to talk about birds. On this day we were talking through the present issues in Isabelle’s life, the meaning of our group, the meditations, past heart aches with boyfriends, her hopes for marriage and children, and her angst over her career choices. During chapter one, I made reference to Joanna Macy’s belief that reconnecting to the earth begins with the mystical idea of erotic interplay. When the image of the bride appears, Macy contends that a “fall into self” is inevitable. von Franz (1974) explains that the marriage of the masculine and feminine occurs when the individual detaches the archetypes from their embodied gender.

Isabelle experienced the following meditation in the spring of 2005 during a Friday night drama class. The meditation addresses alchemical transformation and resonates with Osho’s comment on transformation,

I was inside an old and very beautiful church. There was a bride and groom at the front, but no one else was present. The church had beautiful stained glass windows at the front. There were not any pictures on the stain glass, just coloured shapes that shone with light, up to the ceiling and on the roof itself. A burning wooden cross appeared in front of the bride and groom. Although the cross was
burning up in flames its shape and wood were perfectly distinguishable. The burning cross rose up out of the church, (with a brilliant freeze-frame of it burning next to the stained glass shapes) up into the sky. The sky was a perfect blue and the burning cross, sailed over an ocean. It then plunged into the depths of the ocean thus extinguishing. The cross glided through the water, sizzling and bubbling. There were corals and other sea plants in the water. The cross then rose out of the water into the blue sky and gleaming sun…the rest is a little hazy; I think that’s approximately where it ended (Email, Sept. 23, 2005).

Isabelle’s vision begins with a marriage. Thomas More (1992) describes the marriage between the anima and animus, or spirit and soul, “The ultimate marriage of spirit and soul, animus and anima, is the wedding of heaven and earth, our highest ideals with our lowliest symptoms and complaints” (p. 263). The vision expresses a form of elemental transformation that follows a specific alchemical path. Four elements are prominent in this vision: fire, earth (wood), water and air. The cross, a symbol of wholeness and convergence passes through elemental change without changing form. The cross then rises to move through colour and shape or light and form. After rising through the church the cross then descends into the depths of the sea. Sea corals and vegetative green growth are visible. The cross glides along the surface while the fire extinguishes. Then the cross rises again towards the sun. The starting point for the above vision is commitment and love. The movement of the vision involves a rising, falling, following the surface and a rising again. The movement implies that interpenetration or convergence occurs in a waves.

*Dream Synchronicities*

Just before the opening of the inquiry, two years after the vision had been examined and set aside, Isabelle described a nighttime dream that addressed our future relational dynamic as researcher and participant,

…Then, the dream changed scenes. I was in what I think was your basement. I was dressed in a long white blanket/cloth/shawl like thing, obviously part of a character's costume. You were helping me adjust it, saying that the edges of the fabric must line up. Then you gave me direction on how to sit, which facial expressions to use, as if we where doing some sort of photo shoot in character, or perhaps working on some sort of scene. I awoke from the dream feeling great, and started getting really excited about the coming year. On a side note, I just finished piecing together my wool blanket, and didn't make this connection until now, but I spent hours today, making sure everything lined up (Email, 2008)

The dream explicitly connects to my past role as director and to Isabelle’s role as actor. As a researcher, this image also rings true with the notion of the qualitative researcher who plays the role of the bricoleur (Denzin&Lincoln, 2005). But here is the emergent synchronous element. I
recently had a dream about Isabelle in a long white dress. It was a dream that revealed my challenges with creating the order of participant chapters,

Isabelle, I had a dream about you too. We were in a church getting ready for a performance. We were supposed to process and sing from the back of the church to the front. I was trying to remember the words of the song. Thinking that I would most surely forget the first note and the lyrics I was relieved that you were the first singer/processor. You were dressed in a long flowing white gown. There were others with us but they were in the background. Your white dress seemed to be of some significance, as well as your singing and your leadership. But as I remember there was a great upheaval in my thinking regarding the fact that I could not find my own costume. (Email, Sept. 2008)

Isabelle wrote me back to say how interesting that we both had dreams about white cloth. I have been piecing together and aligning the edges of this chapter. In my dream, Isabelle prepares to lead the procession and leads because she remembers the words to the song.

Winter

During the winter inquiry meeting, Isabelle, who can typically report on esoteric or metaphysical scenarios said that she could not stop hearing the Beatle’s song, “With a Little Help From My Friends” (Winter Inquiry 21/12/08). Isabelle wrote in her journal, “Music is awesome!” Why are goofy Beatle’s song lyrics coming to my head right now? I don’t know…it doesn’t matter…they make me smile!” The following day I went to a friend’s house where we decided to watch a recent film titled, Across the Universe where this same Beatle’s song was performed. I was not aware of this film and my friend and I did not have plans to watch it. I was amazed at this lighthearted synchronicity. However, as I wrote this paragraph to the strains of bird songs and summer city noise, a carpenter next door began to whistle Hey Jude. I just had to smile too.

The Meaning of the Group

Isabelle came to the first meeting with a five-page journal that explored her thoughts on the meaning of meditations, the drama group,

For years, during my late childhood and adolescence I dreamt of writing the story of our group. Our group was unique, we had been through so much together, learned so much but most importantly we came to know ourselves in a way that never would have been possible in a classroom setting (or any other setting for that matter). I use the words ‘our’ and ‘we’, which may be interpreted as everyone in the group experiencing what I experienced. This may or may not be true. What does fill these pages is my personal opinion of what went on, of what I
experienced and of what my perceptions of what others in the group experienced. It is up to them to provide their own account, should they wish to do so.

I first started participating in the group when I was 10 years old, and I have been a part of it ever since. As a result, Kelli and the other members of the group, (most of which were there for as long or longer than I) have come to know me in a very sacred way. They have all watched me journey through one of the most important transformations of life: the journey from childhood through adolescence, and into adulthood. I have felt tremendous love from these people and I know that I have also had the pleasure of walking along the path my friends journeyed through, watching them grow from children to adults. Perhaps the beauty of this group was not that we watched each other journey along separate paths but that we created one path on which we all journeyed together – A path that encompassed each person’s uniqueness while still binding us together.

Like everything in life that has great significance it always comes at a price. Nothing is ever free, save the grace of God, the love that I feel from Him and the beauty of His earth. But like every journey there are times of trial. The journey that we embarked on was a journey of coming to know the self. In my opinion, probably one of the most valuable journeys any human will embark on whether they want to or not. Learning about your self is scary. You discover things you do not understand. You learn about life and its struggles and rather than distancing yourself from them you have to deal with them and accept them as part of who you are or at least as part of your life.

The group nurtured an environment of openness to new experience like none I have ever encountered. This led to personal developments that although were in the long run very positive have taken years to understand and caused much turmoil in myself as a person. What exactly is this thesis project trying to figure out, or shall I say, trying to discover? I think it is trying to discover what it is that I now understand but has taken me 10 years to understand. This project is seeking to understand the new way of being and of learning and of seeing the world that I came to know through the work we did as a group.

The meditations were always a meaningful experience for me. I always looked forward to doing the meditations, as images were frequent, vivid, and extremely meaningful. I say meaningful because I knew that they had meaning and importance but at the time I didn’t know what that meaning was. I tried to figure it out but all I knew is that I liked the experience. It was like delving into the mystery of myself as if God were showing me a part of myself in a world of symbolism. Whenever I was stressed I would see images and excitedly wonder what they meant. These images although mostly positive had their time of trial as well. Near the time of my Uncle’s death I remember having a vivid meditation of a person running through a forest. I could smell the air and feel the earth beneath my feet as this young woman ran through the forest. The young woman came to a cabin in the woods. I remember looking in and seeing my Uncle in a state of his terrible illness. I remember looking into his eyes and seeing the love he felt for the world and me and yet knowing that his pain would soon be over. This image has
stuck with me as one of my first meditations. I cannot remember if this was before or after my Uncle died but I was about 13 years old, and his time of death had either just passed or was close at hand.

What could these images mean? I didn’t know, I didn’t understand, I just continued to search. The first meditation that had the most impact on me was one that I experienced the day (or approximately the day) after I first learned my grandma had cancer and we didn’t know how long she was going to live. It was during the summer theatre class that took place after *Gamma Rays*. I was in an old Gothic church and the only thing I can remember is the building being tall and beautiful and inside was a coffin. I never told the group about seeing my Uncle or about the coffin. No one else reported any images nearly this intense and I had no desire to share it with the group and freak them out. The images were not traumatizing to me. They were just a part of me. Looking back I think they helped me experience grief and helped me to accept the reality of death. I never had any negative side effects to the meditations for example, nightmares. I was always keen to do the meditations.

For a few years meditations were sort of on the back burner. However in the last two years before I went to university they took off. I started seeing images and symbols that I could find no concrete meaning for. Churches, pastures, a girl, water, spirals of air/water substances, Grandma, sunflowers, blue ribbons I saw it all. I will not delve into the specifics of each meditation right now but will just say that a part of me was emerging like it hadn’t before. It has taken me until now to realize what these images all meant. This is not to say that I have all the answers, far from it. But right now, the meditations as a whole have a great meaning that I never realized at the time. In the two years leading up to my leaving for university the meditations were more frequent. All the meditations I am referring to were ones that we did as a class, with the exception of maybe a few that I did on my own. The vast majority of them were also not guided but simply when we sat around in a circle palm to palm listening to music.

But I digress. Through these meditations I have come to know myself better. For years I tried to figure out what ‘they mean exactly’ whereas now I look at them differently. Each image I saw (and still see) was a part of myself and my life being reflected back for me to see. It was as if I was allowed to have a look at what Isabelle was struggling with, what Isabelle was excited about, what Isabelle was trying to conquer. It was through these images that I learned to triumph over death. I remember one meditation we did shortly after my Grandma died. I saw many things but the images that were most pronounced were of me running through the palliative care unit she stayed in with a long blue ribbon. I came to Grandma’s room, where her body lay and as I held the blue ribbon it wound around Grandma’s body and she floated several feet above her bed in the air. The other image from that meditation was of a burst of sunflowers shooting up into a beautiful clear blue sky.

Many of the meditations had nothing at all to do with Grandma or my Uncle and they too had a great impact on me. Again I do not feel like going into detail now
but I will say that over the past few months I have come to understand myself much better through them. Rather than interpreting them I am simply much more able to accept them as a part of who I am. I am thankful to have had the environment that nurtured this type of visualization and although I do struggle with it and think that it is more a visualization of who I am and what I am seeking to do. It is not the images that bother me, it is the issues that I face in my life that I struggle with. I guess I am coming to see my meditations as a looking glass into how I see the world on a spiritual level. It is the visualization of my journey through life in a very symbolic, mystical, spiritual and above all, DEEPLY personal way of connecting to the world.

I do not want to glorify this experience. I do not want to make it more than it is. I don’t want to overanalyze it. It is what it is. It is a part of me, I am in control of it and I don’t even know if I want to share it openly with the world. On the other hand I don’t want to turn my back and shy away from it. This is my story, a tale I will tell when I am ready. I may revise it, I may change or alter it, I may discard or add to it. It is a story about an actor and her journey through a world of wonder, a journey down a rabbit hole, through a pool of tears, to a wild tea party.

Has Alice found the key? Has she entered the garden? That my friend, you will have to wait to find out. It is getting late and it is time for bed. Sweet dreams!

I had not asked the participants to provide me with a summary of the meaning of the group. Isabelle however, needed to work through this story. It was her passion and her concern.

*The Four Seasons*

*Saturday, 20 December 2008*

**Summer** came and I gazed at the sky. It gave me strength. Day after day I gazed into the sky. I came to understand the clouds – they were in turmoil. The weather was forever unsettled last summer – life was unsettled, and yet looking into the sky I felt a clarity of vision pass through me. Sometimes life is confusing, like the sky, never making up its mind, wanting to shine and yet being overshadowed by dark ominous clouds. I grew to love the sky. I grew to love the clouds. Each day I would gaze up at them and they would tell me a story, perhaps a bright and cheery stories, perhaps a dark tempestuous story, but regardless of the genre or the mood these stories brought me a wave of peace and comfort that passed through my body as I gazed up to the heavens.

**Fall** came and I gazed at the earth. I saw myself as a little girl jumping and rolling in the leaves as they danced beautifully around me. It filled me with a sense of beauty and passion. Whatever I had to endure that semester seemed so small knowing that I was surrounded by such beauty. An old lady at a bus stop told me she loved the fall colours. She pointed out a beautiful yellow tree standing tall beside a rich dark red/brown tree. The contrast was beautiful. The sun was out and the sky was blue, a shade off blue that we cannot create, a blue that was given to us, for free… a blue that is healing, a blue that we must savor.
Winter came and the snow shimmered in the crisp December night. In the morning it sparkled like a diamond. I felt honored to make the first footprints in the snow gazing up the empty street with not a soul around- just me and the snow and the crisp winter air turning my cheeks a very bright winter red. I felt a burning desire to go skating amidst this beauty but alas the books were beckoning. So I returned to my studies. Several days after the first snowfall, I was studying for exams. I had been in the house, at my desk all day and was getting very antsy. I had to leave the house… the water was calling. I put on my winter coat, my hat, my boots and my scarf and I ran as fast as I could to the water. I sat on the rocks for a long time, just looking at the water. A great comfort came over me. The world is so much bigger than exams. The beauty of this world is breathtaking and it is so important to recognize that in a world of time pressure, competition, money and stress, some things are so much more important than others. It is so much more important to be happy than financially, academically or professionally successful. Happiness and taking a moment, just a moment out of every busy day to realize that there is a beautiful ocean in your back yard sending you strength.

A few days later I was walking home, rather distressed, as it was exam season and anxiety is a natural course of the education system for me, although it has been improving. Regardless, I was walking home quite anxiously. I came to one of my favourite trees and felt drawn to touch it. As I held my hand on this beautiful old tree my breathing slowed and my mind was filled with calm. I had touched that tree before and it had a similar effect on me, but this time the feeling was much more powerful. I felt a rush of energy fill my stomach and travel up to my chest. This energy was warm and loving. It spread through my body and made me calm down completely. I returned to my studies… almost excited 😊.

**Fall Group Meditation**

During the fall meditation, standing in a circle under an almost full moon, Isabelle said that she felt an intense pushing from side to side. She also felt as if a hand was resting on her back,

Isabelle: Then I had my eyes closed for the rest and I felt sort of a pushing on one side and a pulling on the other.

Gwendolyn: Just out of curiosity was the pushing on my side?

Isabelle: Yes. (Fall Group Meditation)

As we were standing and describing the feeling of these sensations, Isabelle later divulged that she saw a vision of Gwendolyn suspended in a triangle full of what she referred to as goo, the air/water substance earlier mentioned in her vision. Isabelle explained during a telephone conversation with me how she dove into this substance to rescue Gwendolyn. Isabelle also later conveyed her empathy for the challenges that Gwendolyn was going through.
Winter Inquiry

Isabelle wrote in her reflection notes after the group wandered outside on a bitterly cold day, that she wanted to run and dance like a five year old. Isabelle loves winter and claims that cold winters are preferable to more temperate ones,

Without the cold… we would never understand the beauty of having the wind burn the cheeks or experience the wonder of having white powdery crystal fall from the sky and glisten on the window panes of our hearts. I pressed my body against the old tree and turned to the water and watched the waves lap up against the shore. The wind carried a gust of snow from the ground to the sky, sailing off the cliff and my heart sang” (Winter Group Inquiry 2009).

Isabelle’s relationship to nature includes a poetic appreciation for nature’s beauty. Gratitude continually emerges. Isabelle also identifies three ways of seeing in her winter reflections where she acknowledges light, pattern and movement.

University Marks and Pushing Presence

During the second interview, descriptions of mind/body awareness, meaning and synchronicities gave way to Isabelle’s honesty regarding her anxiety and stress, “…anxiety is a natural course of the education system for me…” (Journal 10/28/09). During a follow-up interview in late December of 2009, Isabelle admitted that she imposes standards on herself that produce the stress that she constantly feels at university. Isabelle articulated again, how creativity and competition do not function well together within her learning experience. It was at this point that I pressed further for Isabelle’s description of felt experience, specifically resonance as a physical sensation. I redirected her away from abstract responses and her desire to pull our discussion into the question of meaning. Isabelle finally responded, “kind of like a wave that washes over you…like comfort and relaxation…” (Interview 2 p. 8). Isabelle mentioned swimming as her way of connecting to her body and releasing anxiety, “Everything is on pause…I guess it is a classic result of exercise” (Interview 2 p. 8). Isabelle said that she could not describe more fully the felt sensations of the meditations but maintained that she could if it was directly after the meditation.

Paying Attention to Body

In February, Isabelle took up her journal writing again, after being blocked for some time. A connection to being in body reappeared throughout her writing. Isabelle revealed that she had been lying to herself. When a friend pulled her aside and told her a few truths she had been
avoiding, Isabelle explained, “My body became full of this kind, warm and honest energy... a tingling in my toes...a sigh of relief...a flow of excitement”...On a less visual and meditative note, I experienced a moment of unexpected energy pass though through me...an excitement like I never experienced before passed through my chest and deep into my stomach...I felt like I was flying!!” (Journal 01/12/09). Later, upon her arrival at the pool, Isabelle felt a homeostasis return, “The crash had been painful, the healing that ensued indescribable and now a wave of calm as I rushed though the water. Every stroke every breath, every kick bringing me back to earth” (p.2). In the same journal, a week later, Isabelle had a vision of an eagle. Standing at the edge of the cliff she waited for this eagle to arrive, all the while noting how reticent she felt to trust that it was time to jump, to fly with it, to trust this imaginal experience. Isabelle turns to the question of meaning again and situates this knowing in her heart, “I had been searching for answers for so long but in my heart I have always known the answers are there, I just didn’t want to accept them”(Journal 02/12/09).

Spring

The onset of spring, after a “roller coaster year”, offered Isabelle some comfort. As she reflected on the Elemental Exercise, Isabelle remembered a feeling of excitement and nervousness. Jitters and self-consciousness also emerged, “But as we began to sound and move our bodies -the group settled and became more focused” (Spring Inquiry). As we continued the warm-up Isabelle began to feel more confident,

I said that I wanted to learn how to hear myself better. I know that I am listening to myself but I don’t feel that I am hearing everything. I have answers but I am fighting them. I need to open myself up to hearing the answers because until then I will not be able to channel my energy into the best possible path. There is so much to be heard, not just from myself but also from nature, from other people and from the world around me. What would it be like if the whole world was able to hear – To be able to respond to the senses in their body, in the trees, the sky, the water and in the world around them in general? (Spring Inquiry)

This spring gathering evoked memories for Isabelle, not only of the group’s early experiences with warm-up exercises but also the performance experiences,
During the wandering meditation I walked briskly around the park. Memories of *The Tempest* flooded through me and I felt an urge to go find the Trinculo wall (Act 3 ii). I thought about how much I missed being in plays. The exercises we had just done in the park brought me back to that feeling of excitement that I always felt before a show. That feeling is like nothing else! *Like a tingling in my body that starts in the stomach and works its way up and down my entire body up and down.* Happiness fills me. A sense of security and passion fills me when I perform (Spring Inquiry 09/03/21).

In this reflection Isabelle describes the flow of energy in her body as a complete loop. She began with a surge of energy from her gut to her chest and progressed to note a flow of energy through her chest down into her stomach. Although Isabelle did not seem to focus on any one aspect of nature in the park, moments later she had an imaginal experience with the eagle that she had been previously interacting with,

I pondered my issue. It was hard to think of a certain person, character or creature that would have something to say to me. The only one that has come to me is that of the eagle, a great big eagle, hovering just below me, telling me to jump onto its back from the cliff, “It’s time to jump Diana, everything is safe but you must trust me”… But I know the eagle is really telling me to just trust myself.

**Summer**

A conversation sitting on a rock by the lake on a hot summer day rendered a more relaxed rhythm to our talk in comparison to the winter interview. Isabelle was confident and playful. This conversation occurred by the lake in a secluded area of conservation authority land. I had hoped that the space would help me to let go of the need to listen to the participants’ talk for research purposes or to press them into my agenda for their development. We laughed as Isabelle discussed nonsensical possibilities for her future. We also talked about how difficult it was to make sense of visions and how maybe people who experience them must be careful to whom they share their experiences. Isabelle said that she had a vision of herself leading a crowd of folks and waving a blue ribbon. I asked her if she understood the symbolic significance of the ribbon. Isabelle replied, “Healing…I don’t know perhaps healing the world”.

In the summer Isabelle camped in Algonquin Park with Angela and Gwen. Isabelle recalls sitting on the edge of a cliff,
We sat on a beautiful rock type cliff overlooking the lake and the gorgeous trees, thinking about how we feel so proud to live in such a gorgeous country. We both want to spend more time in nature. It is truly a healing place. It’s as if I look out into the trees and the water after having had exercise and feel an exhilarating calm… like a freedom from the resistance I have felt so deeply over the past few weeks. It may be contradictory but I am resonating with the opposites now. Things are going well. I feel as if I am floating through an abyss between the comfort of the water and the freedom of the air. The air is representing the extremes, the water the everlasting comfort. (Email 09/10/10)

In late August Isabelle wrote how the middle road was vanishing for her and the extremes of air and water were what she felt and desired. Although edified to know that the ways in which Isabelle described her relationship to nature continued to develop (symbolically and elementally), I was concerned for her extreme almost wild mood swings. The following is an expression of her passion,

The fire is burning strong, perhaps stronger than I am aware right now but I know it is burning. The earth is rising up from under my feet. I can smell rich soil squish through my toes. It smells like heaven, sweat and moist on a summer’s day ready to provide nourishment to freshly planted seeds. Seeds that we do not plant but have been here since the beginning of time. It is impossible to know what the seeds are right now. Perhaps even seeking to discern their power we loose some of their magic… The comfort of the water will always be with me. My true place of comfort and meditation has always been the water. It will NEVER leave me…but now the wind is calling. Let the laughter begin. Have you ever felt the wind laugh inside you? (Email 09/2009)

But later as I reviewed the work of Thomas Moore, I wondered if Isabelle was feeling the visceral interplay between her own soul and spirit. In the chapter titled, *Wedding Spirituality with Soul*, Moore writes, “Our depressions, jealousies, narcissism, and failures are not at odds with the spiritual life. Indeed they are essential to it. When tended, they prevent the spirit from zooming off into the ozone of perfectionism and spiritual pride. More important, they provide seeds of spiritual sensibility, which complement those that fall from the stars” (Moore, 1992 p. 263)

Before the last inquiry Isabelle confessed that she felt like a loaded gun, ready to burst and that the tension in the final inquiry discussion was a safe place to play out her frustrations. Uncharacteristically she voiced a longstanding grievance with Digby. An explosive red energy flooded her face as she challenged Digby’s adamant proclamation that he would have nothing to do with religious fundamentalists. Prior to the moment where Isabelle voiced her concern over Digby’s statement, we all participated in a final transformation exercise. I noted a mixture of two energies within Isabelle’s body. She stomped rhythmically almost militarily with the lower
part of her body. Her arms swung upwards and she began to laugh, continuing to swing her arms upward in an ecstatic movement. The young girl, who always did the right thing, was always on time, always fulfilling her obligations, seemed to want to break free. A wild energy flew upward as the march continued to rock through her feet.

*Coming to an End*

I urged Isabelle to begin practicing yoga, or at least to find a body practice that would ground the primal energy that seemed to be rising continually in her. She began doing yoga. Something else grounded Isabelle, easing the polarity she felt so strongly. She began to enliven her passion for drama. Isabelle participated in two productions and auditioned for one of the premiere acting schools in this country. Something else continued to develop. Isabelle began to hear the young woman who continually appeared in her imagination. Looking for guidance in Isabelle saw the following vision,

I was in a beautiful open field, one I have been in many times before. The young woman (whom I have seen for several years now, who I feel is some sort of representation of Joan) walked up to me. She was wearing the familiar dirty white clothing, again, garments I had seen before. She was carrying a sword and a shield. She came up to me. I tried to ask her something; I was digging for answers for something but could not make out the start of the conversation. Then, all of a sudden, she placed the sword and shield on me, looked me straight in the eyes and said: "Be honest with Michael". Then, she turned and walked away without another glance after me. I became frustrated, I was burning with questions, I didn't want her to leave so abruptly. I tried running after her and calling for her to come back, but that didn't work. She was gone, walking away through the field. I was left standing in the field, stunned, and pissed off that she left, feeling rather ridiculous standing there in this old shield and sword. Then three round, blue birds came and sat on top of me, one on either shoulder and one on my head. (Email, 04/09/09)

When Isabelle sent me the above email, I interpreted the vision as an indication that her personal contribution to the inquiry was coming to an end. However, it seemed that this imaginary figure, so prevalent in Isabelle’s visions initiated her into a new stage, a stage where the Isabelle has become her own guardian or guide. I remembered the blue bird in the beginning of the inquiry that I had hoped Isabelle would acknowledge. Isabelle wanted to apply her visionary gift to the burning questions of her life and it seemed now she had opened to clear hearing, a way of interacting with her imagination that she had not experienced before.

Perhaps I have been wandering in the desert searching for meaning, for truth and for life thinking that the harder that I look the better prize I will discover. Perhaps
I have been wrong all the time. The teachings I have learned, the wise people and powers that have passed through my life have been pointing to the very thing that I seek, the very thing that I ignored. The seeds are buried beneath my feet; they live in the fire and the light and have been there all along. Rather than journey for ages through mountains and books, emotional roller coasters, tense moments or any sort of journey that takes you away from home, the answers all lie beneath your feet. The seeds are all buried beneath your feet.

Summary

I have made several assertions in response to Isabelle’s story about the meaning of the drama group,

- The drama experience was about knowing self/other in a sacred way
- Love carried Isabelle on the journey
- Development is about travelling with self and the group “…we created one path on which we all journeyed together – A path that encompassed each person’s uniqueness while still binding us together”.
- This project is about a new way of being, learning and seeing the world
- The meditations helped to delve into the mystery of the self
- Making meaning from symbols evokes both confusion and calmness

One of Isabelle’s primary desires for this research inquiry was to arrive at a more concrete understanding of the imagery that she experienced during her meditations in the drama class. In her childhood years Isabelle valued the experience of openness through exploration. Isabelle learned to hold a tension between creative process and goal-oriented living. Later on in her early teens the meditation, movement and voice work, although different from any other learning activities she had formerly experienced, evoked openness to encounters with the Self. She also revealed that passion fostered a connection to her body, through her desire to be loved.

Isabelle described the fall meditation as a pushing and pulling sensation. Three times in Isabelle’s writing she described felt sensation in gradual movements between her chest and stomach. First, energy began in her stomach and rose to her chest. In a subsequent entry she referred to energy passing through her chest to her stomach. Finally the last reference to a rush of energy referred to how the energy passes through her in a rhythmic loop between her chest and stomach.

Isabelle was held by her need to unravel the mystery of our time together. Energetic experiences emerge in Isabelle’s responses later in the inquiry but her desire for meaning needed
time to be heard and understood. When Isabelle reflected on her summer experiences, she recalled her attempt to read clouds. Henri Corbin (1969/1997) maintains that clouds are the divine imagination. The divine imagination is paradoxical; it reveals and it conceals. Corbin also writes that a cloud represents the active imagination. The cloud is the Creator, “All that is differentiated from the pure essence...created not produced…Creation is Epiphany, that is, a passage from the state of occultation or potency to the luminous, manifest, revealed state” (p. 187). Also drawing from Corbin’s ideas I note that an open passion and appreciation for beauty is an expression of love.

I believe that the visionary experience is the root of Isabelle’s ontological connection to nature and lived experience. Her meditation and nature experiences, both activate an elemental awareness. She has also consistently identified the elements as the bridge to her connectedness to consciousness and nature. It was through her experience of extreme passion and ecstasy that I believe Isabelle initiated her ability to hear during her experiences with the active imagination.

This chapter shows how Isabelle describes her childhood experience of openness in the drama class as the freedom to explore. While struggling to make sense of the meaning of the drama group Isabelle articulated a tension between the ways in which her family sets a linear path and contrasts this habit with how the drama group’s imaginal and body work highlighted creative process. During the nature phase, Isabelle wrote that the group represented to her, “a new way of being” and later explained that through the course of the research year, she allowed the images in her meditations to flow more freely. A shift in Isabelle’s acceptance and relatedness to the visions occurred in the final months of the inquiry. Isabelle’s primary relatedness to nature is revealed through her visions and connection to the elements, air, water, fire, earth and aether. Isabelle also engaged her active imagination, expanding her perceptions beyond her gift of seeing to being able to hear.


Chapter 5: Angela

Plays
The Psychological Shipwreck  Narrator
Cinderella  Fairy Godmother
The Precious Maidens Ridiculed  Magdalon
The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds  Ruth
Good Night Juliet (Good Morning Desdemona)  Constance
The Seventh Year Review
Alice in Wonderland  The Mouse/The Cheshire
Belle Moral  Cat/The Caterpiller
Victor

Background
Two months before starting this research project, I reconnected with Angela at a west end city café where she shared a Sunday afternoon singing gig with her mother. Mother and daughter each sang a twenty-minute set of folk and jazz tunes. Boundless energy remained with Angela throughout her growing and now it was as if time tucked that liveliness inside the notes that floated throughout the room. Angela’s head slowly moved from side to side. The space gradually attuned to her clarifying stillness. Sometimes the sounds of a bustling café push the music into the background. Animated conversations, swinging doors, brunch plates and cutlery combine in a cacophony of noise, but in the moments that she sang, the sound gently pulsed through us. In moments like these backgrounds or foregrounds mesh and meld into one another.

While writing this chapter, Angela lived with her mother Lyla, in a semi-detached home only a few doors down from Isabelle. No longer able to afford the home, Lyla sold the house this past summer and moved to an apartment. Lyla is a talented songwriter, folk singer and Reike master who is presently attending college to become a holistic practitioner. Reike is a form of intuitive healing, which involves cultivating a feeling sensitivity to energy (ki) and draws from the healer’s felt sense, intuition and imagination. Angela’s father is a full time musician. Her father and mother have been divorced since Angela was nine years old. In the summer of 2008, I had the privilege of watching all three family members perform together.
Education

Angela has finished three years of a four-year jazz vocal program and is now currently enrolled in her final year. Angela’s maternal grandparents contributed to a college fund, which has provided financial support throughout her post secondary schooling. From the day that nine year old Angela bounced into my drama class, long straight brown hair waving back and forth, I was intrigued not only by her energy but with her creative ability. She possessed the talent of a chameleon, easily transforming herself into distinct characters, animals or inanimate objects. She was unusually fearless when it came to experimentation. From time to time this fearless energy became disruptive when Angela did not see the point in changing from one activity to another.

Angela attended a public school a block away from her house. She struggled with trying to remain still in school and at times, refused to attend. Angela was acting out at home and violent outbursts were frequent. At the age of eight, the school supported a recommendation that mother and daughter attend a workshop that focused on behavioral strategies. Later Angela attended an arts high school and preferred the curricular emphasis on drama and music. Even after Angela’s passions in school were more meaningfully engaged, periodically she still refused to go to school. In the year 2000, at the age of 13, Angela was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Angela stated that she refused the recommended treatment because she did not have trouble focusing on tasks; she just experienced emotional turbulence while changing from one task to another.

During the 2008/2009-college year, anxieties resurfaced again. Angela was having trouble coping with a full course load, choir rehearsals and singing practice. Angela feared she had a learning disability and asked the college learning support centre to do an assessment. She was tested again for ADHD, this time by the college educational psychologist. The results showed that Angela did not fulfill one of the major criterions for the ADHD test. The psychologist further concluded that Angela suffered from emotional issues that contributed to poor study habits. One night, while dropping Angela off in the car, began to explain that she really did not know why she feels so much anxiety.

Astrology: Colouring Outside the Cognitive Lines

The school drew from and supported the benefits of the behavioral and cognitive developmental model, which brought some valuable insights to Lyla. Astrology, however offered a complementary way to understand Angela’s turbulence. During the third interview by the lake, Angela told me that her relationship with her mother was very intense. Her father is loving and
supportive, but Angela said that her sun sign (Cancer) points to the powerful presence of the feminine in this lifetime and in particular, the Mother archetype. The interview by the lake revealed Angela’s keen interest in soul, spirituality and astrology. When Angela was six years of age, Lyla asked Taina Ketola (2001) to compile Angela’s astrology charts. According to Ketola, Angela’s outbursts, which were often directed towards Lyla, were an expression of Angela’s terror of being abandoned by her mother. Ketola claimed that during a former life, Angela’s mother abandoned her. During this lifetime Angela will work through her abandonment and attachment issues. Angela considers Ketola’s assessment accurate, both in relation to her fear of taking risks, her fear of leaving her mother’s home and with respect to how the reading of her past life could relate to her irrational feelings of anger and rage towards her mother.

In “Sun Signs: Portrait of the Soul”, Ketola (2001) combines her intuitive interpretive abilities with unique perspectives on astrology. For example, the twelve sun signs are one way to construct an astrological developmental model. An individual is born under one of the twelve sun signs, such as Capricorn, Gemini and so on. Ketola’s critique of the typical approach to interpreting the twelve astrological signs challenges what she describes is a deterministic and somewhat simplistic interpretation of the sun signs. For instance, within the present sun sign typology a soft and gentle Scorpio is an anomaly.

Ketola maintains that the central reason for such perceived anomalies is reincarnation. Each sun sign is divided into three stages. Every soul may incarnate several times within one stage, until the individual has fully mastered that sign’s archetypal energy. One of the principle understandings of this model in relation to soul development is that prior to returning to earth, the soul chooses specific life challenges for that given lifetime. Angela believes her evolutionary process lies between the second and third Cancer stage and that she is in the midst of transitioning to the third stage. Ketola writes that the soul comes to almost a breaking point while transitioning. All transitions reorient the individual to a greater awareness of their inner life. When ready to surrender to the transformation the person passes into the third stage where the soul maintains complete responsibility for the individual’s development. To the soul that has chosen to incarnate under a certain sun sign, earth is the school. The birth charts are the curriculum or learning path and the sun sign provides the subject matter.

Angela’s present transformation signals a shift from an external focus, meaning external events initiate changes in her consciousness, to a more internal awareness where Angela claims that she is learning from a new connection to her interiority. Angela also suggests that another
reason for this shift to an interior awareness is that certain ways that she has identified with her ego are now dissolving. Angela explains that she feels the difference between her immediate egoic self-interest and her inner voice of wisdom.

*Present Reading and Film Influences*

While on hiatus from school (fall 2009) Angela explored ideas pertaining to the human psyche, Angela has read books by Eric Fromm, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung and Robert Assagioli. I am including examples of her reading interests in this chapter not only to illustrate her fascination with human consciousness but also to show her motivation to pursue her interests independently. An understanding of quantum physics was also introduced to Angela by watching the film, “*What the Bleep Do We Know*”. To further her curiosity in quantum physics, Angela also read, “*The Self Aware Universe: How Consciousness Created the Material World* ”, by Amit Goswami (1995). Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* also influenced her thinking about alchemy and soul development.

*What was at Play?*

I did not find that Angela and I achieved an easy flow during our formal interviews. Did this communication tension represent an elemental challenge between two different sun signs, earth (Capricorn) and water (Cancer)? I am not sure. Instead flow occurred between us in emergent or spontaneous moments, meaning, in the car, on the phone, by the lake, or while chatting over tea. During the taped interviews Angela would consistently correct the ways in which I rephrased her thoughts in preparation to ask her another question. In the less formal exchanges she and I were not as concerned with getting it right and so an easier dynamic emerged. Memory was also an issue in our talks. Angela would often say, “I don’t remember the most recent events.” “I don’t know”, appeared frequently in the transcripts.

*Participant Contribution*

I reviewed all of the performance videos, photos and playbills. Angela and I met for three interviews and she attended all group inquiries. She also kept a journal throughout the year with meticulous notes on her dreams, daily events or emergent happenings, sketches of her experimentations with energy and moments of attention to nature.

*Phase 1: Drama*

Angela said that she became curious about drama while sitting in an art class during a summer day camp, drawing apples, “It was boring”, she reported. Everyone in the drama class
seemed to be having so much more fun, “They were kids except for you, but there might have been some of that there (Laugh)” (Interview 1 p. 4). When she began the class, it felt like something new was about to happen, “…I just knew I needed to do it… it was as if we were exploring something new which held the potential for endless discoveries” (p. 4). Despite Angela’s exuberance and fearlessness in the class in relation to her drama classmates, she is timid if the challenge seems to lie outside of her comfort zone.

In her first performance, *The Psychological Shipwreck*, Angela played the narrator and confidently demonstrated her storytelling talent. As a child Angela possessed the gift of presence, meaning that as she walked downstage her attention was not only on speaking her lines, or conveying a message but it seemed as if the audience was being drawn downstage as well. Curious about her unusual ability to transform her body into a distinct character, I asked Angela to describe the feeling of being in body, “I don’t know if the drama class gave me more…I have always been really physical doing weird gestures and things with my body, so how does that feel did you say? It feels fun” (Interview 1 p. 4). Her early fascination with drama was due to the fact that the discoveries made during our explorations seemed “new with the potential for “endless discoveries”. She continually reiterated that the drama experience was fun and that she felt at home with being free to act weird. Having fun during her learning experiences in college is still important. I honor this as an important need in Angela’s ontological development.

*The Sleight of a Child’s Hand*

Angela gave a captivating and winsome performance of the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella* when she was ten years old. The magical twinkle of this character came alive through her voice and body with very little coaching. Angela explained that being the Fairy Godmother was something that came naturally to her. How did she bring the character to life? Angela insisted that the gestures and voice of this character came from her own idea that the character was royal and magic, “Well, she wasn’t really royal and important but she had the power to do magic…Yeah, the Fairy Godmother was very child like. The whole thing was very open, free, exciting and bouncy and fun” (p. 5). What did magic mean to Angela at the age of 11? She insisted with a tone of defensiveness that by 10 she was aware that magic was just make-believe, “Well, I didn’t think I could create horses out of nothing” (p. 5). Throughout the writing of this section of the chapter I could repeatedly hear her incredulous tone as I wrote. While Angela still permits the archetypal child to move through her body during creative work, she does not want to be understood as naïve. I pressed her further regarding her understanding of magic, “Because
magic is like flying like something we want to be able to do but can’t” (Laugh). Shortly after this statement Angela offered an insight into how she draws from astrology to understand who she is and how she behaves,

Apparently I was born with five planets in retrograde and most people have one or two planets. I have five apparently. That means that I am otherworldly or something. Maybe that was why. They communicate or connect with the world and with people in a typical way. I have unique ways of connecting (p. 7).

As a child and even now, Angela is aware that she feels different, “I would do weird things and people thought I was unusual and not good” (p. 7). Angela gave an example of her uniqueness, explaining that in music class she spontaneously sounds out blips and bloops, jumps around and makes wacky movements. She laughed and maintained that musicians thankfully, “really don’t mind so much”. I wondered if these sounds just “came out of nowhere”. She shrugged and said, “it just feels really nice to make them” (p. 7). While this habit of sounding out her happy feeling, seemed lighthearted and child like she also explained that the blip and bloop sound could be accompanied by a darker GGGRRRR sound.

*Playing with the Dark/Light*

Angela recalled that Pantalone was her favorite commedia character. She enjoyed his strange mannerisms, extreme physical posture and didn’t know why she felt drawn to, “the greedy old asshole”. When Angela was younger, she liked to embody characters that were fun in the sense that they possessed extreme passions and mannerisms. I asked Angela what she thought of the commedia characters’ instincts,

Probably because they are natural human instincts that society makes us fight against, but we need to explore them. Yeah, not in a, you wake up, “I think I am going to be greedy today. I think I will explore being a greedy and mean person (Laugh), although perhaps there is something in that too. (Interview 1 p. 8)

Angela also fondly recalled a character called Arlecchino who is known for moving before he thinks. Arlecchino stands, “on the balls of his feet and is light, jumpy, ready to go- ready for anything, Yeah” (p. 8)!

Angela commented on her experience playing Magdalon who was an “an upper class snobby maiden”. Angela maintained again, that it was fun to explore this aspect of Magdalon because, “Maybe there is a bit of that in everyone” (p. 9). In Molière’s, *The Precious Maidens Ridiculed*, Angela reflected on how a character could be embodied more easily when their
attributes were extreme, “My character was not the type of character you strived to be (Laugh). There is something, I don’t know, maybe because we are supposed to do all those good things in life, maybe there is a relief to do the opposite” (p. 9). From a very early age Angela showed that she felt the burden of having to do the right and good thing. I believe her sense of play and her need to be in her body played a vital role in lifting the pressure of her own embodiment.

*Developing an Acting Technique*

Angela described her acting process, “Yeah, for me it was like this, one way is to discover the inside of the character, their mind and their dialogue and then discover how their body might be. Then it is really neat to do it the other way” (p. 8). I asked Angela whether demonstrations of a character, experimentation with the physicality (image) or knowledge of the text (word) was more helpful in embodying a character. Angela replied, “I think the image, more, yeah…I like seeing and doing …I am very visual…” (p. 8). Later Angela noted that during the meditations, she had difficulty seeing images. There seems to be a difference in Angela’s experience between viewing an object in the world and viewing an image in the imagination. According to the way in which Angela described her learning process, the imagination is interior seeing. Spontaneous interior seeing, or imaginal seeing later develops through the nature phase of this inquiry.

*Breathing and Colour*

To the question of breathing and colour work, Angela responded, “I think that while I was breathing and picturing the colours swirling around my body, and going out and that, it helped to gentle me…it was a relaxing exercise and training to be able to focus” (p. 2). In grade four a guest teacher came to teach the children about proper breathing. Angela maintained that she was disappointed that this life changing moment was really only information that she already knew, “I didn’t understand it, why people didn’t breathe the correct way…When we were doing the breathing and the colours it was just generally good to focus on the breathing and feel the connection with the body” (p. 9).

*Psychology and the Dark Side*

Angela did not join the drama group the year we performed an adapted version of *Romeo and Juliet*. She was not comfortable with or interested in the complexity of Shakespearean language. Angela joined us again for *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*. I recall casting her in the role of Ruth, a very wounded and manipulative teenager who was struggling to make sense of poverty, feelings of jealousy towards her sister’s interest in science
and an alcoholic mother. At the age of twelve, I felt something dark was brewing at the surface of Angela’s psyche. She also possessed the power and skill to handle the subtle nuances and explosiveness of Ruth’s complex inner landscape. More importantly, playing Ruth would give her a chance to attune to the creative energy that seemed almost explosive at the time.

Rehearsing *Gamma Rays* called for a shift in the group’s preparation for scene and character work. We experimented with the physicality and rhythm of a character through Stanislavski’s method, the psychological motivations of a character, their history, the internal conflicts and emotional challenges were also explored. Angela balked at the prospect of playing Ruth and repeatedly complained that Ruth was boring. Eventually Angela agreed to play the role. Playing Ruth helped her to understand, “how people interact in a sort of yucky, selfish, kind of way, yeah…well not selfish but people who are hurt and seeing how they act with others and stuff…they were all needing of love…” (p. 12). For an actor to play a wounded or pathological character with any convincing authenticity it is necessary that they learn to empathize with what is seemingly dark about that character.

*Antsy Moments in Meditation*

The same year that we performed *Gamma Rays*, we began the circle meditations. Breathing, visualization and some other mind/body warm-ups were by now a firmly established practice before the play rehearsals. Angela commented on our meditation and visualization time,

> Again, I think I was pretty antsy at first. I was open to the idea of the unknown and spirituality and body/mind experiences but I wanted something exciting to happen right away (We laugh together sympathetically). I was too antsy to really settle in those situations. It seemed whenever I was supposed to embody a character or do something wacky with my body; I could do it pretty easily. But in this case I was more expectant which got in the way of actually experiencing something at a deeper level, for like a long time. A lot of my experiences after we would go around the circle and say what we experienced, most of my experience was, (Cartoon Voice) “Well I saw colours and not much happened and I didn’t really see anything.” (Interview 1 p. 5)

Angela revealed that her expectations of the exercise were getting in the way of “experiencing something at a deeper level”. Perhaps she was expecting to see and what she needed to do was honour her capacity to feel,

> I wanted more after the experience but at the same time I was still excited with the meditation and I liked doing it and I remember feeling… the one thing that I felt was that
I felt energy during the circle. We would touch hands during the meditation and it always seemed like a special energy. I also expected to see things and eventually I did, but compared to the descriptions from other people… I didn’t think it really mattered to me that much. Like some of the group members said that they saw things that seemed really significant and said something like that was important to them. That never happened to me with a meditation but…(Interview 1 p. 6)

I asked Angela to elaborate on the felt experience of the meditations,

Settling in and like energy building...It was warm. It started in the hands because we were not holding hands but we were touching hands together so they felt like heat was created within the hands and I had tingly sensations going up my arms and stuff like that but also just a sense of the air and energy within and around the circle. It was also similar to when I was doing yoga in the park, when there is a focused energy and everyone is focused it is like the air is kind of …the air is thickening and hovering in this in between sort of space and I felt that when we did meditation. (p. 9)

Angela continued to explain how she responded to the sharing part of the circle meditation, “Sometimes in the world you need to feel like you matter...you would go around and they (the other students) felt like they mattered ” (p. 10). Even though Angela felt that she should be experiencing more from the meditation, she identified important elements to the practice. Her description of energy is detailed and includes a reference to the energy within the group as “in-between”, “focused”, and “thickening and hovering”.

Transition from Drama to Music

While attending the drama group, Angela consistently showed dedication to learning the acting craft. However, during eleventh and twelfth year in high school, singing began to eclipse her interest in the acting process. While working on a monologue from Romeo and Juliet for a school drama assignment, I could not connect Angela to the emotion needed to play Juliet with honesty. I resisted a tendency to even gently push Angela towards a psychological understanding of the character’s inner life. I think her talents at the time as a performer were simply refining around a certain type of performance that was more presentational and less internal. The interiority we had worked to implement became virtually inaccessible as Angela began to focus on obtaining the music requirements she needed for the college jazz program.
Summary of First Phase

A simple summary of the drama experiences shows that during the early stages of the drama work, Angela was drawn to drama because it was exciting, bouncy, fun and exploratory. The early phase also introduced the feeling of doing something significant with a group. Later throughout the discussion on the Commedia, Moliere and Gamma Rays the reflections addressed the benefit of exploring and becoming sympathetic to the darker aspects of human behavior. Angela’s acting approach evolved from using words that she associated with the character, as in the case of the Fairy God Mother to developing characters through physicalizing their rhythms and gestures and examining their inner lives. Angela also considered the colour and breath work easier than the meditation circle. The colour and breath work were calming and gentling and were activities aligned with her close affinity with movement. Angela elaborated on the felt sensation as opposed to recalling the symbols, which seems to resonate with her natural ability to connect to her body. Although Angela claimed that she was a visual learner she could not recall specific images or symbols from the meditation circle.

Phase 2: Nature

Fall

I am locating the beginning of the nature phase of this inquiry through a synchronicity, which occurred in the fall of 2008. Angela does not often have mind/body experiences in nature. In fact prior to this research study, she did not spend much time attending to nature at all. However, a few weeks before we began the inquiry, two college friends planned to practice yoga, read a nature poem, and chant in a nearby park. Angela explained, “While we were doing yoga, Nima said, “The trees are so beautiful!” And then we all started to look at the trees (Interview 1 p. 2). I hastened to ask, “Was it the colour”? Angela replied, “No, they just looked magnificent and I don’t know, they seemed really special”. She continued,

No, it wasn’t the colour, it was the size for one. They are really big and I don’t know what was special about them. I guess I don’t take much time to be in nature. I don’t know what was special about them they just seemed special and they had an energy to them that was calming. The energy was really calming and settled when we were all there. It is like the energy that collects when we are all focused on one thing. Doing yoga together was really comforting and soft and relaxing and nice and I liked it. (Interview 1 p. 2)
I wanted to know whether this calmness may or may not have been sustained throughout the day. Angela contributed a significant insight with respect to how gentling or opening to a calming experience in nature can also lead to feeling negative energy,

The next bit of it was really nice. Immediately after the meditation I went to my East Indian ensemble practice with one of the girls. The rest of my day after that was kind of annoying. Oh it was amazing the things that were coming out, because the three of us girls were walking through the park and back to school and Josie said we feel both good and bad. She used the word gentling. So we have all been gentled and we are a bit more vulnerable. She noticed that it is a really nice feeling but then if you come into contact with a negative experience or something, you are extra sensitive to it. She mentioned that, which is neat. (Interview 1 p. 2)

Angela agreed with her friend’s position on the gentling process as she later encountered feelings of intense frustration, later on in the day while she was at work.

Angela described this nature experience as spiritual, in the sense that it was different from an everyday awareness,

This meditation in nature felt like something that is in water neither floating to the top or falling to the bottom…it is hovering in this sort of medium area…it feels really settled.. and flowing and … floaty like hovering sort of in space that is not …it doesn’t feel like water. It’s like floaty and sort of hovering kind of like something in water that just stays in the same place that doesn’t go up or down. (p. 2)

During the description of this initial synchronicity between the research question and Angela’s lived experience, Angela conveyed the experience in nature as one that has been shared. Throughout the second phase of the research, trees became a consistent passion and focus. There were several key points that arose for Angela; sharing the physical and meditation activity with others, feeling the special quality of the tree; feeling the tree’s magnificence and special energy. She continues to describe meditation as an in-between energy. Understanding the softening or gentling aspect of attending to nature points to how openness can lead to a deeper sensitivity to the environment.

Fall Group Inquiry

Angela enthusiastically affirmed Gwendolyn’s experience of feeling rooted during the fall circle meditation,
I felt the same thing with my feet like really rooted to the ground. But I suddenly felt like because I was swaying I also had an intense feeling, like I was being pushed really fast upwards, as though the little like square foot piece of ground that I was on was attached to this huge...I don’t know what it was attached to. It felt like it just started shooting up ...and suddenly I was thousands of feet in the air and continuing going up but I was really rooted to this so I wasn’t afraid of falling and feeling myself moving around on this one little piece of earth that was shooting up in the air and I felt like there was this huge night ruralness below me. (Group Meditation 1)

Angela imagined herself shooting up in the air, in an upward movement. Her awareness is also rooted through the “the huge night ruralness” below her.

**Dreaming**

During the writing of this chapter, I was contemplating how the mind/body gentling process might connect to peace education. Various movements are present in the dream; nature moves in circular patterns. The interior/exterior and upward and downward dualism is also observed through the movement of humans.

**The Peace Rally Dream**

I was at my mum’s house with two guy friends of mine, and we were hanging out in my bedroom, which is in the basement. I noticed a spot on my carpet where some bugs, or something like that were gathered-like when you see a bunch of ants on the sidewalk-all crowded around this one little piece of food or whatever. It was gross, and one of my friends said, “It is because there’s a bit of honey on your carpet”. But then I noticed that there were a bunch of spots in my room-on my walls and floors where there were groups of bugs congregated. (There were several different kinds of bugs specifically the antish one and some fly ones.) They were gross, yucky, and I was asking my friends how to get rid of them. So I went upstairs to try and get rid of the bugs. One friend was suggesting various things that I might try, like spraying the bugs to get rid of them.

While I pondered, looked around and considered the suggestion of my friend, the other friend came upstairs, went outside and walked half a block from my house to the neighborhood schoolyard. He was standing on the sidewalk right next to the schoolyard, and he got about thirty people and brought them back to the house. They gathered just outside the front of my house. When they first got there, I said/thought, “What!? You’re bringing all these people to my house?!?” It made me uncomfortable because I am a hermit and don’t like lots of people coming to my house.

I had gone to my front door (or just outside to see what was with all of these people that my friend had brought a few minutes and fretted about it and the bug issue. Then when I went out there were THOUSANDS, to hundreds of thousands,
of people gathered on my street in front of my house having this enormous peace rally!!! It was huge, and there were TV news crews filming and reporting it on live TV. It felt like we were going to positively change the world in a big way!

People were calling up radio stations requesting anti-war songs and someone suggested that I email the song that Ben and I recorded called The Politician. Also, at some point I said to my mom, “Is this a big deal”? And she said, “Yeah! There are television crews filming it all”! My whole body has been affected by this dream. It was powerful.

I don’t know how all of this fits in, but I should also comment on some other things that were happening in this dream that are a bit more blurry and confusing to me. When I realized that there were all these people in front of my house, at some point I went down into my basement and found that it was (somehow) raining in my basement/bedroom, and I was scrambling around trying to cover up my stuff and keep it from getting wet. For some reason I remember covering my blue exercise ball with a foam mattress to try to keep it from getting wet (I know that doesn’t make sense.) (Journal 10/11/08)

This dream presents the pattern and movement of nature in contrast to the movements of humans. Angela expressed a childlike revulsion, annoyed by the presence of the insects. Ants are known for their survival capabilities. Flies are associated with speed and agility. Angela protects the blue ball, a symbol of wholeness, energy and childhood by wrapping her arms around the ball. Although this is a protective move and one that keeps Angela from ascending the stairs and going into the outside world, in the dream she embodies an image of wholeness. Her impulse to protect herself, although initially understood as resisting and negating a confluence of experience, is an embodied gesture of surrounding and encircling.

During the winter Angela continued to record several more dreams that showed she was continually being chased by various male figures. The masculine plays a role in pointing us to our path or place in the world. Angela’s dreaming is attuning her to the primal joining between the masculine and feminine. Angela’s cosmological self is called to sing for peace, while this primal dimension, is struggling to deal with issues of the fear of joining, of simply being in the world and risking being taken by the world. In three dreams Angela either ran to the basement for protection or solace or tried to escape to the basement. Angela noted how her inability to move in one dream carried with it, a physical sensation, “But of course, I had that problem that people sometimes have in dreams where I could not run, I was trying so hard, but the dream force was pulling me back and making me go so slowly and feel physically unbalanced” (Journal 11/21/08). Questions emerged from the powerful feeling tone of these dreams and were discussed in follow-up conversations. I asked her, “What did she feel she was running from?
What was she protecting and why was she so scared?” In a moving and powerful discussion, Angela described the fear that has been with her most of her life. She does not know why she feels so much fear. During the second interview, I asked Angela how she understood “basement” as a symbol or image. Angela claimed that she thought basement meant, “The home base” …Yeah, that is what I said, the base” (Interview 2 p. 3).

*Psychic Moments*

Angela wrote about and interpreted various events in her journal as psychic, “I’ve been noticing that I am a bit (more than usual) psychic about things lately, and I’ve been learning to trust my intuition more” (Journal 11/22/08). In a journal entry in the late fall, Angela explained an intuitive moment while traveling on the subway, “I thought to myself, “Geoff probably has to get off at the next stop, so I shouldn’t start in on my story because Geoff will have to cut me off…I had no idea where Geoff lived, but for some reason I just knew”. The next day Angela explained to Geoff, her psychic moment, “It’s weird”, and he replied, “No it’s entanglement, ya know”. Angela concludes, “Anyway, those things are neat, and I know that I am fairly intuitive, and that I should trust my intuition more” (Journal 11/22/08).

Angela relayed another moment where she noticed a hydro bill that was coming due on her mother’s desk. She went through a scenario in her imagination where she agreed to pay the hydro bill for her mother. Moments later her mother did ask her for some help with the hydro bill, “I thought it would be dumb to ask my mother to pay me back for several reasons (including the fact that she is letting me live in her house for free, but also just because it would be the right thing for me to do)” (Journal 11/28/08). Angela wrote, “I was just allowing my thoughts to flow… I thought that it was neat that I knew it” (Journal 11/28/08).

*Nature and the Imagination*

Angela began a contemplative moment by focusing on the last few leaves of fall, “I just thought it is neat that I keep looking out and noticing this one lonely leaf that has not fallen from the tree, neat! The tree has been almost completely bare for a few weeks, except for this stubborn leaf” (Journal 11/22/08). Later Angela added her symbolic insight, The leaf is still there! I’ve actually realized that it is a few leaves (perhaps three) attached to one little twig that has snapped, but is still attached to the branch. But it is the only cluster of leaves on the whole tree. It looks alone and special and out of place (Like some people?). I wonder how long it will hold on for? (Journal 11/24/08)
Angela wrote that the leaf was “alone and special and out of place” and although she did not explicitly make a connection between herself and the leaf, a feeling that she is making a connection between the leaf and “some people”, points to how imagination can facilitate an empathetic connection between self and other.

**Nature: A Feeling Vibe Dream**

Later in the fall, Angela also wrote about a dream that chronicled a trek in nature. She was impressed by the epic feeling of the journey and described the energy of the dream, “The weird thing was the vibe, energy of the dream, and of the journey that we were on was a bizarre mix of subdued and relaxed and really epic and important”. This dream trek had a unique feeling, it had the same vibe that Kelli’s dining room had the very first group meeting…it was the same vibe that I felt after my yoga/meditation meetings with my two friends. It was really a nice magical vibe. So these are the parts of the dream that I can remember. It was a strange feeling dream, and one that is hard to describe because it wasn’t so much on what was happening as it was on the setting and the feeling vibe (Journal 11/25/08).

The group in the dream went through several seasons. They began their journey in a snow-covered field and followed train tracks. They slipped on the ice while trying to follow these tracks and eventually began to wander, discovering their own path, “And water was a focus of mine-both in the form of ice, snow and lake”. The scene changed to summer and the group found themselves at a lake and began to wade in the shallow water. The bottom was soft but spikey, filled with light green plants. The water was warm and still. Similar to our yearlong inquiry, this feeling vibe dream showed a journey through seasonal changes. The dream conveyed a warning of the possible danger of following along a track as opposed to finding one’s own path. Ironically the final image conveyed stillness and peace, with a subtle tension between the soft and sharp qualities of the plants at the bottom of the pond.

**Taking Time to Attend to Nature**

One evening Angela decided to go outside to focus on an aspect of nature that caught her attention while she practiced for a singing gig. In essence, this reflection shows how Angela connects to the vegetative through her imagination and feeling,

First I just sat there while I practiced the melodies and I paid attention to the plants and trees (trees, grasses, other plants) in my yard, how they moved in the wind, the quality of light… I really liked looking up from under my tree and watching them moving in the wind. I found it really calming and relaxing and peaceful. I don’t think I noticed anything profound except that I felt comfortable and connected with my surroundings.
Eventually I stopped singing and just sat still and observed my surroundings for a while. Then I closed my eyes and tried to really believe that I was connected with everything in the universe (sounds really cheesy, but oh well). On an intellectual level, I do believe that. But I wanted to really grasp that idea at a deeper level. That is hard because most people’s idea is that people, objects, physical stuff is all separate—not connected. So even if you believe the opposite in theory, it is really hard to REALLY fully believe it. This is what my meditation was about.

At one point in the meditation, I saw my arms reach out to either side and grow, really, really long, and wrap around the entire world—really fast! And my arms wrapped round and round the earth, about 50 times around (Really long arms wrapped around the earth about 50 times (Really Long arms, hahah).

I also tried to imagine myself being connected to different things in my backyard such as the tree fort. I did this by focusing on my energy, which was directly connected to the ground and my feet were touching. So I focused on this energy from my feet to the ground. Then I tried to focus this energy further out, across the ground, towards the ground right under my fort…I had to spread the energy out slowly so as to keep the feeling of connection (the Angela energy). If I tried to do it quickly, I would lose the connection. When I got my energy to the ground I then moved my energy up the legs and the walls of the fort to its roof…When I was meditating and seeing myself bouncing around, it felt like one of my most deep and natural meditations ever. I was able to, more than usual, let my mind go, and stop thinking.

I was totally still for quite awhile, to the point where I couldn’t really feel my hands, but it felt really good, not bad. I was really able to settle into it. Way more than usual. So that was neat. I didn’t think I was waiting for something to happen; I was just letting myself be, and I totally zoned out. (Journal 11/28/09)

In this outdoor experience Angela developed a unique approach to following energy and the imagination as she attended to nature, beginning with watching movement and light patterns, experimenting with stillness and identifying her belief in the interconnectedness of the universe. Angela’s experiment with imagination and energy led her to practice energetic connectedness in her lived experience. The primary benefit of this experiment was that Angela felt her thinking was not guiding her awareness.

Winter

During the winter group inquiry, Angela’s reflections showed a direct relationship between a settling in the mind and body and a freeing of the imagination, “I feel like the energy is solidified sometimes when we are singing a note together. …The bowls are a similar feeling. When the bowls are ringing its like the energy of the room is going from unorganized and unsettled to being concentrated and settled”. During the still meditation, which occurred after the
singing bowls, Angela remarked, “I thought about my back pain and then saw a raven spread its wings” (Group Inquiry 12/21/09).

Later, during a brief wandering through the snow and cold, Angela explored her connection to bare branches. Angela was drawn to the bushes, “the bare snowy branches” (Dec 21, 2008). She continued to describe how she visualizes herself sliding through the branches and then, “The last time, I saw my body get so entangled in the branches that I became a part of them. We were attached. That was cool”. When I read this entry I remembered her psychic moment with her friend who described their connection as entanglement. She noted however, that she didn’t really fully settle into her body and that meditating with her eyes open was more difficult (Group Inquiry 12/21/08).

Resonant Authenticity: Music, Meditation and Jazz Improvisation

During the winter Angela took up the challenge of deepening her understanding of authenticity and resonance. She wrote of the importance of coming to a place where the “music flows out of you freely”. Angela explains the method,

...you start by just playing the melody, and you play the melody over and over so that it feels totally comfortable...then you begin to stray away from it very gradually. And the more comfortable you become, the more you feel totally free to play other notes that come to you. (Journal 02/17/2009)

Angela continued to explain that the point is to only play what you “honestly feel compelled to play...So you have to learn to play less and make the notes that you do play really count, quality over quantity”. She acknowledged that these ideas are abstract, “Sometimes it can be frustrating because it feels like you’re looking for something, but you don’t know what”.

Angela writes that she used this approach to play All The Things You Are. Initially, she was not aware of what was “bullshit” playing. Sometimes she was not compelled to play at all, “But I stuck with it and when in doubt, I just resorted back to playing only the melody until I felt really compelled to play something else”. One day, during one of these exploratory sessions,

I finally got into a state where I was playing really honestly, and it felt very emotional. It felt like I really, really meant every note I was playing...It was very neat, and I was very glad to have got to that space. I felt it strongly in my body...like something really emotional was happening. Kind of like if you were having a conversation with someone about an intense subject, and just talking about it makes you feel like it’s releasing something, and your body feels extra sensitive and open and kind of heightened...It’s so hard to explain, but the emotions can be strongly felt throughout the whole body... in the chest and in the skin. It’s like you can feel your skin or something. Anyway, this happened because of the way I was
playing music and it felt very powerful and, as I said, emotional. Like, in my soloing, I was finally actually saying something that meant something for once, instead of just singing a bunch of notes just to fill up space. (Journal 03/20/2009)

There is a subtle similarity with Angela’s epic dream, as she attempts to move beyond the note (track) to find emotional authenticity and a new connection to the song.

Angela explained that she kept working through the song and after quite some time, “It felt like I was really small and the song was this whole world all around me that I was swimming in. And instead of the song just speeding by me, and me having to jog to keep up with it, so to speak, which is kind of what it felt like before, now it felt like the song was going way, way slower so that I could, in such a relaxed way, pick what notes I was going to sing…seemed to be hearing different notes in a different register of the song.... kind of like I was seeing the song from a different perspective—a deeper one—and hearing it in a different way…I had definitely reached a different state of consciousness. It felt really floaty and relaxed and suspended and neat”. While Angela’s interconnectedness experiment in nature revealed how she followed the imagination, this experience helped Angela to follow feeling the rhythm and sound into a different state of consciousness,

Even though I’ve been meditating a little bit since we started meditating in drama class, this was the first time I really fell into such a different state of consciousness, and I wasn’t even trying to meditate! (Obviously the ‘trying’ itself would be preventing me from getting into such a state).

Angela’s experimentation with jazz improvisation revealed some reoccurring ways of describing energetic feeling. Angela remarked on the floaty and hovering quality of the experience. Repeatedly Angela refers to a feeling of slowing, of calmness, gentling and opening. It is within this rhythm that Angela relaxes into freeing the imagination and going off the beaten track to find her authentic singing self.

**Spring**

When we gathered in The Owl’s Park, it was a freezing cold day. Angela responded to the challenge of listening to her inner self by writing that she felt that “happiness, openness and trust are really important to me”. However, she writes in her reflection notes that she already feels as if these were characteristics that came naturally. Instead, Angela begins to think about what she lacks, “The things that I thought of were confidence and fear of taking risks. I am terrified of taking risks” (Journal 06/25/09). After the meeting in The Owl’s Park, Angela felt she
needed to “put herself out there” by approaching more experienced musicians for the chance to play music. Then, after a visit away for a few days, she lost all her drive to be a part of a jazz group. She was stupefied, not understanding the initial success of her efforts to make connections with good musicians who respected her talent and wanted to work with her. Neither did she understand her sudden lack of interest. Everything was progressing in the direction she had hoped and then her desire faded; her “passion and excitement” disappeared.

Angela wrote in the spring journal, “Since this change of heart/focus has occurred, despite my frustration and confusion over it, I have decided to trust my feelings of not wanting to dive head first into a music project”. During this period, Angela began to rethink her life, making small but significant changes in her routine. She described going on several walks in nature. Her chronic back pain was becoming an obstacle in her life and so she began taking yoga classes, “After only one 90 minute yoga class, I started to feel my shoulders shift back and down, and my entire back loosen up” (Journal 06/12/09). Again she relayed how the energy in her yoga class is focused and she appreciates the chance to be in her body fully after the class. Lying there still, “she felt her whole body pulsating…I can’t describe what it meant, but it was very powerful and intense” (Journal 06/12/09).

Angela wondered if the experience of learning to improvise is beginning to inform her life choices. She wrote that she wanted to use the summer as a contemplative time, “I need to figure out how to be creative and to express myself. That is what I am really lacking, “…I need to write my own songs. I have to re-learn how to create for the fun of creating”. Angela continued to comment on how she did not have anything interesting to contribute to the world and that now she is convinced that she “probably does have things that can be expressed”. Angela admits, “I still feel really confused about how I am going to do this and what’ll happen, but at least I know that this is what I have to do”.

**Summer**

We’ve talked about attending to nature and we have also talked about the sense of gentling to the mind and body… I have been attending to nature a lot since spring, but I didn’t know how to write about it. So I talked to my Mum, and she said that when we attend to nature (at least her and me) we naturally gentle to it without realizing it. ..I realized that she was right because as soon as I look at a tree or a body of water I automatically feel a connection to it, a respect for it and a sense of calmness and peace.
Right now I am sitting in my backyard and it is beautiful. It is sunny out but there is a lot of shade in my backyard and the sun is shining softly through the leaves of my trees and making beautiful shadows on the back porch. There is a very soft breeze, which is making the leaves flutter and their shadows dance in such a beautiful and magical way. In fact looking at the light and the shadows is almost putting me in a dream like state. Wow, I am amazed that you don’t have to put any effort into gentling to nature. It just happens.

I went for a walk down by the boardwalk. On the walk I kept noticing the trees. I was drawn to almost every tree I saw. I saw a few Norway Maples...and I just thought they were so beautiful, with such solid trunks and beautiful leaves. They seemed as if they have a strong purpose and they are fulfilling it with elegance and pride. ..You know when you get a negative vibe from a person? Well you never get a negative vibe from a tree...I’m worried that you will think I am writing what I am writing because you think that is what I think you want to hear. But I am not. The more I attend to nature the more I love it and respect it. (Summer Journal)

**Summer Equinox Inquiry**

Our summer group inquiry, took us down to the lake on a sweltering day. While sitting on the rocks by the shore, Angela wrote,

…I pictured myself as a successful musician, singing. Then, when I first looked out at the horizon, I pictured a clown coming over the horizon toward me. Just for a second, then he disappeared. When I looked at the horizon and thought of my future, I immediately saw myself meditating on a mountain, draped in beautiful fabrics. This image of my future resonated with me more than the musician one. I also looked into the horizon and saw a thick line of horses galloping towards me from a long way off. (Summer Journal)

I recalled Angela’s earlier comment in reference to her understanding of magic when she was 10, “I knew you couldn’t make horses out of nothing”. During a telephone conversation I pointed this out to her. We both chuckled at this irony.

However, Angela described her challenge with attending to nature as a structured activity. She pinpointed the way in which she described her expectations during the meditation prior to her gaze into the horizon. This is how she described her challenge in the group inquiry discussion,

Well, every- when I , as I said when I was trying to pay attention to nature I was still enjoying it and had my feet in the water and it was really nice but still my mind is stuck because every time I try to do something, it doesn’t work and as soon as I stopped trying and I had my writing book...(Summer Group Inquiry)
Angela encountered a dilemma regarding how to choose what to attend to, her desires seemed split between the water and trees, “I don’t know why it was, if it was… I decided to attend to water because lately I have been attending to trees a lot and I have been writing about that. Every time I see a tree, I am so drawn to it and I just love it and I feel weird saying it but I never used to care about trees as much”.

In the inquiry, Angela again addressed the issue of expectations versus spontaneous creativity, “It is the same thing with song writing. It is the same thing. If I feel like I need to write a song it is the same thing. Well I can’t usually write a song. Nonetheless it is the same thing. It happens in all aspects of life…It happens in all aspects of life when I am trying to do something and my mind won’t let me, it just blocks it and then we went to our journals and then I relaxed in nature completely and then I felt it around me” (Sumer Inquiry 4 p. 15).

_Galloping Towards the Horizon: Lessons in Interconnectedness_

A few days prior to Angela’s meeting with an astrologer, we talked at an East Indian restaurant. Angela explained in a moment of heightened presence that when she travels the subway or walks down the street, she wants to inhabit an awareness that is difficult to describe. She explained it is a space in which she does not want to put too much energy forward, to smile too much or react negatively to what is happening around her. Angela was talking about remaining present and she was realizing what she needed to experiment with how to feel connected in a non-dualistic way.

Angela continued to describe a space in which everyone shares purpose and place thereby belonging naturally and authentically. When she described potential scenarios from the subway, I realized she was not just talking about creating balance between two dualistic principles, the light and dark aspects of her existence. Angela was rejecting the need to use an evaluation of bad or good as her primary way of interpreting the world. She was beginning to see that the shadowed aspect of the world had a place as well and that being in the in-between is an important space in which interconnection can be experienced.

_Meeting with the Astrologer: Intuition_

Angela wanted to update her understanding of her development in relation to her astrological chart and consulted an astrologer. The meeting was tape-recorded. I listened to the recording and studied the astrologer’s charts. The astrologer affirmed an aspect of Angela’s personality that appeared in Taina Ketola’s original reading; the strong presence and continual emergence of the feminine and Angela’s future role as a peacemaker. The astrologer pointed out
that Angela was also highly intuitive and encouraged her to play with her intuitive ability as a way to learn how to handle her unconscious as it emerges. Angela’s transformation accelerated after the meeting with the astrologer. So many epiphanies flooded into our conversations and yes, it felt like a long line of galloping horses. We talked about the unified field and of our toning experiences. Angela began to remember felt sensations, like the flutter in the air when we toned together as a group. While sustaining one single note a subtle resonance could be felt and heard. But in the context of Angela’s development she was beginning to feel an inner voice of wisdom. All of her experimentation with the imagination, energy and intuition led her to listening for the wisdom that arises from orienting herself to her interiority. She returned to school in 2010 and is regularly performing in jazz ensembles.

Compassion Towards the Sacred Other

During the last moments of writing this chapter Angela described to me the break-up between herself and her boyfriend. During this time she was contemplating how interconnectedness could pass through her thoughts and move through her heart. Angela had decided to break up with her boyfriend because she did not feel that their commitment was mutual. She was demanding his devotion while avoiding following her own path. He seemed devastated by the breakup and about the prospect of her dating someone else. Angela said that she experienced a profound moment of compassion, a vivid awareness of her selfishness at wanting to date so soon after the break-up. She identified one of the reasons for this shift was her feeling for him, which was heightened by a vision she experienced during an emotionally charged moment in the discussion.

The vision lasted only a few seconds. In the midst of feeling anger and sadness, Angela saw a vision of herself as a cat, clawing away at her boyfriend’s crossed arms. Finally he succumbed to her “pull” and wrapped his arms around her. At that moment she felt his grasp was suffocating and so she broke free, shattering his arms, which had turned into cement. It was at the moment that she felt his pain that she began to feel her own. Angela understood how their relationship dynamic was being fed through need and a rigid demand for the other’s responsiveness. This is one example of how Angela’s mind/body awareness contributed to her ability to hear her inner voice of wisdom and how it is beginning to connect to her lived challenges.
Angela’s Concluding Thoughts on Nature

Lately I have been more interested in trees and less interested in water. But I wasn’t drawn to the trees, and I decided to walk over to the cliff area and sat on the wooden chair and I couldn’t stop staring at the water, like the relationship between the water and the sky—it seemed more connected than usual, probably because my vision is blurry (Laugh). At first the clouds were really beautiful and then I kept staring into the horizon into the distance. I felt these two lines from behind me like across towards the horizon, like a path and I just felt like I was on the path like I was physically drawn but then it felt like I was zooming towards the horizon and it was really neat and it was just there and everybody was congregating round you and I had to stop. It was really neat like I was really feeling difficulty from all the change in my life. And now I feel excited about the vastness and the mystery and the change and I could trust in it. Like trust what I wanted and myself and just flow with it. It was free…cool… like lines going towards the horizon and I saw it and it was really neat. (Summer Group Inquiry 5 p. 5)

Summary

Angela described her love of drama in the beginning as bouncy and fun, confirming the feeling of new and “endless discoveries”. When Angela was a young adolescent, her feeling function of awareness was more refined than her imaginative visual sense. She conveyed an intriguing irony regarding her learning style. While describing herself as a visual learner she reveals that the visual aspect of her imagination was not really activated until the nature phase of the inquiry.

I became aware of my assumptions about the imagination through listening to Angela. The assumption was that highly creative people possess an imagination that they see in a hidden part of themselves. But in Angela’s case her creative energies are activated bodily and her experience in the meditation circle revealed that I needed to guide her in orienting the practice to her felt sense so that she could perhaps tap in to other dimensions of her creativity as she became more comfortable.

Her description of energy as hovering and thickening, connects to her experience later in the inquiry when her friends shared a meditation in nature. Her felt expressions of energy involved words like “floaty”, “in-between”, and “solidifying”. The result of this energetic experience showed that Angela could feel focused and calmed afterward, as long as she became aware of her possible negative reactions later on in the day. Working and experimenting with energy helped Angela in calming her anxiety and with her ability to focus.
Following Angela’s experience revealed a consistent rise in her imagination as it is expressed in images. Connections between dream symbols and imaginal experiences emerged in the image of her arms wrapping around the ball in her exercise dream and the world in her energy experiment. Angela saw a raven in the beginning of the inquiry and by the summer inquiry she was experiencing numerous images; as well as the emergent image that expressed her and her boyfriend’s relational dynamic. Angela’s experience with her boyfriend was the first spontaneous moment in which a feeling of compassion and image arose simultaneously.

Angela began with a symbolic connection to a leaf on a tree. Her dreams revealed the elemental and seasonal rhythm of her growing connection to nature. Her dreams also pointed to her place as a peacemaker. Her song experiment was an arresting example of a careful approach to finding one’s authentic voice/song, beginning with following the path of the melody carefully and then feeling a movement away from the melody. She expressed a type of transpersonal experience as she felt herself become small in relation to the song. Angela also notes the slowing effect this synchrony had on her perception of time.
**Chapter 6: Gwendolyn**

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“...the whole terrain flounders, the soil underfoot is afloat, the constellations are shaken loose from their moorings, the whole known universe, including the imperishable self, starts moving silently, ominously, shudderingly serene and unconcerned, toward an unknown, unseen destination.”

*Henry Miller*

**Background**

During our first interview, Gwen and I reminisced about how she danced to the song, *The Rose* in *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*. The dance was situated between the last scene and the curtain call. It was added as a bridge between the lingering power of Paul Zindel’s story and the young performers as they successfully completed the year of creative work. The goal was to provide a moment that would poetically transform the characters that had not changed throughout the play, in particular the addicted, embittered mother, Beatrice. At the age of fourteen, Gwen had given a powerful performance of Beatrice, showing how she could tap into the inner rage that tends to let loose when a life does not play itself out as expected. Did I want to set the character free from the confinement of her own helplessness, her alcoholism and even her relentless cruelty to her children through this dance? The dance I would have choreographed might have been a performance drawn from the desire to escape the misery.
of Beatrice’s existence, a conciliatory bridge between Tilly’s educational triumph and Beatrice’s inability to feel the transformation of her daughter. There was still the darkness that hung in the air from Beatrice’s intransigence.

Gwen conveyed the sadness of Beatrice with a kind of inner wisdom that emerges from a mysterious place within. The dance was not a rush to proclaim that love could in the end conquer all. But somehow Gwen knew that Zindel had intended for us to feel the fullness of this character’s existential rage and suffering. The dance gave hopelessness a body. The dance was not a dance of triumph, it was an effort to expand through Beatrice’s complex. Gwen’s dance was expressive of the pathos of human woundedness and I believe it marked her adolescent understanding of how to mourn for what is missing in life.

I remember feeling a cool intensifying energy spread like a wave throughout my head as Gwen accessed the space where the movement of her body issues from currents that are forming and are not yet known, where words rise and are not yet seen or heard. She danced her felt relationship between herself, Beatrice as an archetype of failed hubris, and the space itself, which seemed to surrender to the lyrics of *The Rose*. This depth was gathered inside of each rhythmic moment, gestured, swooped, lunged and held at the tip of Gwen’s point shoes. A silent grace escaped Gwen as she danced to the sound of the acting troupe’s voices.

*All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves, we must die to one life before we can enter another.*

Anatole France

*Loss as Transformation*

Gwen shared her feelings with the group as we sat around my dining room table to talk one day before the research project officially began. There is a transformation occurring in Gwendolyn’s life now and it is evidenced in the psychic pain that she regularly expresses. There is a resonance with Gwen’s solo dance and the way in which she is now encountering her own sadness. Several times Gwen lamented the loss of the Friday night drama classes and expressed her longing to integrate creativity into her university experience. During one of Gwen’s classes the professor asked the students to remove their shoes so the class could explore an exercise together. Gwen said that she began to fight back tears, remembering her bare feet in our Friday night drama classes. A drama workspace is sacred, and part of designating the space and honoring it as sacred was exploring the warm-up exercises in bare feet. However, being barefoot
is also a symbol of freedom for Gwen, and this is more about who she is than our habits in the class. In the summer, she will kick off her shoes and she will enjoy the feeling of the ground underfoot before springing forward to take another step. Gwen walked confidently down the mud path during our summer inquiry, swinging her sandals and carelessly walking through the mud that ran down the hill.

Despite her life challenges Gwen seemed ready to take on an inquiry, “I know that anything I do with the members of the old group will be a positive addition to my life and my personal journey, just as it always has been” (Email, June 2008). The first phase of this chapter shows how Gwen’s relationship to body, creativity and imagination is integral to how she articulates her sense of self. Beginning our interview with mourning the loss of her former connection to her body and her confidence, Gwen also mourns the loss of her creativity, stating that, “she does not know where to put it”…(p. 2) and finds the constraints of school and a job crowd in on her connection to self.

Gwendolyn is now 23 years of age and is attending the third year of a social work program at a university situated in the downtown city core. Her educational goal is to apply to the master’s of social work program at the same university. Gwen’s current job placement involves working in a women’s shelter. During the year of the inquiry portion of this research, Gwen served as the events coordinator for the university women’s centre.

At the time that I first wrote this chapter, Gwendolyn lived with her parents and younger brother in a three-bedroom apartment in the west end of the city. Both parents are gifted visual artists. Gwen’s father, Peter, is self-employed and does home renovations. Gwen’s mother Georgia, works at a building box store in the paint department. Their apartment is an intriguing living space, with Georgia’s original sculptures, sketches and paintings. A large portrait of Gwendolyn as a young Juliet sits on an antique bureau in the dining room. A dagger lies in the foreground. Not only is Georgia a gifted visual artist, she is well versed in the stories of the gods, and Christian mysticism. She holds a keen interest in the body’s energy system as it has been described in the energy chapter. Georgia’s lived understanding of creativity, her knowledge in the area of Christian Hermeticism and spiritual mentorship to the group members and myself were invaluable to this drama group’s evolution.

Gwen’s mother and father designed and built several sets for our productions. One memorable design was the Alice and Wonderland set. Gwen cultivated her production skills by working with her mother. She continued to develop her design skills during high school, both
through the shows that she was assigned to support at her arts high school program and through our production of Anne Marie MacDonald’s *Belle Morale*. Gwen also helped out as a mentor for the younger children’s productions and as a costume designer for several of the junior group’s drama performances.

*Arts High School to University Theatre: The Shadow Side*

Gwen felt overtaxed by her high school production courses and believed the workload was unfair. Because she knew how to design costumes and sew, she fell into a leadership role in the costume department and became overtaxed by the hours she had to put into the shows. Gwen felt her audition preparation time was affected by this stress. During the final year of our drama group, Gwen prepared a contemporary and a classical monologue. She auditioned for two university drama programs. With ample performance experience, passion, talent, personal sacrifice and commitment to theatre, we were all disappointed when Gwen was not accepted into theatre school. The sting of not getting into a theatre program struck Gwen to her core. She explained that throughout her whole upbringing, her life had been drama and dance. For the two years after high school, Gwen claimed she just existed, not even caring to relate to her coworkers.

She spent the next two years working as a security guard and as a sales assistant in a costume store. Confusion over what profession she should choose and a growing sense of uncertainty lead to a feeling that she had lost herself, “I don’t know how to explain it. I felt lost like somewhere along the line I lost myself. I was really excited when I started university because there were a couple of years where I did not know where I was going” (Interview 1 p. 3). She traced her sense of losing her self back to the final two years of high school.

*Being in Body*

Prior to focusing on the drama experiences, Gwen expressed her present challenges with her body. Growing up, Gwen had lived in a tall, lithe ballet body. Since experiencing depression and her transition into university, Gwen had gained enough weight that it was affecting her knees, her feeling of being in her body and her sense of identity. I can still hear her voice tremble as she described her body, “It hurts all the time...like all the time”. The topic of body emerged repeatedly throughout the interviews and her journal entries,

I am completely disconnected from it…(emotion) *it hurts all the time*...like all the time…I am having such trouble with my legs right now …and I think it is because I have put on so much weight but I am not entirely sure. I have always had bad knees…so like
my one knee in particular is just not happy with me at all. If I sit too long in one position or if I try to bend it, it gets pissed off at me. (Interview 1 p. 2)

This passionate and articulate young woman is grappling with issues of self-confidence. She connects the feeling of the loss of her former body to her loss of self-confidence,

…I am not myself and I used to-for my whole life I have had confidence…And I lost it somewhere along the line and I miss it so much like I can’t remember how long its been since I felt that way and I don’t know what to do to get it back. …. I feel incredibly unremarkable and I am not used to it, which is kind of arrogant, but true. (Interview 1 p. 2)

Gwen also insists that she knows who she is but cannot sustain a connection to herself. She said that she knows what centers her but she, “could not make time to make it so… I know where I want to be and what I…I know and when I look at myself and my life I don’t see it reflected which makes me upset” (Interview 1 p. 3). Gwen’s sadness over her loss of confidence and feelings of being disconnected with her body was accompanied with a sense that there were two selves or personas, one that knew how to regenerate her connection to life and one that does what it takes to achieve good marks. Gwen identifies more significantly with the self that knows how to play,

…When I have time, I come back. Like this holiday has been really good. I have resurfaced. I am doing rejuvenating goofy things. I had time to play in the snow and jump in puddles and whatever goofy things I needed to do, like, play a lot of monopoly. I feel like I am coming back. It is kind of weird, my marks were really good again this term…So like I am measuring up but I don’t care…loosing monopoly makes me feel so much better than getting A’s. (Interview 1 p. 4)

Gwen’s feeling of discomfort comes from a feeling of being disconnected from herself and stems from her relationship to change, “I hate change…but I don’t mind if I change as long as I know that there are some things that just make you up and I don’t really care how they get expressed. OK, if its not dance and theatre but fine it needs to be something” (p. 5). Gwen understands this stage in her development as a time of realizing that her core self (the things that make you up) emerges when she has the time to play and access her inner child.

After Gwen told me of a few social projects that she had initiated at university, I searched the Internet, to see if there was more evidence of Gwen’s unfolding professional identity. The woman portrayed in the on-line newspaper articles, the woman who possesses power, surety and
fire, appeared miles away from the ways in which Gwen described her psychological state of being.

The Feminist/Social Work Persona

Three articles discovered on-line in the university newspapers showed a dimension of Gwen that was expressive of her leadership as a feminist. Gwen worked as the Student Events Coordinator at the university women’s centre. The newspaper articles include quotes detailing Gwen’s views on issues pertaining to women and equity. One article reviewed a Wen-do workshop that Gwen coordinated for the women’s centre. Aside from the movement element of Wen-do, there is a yell. Gwen described the nature of this unique expression, “For once in my life my voice came out strong. I could feel it rumbling in my body as it rose through my core and erupted out of my mouth. After it ended, I felt so good I spent the afternoon dancing around the office” (Journal p. 70). Another quote was given in response to the suggestion that male teachers should be hired as a safety measure, "Being male is not the B all and end all of stopping violence — in fact, it can be quite the opposite. Being male does not always mean that a man is imposing…”Another newspaper article reported on Gwen’s poster campaign, which was aimed to have tampons put back in the dispensers in the women’s washrooms. In the article she quips, “For a woman, having a period is not an option!”

What was at Play?

Gwen is in the midst of what she recognizes is a soul shift. Given Gwen’s depth of feeling and her willingness to be candid about her process, our talks progressed with relative ease. However, although her commitment was consistent, I was caught up with her inner Hermit when checking on some of the facts about the chapter. Gwen freely admits that she has difficulty returning phone calls and emails.

Participant Contribution

There were three interviews, transcripts of Gwen’s contribution in the group inquiries, pictures and videos of her work in the drama class, telephone and email exchanges. In addition to three interviews, and the newspaper articles found on line, Gwen chose to keep a journal that included a description of her dreams, descriptions of lived experiences, synchronicities, reflections on nature and the group inquiry. Gwen declared that her true communication gift is talking and believes that she is not good at the journaling process. Gwen revealed that while writing for assignments at school, she often feels as though she is “making it up” (p. 6). Additionally, as she writes she hears a voice inside her say, “You are a fake” (Interview 1 p. 7).
Gwen also offered a reflection on our interview dynamic, “So you were talking and before you said something I would get an image and you would say it…it was fun” (Interview 1 p. 15).

**Phase 1: Drama**

By the time Gwen arrived in my class at the age of ten, she had taken several years of ballet classes and was comfortable with the physical exercises. Gwen was adventuresome, enthusiastic and yet deeply sensitive. She moved lightly and elegantly, as if sometimes she was rolling forward on the balls of her feet, effortlessly balancing on some magical ball. The leader in her has remained consistent, as Gwen has always been committed to issues of social justice and inclusion and was consistently welcoming to new students.

*Younger Years: Introduction to the Fool*

The very first production Gwen did was a fairy tale titled *The Big Stone*. Gwen was ten years old and played the role of the Fool, which she absolutely enjoyed because she got to dance around and make gestures behind the King’s back. Fool at the age of ten meant free movement, mockery and hidden or veiled intelligence. Gwen recalled that the Fool reappears numerous times throughout Gwen’s drama experience. Gwen later plays Ariel and wears the jester’s cap. The fool’s cap appears again when Gwen played the narrator in *Alice*. In a book on Hermeticism and the tarot, a book Gwen’s mother had introduced to me, the anonymous author writes that the Fool, “presides over the mysteries of EROS”. Throughout the chapter on Eros, the fool is described as a wanderer and an anarchist, “The esoteric name for the fool is Love” (Unknown Author, 1993 p. 591).

Gwen shared the sentiments of Isabelle and Angela, claiming that her sharp memory of the drama years was due to the fact that the drama experience was very important to her. She recalls feeling that it, “…was a whole lot of new things” and, “We did all sorts of weird things”. I asked her to give an example of a weird thing and she replied, “We did that bus stop exercise with clown noses”. Gwen remembered that the students had to make weird sounds like, (She exhales a large and voluminous “BLA”) and that the students, “…all had these clown noses on and it was excellent I remember that” (Interview 1 p.11).

*Early Transformations: Start a Motion and Transform it into Something Else*

We tried to recall the warm-up exercises of that early period. Gwen remembered an early version of the *Transformation* exercise,
The thing that I remember doing was close to where we wound up going. It was that exercise where you start a motion and then somewhere along the line you have to change the motion. How does that go? We were all in a line and it had to go around in the line and someone started a motion and you had to take the other person’s motion and turn it into your own motion. You kept telling us not to think about. (p. 9)

Gwen recalled that this exercise was scary, “I don’t know you always thought your motion was going to be bad, weird or I don’t know”. Gwen remembers thinking, “I am not supposed to think about it, but I am thinking about it now, ‘Stop thinking about it!’” (p. 10). I asked her if she knew what not thinking meant at the age of ten. Gwen replied that she knew that it meant, “Don’t sit there and decide to go quack and then, go quack” (p. 10).

Gwen recalled that the Psychological Shipwreck was a much more sophisticated play. With an ironic giggle she said the play was, “exactly what the title implies”. She recalled her character’s name (Dornell), the other members in the class, the large blue sheet that was used to represent the sea and she recalled wearing her father’s rubber boots. Gwen also remembered that the students reacted to the sophisticated vocabulary. Gwen assumed a child-like voice, “Big words, we say big words” (We laughed) (p. 8). Gwen concluded, “It was good and we learned a lot of words by that way too. I think that being in drama had a lot to do with my vocabulary…that and reading books but it has been really helpful in later years, I mean if you are going to try to say something you have to try and figure out what it means, if you are going to say it right…” (p. 8).

Addressing the creative dynamic of the group, Gwen described the supportive feeling the creative process evoked,

We learned how to work like a team. I can remember supporting each other and working together on stuff, trying to help each other figure stuff out, how to do things. It was also that we would put in ideas and everyone would have some weird idea and something wonky would happen. Everyone felt sort of good about that and everyone bawling their eyes out at the end of year, ‘You have to come back next year, you have to. You are coming back aren’t you?’ (p. 14)

I asked Gwen what it felt like to get dressed up in a costume and become a character at this stage in her development,

I think that was the easiest part of it. Like when I lost track of everything in high school and stuff. That was the place I wanted to go back to in my acting because it
was just so obvious and you didn’t get caught up in all sorts of ridiculous things. ‘OK, the character is sad right now …how did I feel when I am sad? OK we’ll be sad.’ It was just simple and you could just do it. You don’t have to worry about whether you are being sad. You just do it. (p. 14)

Isabelle had expressed how she was brought to her boundaries and beyond. Gwen stated that although the work stretched her limits, the challenges were not enough to make her feel like quitting.

**Ariel: The Tempest**

Even though there is more complex language in Shakespeare, Gwendolyn’s connection to the character through gestures and rhythm helped her to understand the play. At the age of 11, Gwen was the youngest person in a cast of eight who performed *The Tempest*. Gwen admitted that the Shakespeare text was difficult to understand when she was twelve. Half the time she “had no idea what was happening”. Several rehearsals were spent trying to connect Gwen to the rhythm or felt sense of Ariel. Gwen and I reminisced about the rehearsal where the character came alive in her. Gwen’s Ariel was born in the instant that she pouted and stomped through the line, “Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains. Let me remember thee what is not yet perform’d of thee” (Act 1 ii). Gwen also recalled the rhythm work I introduced to teach the students how to embody iambic pentameter. Meaning in Shakespeare can often be derived through the rhythm of the text. Gwen referred to the iambic pentameter rhythm work as skipping. However, I intended to use the image and action of riding a horse to offer the students a chance to feel the strong beats of the iambic pentameter. Fresh out of acting and directing school, I was floored by Gwen’s twelve-year-old performance of Ariel in Act III. She commanded the space and understood the energy of wise admonition. Gwen claimed that she remembers Ariel’s lines from Act III iii more than any other character’s lines.

**Masks and The Lofty Jerk**

Gwen enjoyed the Commedia dell’Arte the following year, but revealed that this style of theatre was not really in her comfort zone, “I think it has to do with the very sort of like …probably completely untrue way that I saw myself. Not untrue but like unrealistic. I didn’t see myself as tricky or greedy or I saw myself in a different light whether that was true…Yeah, I think I was too …moralistic. I could get caught up in other people doing it and I can’t remember really connecting with it” (p. 6). However, Gwen created a distinct voice and gestures for her performance of Mascarille in *Precious Maidens*. In Molière’s play, Mascarille is a character that
is comprised of the pedant and soldier commedia characters. Gwen recalled that it was “fun, fun, fun”. Gwen laughed, “Lofty jerk! I liked being the lofty jerk I think. Maybe that is my negative thing when I am being a bad person. I am either being a lofty jerk or a crazy hermit” (p. 21). Gwen began to note, as we progressed to the early teen years that her memories of the drama experience were beginning to shift to the interpersonal. Isabelle “was a big memory…she still calls me boxer brother when we are on the phone (Mascarillle voice), “One more little kiss please” (p. 21).

Gwen began to affirm the creative skills that were encouraged through helping her mom with the props that Georgia created for the productions. Georgia had devised a large stuffed corpse made for the ball scene in Romeo and Juliet. They took the corpse on the subway to rehearsal and found the curious stares amusing.

For me too, I think I had to learn how to be really resourceful from that. But I was always trying to help her (Georgia) with that stuff. I learned a lot about seeing things in different ways. Then it turned out to be a really useful skill to have. To be able to look at something and say, “What could this be, its not what it is. Like crazy I don’t know how she does it sometimes. The most random things could become …something else”.  
(Appreciative, wild laughter) (p. 11)

Breathing and Colour

Gwen recalls that while the other students complained about having to lie on the floor and breathe, she acknowledged that it was a calming activity. Gwen had no problem picturing colours, “For some reason like a pinkish coulour is coming to mind, like a rosy color that I don’t really like is coming to mind and umm a silvery colour”. I asked her if it was easy to see colours. She replied, “Some colours are always easy to see like green is easy to see and blue is usually easy to see. Like orange… no, I can never see orange”. Later in the inquiry Gwen continued to experiment with her relationship to colour, maintaining that she was “sitting in the colour purple” (p. 10). Gwen shares the inability to see orange with Dylan who also remarked that she was unable to picture orange.

A Paranormal Visit

This is in the end the only kind of courage that is required of us: the courage to face the strangest, most unusual, most inexplicable experiences that can meet us.

Rainer Maria Rilke
When we moved into the Community Centre, the group began the circle meditations. Recalling one meditation, Gwen conveyed her memory of seeing a ghost, “They started (meditations) in the Community Centre and there was a white lady in that room. I remember that really clearly. She was dressed in white and she wasn’t happy (voice tremors). She was very sad … I am getting my ghost feeling now. I get a feeling that something is trying to come up at the back of my throat, sometimes” (Interview 1 p. 18). After the students reported seeing this woman (this occurred more than once) I ceased the circle meditation and as Gwen recalled we worked on intensifying the colour and breath work by making more concrete connections to the chakras. For instance we visualized each energy point, its corresponding colour and how to open and close each energy centre (Brennan, 1993). These activities were important to me on so many levels, but one fairly obvious one was that I wanted the circle meditations to be about the students experiencing imagery and not a circle that invoked any notion of paranormal activity. It did not matter whether the ghost was real or not. Seeing ghosts, whether real or imagined, was not the aim of our drama group.

Meditations: Catching a Piece of You

Gwen enthusiastically responded to describing the sensation of the meditation experience, “Everyone would have his or her thoughts and insights. And I remember feeling in the meditation a tingling in my back, kind of a tingling feeling but not like spiders running up your back, but like something solidifying. Tingly, like a column or like fuzzy feelings in everyone’s hands” (p.25). Gwen described the images in detail,

I saw pictures right away. I saw pictures, scenes played out in my mind and they started with the usual tribal jungle scenes… I remember people with spears and they were muscular…and red…not a really colourful red like fire engine red, but its not conceivable that skin could be this colour but just a little more redder than skin would be...and always trees. They were not jungle trees but they were like coniferous trees…like Canadian forest trees…(p. 25)

Not only could Gwen easily connect to her memory of the meditation experience, she offered a fitting analogy to describe the significance of the experience,

I was always really interested in it. Cause well it was something that was new. I don’t know… it is hard to remember what I really thought about it. I don’t remember thinking too much about it, just feeling. I always wanted to do it. I remember being interested in it. Kind of …I am trying to think of something that would describe the feeling… well... I
don’t know if it is at all helpful, but it is kind of like the first time you are allowed to light a candle or light a match. You kind of have the idea that this might be something important. But it is not a child’s thing it is not a kid thing. It is something you have to take seriously. Yeah kind of like that. (p. 24)

At this stage in her development Gwen began to question the nature of consciousness, “I remember being absolutely amazed at how different they were (the meditations). Then, sometimes I really clearly remember-“I can’t believe you saw that too…you know what I mean? That was always really shocking to me. I always wondered if it came from me or it came from them? Did I catch a piece of me or did I catch a piece of you? Is that possible?” (p. 25). Students sharing the same seemingly random image was a common, if not weekly occurrence. Gwen contributed an integral point with respect to the nature of consciousness and whether during meditation we are opening, to the extent that we “catch” another’s image.

Gwen had not thought about energy too much or consciousness specifically in relation to her own understanding of perception,

It was so much a part of the way my mother thought. Sort of like the atmosphere that was around me. When I started meditating with you guys, then I started going there… But now I actually understand it in a personal way. You know how you understand things with your brain but you don’t really understand them? Your brain goes, “I can really understand how this works but you don’t really until you have a full experience of what its like…‘Oh, I get it now’ (p. 25).

Gwen admitted that she believed in what she was doing and that it made sense and that the circle of drama students engaged in the same activity, offered the container in which she could experience consciousness and a unique connectedness to herself and others in the group.

*Meditation Then and Now*

When Gwen meditates now with the group or by herself she, “*feels* more and it feels more profound”. With the group she is more aware of the people surrounding her, “like I can feel them and sometimes I feel more than that, more like sometimes I feel anchored and I am more aware of the sensations in my body. Now when I see things they are like singular things and they are not so much like a whole bevy of things like this is the same as the things you are seeing now” (p. 26). She reflected back to the feeling of the first meditation circle, “The circle was spinning all the time, I think it was in the summer when there was another circle spinning around us” (p. 25).
**Gamma Rays: Being in a Spot Without Judgment**

Gwendolyn started skipping school in the first year of high school. She admits with hindsight to making a mistake as to which high school she chose to attend in grade nine. Georgia learned of an altercation between Gwen and some boys on the subway. Being concerned for Gwen’s well being, she took her daughter to see the family physician. Gwen remembers, “She (the doctor) talked to me for five minutes and then told me I was depressed” (p. 29). That was a real moment for me and I remember thinking, ‘Is this how I come across to the world?’ I don’t recall feeling depressed until that moment. I just felt angry all the time” (p. 29). Beatrice is the mother in *Gamma Rays* who continually reminds her daughters that she dropped out of school. Gwen reflects, “Beatrice was right where I was…Oh my gosh! I didn’t realize that at the time that is really dumb” (Interview 1 p. 5).

Beginning to notice that Gwen had skipped so many school days, Georgia agreed that the neighborhood school and the creative interests of her daughter were not a good fit. Instead her mother enrolled her in an arts high school, which Gwen attended with Angela, Dylan and Rose. *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds* was an intense psychological play. Beatrice seemed to intersect with Gwen’s life in many ways. Gwen articulates how she reconciled her perspectives on female psychic pain and Beatrice’s drinking habits in order to play her as a character,

> Well it’s hard because Beatrice is a drunk. Well drinking is something I just have no experience with. Drinking is totally repellant to me. It just doesn’t do it. But to be able to explore that part was interesting. And I had to think about it and put myself in that place because I had to humanize it for me. I am very moralistic. Like in high school I was really an ass about those things, you know. I was in the place of not being Miss Perfect pants, so it was good. It made me humanize that negative part, like accept that it is just a part of people as well, that they are not necessarily bad people you have to learn how to- well I had to learn how to be in that spot without putting the judgment on it (p. 15)

Gwen parallels the experience of playing Beatrice with the trouble she was encountering with the mask characters. She draws out the importance of empathizing with a character one is preparing to play. With her voice wavering, Gwen explained the issue of psychic pain,

> I think I caught psychic pain, the drinking thing (voice trembles). Pretty darn sure I caught it from my Mom. Like in my family there is a lot of female psychic pain. And I always felt it so keenly and ever since I was a kid I absolutely railed out against
everything that had to do with being a girl. Everything that said, this is how girls act and this is how boys act. (p. 31)

Gwen continued to explain that a part of her anger had to do with being approached too young by men on the subway.

*Good Night Desdemona, (Goodnight Juliet)*

It seemed as if another dimension to female psychic pain continued throughout the experience of playing Juliet in *Desdemona*. Gwen struggled with playing the role of Juliet, preferring roles that showed strength or transformation, for example, Constance or Desdemona, “…being Desdemona with the knife, like it would have been nice and comfortable… I was always getting into fights with boys and being the warrior. My earliest …like the things that I was drawn to in stories and stuff were warriors. I have always thought of myself as a knight and that is sort of one of those things that I was talking about that is a part of me” (p. 31). Gwen explained that with Juliet she had to be sexual, which was difficult for her. At that point, at the age of fifteen she had walled off everything to do with sex “everything that had to do with that (sex) turned negative”. Gwen says, “Juliet is exactly where I didn’t want to be so it was very, very difficult” (p. 31).

*Summary of the early years*

During these early years Gwendolyn points out the simple and yet fundamental aspect to how she felt opened to experiences in drama; the feeling of newness, the fascination and pleasure of weirdness, being able to voice random sounds and trying out random ideas and experiencing the wonkiness of them. Finally, this period established important bonds between the students as they learned to support one another and handle the ongoing challenges of balancing relationship with putting on a production. Gwendolyn affirmed a lasti

*Phase 2: Nature*

*Fall*

Gwen’s fall journal began with recollections of her experiences in nature when she was a young child. A connection to trees and birds remained consistent throughout the year’s journal
writing. Gwen also shared a story of how her family went together apple picking on the Thanksgiving weekend, watched birds together and waded barefoot in a pond. The inner child reappears throughout her writing about these moments in nature,

As I meditate on the subject I keep coming back to this core thing so I think I will write about it. Ever since I was a little kid nature has been so special to me. It is like when Dylan said when we met in the fall that she gets really happy when she goes to the beach. I really resonated with that because I feel that way too, not just about the beach but about most places where I am surrounded by nature, most specifically the forest. Something about the trees is welcoming. It is a hard sort of feeling to explain because it is so emotional. I mean it is an emotional reaction. It has almost nothing to do with mind at all. As soon as I get into a forested area I get excited and all my senses seem to sharpen, especially my hearing and my smelling. I feel a deep sense of contentment. I feel in my element, often almost giddy.

If I stay there for a while obviously I calm down, but things easily move me. Everything seems more beautiful and I take the time to enjoy things. I feel a spiritual connection and part of my soul sings. If I were to choose anywhere in the world to pray it would be in the Canadian forest beside something beautiful like a creek with rocks at the bottom or sitting on a mossy rock. Everything about me is better when I am in the woods. I think because it makes me feel more connected in the world which makes me want to be better in the world...I guess the best way to say it and the simplest is I love everything, not just superficially, but deep from the core of me. (Journal 1 p.10-14)

This is a sensitively written excerpt, which outlines the emotional and sacred feelings evoked by being in nature. An initial feeling of connectedness, excitement, giddiness gives way to calmness. I could not help but be moved that Gwen simply wrote about love, “deep from the core of me”. The statement, “part of my soul sings” illustrates the celebratory and sacred dimension of this experience and indicates how being in a forest fosters a connection to who Gwen feels she is.

**Group Inquiry: Nature Experiences**

To initiate the beginning of the inquiry the group requested that we engage in a meditation together, and so we gathered outside at night for a meditation under the moon (Fall Inquiry). We had very little preparation for this experience, other than moments of wandering but this meditation evoked a different dimension to the sensual, emotional, ontological aliveness Gwen feels while being in a forest,

The trees were silhouetted against the blue backdrop of the night sky and there were sounds all around us in silence… I chose to focus on a tall pine tree directly in front of me. It was everything I felt I was not at the moment; tall and straight and strong a sentinel in the night. I imagined myself as the tree; I tried to
straighten my spine and imagined my head reaching up towards the sky. I closed my eyes...The first thing that I was aware of was my feet. They were rooted to the ground. I felt as if they were planted to that spot. I began experimenting with that feeling by gently swaying back and forth from side to side. As I swayed I began to feel things at first just small things like an awareness of living things around me and I slowly began to feel the people standing to either side of me as I swayed towards them. It was a feeling almost like a change in temperature a subtle difference in the air like walking from one room to another. I kept with those feelings until I could feel the whole ring around me, all my friends in a circle. Looking around me I wonder if that is how a tree feels when it is in a forest, if it is aware of all the others surrounding it on some simple level...we broke. I felt calm and better…the last thing I saw was the moonlight reflected in Rose’s fairy hair. (Fall Inquiry 1)

Gwen imagines herself as the tree, “strong and straight and sentinel”. A sentinel is a border guard; energetically inhabiting the border archetype seemed to transform the militancy of the soldier image into something different, a strengthening of Gwen’s sense of confidence. Aligned with the tree through her imagination, she straightens her back and roots herself through her feet. More fully inside of the presence of the tree, she described her subtle awareness deepen until she could feel the circle, a feeling she had described during our talk about the drama meditations. I note the progression here of beginning with activating the imagination, becoming aware of an archetypal presence, further exploring tree as symbol, becoming aware of the subtle energy changes and an awareness of sacred other. There is a shift from the vertical energy flow to a horizontal encircling energy flow.

Storms

In the fall Gwen reviewed her day-to-day lived experiences in nature and described how she is drawn to watching storms,

There have been so many storms lately. Thunderstorms make me both crazy happy and very calm and content and reflective. I love my room on days like this. It has two big windows where I can see the storm and right outside there is a row of four tall old pine trees, which I have loved to imagine about since I was a kid. (Journal 1 p. 20)

Gwen acknowledged the strange admixture of emotion, “crazy happy” and “calm”. She indicated that she slips into a reflective mode that brings forward her imaginal experiences with the trees outside her window.

Birds

Gwen wrote that she has a special connection to hawks and watches them also through her bedroom window,
Last year there were two magnificent hawks, which flew around my windows all through the winter exams and essays. I became attached to them. It seems that whenever I was feeling at my lowest they would show up. Looking at them always made me feel better. They reminded me to be strong and calm, that the world was bigger than my exams. Today right when I have been freaking out about papers I saw one flying over my house. It made me feel a lot better. Actually it was like a visit from an old friend. I took the time to just sit there watching it in the sky. Just watching that hawk managed to change my whole outlook on the day. Watching the hawk reminds me of all the majesty in the world and in myself. I noticed that after watching hawks I sit a little straighter in my chair. (Journal p. 43).

Gwen watches these two birds and begins to use words like magnificent and majesty. An awareness of herself in relation to the events of her life brings a new perspective on her place in the world. Gwen noted the effect that gazing has on her energy and posture; she lengthens and straightens after attending to the presence of hawks.

*Transformative Visualization*

A visualization technique helped Gwen to calm herself after a turbulent moment with her boss. She noted that using a visualization technique in order to satisfy one’s need for vengeance is not as edifying as simply attending to nature and following the imagination,

First I imagined my boss falling into a large hole in the ground, which he couldn’t get out of. When he asked for help, I told him that I didn’t give a *%$%^ (yes, I am embarrassed to admit it but I thought that at first) but since that thought didn’t calm me down (I still needed to focus on my lecture). I stared out the window instead. Outside there was a big tree covered with ivy and two squirrels were chasing each other around it. The tree had lost most of its leaves but the ones that were left were a pretty yellow colour. I took a deep breath and imagined myself away. I put myself in a little tiny cottage in the middle of nowhere and I pretended I was looking out the cottage window at the tree. I pictured a fire burning in the corner and tried to feel the heat on my face. Then I closed my eyes and began to picture the rest of my tiny cottage. I created smells and furniture (all mis-matched and old). I tried to hear the woodland sounds coming in from outside and I just sat there in my imaginary sanctuary for a little while. It worked really well and I felt so much calmer and more human after I was able to continue with my day. (Journal 17-18)

This is a unique example of how nature, gazed upon through a window activated Gwen’s imagination. This imaginal experience provided an open door to allow her thoughts to flow beyond her anger. Following her imagination provided an opportunity to return to being present to the class with calmness and focus.
Synchronicities: Connecting to the Sacred Other

Gwen explained an encounter with a rather unusual sacred other. An experience with a dead rat became an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of other,

It snowed a while ago but the snow is mostly gone now. I was walking through the alley behind my house to get to the bus stop and I saw a dead rat. It was all smashed and frozen. I am not a fan of rats but I don’t hate them as much as most people do. For some reason this poor frozen fellow moved me. Often all rats are just animals like any other trying to stay alive and eat. Just because they try to come into our warm houses everyone hates them. They are totally unloved and everyone wants to kill them. So here this rat totally reduced to the sum of its parts all squished on the road. I felt so sad for him (or her)….I moved him out of the way of car wheels and told him I was sorry he was dead and it was true. (Journal p. 142)

Gwen experienced a moment of compassion as she moved the dead rat out of harm’s way. Later, at school a synchronous event affirmed and deepened Gwen’s understanding of the sacred other,

A weird thing happened today. When I got to class my teacher told us a story of a dog that people brought home from vacation who turned out to be a rat and we were talking about how the rat had always been a rat. It never changed but when they called it a dog it was worthy of love but as a rat, it wasn’t. My teacher compared herself to the rat (she is queer) saying that that was how she felt as a kid growing up, like her parents thought she was a dog but she knew she was a rat. I just thought it was weird how these two things popped up on the same day. I think I will pay more attention from now on as to how we are told to view things. I will try to look outside of that and see things from other angles. I don’t think there should be such a thing as an unwanted creature. (Journal pp. 30-36)

Again, Gwen explained how her views have changed. This is an important synchronicity in light of not only her need to accept and include the other in relation to the social work field, but how she continued to locate what she has “othered” in her interior world. The following section is another example of lived experience and a dream synchronicity. These dreams and events connected Gwen and I in our relationship to the question of this inquiry.

A Synchronous Primal Scream

Like many Canadian universities and colleges, every year on December 06 a memorial for the Montreal massacre is held. Fourteen women were killed December 06, 1989. Gwen prepared a speech, which she said was written from her heart. Below is a journal reflection on the experience of the primal scream, planned as a communal ritual at the memorial,

I had a weird voice take over my experience today. As part of our December 6 memorial we were going to do a moment of screaming as well as a moment of silence because while remembering is important, we must be committed to action. It was about unsilencing ourselves. I was ready to make a deep bellow like my
Wen-do scream. I breathed in and prepared myself but what came out of my mouth was so different it shocked me. I had been expecting to hear a deep yell but instead the little girl who lives inside me under the wall which is held across my diaphragm/lower body hijacked my voice and I let loose a high-pitched scream. I was so shocked that my hand went a little limp and I almost caught my hair on fire…obviously that little girl needed to be heard. (Journal 1 pp. 39-41).

This experience of voicing one’s primal self illustrates an important dimension to emergent awareness. Gwen became aware of her inner child and the wall that she described earlier in this chapter, between her lower body and her diaphragm.

On December 04, it was my grandmother’s birthday. She passed away during the latter part of the summer of 2006 (Nigh, 2006). Winifred appeared to me on December 04, 2008 in a dream and seemed to speak to me directly, unlike other dreams where she has shown me images and scenarios. In this dream I heard two short and direct sentences. My grandmother introduced me to a figure named Rose, a lovely elderly woman with round cheeks and a countenance that seemed on the brink of some form of merriment. Rose reminded me of the feeling of home I experienced when rolling out piecrust, “Where in the house does Rose live?”, was my dream question, “In the wall”, replied my grandmother.

There was something strangely resonant about our experiences as I examined both time and meaning in our journal entries. Although my journal reflection on December 06, was not as eloquent and heartfelt, I too allowed myself to voice a primal scream. Nothing of that expression made rational sense, except that I was aware of the benefit of the bodily release. Yes, I may have been initially invited into the experience of primal rage through some reoccurring relational frustration, but the desire to voice the primal seemed to arise from a different place, a space that called for the voicing of the unknown, a release from the borders between the unconscious and the conscious. In other words, I was voicing something that was not yet known to me. There is a resonance with “wall” in our experience and so it was that the archetypal child and the crone emerged through this synchronicity.

Winter

During the winter group inquiry, Gwen noted her felt sensation and imagery while we were toning, “I could hear my voice this time vibrating on my note. I could hear it vibrating across my chest and in my sternum...Kelli’s note was purplish but not a normal purple, sort of a reddish orange like purple. I felt it leaving my mouth like a snake” (Group Inquiry 2). When we wandered outside Gwen responded to the sound of the wind, in the trees, “It was the wind,
calling me to meditate like the bowl only more alive (Group Inquiry 2). Gwen experienced a pulsing sensation, “Then I moved around to where the wind seemed to be pulsing me, I tried to feel the force of it on my body”. Then an icicle caught Gwen’s gaze and she wondered what it might be like to be water turning into ice. Moving as if she was ice, cold and hard, she continued to attend to the sound of the wind again, as if hearing the complaint of the trees. She realized that perhaps trees don’t like to be ice either. As her body did not like the experiment with ice, she turned her attention once again to the water. In this experience Gwen continued to experiment with rigidity and flow.

Later in the winter Gwen reflected on her connection to colour and began to explore colour before going to sleep. Gwen wrote that she was trying to, “realign herself before sleep”,

I have been sitting in the colour purple a lot. It seems to be coming really strong. I must need something from the colour, or maybe some part of me lives in purple, needs something, maybe healing. My mother says that the purple chakra is about connection with higher spirit and finding your place in the world. I am going to take the colour purple as a good sign. I really like purple. (Journal 2 p. 52)

Holistic Knowing

In Gwen’s aboriginal course, she is learning about how First Nations people view the world, life and healing,

It just makes so much sense. They look at life and people in such a holistic way, knowing that we are more than just bodies. We have minds and hearts and spirits and souls that need to be taken care of too…First Nations people understand that not only are we connected to another but with the environment. It is from the earth that they gain knowledge and understanding…(Journal 2 p. 55)

Gwen wrote that she wants to learn to heal the whole person not, “only the aspect that hurts… I need something to bring me back into alignment and help me live in a balanced way” (Journal 2 p. 60). Gwen described a sweet grass ceremony where one asks for help from the Creator to “live, see, hear, speak, think, feel and walk in a good way with a good heart…This kind of centering activity has been missing from my life since our classes ended. I’m glad it’s coming back and on a Friday too” (Journal 2 p. 61). Gwen wrote the following poem,

I dream about calm cool waters
And a canoe to paddle in
I dream of fresh air crisp in the early morning
Spiced with the rich scent of leaf litter and tree moss
I dream of sleeping all night because my body is tired from swimming and hiking
I dream of waking up in the morning feeling rested.
I dream of catching a fish, big enough to eat
And then I will cook it in my fire.
I dream about my favorite old baggy sweater, smelling of campfire.
I dream of smiles and laughter and moonlight swims.
I dream when I am tired and too burnt out to work anymore
I dream these dreams to keep safe when my life is so far from my dreams (Journal 2 p. 62)

Dreams
Gwen chronicled various nighttime dreams throughout her journal, dreams of being chased by a moose and being bitten by her boyfriend and various birds. While she conveyed repeatedly that she derived comfort from a connection to birds, in her dreams, birds continued to bite her. Another dream showed her boyfriend biting her legs, in a place where she has felt discomfort. I believe that these dreams seem to be calling her to *bite into life*, or as the images indicate, life will bite into her.

Spring
During the spring gathering in the park, Gwen opened with a reflection on the surrounding trees, “It was a cold day in the Owl Park. The ground beneath our feet was damp and the air was dancing through the branches of the surrounding trees who were beginning to wake from their long winter slumber” (Spring Inquiry). Gwen acknowledged the importance of relationship in this reflection, the trust and comfort that she feels with this group,

We gathered in the gazebo, with the familiar faces I have known forever, each one slightly changed over time. We spoke, each sharing unashamedly with the others what it is that we were searching for, in our lives and in our selves. I appreciated the simple trust that forms over years of work, laughter and self-discovery. I sat in the cold gazebo letting the familiarity of these people and our shared experiences pull me back towards myself.

(p. 61)
Gwendolyn began her time wandering and mourning the loss of her former self and her confidence. She then followed her feeling, to “take her questions to the elements and the earth”. Gwen wandered under the rose garden arbor, beside a large tree where she again, was drawn to watch the wind shake the branches. Another reference to standing tall and free emerged, “to the trees standing tall and unbound by time …or the long progressions of winter” (Journal Spring Inquiry).
Gwen found a place in which to silently attend to whatever aspect of the surroundings that she was drawn to, “I crawled beneath the sheltering branches and sat at the dim hollow beside the resinous trunk. I had been looking for balance”. Then she watched a small squirrel, 

It was here where the tiny squirrel man found me. He was strong and healthy and clothed in a simple fur mantle, perfectly proportioned save for the fact that he was 12 inches tall. I heard him say, “You are small.” I sat there thinking what could this mean until I saw the others gather again. I have since come to understand it to mean that I am small in the greater scheme of things. I am one drop in the bucket that is the world and that is OK. I do not have to be the biggest or the brightest. I do not have to do it all myself. Just because I let something go does not mean that the world will stop turning. I am small and that is OK. (Spring Inquiry Journal)

By the end of the spring term Gwen began reveling in simple pleasures, like taking a chair outside to sit in the sunshine. The enjoyment of the warmth and light seemed to take her on another imaginal journey, “I pictured several places where I can go out of the way of city life, places where I am one with my body, trusting it and loving it” (Journal p. 76).

**Summer**

The chat by the lake in the summer began with another synchronicity. We both had unconsciously submerged a technological device in liquid. In the middle of the night Gwen had slipped her phone into a glass of water. In a moment of frustration, while running to get the phone, I had spilled soup on my laptop. Gwen confessed her many issues surrounding the phone, returning calls and feeling as if her inner hermit wanted to keep her protected. I was realizing my resistance to being involved in a project that I didn’t feel a sense of synchrony with and I had realized that it was time to make a choice regarding whether to continue my involvement.

As I wrote the poetic description of our talk I also recalled how the waves and the luminosity of the light on the water gave us intermittent pause from discussing what seemed irreconcilable about politics and social inequities. As I wrote the poetic description the continual emergent appearance of animals seemed almost unusual. The fox appeared and the birds were unusually loud and active. When I considered the pulse of our conversation, it seemed to contract into moments of impossibility to moments of agency and acceptance. We began with the complexity of power relations, the frustrations of her summer student placement and issues surrounding Gwen’s relatedness to others. I suggested a strategy of attunement as Gwen relayed a story of facing a potentially embarrassing situation with a nemesis. Her face seemed to soften
and possibility streamed back into her demeanor. “Yes, I can approach the situation with vulnerability,” she said. I did not say vulnerability. I had said attunement.

**Summer Solstice**

The summer solstice meeting revealed a deeper commitment to balance through joy. For Gwen’s future she continued with her commitment to “balance and joy”. Gwen wrote, “I concentrated on feelings instead of thoughts and plans. For my future I want to keep this feeling of wholeness and connection because after all if I can find this feeling within myself I know my life will be good” (p.92). She continued to write about how she notices this place by the lake as a natural setting to watch many different ecosystems, the water, the beach the cliffs the marshes, all of the inhabitants, “From the rock spiders which hurry around on the beach to the tiny swallows who dip and dance through the air…it is so easy to see that I am a part of it all, I am a part of the cycle as I fill my lungs with new air and the breeze from the lake gently lifts my hair, life becomes a thousand times simpler” (Summer Inquiry p. 2). Gwen also noted how she feels in relation to the rest of the group, “I have noticed a decided difference in myself when I am in the midst of the group”. Gwen described the group as a second family, “I do not feel shamed or self conscious in their presence…I am able to drop much of my day to day pretense”.

The bugs are biting
But the grass is soft and plush beneath my bare feet
and the summer breeze is gentle on my face
I am happy and content and calm

**Summary**

Gwendolyn described her early creative experience in terms of her role as a young leader. She affirmed her enjoyment and receptive feeling to the learning in the drama group as being initiated by the sense that everything was new and weird. Gwendolyn recalled the *Bus Stop* exercise, which also explores the tension between vulnerable openness, neutral and impulsive energy. She learned through the early *Transformation* exercise a beginning awareness of the relationship between movement and thought.

Gwen acknowledged the importance of language development through drama, pinpointing that “trying on” new words was integral to her love of language and reading. Gwen revealed her awareness of an archetypal tension between the lofty jerk and the crazy hermit. Her
primary recollection of the production aspect of drama was that it taught her to be resourceful, and contributed to the cohesiveness and intimacy in the group.

One of Gwen’s strongest connections to the warm-up exercises was the colour exercise. Her experimentation with this work carried throughout the inquiry year. As an adult, Gwen meditates on the colour purple as a means to calm herself and to explore a feeling of place. I believe that she thinks deeply about her place in terms of social justice and equity but that this exercise also cultivated her sensitivity and commitment to wholeness and well-being.

Although Gwen recalled experiencing a bevy of images when she was a young adolescent, she more succinctly described the feeling aspect of the experience in the nature phase. Gwen felt a tingly feeling and she described it as solidifying energy, “Tingly like a column, like fuzzy feelings in everyone’s hands”. Her comment bore some similarity to the description of a column in Isabelle’s meditation. In terms of her awareness of her thoughts, although she did not recall a plethora of images, she remembered feeling as if the group shared their thoughts during the meditation, “Did I catch a piece of you or did you catch a piece of me?” The exercise caused her to question the nature of consciousness and allowed her the opportunity to experiment with developing her own understandings of consciousness. While she experienced symbols in her adolescent stage she now experiences more feeling and a greater awareness of others during the meditation experience.

What happened when Gwen attended to nature? During the wandering portion of the inquiry Gwen attuned to her feeling sense and her imagination. Gwen also began reflecting back to her childhood relationship to nature. Through that reflection she described the unique sensual and emotional feeling she experiences in the Canadian forest. Storms, trees and birds outside her window also evoked memories of imaginal experiences as a child. Numerous times Gwen noted that being in nature promotes a feeling of connectedness, love, calmness and magnificence. This feeling sense led to a reflection on her feeling of place in the world. These reflections pointed to wanting to be better in the world and eventually allowed Gwen to let go and accept her “smallness”. The warrior archetype had placed a burden on Gwen to become a hero, to fight for justice. This smallness, invited by her imaginal interaction with a squirrel, was an effort to balance her life and allowed her to surrender to the larger whole.

Gwen noted energetic aliveness directionally, meaning she often is aware of a feeling of being drawn upwards and rooted downwards. She could also feel the travelling vertical movement of energy as it encircled a group. Her description of the fall experience in the opening
circle included the energetic sensation of a wave. During Gwen’s moments of attentiveness with nature, her imagination is freely integrated with her felt sensations.
Chapter 7: Dylan

Plays
The Psychological Shipwreck
Cinderella
The Flying Doctor
Romeo and Juliet
The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds
Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)
Seventh Year Review
Alice in Wonderland

Roles
Chorus
Stepsister
Sabine
Juliet
Granny
Desdemona
Tilly
Eaglet/Duchess/Gryphon

All practical esotericism is founded on the following rule; it is necessary to be one in oneself (concentration without effort) and one with the spiritual world (to have a zone of silence in the soul) in order for a revelatory or actual spiritual experience to take place.
The practical teaching of the Magician? The practice of unity. (Unknown Author, 1993 p. 11)

Background
In the early spring of 2010, I listened to Dylan sing and play the guitar at a west end café. The café was situated on a side street and drew a steady stream of neighborhood walk-in customers. On this Sunday afternoon, the café’s inhabitants passed the time reading books or leaning seriously over their laptops. Dylan joined my table for a few moments before playing. She was a few minutes late, after having been in a minor streetcar collision. After calming herself, Dylan simply sat on a chair, arranged her nylon guitar case and balanced her guitar on her knee. Matter-of-factly Dylan confessed her nervousness, saying she had not sung in front of an audience in two years. In an earlier interview and also during the group inquiry, Dylan had revealed that singing in front of a crowd was extremely nerve wracking. The tone of her voice was clear and steady. Dylan performed her own material and sang songs about love, friendship and living in the city. As time went on, my attention shifted to her lyrics. Later in this chapter I include the song lyrics that Dylan wrote during the course of the research inquiry.

Dylan is now twenty-two years of age and has just completed an English degree with a minor in drama. She lives with her family in the east end of the city. They live by the lake on the edge of a trendy beach neighborhood. Her mother is employed in senior management for a finance company and her father is a computer consultant who works from home. Dylan has one brother who has recently applied to law school. Dylan however feels both comforted and conflicted about living at home with her parents. On one hand, she loves the relaxed feel of the
neighborhood and its proximity to the beach, but on the other hand, the people who live there appear the same to her. Dylan explained her dilemma,

> All the people living and moving into this area and how they have been changing the atmosphere, everything in their life is so bland and so ordinary. It is so boring and not appealing to me. I think maybe my family …but I know they are happy doing that. My parents both went to school and now they have good jobs and they really, really care about school and marks and stuff like that and I guess I do too… (Interview 1 p. 17)

After returning home from a disorienting first year university experience to live with her family Dylan now wants to leave the comfort and predictability of her neighborhood to find a more diverse community where she feels she can be more creative. I asked her to clarify the type of atmosphere that might stimulate her creativity. Dylan described a drama class where the focus was on reading plays written from a variety of cultural perspectives. Dylan feels that she could be creative amongst a more diverse community of people, “the more diverse your experiences, the more you have to write about…you can’t write in the same way when everyone is the same” (Interview 4 p. 1). Dylan’s new vision for her own home, as she prepares to leave her parent’s home, includes a spectrum of economic backgrounds and cultures.

**Education**

After public school, Dylan attended Bridgewater High, the same arts high school as Gwen, Angela and Rose. Dylan’s experience at Bridgewater, was positive and expansive, in terms of offering her a variety of art forms to explore. She preferred this approach to more specialized schools where the students were forced to choose one art form, “In that sense I loved Bridgewater because you could do anything. I did acting and singing in the first year and in the second year, I did dance and acting and in the third year, singing and acting. And in grade ten I got to do guitar class. They gave you more opportunity to learn whatever you wanted to learn and they didn’t care if you had never done it before” (Interview 3 p. 3).

**Trying to Find a University Theatre Program**

Dylan auditioned for three theatre programs at the end of her final high school year and was not accepted into the drama programs of her choice. Two years after leaving high school Dylan was experiencing depression over her educational direction and choice of universities. I gathered my energy to ask her a difficult question after painfully considering Gwen’s struggle to find a university theatre program. Dylan agreed that not getting into a drama program was extremely difficult. She also felt that in all of the auditions for university drama, the
improvisation made her feel the most anxious. After having finished her degree she will join an improvisational group.

Dylan spoke emotionally about leaving home at the end of high school to attend university out of town. Having to leave her friends to move five hundred kilometers away did not turn out to be an experience Dylan could thrive through. During our follow up interview Dylan’s eyes filled with tears when I asked her if that year she encountered depression. Reaching for a tissue she explained the duress she felt with trying to fit into a program that her heart was not in. She could not bring herself to get involved in the activities that were offered. While she searched for a new university, Dylan auditioned for another theatre program. She called me from the bus on the way to the audition and said that she was trying to remember the things that I taught her about acting. It was an emotionally charged call for both of us. I felt empathy for her desire to be in a serious acting program, admired her determination, and felt that there should be nothing holding her back. I felt this way because it was easy to work with her. It was very seldom that I came up against her resistance to expand. She was diligent and dedicated and talented. Her marks were good. At the end of that year Dylan discovered a university with a small drama program in her home city and moved back with her parents.

In the spring of 2007, Dylan expressed how happy she was to be back in the city, in close proximity to her friends, and to be with people who were pursuing their creative interests. After returning, Dylan was doing everything possible to remain connected to the arts community as she attended university,

All my friends at my work are artists. Everyone at my work pretty much is an artist and that is why I work there. They pretty much have flexible hours because they know everyone is an artist and they have other things to do, right? And so I talk to a lot of people. I think everyone is so concerned with creating something or being creative and being able to live off of that, you know? There are a lot of people that don’t like that idea. Being creative is unstable and that it is not safe and it’s not regular per se. I think all of those people are just trying to, to be able to do what they love. (Interview 1 p. 18)

Dylan continues to explore a variety of art forms. She worked at the front desk of a comedy club. She writes poetry, songs and has co-written a play. Recently Dylan cut her first CD and has for the first time, performed her own folk songs.

Dylan was the only participant who had already imagined a fantasy for her future. She pictured owning a very large house. Every room in that house would be dedicated to a different
art form. Art shows would be community endeavors. Each art would support the other. There is a strong connection between community and art in Dylan’s life. While talking about plans for the future, Dylan mentioned that her parents had different ideas of how she should plan her theatre career. Both parents believed that she should focus more on the professional requirements of being an actor, namely, having her eight by ten promotional headshots done, getting an agent and networking. Dylan is not sure that she will follow these conventional approaches. When I spoke with her upon the completion of her degree she said that she will try to get an agent but she continues to say that she just wants to do her own creative projects. With respect to her singing, she said that she would not sing cover songs, “I just don’t feel special doing it” (Interview 2 p. 5). Dylan has trouble explaining to people what she plans to do after university,

> Like when you get into school and they start telling you what to think about and what to do and then when you go to university and they have it sort of structured and everyone is going well, “What are you going to do after?” I don’t really know …and then they look at you like “Oh! NO PLAN!” And like maybe I want to do my own thing and I have been writing scenes and then writing music and writing things and they just look at you, like that is so... (Interview 1 p. 17)

I should not presume to complete her sentence, but this ellipsis seemed to speak volumes—that Dylan is not entirely comfortable with the judgment she feels when others confront her desire to pursue her creative interests. Collectively, perhaps this is our fear of liminality, of understanding the deeper value of allowing a young person to wander.

*What was at Play?*

Throughout the interviews, Dylan experienced continuous waves of emotion. She and I quietly wept throughout the first two and a half hour interview. I had missed Dylan. Dylan’s presence during interviews and group inquiries seemed to assume a similar rhythm. She was comfortable with asserting her views and when she wanted to make a point she was animated and enthusiastic. Dylan’s interview transcripts showed numerous ellipses. Her voice would trail off, as her thoughts seemed to disappear into an interior cloud. I did not and could not retrieve all of those thoughts.

*Participant Contribution*

I reviewed the videos, photos and playbills from Dylan’s drama performances. Dylan was unable to attend the summer equinox gathering. She attended three group inquiries, three one-on-one interviews and she wrote journal or poetic reflections for each season. Dylan possessed a
straightforward and yet penetrating clarity during the interview process. She did not choose to follow her dreams on a regular basis but shared her dreams during the group inquiries.

**Phase 1: Drama**

In 1996 nine-year-old Dylan breezed into the summer arts camp. Two months after, Dylan joined the yearlong Saturday morning drama class. She was by her own admission, “pretty shy”, except when she stepped on stage and committed to pouring her energy into a character. There was an arresting, airy quality to her self-contained personality, but she was by no means oblivious to others. Dylan was quick to form friendships and willing to work as a member of the group on creative challenges.

Dylan’s earliest learning memory in the arts involved her experience as a preschool ballet student. She revisited this memory twice during our interviews. Her voice was playful as she navigated her way down the steep gravel hill to the lake. The path to the west had recently been washed out. Spring streams had made their patterns in the mud and we were avoiding the rivulets that had cut their way across the path. Dylan explained with a touch of irony in her voice that after a few ballet classes the teacher informed her mother that Dylan was not altogether compliant. Dylan seemed to be more of a free spirit. The ballet teacher became frustrated with Dylan’s lack of focus when it came to dancing the *Dance with the Coloured Scarves*. Dylan laughed after recalling how she danced off in her own direction, mesmerized by the colour and movement of the scarves. This memory captures a core aspect of Dylan’s embodiment process as she continues to dance off in her own direction while following her various creative interests. Dylan carried her determined commitment to the drama class with quiet fluidity. Her readiness for play revealed itself in the way she pressed her feet into the floor. Almost immediately they would spring up again. Her arms willingly flew open and the ends of her mouth spread into a ready grin.

And when I write this chapter I remember her at the age of 16 struggling to create the character role of the duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*. I recall her struggle to make sense of the following line, “I quite agree with you, and the moral of that is—‘Be what you would seem to be’—or if you’d like it put more simply—‘Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been or would have appeared to them to be otherwise’”. That year Dylan transformed her creative energy into three distinct characters, with three distinct bodily rhythms and vocal tones.
The Alice year was also the final year that Dylan participated in the drama group. The following fall she decided not to join the group that met in my basement studio. Dylan wanted to broaden her theatre training to include audition technique courses. I remember her emotional farewell.

*We went through it but when we were growing up*

Before I began the formal interviewing process, I got together with a few of the members of the drama group and asked if they would be interested in participating in a group inquiry. Dylan’s comment during our first interview reflected the sentiment that she expressed at our informal chat at a coffee shop, months prior to the beginning of the group inquiry, “We went through it but when we were growing up. We went through it but when we were growing up…most of them (the exercises) made you think about yourself and like what was happening in your life kind of thing” (Interview 1 p. 1). It is this comment that repeatedly returned to me.

Before interviewing the group members, in my theoretical preparation for this study, I had placed exclusive emphasis on the mind/body activities. These youth participants continued to point out the importance of these activities in relation to their own development.

*What drew you to drama?*

Dylan was introduced to drama through the arts camp that I worked for as a drama teacher in the summer. Each child took part in one of four classes throughout the day; music, art, dance and drama. At the end of the week the children performed a play, which integrated all of the four art forms, “I met you in the summer when I was in the camp and then I decided that drama was what I loved best and I decided to take your class” (p. 1). Prior to coming to drama Dylan said that as a child she enjoyed dressing up, “…sort of pretending whatever it was I was interested in” (p. 1). She continued along a similar vein, “…I liked having fun and being silly and sometimes I guess when you were too silly people would say, “OK, You are being too silly …When you were someone else and dressed up in a play you would do things you wouldn’t normally do” (p. 1). Dylan laughed and added that people couldn’t really judge you for your silly behavior if you were playing someone else.

*Commedia*

While Dylan wished to recall the lighter qualities of her experience, namely being silly and trying on costumes, I applied my research agenda and attempted to focus in on how she felt while enacting the impulses and drives of the commedia characters. I wanted to draw her into what I thought was the more serious dimensions of our creative history and the research inquiry. My former teacher persona, committed to creating skilled and serious young actors, at times
forgot the need to value the joy of creative experience. I believe it was that persona that began to overshadow our unfolding conversation. As a teacher I did try to provide enjoyable activities, and loved comedy, but my demeanor was intense; all fun was mere fodder for the more serious creative cannon. Dylan balanced my ever-present research agenda and repeated her love of Arlecchino. I also possessed a narrow lived understanding of the commedia characters.

Dylan was not really drawn to the characters that let their unchecked darker instincts drive them, “Arlecchino was my favorite”. The Arlecchino commedia character moves like an acrobat and is typically considered a trickster. He is irresistibly drawn to the sound of Columbina’s singing or the scent of a raspberry pie. Showing his readiness for almost anything but work, he bounces on the balls of his feet, his arms flap to the rhythm of his excitement. He tucks into any gustatory delight left to cool on a windowsill and is unabashed at showing his primal ecstasy while eating. Arlecchino’s central character foible is that his body moves faster than his brain, which leads him into many complicated pratfalls. Arlecchino is an archetype of pleasure before thought and is very much a character that is driven largely by unexamined unconscious desires.

Mimicry: Take It As Far As You Want

Dylan recalled an exercise that I had forgotten, where the students walked around randomly in silence. The exercise was introduced to deepen the presence of the character in their bodies and allow them to experiment with gestures on their own. Dylan’s reflection did bare some resonance to how she would wander off by herself as a small child in ballet class. I also found that her reflections on this aspect of our work revealed an important dimension to embodying a character and that is the joy of mimicry,

Oh! I remember you made us walk around a lot with different sorts of gestures, “OK, now you are sort of this person who has to walk around with their arms in the air and then…was that when we started the Commedia dell ‘Arte? That was my favorite thing…”

(Interview 1 p. 3)

While Dylan’s recollection acknowledged that the practice began with mimicking gestures and character gaits, Dylan still understood that the point was to, “take it as far as you wanted”,

I think the commedia characters were so specific and they were so outlined already for you. You can decide how far to take it and how much you get into it. Pantalone with the walk and he was always hunched over. Arlecchino was my favorite because-I just thought that was so fun. I remember that everyone was sort of walking around by himself or herself. But we were also doing the exercise together, at the same time. You said, ‘OK, just walk around the room by yourself
like this character’. I thought that was so cool. You didn’t really think about anyone else in the room, not really because there is no one really watching you and I don’t even think I noticed that you were watching. I thought that was really cool. (Interview 1 p. 2)

Dylan articulated her insights regarding how she came to understand what it was to inhabit a character during the above exercise, an exercise that asked the students to try on the gestures of a character and wander through the space, “…sort of how far away can I get from myself into the character” (p. 2). Additionally, it seemed as if the creative atmosphere helped Dylan to focus further on exploring how she could deepen her ability to inhabit the physicality and rhythm of the character.

I invited Dylan again to respond to what she thought of the darker instincts, the greed and selfishness of the commedia characters. She repeated the word greed and trailed off in her characteristic fashion. An ellipsis filled the space between us, for more than a few seconds. She continued to elaborate on Arlecchino, “He seemed to want to please people”. Initially I felt this comment did not specifically address embodying the darker drives and instincts of the commedia characters. However, considered within the context of Dylan’s life now, her effort to reconcile the tension between pleasing people and her own desires for her future, I think Arlecchino represents an important archetypal presence.

*Trying it On: Thinking and Feeling Like the Character*

Dylan played Sabine in Moliere’s *The Flying Doctor* and remembered that she was not on stage a lot, “But I sort of felt I remember feeling really cool because I got to wear this cool dress. I was the one who made the story go forward” (p. 2). Dylan explained the challenge of thinking and feeling like the character,

I don’t really remember too much about playing specific characters. Because of all the different characters that we played, you got to try on so many different ways of thinking. You have to think like the character and kind of feel like the character in the situation instead of thinking in the ways that you would do. (Interview 1 p. 2)

This statement reveals Dylan’s insights into the early learning necessary to become a character and specifically of the value of “trying on” a variety of characters and their different ways of thinking.

*Getting into Character: It Sort of Seeps into You*

I wondered how Dylan’s creative moments emerged and how did the commedia gestures help her understand what to do to become a character? Dylan compared her experiences with
Arlecchino, Desdemona and the Duchess from *Alice in Wonderland*. Three different characters and theatre styles evoked different insight into the moment where the door between the actor and the conception of the character, opens. Dylan recalled how powerful Desdemona was and how shy she felt at the age of thirteen. She wondered and doubted whether she could draw from that power within herself. As a teacher/director I recall applying encouragement and pressure, ruminating over what it would take for Dylan to step into Desdemona, with all the character’s raw, primal energy, “She is powerful and stands up to people. She stands so strong and I don’t think I really knew how to do that” (p. 5). In contrast to Shakespeare’s Desdemona, Ann-Marie MacDonald transforms the meek and submissive Desdemona into a warrior. Dylan revealed one moment where, in order to discover the power and character rhythm of Desdemona, she worked very slowly in front of the mirror while she observed herself try on gestures and voices.

In contrast to the slow experimentation needed to tap into Desdemona’s power, Arlecchino, with his fast carefree movements left little time to worry about getting into character, it was all about taking the risk and jumping in,

* Arlecchino is really nuts and always kind of jumping around and looking like an idiot, right? And you don’t really want to do that in public because people think you are crazy, right? And then all of a sudden you say I am going to do this! I am going to do cartwheels all over the place and jump up and down and act like a clown. Once you do it you feel so good because you can’t do that in regular life, right? You get past the fear of what other people think. You feel good …I am going to do this motion and stand up… then it sort of seeps into you…(p.3)

The year we performed *Alice in Wonderland*, Dylan exploded with her ability to create distinct characters with distinct gestures. It seemed as if her creative efforts and ability to discover character was not just seeping but flowing into and through her.

Dylan remembered how she struggled to find the role of the Duchess, not recalling specifically why she had so much trouble with that character,

* Another character was the Duchess… I remember I had so much trouble and went home and I looked at the script again. I tried to do the voice and something clicked. I did this crazy voice and I did some flailing of the arms and it was kind of liberating because it was the last year. Yeah, so I was sixteen, right? That was sort of like, “I am too cool”. (Interview 1 p. 4)
In searching for the character of the Duchess, Dylan combined voice and movement in a gesture of abandon. Dylan elaborated on the type of crazy this character conveyed, “it was an ordinary type of crazy” (p. 4).

**Group Dynamics**

While recalling how she struggled to embody the duchess, Dylan also recalled the difficulties that we encountered as an(162,408),(864,538)(179,613),(867,755) acting group. During another moment of deep emotion Dylan revealed that the drama group had meant so much to her and the conflicts that arose with new people in the group threatened her sense of comfort and security. I also had not anticipated that the regression into a child’s world for Alice was going to be as hard as it was for the students when they were in their mid teens. I was asking the young actors to enter into the primal energy of a child. That was an intense expectation given that I did not fully understand what it meant to activate the child archetype within a young adolescent who no longer wanted to identify with being a child. As Dylan pointed out, needing to feel cool is one reason that acting with child-like exuberance was hard. Clearly, we shared a similar sentiment as to why our early Alice rehearsals were problematic. I focused on the psychological perspective while Dylan pointed out the interpersonal dimension of our challenges. Dylan’s voice began to tremble again, “I think it is because the world is so bizarre and you are at an age where you are trying to fit in. I think maybe that is it” (Interview 1 p. 4).

Dylan identified that during Alice the group dynamics were shifting, the drama group had been formerly tight and intimate and that year the members experienced challenges with some new members. Nonetheless, I sensed her creative energy accelerating. This airy, young woman became self directed and focused on trying to realize her abilities as a young performer, “I just said, I just don’t care anymore you know? I have my friends and they like me and I like them and I don’t really need to impress anyone, you know”? Continuing, Dylan explained her feelings towards the drama group, “That was a place where I loved being so much (voice tremor). When it became so hard it was frustrating for me…I don’t know I had to find some way to love it again…I wonder what happened for us to get over that difficult part” (p. 5)?

**Reflections on the Group Ego**

Although this conversation on group dynamics began with a feeling of sadness, we had a good-humored discussion about the symbolic significance of the group’s closeness. Dylan was candid, expressing her point of view about a closed quality that was beginning to occur in the group, despite the members’ openness to one another. The group was, “…so tight and we all
stuck together really well. I think we had trouble with the new kids and how to fit them in” (p. 5).

She laughed, “All of a sudden, super, super close people are sitting holding hands (during the meditation circle)”. Dylan takes on the hypothetical voice of the visiting student, “It’s like, ‘I don’t really get it… but it was normal to us” (p. 6). Dylan explained, “I think there was a little bit of an ego; we sort of thought we were great together and if someone new comes along, “Can you be great with us?” (p. 6). We fell into peals of laughter, mocking the memory of our devotion to greatness.

Dylan wanted to explore another part of the history at the time that she left the group. A number of these participants, Gwen, Isabelle and Angela carried on for another three years. Dylan articulated her perceptions of this change, “I think its maybe because, after some of us started to leave, you sort of wanted it to stay the same and it wasn’t going to because we were all sort of moving on. Maybe you were expecting it to stay that way” (p. 6). After Dylan left, my interests shifted to mind/body inquiry and I developed a mentor program with acting as a focus but also the development of personal consciousness as one of the central interests. But she was quite right. The group had been an alchemical container for my ideas in theatre training and consciousness and I had developed a deep affection for these students. It was difficult to let go.

**Breathing and Meditation**

Dylan did not remember the breathing exercises during *Romeo and Juliet* rehearsals since she was too young at the age of nine to recall how she felt about them. At the age of 11, Dylan recalled, “It was weird lying on the floor and everyone else is lying on the floor and everything is kind of dark and there is music, so it is kind of weird” (p. 9). Dylan remembered that I would encourage the students to try and think of nothing, “I could never do that, ever. I could never do that. I was always thinking about a million things. I would always try to picture white…” (p. 9). While doing the breathing Dylan almost forgot that there was a person next to her. During the group meditation, she had a distinct feeling of the group and being surrounded by people, “…but in the circle you are so aware of those people next to you and then you could feel that your hands were all tingly and then sometimes I would think about what other people would think about…” (p.8)

I wanted to know how Dylan understood the meditation exercises, whether the type of thought processes that occurred while she shut her eyes and held hands, differed from other forms of thinking,
The meditations, they were almost like dreams. You are not sleeping. You are not because you can control so much of what you are thinking about. It is almost like before you go to sleep. Like during the day, you are moving around. There is so much you have to do and then to not speak... you can’t control so much of what you are thinking about. You can’t control what you brain is doing half the time. When you turned the lights back on I wouldn’t remember what I was thinking about because it is almost like a dream that you don’t remember. When it is done you feel refreshed. (p. 8)

Dylan described a different state of consciousness where her awareness seemed to inhabit a space between waking and sleeping and whereby her sense of control over her thinking also shifted. Dylan recalled that upon finishing the circle meditation everyone wanted to share their experience, “Like, it was not what you’d do all the time. Everyone wanted to talk about what they experienced. It is not really what you would do all the time, hold hands and just think. It is not a regular practice and sometimes everyone wanted to share and it was hard to get the class to calm down” (p. 8). Although there was calmness during the meditation and a feeling of refreshment after, there was also a sense of excitement as the group shared in a learning experience that was, “not what you would do all the time”.

The Ghost

Dylan launched into a detailed memory of seeing a ghost during the meditation when she was thirteen years of age,

And sometimes it was weird like that time that we all thought about the ghost...I remember the one time we all saw the ghost, the woman with the white dress. We were on the second floor, so we were thirteen I think...I think Gwen saw her and Isabelle. She felt chilly. It was strange because Gwen and I were next to each other but I remember we both saw the woman in a white dress with long hair. She walked around the circle. Gwen said that she was not scared at all and at first I was kind of ...and she’s weird. Where did she come from? All of a sudden she put her hands on Gwen’s shoulders and I thought...(p. 8)

Again Dylan’s voice trailed off and I could not probe any further, still feeling torn about this unexpected experience and whether I was going to address this unusual happening in the inquiry.

Images and Symbols

I was interested in any symbols that Dylan may have remembered seeing, “I would see circles, a lot of circles, like people in a circle ...I remember gorillas drinking coffee in cups” (p. 10). Dylan also recalled seeing a hallway with a lot of doors and Gwen appeared at the end of a hallway. She never understood why this image appeared or why the image still seems so vivid in her memory. I asked her if she questioned the purpose of our weekly meditations? “It was kind
of a way to get us calmed down a little bit, because we were too excited and just to get us back together after the week. It was sort of a focus thing. We all want to sit here and think about something so that later we can focus on the play” (p.9).

Dylan gave an overview of the meditation in relation to where the student’s were in their development, “But I think it became something that everyone really enjoyed because you know, you just had an entire week of school, bus and rules and stuff like that, and it was just… it was a time to incredibly just chill out and to just think and share it after” (p. 9). Since Dylan repeatedly used the word, “think”, I asked her what type of thinking that meditation involved, “Was it spiritual or imaginal?” Dylan replied, “I think it was imaginal” and she acknowledged again the issue of control, the awareness that she was not sure if she controlled the thoughts that arose or not. Dylan reiterated questions regarding meaning, “Why did my friends just appear at the end of the hallway, for instance?” (p. 10). Dylan again elaborated on the dream nature of the meditation circle,

I think it was more…it was kind of dream like, because you can’t control what you think about in your dreams. You are not really told what to think about and to think about whatever comes to your mind and its different because you don’t control it, right? It is like imagination, which is a thing that likes monkeys sitting in a circle. You know what is something that you do when you dream. You don’t ever think about the fact that you are in a room with a bunch of people. You don’t think about what you are supposed to be thinking about …you don’t have to be thinking about anything so yeah it is sort of dreamlike (p. 10)

Dylan provided a statement on how the meditation fostered a space, in which one could allow the mind to wander, but within the context of shared experience,

I think it sort of made the group feel a little bit closer because when you have thoughts like that usually you are by yourself. Because if you are by yourself, there is nothing going on and your mind still kind of wanders. If you are by yourself and then you are done; and you don’t have anyone to share it with. But then, we all got to share these things and we got to feel closer and that closer made it possible to do whatever we wanted together and feel safe and welcome to do that…(p. 11)

Dylan provided her insight into the benefit of the meditation for the group. The meditation circle nurtured a feeling that the group could, “do whatever they wanted together”, while feeling safe and welcome to do so.
Transformations

Dylan maintained that she found the transformations hard. She would watch Gwen and wondered how she could be so free, “She could move around really well and sort of be in her body and sort of be free. I think I was a little more rigid -to just let go of everything, to be in my body to do anything I wanted…”(p. 12). Dylan went on to explain how everyday movement is constricted and that she soon understood that she had to move away from the movements that were tied to normal gestures, “I had a little bit of trouble letting go of that and Gwen being so free and finally I got it and it felt so really good” (p. 12). This is a simple and yet profound statement that speaks to the power of drawing from the gifts and experiences of another student.

While we were talking, I felt a subtle resonance with how Dylan described her struggles with finding the character of the Duchess in Alice in Wonderland. In reference to the Transformations exercises, she clearly identified her difficulty with the fear of doing the unusual, “It was easier when I sort of watched all these other people doing the unusual and they come up to you and give you this movement. Its like you have to copy it. You are forced into it almost. Slowly and surely it gets easier…” (p.12). Again, the unusual and weird resurfaces in our talk. Dylan affirms her need to mimic the actions of others, as she learned in the Transformations exercise. However close Dylan feels to creative exploration or the ontology of the wandered, she continually has to reconcile who she feels she wants to be with her understanding of what societal critique may emerge.

Breathing and Colour

When I asked Dylan about the breakthrough day in which she finally visualized orange, she laughed and said, “That’s funny I was just thinking about that”. Dylan described the colour exercises,

You would go like, “Red”. I’d see it was like a vapor to me. I could see it sort of like swishing around in my lungs and then come back out. Sometimes all over a little bit and then you would go, “Orange”, and then “Yellow” and then all of a sudden I would see either red or yellow and it would never be orange. I could see everything except orange (p. 13).

However, one day, in a grade twelve-drama class, lying on the floor, listening to relaxing music, “I was tired and busy- just stressed out. We were listening to Enya and I just started to do it (the colour exercise), by myself. I don’t know how, but I saw orange. I wondered why this time and never before… I never figured that out” (p.13).
Mind and Body Awareness: It is More Like Reflection

I asked Dylan to summarize how the body and mind practices inform the decisions she makes now. Dylan maintained that she felt clear thinking was one of the key elements derived from these learning experiences, “I just think about what it did for me. It allowed me to let myself go and allowed me to be able to have these creative thoughts. Because I don’t know… I think a lot of people think that a lot of artistic-ness is kind of weird and artists have unique thoughts and sometimes people will just think it is weird (Interview 2 p. 5). Dylan added that some people have a bad day and go home to their TV, eat, go to sleep and get up the next day, “It (the class) has allowed me to look at things more closely and to figure out why I feel how I feel. It is more like a reflection” (p. 6)

Summary

Dylan’s first educational anecdote revealed one important aspect of her core nature that remains constant, and that is her desire to shape her own motivations and processes. However, Dylan showed that she was also capable of following the experience of others, such as Gwen when attempting to do the transformations. Dylan’s experience in the class in the early years was about having fun and being free to try on being silly. Through trying on various characters she learned how to think and feel like the characters. Dylan was able to offer detailed descriptions of her acting process with respect to three different character types. Her reflections on the mind/body exercises showed that they helped her to become aware of her thoughts and different states of awareness. Dylan was able to distinguish that she was drawing from her imagination and that her state of consciousness was more like a dream in the meditations. Her queries over not being able to see orange, seeing the ghost, and the realization that others were thinking what she was thinking during the circle constitute her lingering curiosities.

Phase 2: Nature

Dark Pines Under Water

This land like a mirror turns you inward
and you become a forest in furtive lake;
the dark pines of your mind reach downward,
you dream in the green of your time,
your memory is a row of sinking pines.

Explorer, you tell yourself this is not what you came for
although it is good here, and green;
you had meant to move with a kind of largeness,
you had planned a heavy grace, an anguished dream.

But the dark pines of your mind dip deeper
and you are sinking, sinking, sleeper
in an elementary world;
there is something down there and you want it told.

Gwendolyn McEwen

*Fall*

During the fall group inquiry some members began the conversation by expressing their current relationship to nature. Dylan was the first to burst forward in an Arlecchino like gesture, explaining that she loved the beach, arms moving like wings flapping ecstatically, “I am happier at the beach”. Dylan relayed how going to the beach to sing helped her with the courage she needed to get up in front of people. Again, her connection to a feeling of creative solitude but still surrounded by a few other people, resurfaced as she explained the allure of this landscape, as it provided her a space in which she could really sing.

Dylan also shared how being in nature brought her back to life after her first year of university. Returning to the home of her parents, Dylan still had difficulty knowing how to fit into home life and friends. She went up north for the summer to work at a resort, “…and it felt like I just came back to life. I went swimming everyday and I played tennis everyday and ate real food and gained the ten pounds I lost and I don’t know… I came back to life and moving back to the city I just felt better” (Group Inquiry 2 p. 3).

*Fall Group Meditation*

The fall circle meditation, which marked the ritual opening of the nature phase of the inquiry, seemed to impact each member of the group differently. Dylan responded to the swaying that many of the group members felt during the circle meditation, “I was standing. I became really, really aware of my feet and they felt heavier than they usually do. I started swaying to test that feeling” (Fall Group Meditation). While standing in the circle, Dylan described the unique sensation of the moment, “I felt like my head was in one place and my feet were in another place and my middle was going, wow …” Dylan identified how she became aware of three felt spaces within her body. Her imagination was also activated, “And I also pictured everybody’s breath hitting the middle like streams of breath, hitting the middle at the same time” (p. 1). Dylan echoes the sentiment of some of the other members of the group with regards to the sensation of
her feet being rooted, “And at some place, I almost felt like I was going to fall right over but my feet were so in the ground” (p. 2).

**Dreaming**

During our group discussion on the habits of dreaming, Dylan maintained that she dreams in colour. When she dreams her mother appears as another person, but Dylan still believes it is her mother. Dylan maintains that sometimes she awakens from her dreams and experiences weird feelings. Occasionally she awakes crying. After a nightmare, which typically involves spiders and insects she awakens screaming. Dylan acknowledges that some dreams are trying to tell her something. These dreams provide a rude awakening, “…it is like something that someone tells you to do but you don’t want to listen and then you dream and it just slaps you in the face” (Group Inquiry 2 p. 17).

In the fall journal, Dylan explained why she did not write down her dreams. I wanted to honor her perspectives, as each member of the group needed to respond to the inquiry in their own way. Dylan explained her difficulty with keeping a dream journal,

…it seems however, that it has been hard for me to write down my dreams. I have very vivid and real dreams that almost play out like movies and most of them I don’t feel very comfortable explaining because they tend to have very long back-stories. I do have other dreams but as soon as I get out of bed and I am left with just a feeling that I can’t really explain. It’s kind of like the feeling you get when you forget what you are about to say (Journal 2 p. 1)

As I have referenced above, Dylan did relay several dreams throughout the group inquiries and one in particular that reoccurs. Dylan also repeatedly dreams that her teeth are falling out.

**Nature Experiences**

Dylan wrote in the fall journal that she went skiing a couple of weeks before winter, in early December. She wrote passionately about her experience on a mountain, “Everything would stop in my mind and I was overcome by what I saw” (Fall Journal). I have included Dylan’s journal entry in full below,

The view was almost hypnotizing. Seeing all those peaks covered in snow with the evergreen trees and all those rivers and the frozen lake below seemed to make the whole world stop around me. So much so that I didn’t hear my boyfriend ask if I was all right. When I finally snapped out of it, a little, I just felt overwhelmingly happy. I just had the biggest smile on my face. I think he understood because he just said, “Beautiful isn’t it?” When we continued to ski I
felt a new energy; I wanted to go faster, the cold didn’t feel as cold, and I just felt ecstatic.

The next experience I had was more intense. We found this long trail that went winding down through trees and around these cottages. The trail even had two little bridges where it went over a stream. I stopped on one of the bridges and waited for my boyfriend. I looked down and I couldn’t believe that I was there and what I saw was real. It was just so pretty. I wanted to cry. The stream was running so fast that it wasn’t able to freeze. It flowed over what I assume is underneath all the snow everywhere else and over this pink colored rock and the rock and the water and the ice around it were sparkling because of the sun. I almost felt like jumping up and down. It almost felt like I had butterflies in my stomach. As we continued along that trail we came to this tall piece of cliff that was next to us. That was also really beautiful because it had rained the entire day before and it looked like it had a waterfall frozen on to it. I had never seen icicles that large.

When we came to the end of the trail and got back to the end of the trail to where all the people were, I was almost sad that it was over. I was also so happy and I felt lucky to have been there. I think generally this is the feeling I get when I am in nature. It’s like when I told you about when I go to the beach and I feel so happy. I am at home (and I made that little sound and gesture). I guess it just makes me more alive and more aware of my surroundings, more observant. It also makes me think less about everything else. I can only think about what I see and if I do think about anything else, it is calmer. (Fall Journal)

This skiing experience revealed interesting responses to the overall research question. Dylan repeated that she was happy and excited. She is moved to tears at the sight of the flowing stream. Ecstasy is also a rare experience. Beauty is implicitly and explicitly referenced throughout both scenes. Bodily she feels like she does at the beach (Dylan’s arms fly up and she makes a sound). Dylan also feels butterflies in her stomach, a greater sense of aliveness and renewed energy. Dylan is calmer and thinks less and as a result is more aware and observant. Dylan revealed that in general this is how she feels in nature, “lucky” with a sense that she is “at home”. The final statement is one that deserves acknowledgment. Dylan notes the effect nature holds on her thinking; she claims to only think about what she sees and if she thinks of other things there is a feeling of calmness.

Winter

To prepare for the winter experience in nature our group inquiry warm-up consisted of a circle meditation, toning and experimentation with Tibetan singing bowls. Dylan acknowledged some interesting connections between the experience of the bowls and her bodily awareness and
feeling of security, “The bowls were buzzing in the air. The air was vibrating and as I looked down at my hand, it felt unconnected to the feeling in the atmosphere. I felt a buzz throughout my entire body”. Dylan continued to reflect on how it felt when the sound had stopped and the bowl was passed to the next person, “…it was like a pause in security…” The experience, she wrote was similar to the toning, “When we stopped it was like loosing a togetherness and a relaxed position that we had to find again” (Group Meditation 2).

On the cold December inquiry day, the group agreed to do a brief wandering meditation on the edge of the bluffs, overlooking the lake. Dylan wrote in her reflection notes how she has been drawn to the water from the time she was a small child, “When I see a lake or pond or river I cannot help but stop and look at it” (Group Inquiry 2). She continued, “It has always amazed me to think about how much there is of it. We can be in it or float on it or even get lost and die in it. Entire ships are lost and never found on it…I can get lost staring at it. I think it is one of those things that I can do where I can truly think of nothing. I have a mind that just won’t stop. Staring at the waves makes it stop” (p. 1). She continued to explain that it was the movement of the waves that drew her to continue staring. Neither the movement of the tree branches, or the appearance of snow underfoot could capture her gaze similarly,

Just staring at the vastness of it, the comfort of having the noise in my head come to a silence. I am standing on the edge of a bluff in the dead of winter and when I close my eyes the sounds, the hush of the waves makes me feel warm as if it were fire. But it is not it is water. It makes me smile but I want to laugh and cry and scream at the same time. Gazing at the lake turns me into a ball of emotions every time. (Winter Group Inquiry)

Dylan again acknowledged and described the warmth of an experience in the cold. It is clear to note that elementally, Dylan is often drawn to the water.

*Grinning from Ear to Ear*

Dylan’s winter journal included a dream description that carried a resonance with her skiing experience. Repeatedly, members of the group noted that certain experiences made them spontaneously smile. Dylan’s dream affirmed this taken for granted yet energetically buoyant bodily expression,

Then Barrie asked me if I wanted to play music with him at a bar and it is completely empty except for the bar tender that looked about a hundred years old and like a warlock or something out of a fantasy novel. So we played music for this old man who managed
to clap his hands along with us. He had the biggest smile on his face, which made Barrie and I smile too. That was one thing that struck me about that dream. There was Barrie and I and an ancient man, sitting in a hole in the wall bar, grinning from ear to ear. When I awoke from the dream I was still smiling. (Winter Journal p. 4)

The dream revealed the presence of the male magician archetype in Dylan’s unconscious. In the letter on the Magician, the anonymous author explains how the Magician Arcanum shows that consciousness can flow from the heart. Energy then shifts to a regenerative rhythmic centre of the body, away from the head or intellectual centre. It is this transition that the anonymous author suggests cultivates concentration without effort, “where concentration becomes as easy as breathing” (Unknown Author, 1993 p. 10).

A Summer Memory: Rainbows Drink From Lakes

In the winter, Dylan reflected in her journal on an emergent experience in the summer. While considering this experience, a sentence from a book she recently read stuck in her mind, “something about a rainbow drinking from a river” (Winter Journal). Dylan described how she was out with a friend by the beach. Suddenly they were caught in a downpour and ran to take cover under a children’s climber. When the sun shower subsided she and her friend stepped out from underneath their shelter and gasped,

I looked up and saw an enormous rainbow, stretching the length of what seemed to be the entire sky over the lake. The sky was quite vibrant; glowing a pinky yellow and every colour of the rainbow could be seen; red, yellow, orange, blue, green and violet. The surrounding landscape seemed to be almost glowing as well. The trees were florescent green and our faces seemed to be lit by some other light. (Fall Journal)

Dylan goes on to describe how she and her friend began to giggle and laugh uncontrollably, unable to speak for moments after. This friend is a, “…lucky-have-experiences-in-nature charm…This moment almost seemed as if we were escaping a certain level of reality. We were just friends chatting on a beach and were suddenly rendered speechless by simply a rainbow. It was a memorable and surreal moment” (Winter Journal). After they had taken in this breath taking experience, Dylan and her friend took one look at each other and began to again giggle. Not being able to contain themselves, they spontaneously ran towards the water and the sand, laughing uncontrollably. It was inexorable freedom expressed in a moment. Inspired by the line, “The rainbow drinks from the lake”, Dylan wrote the following lyrics,
Reminder

The days that came and smiled
Have all but passed away
I'm going now to the place where
The rainbow drinks from the lake

The chord that nightly strums
Just might be a minor one
And sometimes I get a minor glimpse
That quickly fades out all of this

There's a great wall built up in China
And its ancient walls have many stories for you
They are locked up in the fortress
Do not want to bug or bore you

Chorus
Listen to the same song everyday
It reminds you of the things that you're supposed to say

Synchronicities and Emergent Happenings

During the second interview Dylan and I began to explore her experiences with synchronicity, creativity and thought. Dylan explained how her ideas come for her creative writing, “…really randomly actually. Like sometimes I will just walk down the street or something…and I always get like a line in my head and I will be able to get it out of my head for days. And then sometimes I will not even write it down and it gets longer and longer” (Interview 2 p. 2). The lines will then undergo further development. They will “move around in my head” until other words and phrases are heard. With respect to writing songs Dylan hears, “a tune and it will go with words”. A personal poll of her songwriter friends revealed that Dylan creates her songs somewhat differently from a musician who has the skill to play the melodies on an instrument. Dylan on the other hand, still working on her guitar skills, writes down the words, and then creates the tune. The tune shifts and changes as she masters playing the song on her guitar.

Dylan explained how the phrases came to her, “It happens when I am in a big crowd of people, like when I am on the subway. I will all of a sudden smile really big and it is sort of embarrassing in public because you are by yourself…crazy…it looks gullible” (p. 3). This type of emergent creativity is hard to control. She must wait for a feeling. Any attempt to sit down and force the feeling proves unsuccessful. Dylan’s description of these emergent happenings in
crowds rings similarly to the first commedia walking exercise. She loved walking around the room, trying on the gestures of a character, alone and separate from her fellow actors, but still in their presence. Dylan described the feeling of being alone and yet not alone as a source for creative inspiration,

I get this feeling when I am by myself but like surrounded by lots of people and it is exciting because you are alone but you are surrounded by a lot of people...usually everyone is in a rush...I am strolling along and it is almost like I am slower than everyone since usually in these cases, I am casually going somewhere...I guess I get into my own head and I feel excited. (p.5)

Dylan described the feeling and genesis of these moments; their almost aimless way of emerging in her consciousness. There is a perceived rhythmic difference between her movements and the crowd. She more succinctly described the connection between the lines in her head and a word or sign that is heard in the subway. These synchronicities make her think that there is a reason that she saw or heard those words in that conversation, but she is not willing to attach any mystical or religious significance to the experience. Christopher Bache refers to these experiences in his explanation on synchronicities as, magic (Bache, 2008).

Spirituality: Why do people just look to the sky and start talking?

During the second interview we sat across the road from the church that Dylan attended during her childhood. So I took the opportunity to ask her about God, or if there is a force that she feels guides her, “I don’t really know. I have a weird thing with spirituality. I think it was just from going to church when I was a kid. I never understood it really. I always thought it was just a big storybook and then I grew up and actually saw that people believed in these things. I was weirded out by this” (p. 4). Dylan continued, “…and just the idea that there is one being who is responsible for everything? I did not like that idea (p.4). Dylan concluded, “I could not really understand why people would just look to the sky and start talking… guess that was because I was thirteen. I thought it was kind of silly” (p. 4).

Dylan’s ideas on the subject of thought and creativity seemed clear. I asked her to ponder a question, which she diligently wrote down and reflected on in her journal notes, “How are synchronicities, emergent happenings, experiences in nature, drawn together in our consciousness to remind us of who we are?”

Emergent (random) experiences are often triggered by synchronicities-when a visual (something you suddenly see) corresponds with a current train of thought.
For example if I can consider being out in public (with people) a place to observe nature i.e. watching people, this could constitute as an example. If you can recall in our last meeting what I saw about acquiring inspiration from big crowds, this might be clearer. I can see/hear words/phrases in public that inspire great ideas or intense feelings. (Journal 2)

Dylan illustrated this statement with a lived example, “I was riding the streetcar and saw a cute couple and thought about how I missed my boyfriend. We travelled passed a park with a tennis court and woven into the chain link fence were the words, “I miss you”. I had to try so hard not to cry (not really out of sadness, but out of astonishment?...in front of the whole streetcar” (Journal 2 p. 2).

Dylan concluded this journal entry with a question about nature, “Have you ever noticed that a lot of the people who concentrate on being eco-friendly are also people that spend a lot of time in nature? (Hikers, campers, people who live deep in the countryside?). I think there is something to this. Maybe it is mostly people who really experience nature who are able to tell how much it is being destroyed” (Journal 2 p. 2). Dylan answered every element of the question, except the one that addressed who she feels she is. Her final personal journal entry reveals an important connection between environmentalism and nature.

**Tread Not Backwards**

There are footprints in the snow
Leading to the window of my room
There are antiques in my house
There’s no need to know what they’re about
Tread not backwards
Mar the words that tell you not to fight
The tree is growing in its rings
And all the twigs are looking green
And up until this very day
Encased within some hardened clay
Frozen in the place it stood
Frozen in the air of dust and soot
Tread not backwards
Mar the words that tell you not to fight
(Dylan)

**Spring**

This spring gathering began with a game, *Follow the Leader* and then we experimented with the *Elemental Voice* exercise that was regularly practiced to identify which element (earth, air, water, fire) felt close to our understanding of self. The final activity for meeting in the Owl’s
Park was to wander and attend to any aspect of the landscape that we felt drawn towards. The participants were asked to listen to an inner question, “The true answer to your question is to be confidently set in who I am”. Dylan explains,

I can only describe this as a way of bringing myself back from a place where I seemed to have lost my grounding and forgot what it meant to stay true to myself. I find being away from the familiar tends to do this to me and I lose a little bit of the person that I both believe that I am and really want to be. (Spring Inquiry)

Dylan writes in her spring inquiry notes that the creativity that she is in the midst of discovering brings her down to earth, “This creativity comes to me most strongly when I am alone but not all alone”. Dylan continues to write, “I have been able to rediscover this, really believe it, and be happy with it through creating pieces of art for myself (as selfish as it may sound)” (Spring Inquiry).

Dylan then went on to recall a childhood connection to nature, which has become important in this research inquiry. I note this in the reflections of Isabelle, Angela, Gwen and Dylan. Dylan writes, “When we were walking around by ourselves I instantly walked straight towards that tree…” Dylan reflects that she was drawn to the tree because of her childhood memory of the love of trees. As a child in the forest she, “would get lost in my (her) own world…” Dylan is “transported back” and writes that, “There is a sense of freedom in a child, that we eventually lose but in the moment, and when standing and sitting in that tree, it seemed to have returned. My mind started to wander and suddenly I started to hum a little tune”. She continued to reflect that wandering in nature was a good way to “rediscover motivations of childhood…to recall a time when I didn’t think so much about things and I was free of worries and insecurities” (Spring Inquiry).

Dylan simply wrote that she did not think she connected to all aspects of the question as I had requested that the participants consider Romanyshyn’s (2007) questions. However, Dylan began to listen to the wind. Since Dylan’s reflections centre so much around the movement of her thoughts, the calming, emergent and synchronous connections between nature and thought, I find her final reflection on this bird carries yet another symbolic interpretation,

Suddenly I heard a bird. I listened really intently to this bird and I thought what is this bird saying? The bird’s chirping sounded a lot like the word ‘hurry’. ‘Hurry’ I thought, is that what it’s supposed to mean? Then I thought about what I was thinking before about loosing a grip on what kind of person I want to be and I thought I feel this loss the most
when I rush too much; when I don’t think about things at all and just do, do, do all the time. It suddenly occurred to me that I need to slow down. That bird was saying hurry, but what I really need to do is slow down sometimes. (Spring Inquiry)

Dylan began to reflect on her need to slow down. Although, I do believe her first interpretation bore merit, her final interpretation completed the circle of symbolic meaning. Dylan’s attentiveness in the spring evoked an awareness to her lived rhythms.

A Conversation by the Lake

Our conversation by the lake, later that season, uncovered other dimensions to Dylan’s relationship with nature. She is an avid sailor and she noted the cleanliness of the water in comparison to when she was a child. When Dylan was young, the lake was not swimmable, with dead fish floating around, but now, the water is safe to swim in. As we sat and chatted about water spiders scrambling across the rocks, we had to keep moving her purse so the spiders would not crawl inside. Dylan says she hates spiders. I recall that spiders also show up in her nightmares. Swans also swam along the shoreline. It was a fantastically calm day and I dreamily commented on how swans were so elegant. Dylan responded, “and they can be aggressive”.

Dylan described her role in the latest drama production for her university drama class. The class performed an adaptation of the Russian novel, The Master and Margarita, by Mikhail Bulgakov. Written in the 1930’s the novel was not published until 1967. This was largely due to its satirical critique on Stalin’s treatment of authors in Moscow. Dylan played the Devil character. She claimed it was a fitting play to challenge her conceptions of light and dark in spirituality. The devil demonstrates his magic skills and challenges the town folks’ perception of truth, proof and reality.

Prince of Darkness
   Foil of Light
   Without both there are no shadows
   There were words that weren’t afraid of the thanks they would receive
   They were blurted out, hung in the air, and everyone could see
   How would you be
   If he should judge you as you are?
   (Dylan)

Continuing the conversation along the line of mixing concepts of the light and dark, Dylan shared with me her interest in the Canadian poet, Gwendolyn McEwen.
Summer

Dylan could not attend our summer inquiry meeting. While I had gone to great lengths to schedule this meeting on the equinox, it also coincided with Father’s Day. Our final inquiry meeting was at the end of August, a couple of weeks before university began. During this meeting, we engaged in a transformation exercise and a wandering meditation together,

I had completely forgotten what it was like to dance (transformation exercise) in a way where it feels like no one else is watching. Sometimes I sing when I walk down the streets that are not busy, when no one else is around. It felt a bit like that. It’s like for a moment you are the only one in the world and you are not actually moving yourself and you are not actually making any sounds; something else is doing it for you and you get to watch. I looked out at the water and for once felt nothing, I saw nothing, I thought of nothing and, for once it was nice. I’ve never really been able to turn off the volume on my mind but the lake’s ripples pressed the mute button. I didn’t even try.

To think or not to think
To blink or not to blink.
But the fire ants were nipping at my feet
and again
I began a little dance and that too,
Truly felt good.

Untitled Song
Act one Scene Three
One great wall built up around
One great breath to bring it down
I should try harder now
I should try harder now

Two blinks of pouring rain
Two blinks and its gone away
I should change it up today
I should change it up today

Three good tries to get it right
Three good tries to make it bright
I should be strong tonight
I should be strong tonight

Chorus
Says the bard to the lovers
This is the best part
This is the best part.
Summary

From the beginning I understood Dylan to be an independent minded child. As a young child Dylan remembered that she wanted to explore being silly, try on characters and take her explorations as far as she could. Dylan recalled the exercise where she was exploring on her own but still surrounded by the group. This memory began to point to the energy in which Dylan later learned to feel emerging creative ideas. This is how I believe Dylan opens to creative and emergent experience; through the opportunity to experiment with the weirdness of an idea and through being alone and yet part of a community.

Dylan learned to construct her own understanding of thinking and feeling like the character, and how to attune to the rhythm required to connect her energy with that of the characters’. She concluded that after all of this careful exploration, at some point the character “seeps into you”. Her explanation demonstrates a detailed understanding of the relationship between her felt sense of the character and the image of the character.

Dylan described her thought processes and different states of awareness when she was a teenager. She acknowledged that the mind/body exercises helped her to think more deeply about herself. Dylan also described the mind/body practices as having an effect on clear thinking; the benefits were calming and helped the group to progress through to the rehearsals.

In the nature phase, Dylan oriented the group discussion by acting out her reaction to the beach. She waved her arms up in an excited gesture, activating the image of Arlecchino. She revealed to the group that nature and good eating brought her “back to life”. Her fall meditation activated her to the extent that she could sense three parts of her body; her feet rooted, her middle expanding and she could also feel her head. Her imagination was also active as she visualized the breath of all the participants streaming into the middle of the circle.

Dylan’s ski trip evoked the emotional and aesthetic aspects of being in nature. She felt energized and also felt so much excitement that she had butterflies in her stomach. A magician shows up in her dreams, affirming a simple smile and clapping as another bodily response to nature and her emergent creative process. Typically, Dylan smiles widely while beginning to feel a creative phrase emerge. Although I have not discovered research on the subject of smiling to initiate the flow of chi, I have felt the affect that smiling has while doing tai chi.

Dylan acknowledged twice that experiences in nature and mind/body experiences with resonance and toning make her feel at home. The movement and sound of water calmed the noise in her head and in the end it was the experience of attending to waves that allowed Dylan to
completely empty her thoughts. Dylan described in detail the creative emergence of her thoughts when she composes her songs. She experiences a rhythmic slowing while she is by herself in large crowds. Dylan also interpreted the bird’s call in our spring inquiry as a reminder to slow down. Finally, Dylan expressed her desire to be “confidently set in who I am”.
Chapter 8: Rose

Dummling and the Golden Goose  Dummling
Romeo and Juliet  Peter
The Flying Doctor  Sganarelle
A Midsummer Night’s Dream  Nick Bottom
Gamma Rays  Ruth
Monologues  White Oleander
A Midsummer Night’s Dream  Helena
Belle Moral  Pearl MacIsaac

Background

I am writing Rose’s chapter, following Angela’s suggestion to read the Witch of Portabello by Paulo Coelho. The main character practices ecstatic dance and teaches people to dance with the tempo and also out of sync with the tempo. The fiery orange sun that appears at 7:30 a.m. this almost winter morning marks the beginning of this chapter. In late autumn the scent of autumn leaves escape their decaying edges. Fragments disappear into the wet November grass and the morning light rests on the leaves that resist being shaken from the branch. In the background Rufus Wainwright sings Leonard Cohen’s, “Hallelujah”. All is the “…secret chord that David played to please the Lord…It is love and it is a broken hallelujah” …Rose introduced me to Wainwright’s version of Cohen’s song while describing an exercise that she learned at camp when she was a counselor. At the beginning of this exercise, children run around until they are breathing heavily and then lie down to listen to music and to attend to how their breathing returns to normal. Rose said the exercise was effective for clearing the mind and focusing a group of young campers.

Rose lives with her parents in the east end of the city. Her father is a housing consultant for the protestant church. Her mother recently earned a degree in gerontology and works at an adult day program. Rose has one older sister who completed her undergraduate degree in history two years ago. Her parents have been a supportive, gentle and steady presence in Rose’s life. Both her parents have a flare for life and a keen interest in the arts.

At twenty-one years of age, Rose has successfully passed into the third year of her drama program. As well as the voice, movement and acting courses, last year she studied theatre production. When I saw her throughout the summer of 2009, she was working as a waitress,
fulfilling the role of stage manager and volunteering for a summer Shakespeare children’s program.

I remember that many parents would approach me to talk about the possibility of their son or daughter attending the drama class, insisting that their child was a natural born performer. Rose was not that kind of child. She was thoughtful, pensive, and even hesitant, but I imagined feeling her soul depth when she was seven. Since this age, Rose has consistently pursued her interest in theatre. At seventeen Rose compiled a promotional package, comprised of an eight by ten professional photo, letter to the talent agency and acting resume. She was successful in gaining the interest of one of the top agents in the city. During high school, Rose took advantage of every opportunity for artistic development possible, for example, writing, directing and participating in province wide theatre competitions. Rose completed her high school diploma, auditioned for three theatre programs and was accepted into two of them.

In her school acting journal, Rose reflected on her shyness,

At times it angers me to hear myself written off as quiet and shy, because this connotes timidity. I feel that I am capable of communicating strongly and then when I do speak up, I speak with honesty and insight. One of my fears is, therefore that I will be written off and disregarded for qualities that I appear to have and in fact, don’t have. This fear then contributes to my ability to communicate freely. If I feel that I am being disregarded for these qualities, I am rarely pushed to the edge and so instead I sit there in silence. (Voice Journal, 2008)

Not only does this statement illustrate Rose’s insight into the nature of her own shyness but identifies the implication of feeling judged, or “written off”. Later in the same journal Rose reflected on what she looks for in others,

The intensity of truth is what I look for in people. There is nothing stronger than truth and nothing quite so endearing. There is something about the arts, the body, the voice and this expressive craft that shows truth in a breath-taking way. (Voice Journal, 2008)

Rose’s desire for authenticity and truth have been valued consistently throughout her childhood, adolescent and young adult life.

Present: Shakespeare Scene Study

In a voice paper written in 2008, Rose expressed her challenges with letting go and with allowing her emotional range to be more than a “white wash”. In January 2009, Rose was encountering a challenge with accessing any kind of emotional potency in her university acting
classes. In February of 2009, Rose invited me to a presentation in her scene study class so that I could watch her perform the role of Ophelia in the scene from *Hamlet* III ii. The audience seemed transfixed as she progressed through the scene with Hamlet. She began on a tentative emotional tone and did not reach or push to expand its resonance. Her signature acting talent is to find the beginning note, the one that rings with an invitational resonant truth. By this I mean that her beginnings make space for the audience to attune to the scene. On that day, there also seemed to be space for us all. Rose draws the audience in and then she presses into each moment as it arises. When Rose responded to Hamlet a myriad of emotional tones were intertwined with her character’s intent; pleading, wooing, refusals, shock, anger and grief. Rose’s cheeks reddened, tears began to flow and finally, her words seemed to lead us into her interior, down the stairs of her psyche to the intermingled presences of her core self and Ophelia. The dynamic between Hamlet and Ophelia became more potent and chaotic. After Hamlet left the stage, Rose performed a primal scene while lying on the ground. Fists pounding, her voice sounded a chord of lament that transcended the admixture of her self and her character and with every pound of her fist we too rose with her to meet the cry that voiced Hamlet’s fall from reason.

Rose revealed that during a class rehearsal for the scene, just before the above monologue, the acting teacher helped to shift her out of her emotional block by telling her to remain still, on the floor, while she continued to recite the monologue. Somehow containing her energy in stillness contributed to an emotional charge and an eventual release,

Yesterday in performance I was working on a scene for *Hamlet* and I was having a really bad morning and having trouble getting into it- in the beginning just before the climax. I knew things were not working out exactly how it should, like so I could start the monologue. The teacher was giving me commentary. Then I got fed up and one part she was like, ‘Slow down and feel the words’, or whatever. Finally I am on the ground and he is yelling at me and at this point Hamlet leaves the scene and Ophelia’s breakdown starts. I was actually bawling on the ground. So when I was supposed to go into the monologue, she said, ‘Don’t try to get up and if you do, if you do, just try and you can’t.’ And if I had I wouldn’t have been able …if I had I would have lost it…You get into a groove and then you get into that mode you need to be in. (Interview 4 p. 2)

The teacher was offering valuable guidance that attuned to Rose’s own sense that it was time to remain still and deepen her connection to the feeling, “Like I had to *be* in a certain area where I was actually at that point where I was actually feeling so much” (Interview 4 p. 2).
An Adam and Eve Story

This past summer (2009), I attended a play, written and directed by Rose’s colleague. A group of friends from her former arts high school applied for entrance into a summer theatre festival, with the hope of putting on an original work. The summer theatre festivals use a lottery entrance process and unfortunately the group’s application was not drawn. Unwilling to let an opportunity to perform pass them by, this group of friends decided to rent a theatre space and raise the production costs themselves. Poking fun at gender stereotypes and religious fundamentalism these youth packed the house and paid their costs. The audience laughed, deep belly shaking guffaws throughout the comedy. As stage manager, Rose sat calmly in the production booth, calling the rather tricky lighting and sound cues.

Psychic and Somatic Care

During a recent email, Rose shared with me that she is seeing a therapist and learning how to engage in “self talk”. This therapeutic approach derives from the cognitive psychology field. I believe self-exploration should be a complement to any program that expects in-depth creative exploration from its students. Arts based curricula, designed to immerse the student in mind and body exploration should also facilitate skills where the student may learn to navigate through the issues that emerge. Various issues will emerge when working on the level that Rose is working. Rose relayed to me that a close friend in the class could not handle the level of self-reflection and awareness required to remain in the drama program and was asked to withdraw. In the summer months Rose continued exploring the challenges raised in her acting and movement classes by attending yoga and Nia dance classes.

What Was at Play?

Rose attended an intermediate drama group during more than half of her time with my drama classes. The intermediate group had only three members who remained in the classes from an early age so the cohesiveness of the group was not as strong and the projects were not as intensive. I also was not able to do the primal work in the intermediate group as intensively. However, Rose joined the senior group for the final three years of the program and was an enthusiastic member of the weekly inquiries.

Participant Contribution

I reviewed all photos, videos and programs of Rose’s performances. Rose expressed herself with ease during the four one-on-one interviews. She was more subdued during the group inquiry discussions. Although Rose did not choose to record dreams, synchronicities, or
emergent happenings, her movement and voice journals contained insights into the mind and body relationship. Reflections on the acting craft appeared throughout both journals, particularly in the goal setting and summary portions of the journal. These journals provided a thick description of the activities in her classes, her experiences of the exercises, such as bodily sensations, emotions and goal setting. The journals did not contain any evidence of imaginal inquiry. After every semester a basic reflection component pinpointed significant learning. Rose attended all of the group inquiry meetings and emailed reflections on nature to me throughout the year.

**Phase 1: Drama**

The effort to understand and articulate presence in the body requires discipline and the willingness to meet oneself at the level where awareness and the unknown reside in the in-between. The mind/body activities similar to those experimented with in our drama classes; tai chi, yoga, breath work, voice and transformations. Although these classes are designed to guide the actor to a more concentrated awareness than our Friday night classes could achieve, the university drama classes do not include colour work, meditation, visualization, or energy experimentation. While occasional exercises involving the imagination occur, no inquiry, class discussion or assignments are included in this university curriculum. When I asked Rose if there was any discussion or inquiry into the relationship between imagination and acting, she replied that her acting class had tried a few visualization exercises but that they did not engage in a formal inquiry into the imagination.

**Flashback**

I remember Rose as a small girl with a round luminous face and soft eyes. She came to the drama class at the age of six. Her energy felt large in a child so small. She was intense. I could see this in the way that her forehead would gather in a slight furrow. Most of the time she moved deliberately and solidly, except when she became unsure of her next step. Then she would stop walking altogether and her hands would travel upwards to cover her throat. The outer layers of her developing self seemed to vibrate with the shock of her own abilities. Rose described her tension throughout her acting journals, as a tension that resides between perfectionism and creative freedom. This chapter reveals Rose’s body/mind development, her growing insights into acting and inward/outward knowing.
We laughed a lot in the opening interview. Like Dylan, Rose had a way of poking fun at the self-important attitude in the drama classes. She repeated drama and professional with great melodramatic affect. Rose reflected on my teaching in her acting journal, saying that I was serious and strict. On some occasions, I was far too consumed with putting on a good theatre production to remember a child’s authentic need for play and fun.

During the first interview we also laughed about the anticipation of a six-year-old child who waits to see what role they may be cast in. I also sheepishly smile now at my dramatic egotistical teacher self,

We were really like professional and like we thought we were really old and mature I guess, we were like “I really hope you get the role…you were good…no matter who gets cast…”(Interview 1 p. 1)

I asked Rose if she remembered the casting process,

Yeah, I remember that moment ... I guess we just thought…because everything was so serious…we worked really hard with you…just like everything was really serious, everything was professional…very...We are going to give it our all and get the best part possible (Both of us laugh). (p. 1)

I asked Rose how she decided to take drama classes. Her response regarding an early childhood memory when she was five years of age was something she had not shared before,

One of my first memories, my Mom always brings up, whenever things are difficult…if I am having trouble with it (drama), and I’m not really sure where things are going, she always reassures me that this is what I want to do. This is what I am most passionate about. When I was about five or six, we went to the West End Park to see A Midsummer Night’s Dream. We were walking down the hill and we saw the stage and I said, ‘WOW…a kid would really like to be on that stage (exhales).’ She always reminded me of that, because I sort of knew right then that is what I wanted, ‘WOW that is something that you would want to experience right away’…yeah…kind of thing. (Interview 1 p. 2)

Rose revealed her philosophical self during a conversation with her mother,

It was like little stories my mom has told me at the same age… I turned to her and I said, ‘Do you ever wonder where our place is in all of this is?’ And she sort of gave me a look and I sort of said, ‘Never mind you would not understand’ (Interview 1 p. 2).
Rose recalled her feeling of wonder as a small child, her ability as well to wonder about place at the age of six. A certain irony arises as she participates in a research inquiry now that questions how youth find place.

Rose also remembered the feeling of the group, of working at an early age on a drama production together. This next response describes what kept drawing her back to the classes, I guess it was just something we worked hard to do together…something we were like…it seemed really challenging and difficult but we always overcame that and it always felt rewarding in the end. But it was sort of like ….if we could get through that…it would I guess I related it to life sort of. So if I can overcome that and be passionate about that and always succeed then the rest of my life, I can work in the same way…

Rose established her lasting impression of those early projects, affirming and connecting the value of the creative work with the passion and cooperation of the group. She also connects the benefit of learning to overcome difficulties with being able to apply the experience of overcoming future life challenges.

Shakespeare: “I just love him so much”.

Rose did not come back the year after Dummling and the Golden Goose. I was a new drama teacher and had pushed these young drama students, attempting two productions in one year. With some groups I found this successful, as each student had the opportunity of receiving at least one decent sized role. But that year the group was too large. Rose revealed that she did not return because she found the work too intense, I think it might have been, it might have been like too much for me at the time I don’t know. During the performance I just remember we didn’t really know our lines or anything. I think you were prompting us a lot.

The next year she joined the group was to play the role of Peter in Romeo and Juliet. Rose recalled seeing the advertisement for the class and said to her mother, “Yeah Mom, I have to be in this, I have to go to this”. She laughed, entering into some self-mockery, “Oh Shakespeare”, she quips, “I just love him so much”. Rose continued to chuckle admitting that she didn’t really know much about Shakespeare’s work, but she apparently loved him nonetheless.

Becoming a Character

I wondered if Rose thought that her desire for the lead role in Dummling and the Golden Goose had anything to do with her understanding of the character. She could not remember much about the character, which made us both break into peals of laughter. The character was not
altogether complex and Rose was six years old. However, again, I asked about a different character, someone that was, “easy to jump into”. Rose instead described what it was like to become Helena from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,

I have always matched her with me. I don’t know how I made that connection… I see her done a lot, sort of weak and victimized. I think my interpretation of her isn’t like that…it’s more just like an unfortunate situation that victimizes her and she is strong on her own. I don’t know but I feel like she is portrayed wrong when she is weak and annoying and whiny…I don’t really know how I become a character, I just get into the emotion and it sort of happens…I have had difficulty with that. I don’t really know how to work…I don’t know what I am doing when I am working really—its like that body connection sort of …Its like the thought processes that I am so familiar with in everything else that I do. I think maybe that’s sort of what draws me to acting as well, its like not knowing, like it’s something that is free from that thought process. (Interview 1 p. 9)

Rose revealed that prior to exploring a mind/body activity she suspends her thought processes and prepares to take a plunge. With respect to developing an acting process she seems to “match” herself with a character. Empathy towards the character Helena creates the “match” between herself and Helena. Helena is not a victim, but caught in a bad situation and she is strong on her own. Rose also pinpoints her need to get into the emotion. Her final statement I think is a courageous one and one that balances what Rose knows about her process with what she does not know. Rose does admit that whatever kind of knowing it is, it is “something that is free from that thought process”.

*Mask Work*

The following year, after *Romeo and Juliet*, the class expanded and divided into intermediate and senior groups. Rose became one of the experienced members of the intermediate group. The intermediate group studied Commedia dell’Arte mask work. I asked Rose about her response to the mask work, “I really liked that stuff, it was really good”. She continued to explain that she felt she needed to “come out more” and that in *Romeo and Juliet* she had trouble creating the physicality of the character. The mask provided a guard and a greater level comfort,

Because it was like you were sort of hidden behind the mask and getting into the physicality, it wasn’t as intimidating…cause you didn’t feel like it was you…it was sort of you …well it was, but you had that sort of guard up … (p. 9)
Rose agreed that acting with the mask brought the acting experience into the body and stopped her from putting too much emphasis on facial expression. She added another insight into the mask and the power of uninhibited free play,

And I think that was really important at that age as well with the group, because I think we were all around the same age. But it was like the awkward age where you sort of getting into that, ‘Oh, am I cool?’ kind of, ‘What does everybody else think of me?’ It was like …that was one place and our one chance to sort of break free from that and to-explore, play with it sort of (p. 10)

The above statement also highlights the value of working with the mask as a means to soften the concern an adolescent may have regarding their performance.

*Early Adolescent Meditations*

I asked Rose if she recalled what it was like as a young adolescent to sit still for a few minutes and meditate,

I don’t think it was ever a challenge for me, I don’t think. I was never like antsy when I was younger …I don’t know I just sort of welcomed it…it was a chance to sit and think.

More than I already did? (Rose laughs)

Kelli: Was it a different type of thinking?

Rose: Yeah. It was it was…I don’t know it sort of worked out that way…it wasn’t as chaotic as I normally felt…it was a time to sort things out. (p. 11)

I pressed Rose on providing more detail on the visualization experiences, hoping to trigger a memory of a specific meditation or visualization, “I don’t remember a lot of actual…yeah, you led us through some when we were younger. I don’t really think that it was until we got here (basement studio) that it was really self-guided”. Rose said that she did not really see other characters in these visualizations but felt she was seeing various projections of her self, “I never really saw anyone else. It was just sort of like looking down…some people did…” (p. 12).

*The Early Meditation Circle*

I did not realize that the students might have internalized a sense that their experience may not be as vivid or imaginative as their classmates. Angela also mentioned that she felt her meditation experience was not as interesting. It would have been helpful to spend time after the meditation sharing thoughts on how the act of communal sharing may have impacted the students’ sharing,
I don’t know…like I remember- like in comparison to what I heard other people talk about in the visualizations. It was like mine weren’t quite as vivid as theirs. Like I always had different images that would pop up but it was never these clear stories. I sort of had to in some ways guide it. (p. 7)

Rose’s observation also highlights the paradoxical nature of describing imaginal experience. An individual requires words and perhaps feels they should follow a certain line of explanation in order to convey coherently what occurred. The desire to convey a significant and meaningful story may have infringed on a simple description of the images and/or sensations experienced.

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Nick Bottom*

Rose played Nick Bottom, a character that is part of a troupe of craftsman actors called the Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The experience of playing Nick Bottom is something Rose continues to refer to when sharing her acting experiences with others. She claims that only a few people get to see her comedic talent. There are aspects of Rose that do not explicitly compare to Nick Bottom at all. Nick Bottom is arrogant and considers his talent far greater than any one else’s. The Fairy King, Oberon, decides to play a trick on Nick Bottom, transforming his head into that of a donkey. I remember Rose’s rendition of Nick. It was joyful, free and uninhibited, “…my chance to show that side that not a lot of people saw, a chance to be silly… (p. 9)

*Cinderella and Gender*

Rose conveyed her unhappiness about the year that the intermediate group performed *Cinderella*. It was the year she wanted to quit the group altogether. I had sensed resistance from Rose during the rehearsals and remembered one or two difficult moments where I felt as if I was dealing with teenage stubbornness. When I compiled the list of characters for her chapter, and considered her stage of development and the way in which she described her thought processes at 13, it was obvious that her resistance ran much deeper than egoic self-involvement.

Shakespeare and Moliere, while rich in symbolism, poetry and comedy, were not full of interesting and complex female roles. Ironically, acting classes can be comprised of mostly females. In preparing to play a role in *Cinderella* Rose was confronted yet again with being cast as a male. Rose said that it was clearly not the year for her to play a male role,

I think part of the reason I didn’t like it was that growing up I was not like the rest of my friends. I was a lot bigger and I don’t know, I sort of matured …grown up development wise before them and I wasn’t really comfortable with that at all. It was like I felt sort of
not as feminine as all my other friends and they were petite like ballet dancers and like I was put into a male character and so it was like difficult for me…and I was like, “Oh, No.” (p. 13)

Rose went on to say that at the time, she also felt that I was being hard on her, “No, no” she added, “In a good way”. She was attempting to take care of my feelings. I think now there was no good way. I was applying pressure to her resistance when I had not fully understood her feelings. I said during the interview, that we should have tried to talk about her feelings,

You don’t even know where to begin talking. I don’t know…I think its just …looking back… it’s like it was just another challenge that I needed to overcome. I think it is only now that I am connecting everything together….At that age dance was really difficult for me …because I wasn’t like the rest of the girls in my class, they were tiny dancers and then being a dancer, you had to be like that, in my eyes. So then I came to the drama world. It was like it all happened in my head. I would be like, ‘OK, I am cast as a man. I must be not beautiful and feminine enough.’ So it’s like I was cast out of the dance world and now I am not allowed in the drama world. I had this fiction there as well and that might have been challenging for me too…but like I am just coming up with this now so I don’t… I am thinking it’s probably what the case was…Yeah, which is probably what it was at the time…yeah. (p. 13)

Although Rose reiterated that it would have been impossible for her to articulate her feelings at the time, I still believe a heartfelt question might have been posed.

*From Fairy Tales to Nightmares*

I was determined to ensure that Rose receive a lead female role in our next play. I cast her in the role of Ruth, thinking that again as in the case of Angela, the role of Ruth might attune her with some of the chaotic energies that seemed to be surfacing. Perhaps Ruth’s fiery nature would draw something out of Rose. Unlike the first *Gamma Rays* with the senior group, which was presented in a large room at the community centre, I rented a stage at a local church and the intermediate class performed the play with the help of the senior class. We talked about the complex psychological terrain of *Gamma Rays*;

It was something that connected with me more. It was cause she is sort of that character, that sort of… I know what I want to say, but I don’t know how to describe it… Just she is subject to …not mockery. She is that sort of outcast. She doesn’t feel she or her family fits in I guess. So I guess I connected to her in that way- to experiences around that age… that sort of like…at the same time it was my outlet…because she was vicious. If I am
miserable I am going to make everyone else miserable. I am going to make Tilly miserable. (p. 15)

Rose identified with Ruth and the feeling that she was struggling to find her place. It took courage to admit that there was a certain psychic release in trying on the viciousness of Ruth’s behavior.

*Mind/Body Connection: Can You See Or Feel It?*

Shortly after *Gamma Rays* we moved to the studio basement acting space and spent more time exploring mind/body relationships, voice and improv. I asked Rose if she was aware of what it felt like to witness her classmates do *Transformations*,

I can remember witnessing it but I can’t remember…what it was…that I was witnessing. You can tell when-like you can tell the transition occurs but I don’t know what that point looks like, really…Well I think its like- It’s not-its like connected to the visual but its not so visual, its instinctive but its sort of energy- connection like group dynamic. I guess or like the amount of concentration you are putting into their work- you have to have that, that whole faith and witness it. (p. 8)

Rose affirmed the level of concentration necessary to observe someone else’s work, acknowledging that faith is required to witness the transformation process. She remarked that it is connected to the visual, but not entirely visual. It is “instinctive”, “sort of energy” and connected to the group dynamic.

*Meditation and Colour at 15*

At the age of 15, Rose responded to my email interview questions, with the following reflection on the meditation practice, “Meditation helps me to relax and relieve tension”. Her reflection on the colour work rendered this statement, “Colour work and breathing has helped me to find my centre and work on expressing emotions dramatically. It has helped me to establish my base (earth, water, air) and further use that to later portray emotions realistically” (Questionnaire 2006).

*Breathing and Colour*

Recalling the work almost four years later was a different experience. Rose struggled to recall her body awareness during the colour work,

Thinking (yeah) with that, I don’t know the exact colours. It was like, it was never right up here it was always like down here (gestures between throat and root chakra). I remember talking about like the chest, right here. I just remember that being like here and
having conversations like where we connected like to the heart and that kind of relationship. I can recall like lower down in my stomach and stuff, it was never above my chin. (Interview 1 p. 19)

Rose however, did recall the awareness she developed of her mid region that was cultivated by the colour and energy inquiries.

**Visualization and Symbols: Openness and Light**

Rose described her felt sense of the meditation circles,

Like a magnetic kind of heat sort of…drawing us together as a group like a connection even if our hands weren’t touching, it was there because we were all sort of focused. (Interview 1 p. 20).

Rose acknowledged a group connection that was established without physical contact but through a kind of psychic focus.

Rose provided a detailed description of her felt sense but struggled with recalling any symbols,

I can’t remember symbols that were reoccurring. I can’t remember anything specific but like I remember they always made sense. But I don’t remember having anything that I thought, ‘I don’t know how this connects here.’ I don’t know what this means. I don’t know what symbols there were but they seemed to always fit in…

I can’t think of what symbols there were. The visualization we had specifically was …like you might have led them…I am not sure. I don’t remember but it was like through a sort of forest. It was like a picture, a path and the trees are there, but it’s bright and open in front of me. But it is never really reaching that and continuing on, but you never reach that open light…I don’t remember anything else really.

I remember connecting that to camp and sort of pictured some of the pictures there in that visualization. It was like going up hill and downhill and coming to this area where we had the like fire which is sort of like an open space like surrounded by trees and everything. I can’t think of how that really connected to anything really significant. Its not a place I think of … I don’t know what it was really telling me but I don’t think I really struggled …it didn’t seem to be the part that I needed to struggle to figure out. It was just sort of what I saw… (Interview 1 p. 21)

Rose described one reoccurring but powerful image and made a symbolic connection to an open clearing. Rose admits that she did not feel the need to figure this image out or make special meaning of it. Rose is now someone who is on a path of open self-discovery.
Falling into the Nothingness that is You

As a part of the mentor group that worked in my basement studio for three years, Rose also had the chance to explore mind/body connections through experimenting with resonance, voice work and using Tibetan Singing bowls. Aside from her present engagement with body/mind exercises in her acting training, this is also another reason I think her insights into the mind and body relationship have developed significantly. The following statement offers a nuanced understanding of the power of sound and its relationship to the awareness of Self,

I guess sort of with the bowls it was, there has always, but like up until the last times we were here (basement studio) that feeling of like of being present while you are here its like relaxing and like being present in your body here. You are left feeling sort of blank, like refreshed but it was like that same kind of a feeling but it was with the bowls it was the sound and the connection to it got that same feeling but lasts for a shorter duration …kind of thing so that same sort of like focusing and like… experiencing like the feeling of like the vibration again… having to be focused so much that you connected with that sound and that feeling that everything else like disappears and it was just like you like are there. It was a like a melting into diminishing into…it felt like… like honestly? Diminishing. Because it was the most appropriate word because it’s like falling into nothingness but it’s that nothingness that is you. Like you are just present in that moment with that feeling, that sound… But I don’t think like words can really describe it like they just don’t think they can really be adequate. (p. 17).

I believe that Rose’s recent acting training has also contributed to her ability to articulate her experiences. The above description reveals Rose’s sensitivity to the vibratory qualities of sound and her ability to describe shifts in consciousness. She has never studied Buddhist philosophy but adeptly articulated the paradox of nothingness, “falling into nothingness but it’s that nothingness that is you”.

The Mentor Group

Rose described the group dynamic and her feeling of wanting our two hour Friday night mind/body inquiries to go on and on into the evening. Her comment is in keeping with Angela’s reference to the group dynamic during her first production; the feeling that the discoveries were endless,

…and feeding off of each other we never ran out of anything to say and like it kept going…we wanted to keep going and ‘OK, It is time to go.’ We had so much more to say. I always felt, ‘But we have so much more to say. We didn’t have as much time to participate and talk as much as we wanted to…I was sitting there and saying, ‘I wanted to
say something’…I am listening to this person and I am interested in that too, but I wanted to say more and more and just go into it. (p. 18)

Rose’s statement echoes the comments of Angela and Isabelle when addressing earlier childhood experiences in drama. Rose’s reflection, however, also addresses how she felt time accelerate.

Observing Transformations Now: Something You Dig Into

Rose responded to my questions regarding whether she could observe the body leading during Transformations as opposed to the mind planning the movement,

I don’t know…It is a gradual thing though like I can’t…I said that it’s a point that they switch but I don’t think it is even a point really. I think it is something that you dig into. I can right now I can think of times in class. So even like in the first weeks when we’d do circles and transformations. When you’d go into the middle of the circle and one of the times he’d pull specific people and then go into it more and the voice. I think with the voice as well, it’s easier when you are working with movement and voice together. I don’t think it’s purely with movement you can tell…I think that you need voice and movement together. You know when it connects I guess. I have to hear it as well. I can see it in my head happening but I can’t…like I said…it like is something that you dig into… even like in the first few weeks of class he (performance class instructor) would pull specific people into the circle and then go into it a little more. With the voice as well, it is much easier when you are working with voice and movement together. I don’t think it is purely with movement you can tell…I think you need the voice and movement together. When it connects I have to hear it as well. There is a point where you can hear a disconnection between the two but its difficult to pinpoint the time. (p. 19)

Rose conveyed an understanding of active mind/body work. She believes that there is a point at which the body takes over, but this is not a switch per se, but “a digging into”.

Rose continued to articulate how she witnesses Transformations during her performance class,

I don’t think it is visual-Well, I think it’s like a-it’s not-it is like connected to the visual bit it’s not visual, it is like instinctive but sort of energy-connection like group dynamic. I guess, or like the amount of concentration you are putting into you work like you have to have that whole faith and witness it. It’s a gradual thing though like I can’t…like I said…it like is something that you dig into… even like in the first few weeks of class he (performance class instructor) would pull specific people into the circle and then go into it a little more. With the voice as well, it is much easier when you are working with voice and movement together. I don’t think it is purely with movement you can tell…I think you need the voice and movement together. When it connects I have to hear it as well. There is a point where you can hear a disconnection between the two but its difficult to pinpoint the time. (p. 8)

Rose again reiterated that faith is required when observing Transformations. Allowing the body to lead or to have more of a central informing role in the relationship with mind relies more on
“digging” into the relationship than watching for the moment when perceptions of what is body and what is mind come together.

Presence and Transformations

With an ironic tone in her voice, Rose explained that her university classes are conducted in a circle, “all of the time”. Two exercises in the early stages of the drama classes are now important to Rose’s training, Walking into the Centre and Transformations. Rose recalled an earlier version of Transformations, “I just remember things like walking around and repeating someone else’s movement. It was a simple way of doing Transformations” (p. 5). Rose was required to do the Walking into the Centre exercise during her audition for university. When the instructor introduced the exercise, she thought, “I know exactly what he wants”.

Rose recalled how she first felt about the Walking into the Centre exercise, “It is terrifying at first. At first it is something so simple but it is so like challenging to figure out exactly what you are supposed to do-not figure out what you are supposed to…just do- but it is really hard –simple, but complicated all at once” (Interview 1 p. 6). Rose explained her process during the moment before she begins Transformations, “I guess for me I am not so much in the mind when I am doing it, but like the moment before, so it is like I am preparing myself for the moment before. I like take the plunge into it…and just sort of be like, ‘I am going to let go and I am going to go, ready set go’, kind of thing…and its just like that preparation and merging into it” (p. 7).

Summary

Rose recalled how she expressed her awe of the stage in a spontaneous comment to her mother when she was five years of age. Rose’s question regarding place shows her early insight into her love of theatre. What opened or gave Rose a sense that she could continue with drama was her awareness that the challenges encountered in drama could be applied to the challenges in her life. Her early participation in the class was described as serious while later, through the commedia and her role as Nick Bottom her experience became more playful. Rose described her early acting process as “jumping into” the character.

Rose’s mind/body connections have helped her develop an acting method that includes emotion, resonance and a realization that her process involves a certain emptying of what she knows about acting and the character. She articulated the experience of listening to the Tibetan singing bowls as a “melting into”, “diminishing” and a “falling into the emptiness that is you”. Rose described the energy necessary to do Transformations as “digging into” and the approach...
to witnessing these exercises involves an “instinctive energy”. While watching others do
Transformations she articulated the need for a level of faith, as the moment of connection is not
necessarily understood as a visual connection. Our experimentations with sound and the Tibetan
bowls seemed to instigate the most in-depth reflection and one that highlighted the effect of the
exercise on Rose’s awareness of a certain paradox, “the nothingness that is you”.

**Phase 2: Nature**

**Fall**

The course work for Rose’s university drama class is divided into performance, voice and
movement. The class that combines all three elements; movement, voice and acting is Rose’s
performance class. The performance class does not require journal writing and unfortunately
there is little time for the students to engage in mind/body inquiry as a group. Two of the main
exercises for the acting class are, Transformations and Walking to the Centre. The voice class
relies on exercises that sensitize the actor to areas of resonance in the body. Students are
expected to write a journal response for this course and the movement course. Movement class
explores the body through various modalities: The Feldenkrais Method, the Alexander
Technique, Rolfing, Yoga, Tai Chi and the Grotowski movement methods.

**Letting Go**

I am opening this portion of the chapter with reflections on Rose’s performance class,
which coincide with the fall of 2008. Rose agrees with Isabelle’s sentiment regarding the power
of transformations,

Yeah, it’s like I think voice and movement are more… I don’t know for some reason in
performance class I can sort of let go and go with the first instinct. I guess some of the
transformation stuff, I try to not to get caught up in my thoughts…but it’s easier to let go
there than movement and voice when we are doing the activities. Voice is a lot about
stillness and silence…and just breathing and its hard for me to just focus on that and clear
the thoughts completely... and like with the breath work as well…knowing when I am
being aware of the breath and controlling it…and like trying not to control and just be
…it is a constant battle. (Interview 1 p. 19)

Rose explained that in order not to get caught up in her thoughts the combination of sound and
movement help to reduce her constant self-evaluation.
Absorbing Experience

The fall was a time of adjustment and turbulence. Rose was frustrated that she could not access the emotional range in her acting class as she had before. Other reflections revealed Rose’s developing insight into the internal/external forms of awareness and her understanding of how to open to the other,

It’s like opening up to people, but also in terms of opening up, be willing to accept other people’s experiences. She (the teacher) talked about it in terms of a circle. The first layer is connecting to the experience internally. The outermost ring is the bold, out there people wanting to share everything and anything. And the one in the centre is where I want to be. It means absorbing and being aware internally but also taking from the outside, being out there and absorbing externally. (Voice Journal 12/04/08)

This is only the beginning of Rose’s understanding of how to absorb experience to the extent that there is an openness to another individual’s experience. The teacher introduced an orientation to experience that involves absorbing self and other through an internally rooted focus that is also capable of drawing from the outside.

Fall Inquiry

The group inquiry discussion began with members sharing their responses to certain spaces in nature, “That was like last night I was really stressed out and I was thinking about getting more exercise and decided to get myself motivated. I just said to myself that I am going down to the beach to run- and I needed to do that. I was like drawn to it”. Rose identified more activities connected to the water and her feelings while being close to water, “Sailing is another thing that makes me overwhelmingly happy…and canoeing” (Group Inquiry 1 p. 3).

On the Nature of Rose’s Dreams

In the fall inquiry various dreams were shared. Rose responded that she never sees herself in her dreams (p. 9). However, the night before the inquiry meeting Rose had a dream that she saw her neighbor when he was fifteen years older,

Kelli: Where were you?

Rose: In front of my house…I wasn’t any older (group laughter). (p. 9)

Later in January, images in this dream seemed to correspond to Rose’s lived experience. I will elaborate on this dream in relation to a meditation Rose had in the 2009 New Year.

Rose also feels as if she cannot guide her dreams. I note this in contrast to her idea that she guides her meditations, “I don’t dream in black and white…I can’t control my dreams. I
can’t make myself do things when I am dreaming” (Group Inquiry 1 p. 5). With respect to writing down a dream Rose stated, “Yeah like that has always been kind of my problem like I am such a perfectionist when I go to write it its like there are too many details and its like I don’t even want to bother but it will make the whole picture. But its like its hard” (Group Inquiry 2 p. 5).

Anxiety: Pushing, Pulling and Drawing In

Rose reflected on her anxieties in connection to her voice work. She wrote that when she is triggered by anxiety she gets choked up, and when she reaches an extreme level of anxiety she cannot speak at all. When she is anxious she stumbles over her words. Stumbling on words occurs when she has been silent for a long period of time.

Rose contributed her thoughts in the group inquiry on the transition from high school to university and the anxiety she encountered, “I understand what you mean like going into university was like you are surrounded by people and its like you don’t know any of them the way you knew them before and you spend time trying to find those people that you spend so much time being alone. It’s like…alone and not alone” (Group Inquiry 1 p. 4). Rose identified a need to slow down,

I think it all ties into how I handle stress, instead of talking about it; I build up my time so I can’t think about it even. I need to give myself more free time to just talk to myself and to others. I’m making things harder for myself than they need to be and pushing people around me away. Pushing is the wrong word, maybe what needs to be used instead is that I am not “pulling people in” like I want to and need to naturally because of the kind of person I am. (Voice Journal)

Group Meditation in Nature

Just after the first fall meditation in nature Rose shared a similar experience to that of the group members. Gwen, Isabelle, Dylan and Angela reported feeling a wave-like, or rocking sensation. Rose experienced a similar feeling but also sensed that she was connected to the ground, “Yeah, maybe I am going to fall but my feet were so-planted”. Rose looked down to ground the sensation, “I just stared down like I couldn’t concentrate if I looked around”. She added another reflection, “It is hazy because it is dark, but I thought I could see my breath and even though it is not that cold and I didn’t feel as cold because I could feel people’s breath” (Fall Group Meditation). Rose experienced a warming sensation that had more to do with the
suggestion of warmth generated by everyone’s breath. We were standing in a large circle, with an approximately ten-foot radius, on a very cold fall night.

**Winter**

During the second group inquiry, Rose shared how difficult it was to transition into classes dedicated to voice and movement and then to learn to write and reflect on the mind/body relationship,

But in terms of what learning voice and movement was like? I didn’t really know what I was doing the whole time I was doing it. Then we went to talk to the teacher individually. What she was saying was, like even though you are doing the same exercises over and over again, it should feel like something new each time. It kind of cleared everything up for me because it was like you need to focus on the experience and how that experience is different each time, instead of focusing on what you are doing actually. What she was saying was like, it needs to be a new experience every time even though you are doing exactly the same thing. And so no, you do the same warm-up every time and so its like what is it about what you are doing, that you can be aware of that is in that moment instead of like the last time you did it. She’s like write down what you felt like in the moment. I don’t know… I was breathing I did the motion… I don’t know how you spell it out…It is entirely different from everything else we have done up until now at this point and to do it and to just feel it and… (Group Inquiry 2 p. 12)

Rose identified key insights into learning to be present to, describe and write about mind/body experience. Her statement also indicated that even though she may have some experience with voice and movement, attending to being in the moment and describing the moment were new skills.

During the winter equinox gathering Rose experienced an intriguing reaction to the sound of the Tibetan bowls, revealing another dimension to how she shifts into non-ordinary states of consciousness in response to her reaction to sound,

With the bowls one thing that stands out in my mind is the apprehension I felt when that first sound was made. My body seized up but not my muscles, but more internally, I guess. I got almost nervous. With the sound I felt in a trance. My eyes had to stay fixated on something, even if it was the floor. My eyes had to blur almost as a subconscious reaction to wanting to be internally aware. As I took the bowl, I focused on the reflection of my handing moving around. The visual connection to my action and the sound and vibration had a calming effect on me. (Winter Inquiry)
The experience of the bowls seemed to hold a resonance to the way in which Rose wandered in and paid attention to nature. Later we moved outside to silently watch whatever we were drawn to watch. I noted that in the beginning of the year Rose’s voice journal expressed a similar desire, to “follow the impulse” (Voice Journal). Rose wrote, “…I tried to follow the impulse…I was drawn to sounds of nature and movement, the wind and the wind chimes gaining on me through the trees, the waves hitting the shore” (Winter Group Inquiry).

In the notes taken right after the wandering session, Rose began to connect these sounds to her association with the seasons,

But now I think about it, I think about seasons. The visual must have connected because it was unique. The sounds were unique, I mean even though they are evident in any season; lots of wind through the trees in the fall and waves on the shore in summer. I guess it connects to outdoor locations you associate with times of year. Although sometimes it gets confused, by going to tropical places in the winter when you’re used to snow. That is what leads me into that thought. But now I guess I mean now feelings associated with time and nature and memories. Or how times of year and nature affect how you feel, or your perspectives on life. (Winter Inquiry)

Rose’s mind/body connections are very similar to her response to nature. During this wandering session she relies on sound and movement to feel her connection. She briefly notes how this form of listening coincides with a unique way of seeing and hearing. Rose addresses how feelings are “associated with time and nature and memories”.

Winter Holiday Reflection

In the beginning of January, Rose emailed me with a mind/body experience that she encountered over the winter holidays. This experience was initiated as a result of some rising tension in her relationships, “I’ve had a couple of days, nothing serious, just not enjoyable, arguing with friends and such. It is all-good now. But yesterday I spent a lot of time talking and so by the end of the day I was drained, physically and emotionally. I ended up sleeping in today which depressed me” (Email 1/02/2009). Someone in the house suggested that Rose go outside for some air,

So I sat on my porch, in stillness for what felt like a really long time and only seconds all at once. I was completely transfixed. I don't know exactly how to describe it (I suppose that makes this less helpful, but I'm trying to articulate it, haha). The air was cool but not freezing on my face. The stillness of the street, the air and the trees were mesmerizing. I looked at the pink sky and the fresh snow and felt a calmness wash over me. That's the best way I can describe it. I actually felt washed clean of my bad mood and as though everything had slowed down.
It was so refreshing after 48 hours of mental chaos. I was aware of my breath moving naturally. I stayed still, and I felt like my breathing was in sync with all around me. When the wind finally caused movement in the trees, it didn't feel sudden or make me shiver, it just felt like it went with the flow and the rhythm of the moment and me.

I felt happy and as soon as I realized what was going on, I wanted to come right to my computer and tell you about it so I wouldn’t forget a single detail. But then I couldn't break the moment. I wanted to stay there in stillness and wait for something to make me break it. It was amazing. I didn't feel like I could physically move myself until the moment was over. Finally my neighbor came out and I took that as my sign to go in.

I'm going out for a walk soon. It's exactly what I need. When I look outside everything seems okay; there's no storm going on. So because the "storm" inside my head isn't being reflected in the world around me, I feel relief. It reassures me that everything is going to be okay, if that makes any sense. (Email 01/02/2009)

As I begin to contemplate this writing in the context of the whole inquiry, I remember the only dream Rose shared was a dream in which she met her neighbor while she was on the front porch. The neighbor was 15 years older. I understand the neighbor’s age as an indication that Rose was dreaming an event that was going to take place in the future.

Rose expressed the feeling of remaining in stillness, of being transfixed and being in tune with everything around her. The feeling that her bad mood had been washed away connects to similar statements that she has made when describing the effect of the drama classes on her moods. At one point during this emergent nature experience, Rose does not feel as if it is even possible to move. Rose seems to travel deeper into the experience as she identifies two aspects of herself with two seemingly different aims. It seemed as if the one who typically maintains control over experience, began to submit to the one who desired to be nurtured by this experience. Rose’s reflection shows how complex the subtle tension between will and the one who is drawn by experience can be. Perhaps her ego had calculated the ending, but body/soul, or the aspect of self that needs to draw from the well of experience just a little longer, desired a further absorption. The end of the experience was signaled by the appearance of the neighbor, who I argue corresponds to Rose’s dream image. Rose read the neighbor’s appearance as a practical interruption. I am reading her experience in the context of this sharing as both practical in the sense of interruption of a private moment and a dream connection.
Spring

Rose refers to her inner issue as “trusting in myself so that I can reach my full potential” (Spring Inquiry). Throughout her journals, trust emerges as a reoccurring challenge. Rose wrote that she is also working on affirming herself. During the group inquiry in the spring, Rose connects this lack of trust to her fear of taking risks as an actor.

Rose goes on to explain in her spring inquiry notes that the movement work is cultivating her spatial awareness, which in turn is giving her a sense of core strength and balance. Rose reflects after her wandering,

Everything was so permanent and motionless. When I am stressed out and busy I feel that the world around me should be moving at the same speed. But these trees and animals stay here all the time. Sometimes the trees move in the wind but they don’t go far. I could go away and everything would remain here. It felt very retrospective.

I’ve described this feeling before of having an emotional storm going on inside me and outside surrounding me is the peacefulness of nature. It reminds me that the world is not ending. In my head everything is very dramatic and so nature comforts me in this way. Comparing these realizations in the moment bring me back to earth and help me see things in perspective. It is funny though, because the other day I experienced this in reverse (this isn’t in connection to our meditation at the park but a continuation?). I was sitting inside and looked outside to see it pouring rain. I was overcome with the same feeling. The weather was horrible, but I felt good. It was just …a lot of rain, but it wasn’t going to bring me down. It felt peaceful—a natural occurrence that reminded me this time that life was going on. The weather could continue to change and be surprising. I don’t know. It was really comforting. (Spring Inquiry Journal)

Moving Towards Calmness

Rose described in detail the tension in her body and how it impedes her ability to explore, “If I can make my body more relaxed and less tense, I will be able to explore my body more freely as an actor...” To relax and centre herself Rose planned to spend a few moments of silence before going to bed every night, “In my everyday life I will enhance my physical, emotional and spiritual well being…I am also less stressed out as I learn to release more and breathe more I am able to fall more completely into the exercise” (Movement Journal).

Rose explained in her end of year journal that the Shakespeare scene was the highlight of her year,

Shakespeare scenes have been my most rewarding experience this term. I got a sense of Ophelia’s emotions, I matched them with personal experiences and emotions and when I went through the scene, I experienced something I’d never
experienced before. When I allowed my body to be responsive, I connected strongly with my partner as if we were in our own real world. I breathed him in and then released it all out and had an enormous amount of vocal freedom that I never knew I had.

With the rich text I was able to indulge in the emotion that I was feeling by taking my time saying each word. When I allowed my breath to flow naturally and didn’t control it, I was vocally and emotionally satisfied. I allowed the breath to drop in, and release inspiration, expelling new, rich emotion. It was such a purging feeling and a moment of realization. The sounds I made in that moment were unlike anything I’d ever heard myself make as an actor, they were real, raw emotion and incredibly satisfying.

I felt so free and open and I wanted to show that to the audience. I wanted to let them into that and affect them. It was the moment I realized that acting was about having an experience witnessed. It wasn’t reenacting an emotional situation; it was about taking the emotional journey every time you go through those lines and stand in front of the audience. It was like nothing else and it has definitely helped me to understand the importance of vulnerability and vocal freedom. (Final Progress Report)

I would like to affirm Rose’s pattern of expressing significant mind/body experience. She uses words like purging and refreshing. Rose arrived experientially at an understanding of the role of emotion in acting. Emotion cannot be the destination in scene work, even if the scene requires intense emotions. Instead, Rose affirms the movement of the experience; the flow of emotion, the breath, inhaling the other actor, feeling the audience, and “having an experience witnessed”.

How Do You Absorb an Experience?

Later in the spring Rose took a trip to Paris, carrying her journal and the research question written inside of it. After spending an hour taking in the vastness of the view and the height of the Eiffel Tower Rose reflected,

It suddenly came to mind that I would be able to answer the question a bit more…it was something about feeling myself internalize, feeling that switch over, like a deeper feeling of concentration. I am fully in tune with nature (or in this case my environment/surroundings/outdoor place/country) when I detach from my body. I was more sensitive to the feelings, the sounds, the smells when I was able to sink into myself. I can move my limbs but they feel at a distance away from me. I disconnect myself from the sense that I’m in control but it’s not a clear path. I can lift my arm…but it feels like I am moving it in my mind…instead of being a physical effort? I think, ‘move my arm’ and it moves almost disconnectedly, like some sort of magical levitation. I’m in touch more with the intellectual spiritual side…detaching from the physical. I pay attention a lot to the fact that I’m thinking too…actually hearing the sound of my voice in my head and I get lost in that. It’s the foreground voice I’m hearing. I can still hear the moment
so much as living in myself and my response to the outside world/nature. It was really interesting but hard to articulate. (Email 07/04/2009)

Considering this excerpt in the broader context of Rose’s body/mind learning, I understand her detachment from the body as a detachment from the energetic body that is responsible for the will (Brennan 1993). Rose connects the sights and sounds of this moment with the sense that she has sunk deeper into self. I am suggesting she is tuning into another experience of mind and a new form of hearing “the foreground voice” by absorbing her environment. The sense that she is being raised by something other than her habitual understanding of controlling bodily movement also indicates that she has shifted into another state of awareness. I am recalling Isabelle’s first meditation and connect this experience to Isabelle’s vision of the levitating woman.

Summer

After participating in our summer equinox experience, Rose confirmed a dynamic between humans and nature that is mutually dependent and “digestive”;

The only thing that exists free of human beings is nature. So I think it only makes sense that when the two are alone together-they are able to feed off one another and focus themselves as well. We are free to exist side by side without forming a relationship and yet you are always connected. I guess what I want to say is that we need one another without really thinking about it. We shape and affect one another but cannot control one another. Everything man made we can control it, but nature runs its own course. So the basic two, humans and nature exist with a certain degree of harmony. When we attend to nature, we feel that comforting calmness on the exterior so we are less overwhelmed with what’s going on inside. (Summer Inquiry)

Rose articulates an existential understanding of nature that leads to freedom. This is a relationship that is mutually dependent and that relies on a connection that occurs despite our full understanding of it. It is a shaping and forming relationship outside of a need to control and inside “a certain degree of harmony”.

Connecting to the calming effect of nature in me: When it’s stormy outside, I feel safe inside and calm. When there’s an emotional storm inside, if nature is calm I’m comforted that the world is not ending. Taking time out of a busy life to attend to nature for long enough calms me. We need one another, and nothing else, to keep us going in life.

Looking out to my Future: Not really sure what I saw…Calm (that word keeps coming up), happiness, pure happiness. Soft delicate. Nature makes everything feel delicate and smooth and perfect-natural. When I’m in nature, really sunk into nature, I don’t feel badly about myself either…(Summer Group Inquiry)
Rose is attempting to reconcile her relationship to nature in this reflection, affirming the calmness and happiness she draws from attending to nature. She continues to experiment with “sinking into” experience.

*The Final Gathering*

During the final wandering meditation, Rose admits that she found it difficult to “truly attend” to nature. She noted that she was not “feeling in” herself,

I feel like I need to be in tune with myself to really be attentive to nature around me. When I’m tired and sometimes I’m not sure what brings it on, I feel out of body because I am so much in body. I’m so introverted that I can’t pay attention to the outer world. Or it feels not fully real. It feels sort of like a dream. I’m less inhibited because I don’t connect myself to reality.

In terms of attending to nature, I can see it and appreciate it, but I can’t enjoy it as much as I can when I reach out and make a connection to it—really feel it. The lines are so thickly drawn between the inner and the outer that they can’t really mingle. I can see and feel nature but its almost as though it can’t go through me. It doesn’t have the same calming power— but for some reason I’m still drawn to it, it has such an association because of relaxation and safety, safety in nature. I guess having that strong separation makes me feel so lost within myself because I can’t be calmed/affected by the exterior forces. It leaves me alone with myself. It can be helpful, but sometimes frightening, or disconcerting? I rely on that mingling of inner and outer (or myself and nature) to settle. (Final Inquiry)

Rose admits that when she is tired she becomes introverted. She cannot pay attention to the outside world. Neither can she reach out or mingle with nature, “It cannot go through me”. Despite this feeling Rose is still drawn to nature as she associates a connection to nature as an opportunity to relax and calm herself. Rose also reveals the intermingling qualities of the dynamic. An attention to nature fosters a sense of self and can also sensitize Rose to when she is disconnected from her self.

*Summary*

It is appropriate to acknowledge Rose’s own summary with respect to the relationship between her acting training and development,

I have to give credit for my growth over the years to theatre and my acting training…Theatre has the ability to challenge and try your strength of character on a deep level. This kind of work is not found just anywhere. You are forced to submerge yourself in work that strips you down entirely and therefore my training in this field is 100% the root of the strength of my character. The recognition and appreciation of my work has helped to build my confidence. I speak up more and speak from my heart and soul, now that I am growing as an artist. (Voice Journal September 08).
During her childhood, Rose conveyed her sense of wonder in response to seeing her first Shakespearean stage. Rose responded to the early drama experience by poking fun at the seriousness of the rehearsals and casting process. After an overly serious introduction to drama, it took some time for Rose to connect to the more silly or playful dimensions of the work. Rose’s experience emphasizes the importance of ensuring the explorer archetype is present in a child’s learning experience.

During the Thespian stage, the mask work provided a chance for Rose to hold a barrier between self-consciousness and her work as a pre-adolescent. *Gamma Rays* and playing the role of Ruth revealed her need to experiment with the darker aspects of her psyche. Although there was emotional turbulence over casting and body image, Rose acknowledged that meditations were calming and helped her with clear thinking. Rose claimed to have experienced numerous images in the meditations but could only recall a reoccurring landscape image of an “open clearing” with a fire. Her experience with The Tibetan singing bowls initiated a sense that she falling into, “the emptiness that is you”.

Rose demonstrated a refined understanding of the mind and body relationship, using phrases like, “digging into”. Later, in the nature phase it seemed as if softer terminology was used, in the form of “falling” or “sinking into” the mind/body relationship. Rose acknowledged the importance of sound and movement together as she experienced watching others and as she herself attempted to “follow the impulse” while wandering in nature. Rose learned that in order to stay in the moment with her acting she needed to understand how to allow emotion to flow through her and that acting was more about having an experience witnessed.

Being transfixed or slipping into another state of consciousness seemed to come easily for Rose as we entered the nature phase. Attending to nature evoked calmness and happiness as long as she could access the internal and external aspects of her awareness. As the year progressed her ability to comment on the relationship between nature and self intensified. Her experience at the Eiffel tower was a remarkable experimentation with subtle energy, inspired by her need to understand how to absorb an experience.

Now experiencing a deepening and expanded insight into the relationship between mind and body, Rose continues to cultivate her awareness through her acting training. Four very simple assertions seem apparent 1) Mind/body awareness is fostered through the repeated practice of doing exercises, reflection and through being witnessed by others 2) An ability to articulate mind/body awareness is cultivated by writing, talking and exploring connections with
group members 3) Drama has fostered an understanding of inward/outward knowing and what it means to enter into an act of becoming 4) Nature softens and deepens the awareness of the relationship between mind and body and also highlights the need for a connection to self.
**Chapter 9: Digby**

*Plays*

Aladdin
Romeo and Juliet
The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds
Good Night Desdemona/Good Morning Juliet
The Seventh Year Review
Fight Club
The Tempest
Mother Courage
Alice in Wonderland

The Genie
Capulet
Teacher/Jack Vickery
Claude Night/Othello
Tyler Durden
Antonio
Second Soldier
White Rabbit/Dodo
Mock Turtle

Fundamentally humor is the power of ridicule or the twisting of things. It is the basis of entertainment and the underlying element in all extensions of consciousness. When a man takes a thing too seriously he is in bondage to it.

Mark Edmund Jones

*Background*

Digby is now a witty, cryptic twenty-two year old young man who joined the Saturday morning drama classes when he was seven years old. For a few years he attended the group as the only male student and kept faithfully returning despite each year’s unpredictable male turn out. Digby requested that the pseudonym he chose for this chapter appear in full, every time I made mention of his name. In the spirit of his commitment to free expression, I have not honored his request. I remember his playful smirk when he handed me the piece of paper with the pseudonym, Sir Digby Chicken Caesar scribbled in the corner.

*The Surprising Adventures of Sir Digby Chicken Caesar* is a British sketch comedy series. The central character is a drunken vagrant; videos of his sidekick and their questionable antics are posted on youtube. At first I was shocked, even a little aghast while watching the videos. Thinking about telephoning Digby to discuss the matter, I wondered, “What would I say? How would I put it exactly?” Perhaps I might have said something like, “I have to uphold the seriousness of the academy, Sir Digby Chicken Caesar, that is my job.” It is possible to view these characters and their wacky scenarios as contemporary expressions of Commedia dell’Arte humor. What commedia character comes alive while watching the videos? Digby’s favorite commedia character, an unscrupulous character called Brighella. Brighella lies and schemes, is
cruel to those in inferior positions and would most certainly sell his grandmother for a few pennies. Digby is not at all like Brighella, not at all cruel or unscrupulous, but he does enjoy these characters. Humor resides at the centre of Digby’s ontology and seems to be a more fitting context than my original hope to urge him towards what I had thought were the overall aims of this research work. I will provide a theoretical context in this chapter, which connects to the group’s work with mask and Digby’s interest in literary tropes and the commedia tradition.

*Family Background*

Digby lives in the east end of the city with his mother and stepbrother. His mother Holly is a university professor and a level two Reike master. Holly practices martial arts and has won awards in an Okinawan martial art form called Goju Ryu. This art form, developed for health and self-defense, cultivates an individual’s awareness to external and internal energy movement. Holly teaches a course, which is, comprised of mostly health care practitioners. In this course students are encouraged to research and reflect on a diverse array of critical perspectives, epistemologies and spiritual practices.

Digby maintains that his father Allan is a very intelligent man. Allan holds a degree in linguistics. Allan lives in the same province as Digby’s maternal and paternal grandparents. Digby said that his Dad has held many jobs and has struggled to maintain employment. He was recently laid off from his work at a box factory. Digby moved to this mid Eastern province at the age of four and spent his summers visiting his father. He would also spend time on his paternal and maternal grandparents’ farms. His paternal grandparents’ farm has just recently been sold.

Feelingly, Digby revealed that he didn’t know how his grandfather was going to get on without being a farmer. His grandfather is a man with many interests but does not enjoy reading, watching television or movies. His life long passion has been farming. When I asked Digby if he ever considered living in a small town, such as the one his grandparents reside in, he shuddered and replied, “No!” Although Digby does not possess any inclination to live in a rural area, he conveyed a deep respect for the way in which his grandfather lived his life. A few years after Holly moved to this province, with four your old Digby, she began living with the father of two young children. Carl passed away from heart disease the year we performed *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*. Carl’s two children remained with Holly, visiting their mother on weekends. Digby’s stepbrother now attends an art college. His stepsister also attends one of the universities in town and recently moved out from Holly’s two-bedroom house to her mother’s apartment a few blocks away.
Employment, Education and Interests

When I reconnected with Digby by telephone in the fall of 2008, he was working for a telemarketing company. The telemarketing job ended just prior to our first group inquiry meeting. Digby had been looking for a job for approximately a year and a half. He eventually secured a sales contract position that involved selling insurance packages for a legal firm. In the beginning of the inquiry year, we talked about job searching several times. Gwen suggested that Digby call the security company that had employed her for a year or so. After a while I made an effort not to talk about employment with Digby, or any subject that focused on his educational plans. Focusing on future plans seemed antithetical to the overall emergent quality of this inquiry, and to the notion that a young person should be free to wander during periods of change.

Digby emphatically maintained that he did not enjoy school. In fact he disliked the experience of schooling altogether, in particular the deadlines, assignments and tests. Digby completed his grade ten credits at a regular high school. He attended an alternative school beyond the grade ten year, but did not obtain all of the credits. At the beginning of the research inquiry Digby claimed that he might want to return to school at some point but he did not know what he wanted to study. Later in the year, however, he shuddered in reference to the thought of returning to the stress of assignments and deadlines. After Digby wrote his first journal reflection, contrary to my decision to cease focusing on career and educational plans, I asked if he would consider studying writing or philosophy.

Two of Digby’s favorite websites are TV tropes.com and Skeptics.org. He pursues various interests ranging from cooking, reading fantasy novels and keeping abreast of current news events. He did not at the time we began talking together, have a body practice, although he obtained his black belt in martial arts during his late adolescence. While we talked by the lake Digby told me a story about Arnold Schwarzenegger. The former actor, now governor of California hit a shark on the nose to save a swimmer from a potentially fatal encounter with a shark. Noting that I had not heard the story, Sir Digby replied, “Open up to the world around you, man”. While I encouraged Digby to open up to attending to a tree, a lake or bird, he nudged me towards a deeper engagement with the world.

Humor, Language and the Mask

In Rabelais and His World (1965/1984) literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin explores medieval humor as it is portrayed in the novels of Francois Rabelais. From this exploration Bakhtin conveys a concept referred to as grotesque realism. During the 15th century, the medieval
carnival was a widely celebrated vehicle for ribald humor. The carnival season overturned social, moral and religious hierarchies. High moral thinking was brought down into the messy, juicy, and sexual regions of the body, “Carnival laughter is festive, it is directed at everyone and it is ambivalent… it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking and deriding. It asserts and denies, buries and revives” (p.11). Throughout Bakhtin’s explorations, grotesque realism is established as a literary trope. The expressed nature of this literary trope affirms Rabelais’ belief that the body is continually engaged in an act of becoming.

During our inquiry meetings shock rippled through the room as Digby peppered his comments with an occasional swear word. Could I coax Digby to stop swearing with a little humor of my own?

Kelli: Am I going to have to find a key for the F shot on my computer? (Group laughter)

Sir Digby: Are you kidding? That would be the title of my thesis, “How to get along with people: Fuck ‘em. (Group laughter)

The potency that humor offers is not usually conveyed or acknowledged during an interview or research process. Our inquiry process was full of humor. The table at which we sat was often rocking with laughter. In between expressing our ideas about nature, expressing anger regarding the effects of globalization on the availability of clean drinking water, issues facing women, poverty and empathizing with someone who was upset in the group, we laughed and laughed and laughed. Sometimes it seemed as if Eros bounced across the table on our guffaws. At some moments, the laugh released self-recognition and at other moments, cutting, satirical sentiments, “Laughter penetrates the highest forms of religious cult and thought” (Bakhtin, 1965/1984 p. 13). Digby was often the instigator of the chuckles, cackles and general feeling of merriment.

Bakhtin makes another integral point regarding the unique role of language during the medieval carnival, “…it was characteristic for the familiar speech of the marketplace to use abusive language” (p. 16). Bakhtin also showed how Rabelais depicts the use of unacceptable language as a bonding experience between friends. Degrading or abusive language is shared with little fear of recrimination,

The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract; it is a transfer to a material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity…Degradation and debasement of the higher do not have formal and relative character in grotesque realism. “Upward” and “downward” have here an absolute and strictly topographical meaning. “Downward” is earth, “upwards” is heaven. Earth is an
element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, or renascence (the material breasts). ...Degradation then means coming down to earth (Bakhtin, 1965/1984 p. 21)

Laughter makes space for an experience of wholeness; static ideology is permitted to flow through the most ambivalent dimensions or expressions of humor. During communal moments of sharing in this form of humor, Bakhtin claims that we belong together and we belong to a renewed kind of wholeness.

*What Was at Play?*

From a research standpoint, openness does not mean waiting for the participant to echo the language of the researcher. To open to Digby’s nature, I attempted to let go of the ways in which I defined nature and spirituality. As I write this now, I feel a sense of irony. After years of attempting to correct Digby’s gaze, to draw his face and eyes up to the horizon, it was the experience of writing this chapter that lifted my own gaze. Although it is impossible to depart from one’s own ontological orientation altogether, it is also possible to desire a more integrative admixture of views and positions while representing the experience of another. What surrounded the tensions and transference fields that appeared in our dynamic? Love and empathy, although I felt this for all of the members, I knew Digby was at a point in his development where he was grappling with who he was and where he wanted to go next. I spent many moments in contemplative prayer for his well-being and felt a deep emotion each time I thought about him.

On a lighter note, what archetypal energy was at play between Digby and me? I played the Dreamy Air Cadet and he played the Skeptic. In our moments of misunderstanding, moments where I could not find the correct word and moments where he resisted my urging towards describing his experiences in nature, aliveness occurred. Even though it was clear that something in both of us perhaps unconsciously, was resisting relatedness to the other. I was resisting a provable material reality and he resisted a reality that was complicated by the wild imagination and not corroborated by a truth held together by facts. This chapter also explores Digby’s body/mind experiences in the drama class and shows how he challenged us in the inquiry year to open to a balance between nature and culture through his critical thought and satirical, cryptic humor. Towards the end of the inquiry Sir Digby expressed his connection to nature in the form of two poems.
Participant Contribution

I watched videos of Digby’s drama performances, reviewed playbills and drama pictures taken on various performance nights. We also met four times for an interview. The interview by the lake, where I decided to try and suspend my need to shift Digby from a causal worldview, was the most potent interview. At that time he expressed his desire to write more for the inquiry. I was only beginning to understand that exploratory writing during some stages of deep transformation could be distressing. Digby wrote sparsely after our meditation sessions and spoke robustly during the group inquiry sessions. The group inquiries were the most expressive venue for him. Digby shared one synchronicity and commented on how his dreams evolved over time. Intermingled with his passionate commentaries on events around the world were his humorous quips. Digby shared the critical perspectives most strongly with Gwendolyn and also instigated philosophical discussions on truth, identity and essence.

Phase 1: Drama

Digby came to a junior drama class when he was nine years old. An interesting young fellow, he was pretty easy to work with. When I say easy I mean that he was eager to play and could return from a moment of raucous laughter to continue contributing to the group. This is not usually easy for a child who loves to laugh. He was a child that continuously stood on the verge of laughter. In anticipatory moments, leading up to a joke or the lingering minutes after most of the laughter had died down, he was still quietly twinkling or smiling. There was also intensity about him. This intensity seemed to gather on his forehead and whether walking to the centre of the circle or standing to wait his turn during a game, his face would tilt down to the earth. His laugh though would draw his shoulders upwards into a rhythmic shake that eventually affected his entire body. One lingering memory of working with Digby involved trying to coax his eyes upwards to gaze at the horizon while he was walking towards the middle of the circle. I would remind him to look into the eyes of the classmates who were standing in a circle around him. Over time his willingness to lift his gaze improved, but intermittently I coaxed him back to attend to the line of the horizon and to attend to the gaze of his classmates.

Improv Games and Strategies: Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Digby’s first performance class was assigned the task of putting on Aladdin. Showing his interest in comedy, character and voice, the young Digby gave a captivating performance of the Genie. Digby chuckled, “…but at the time I wasn’t really interested in anything without humor
values” (Interview 1 p. 2). He simply came to drama to have fun as he declared during our interview, “I just watched a lot of Whose Line is it Anyway?” In this TV show four to six actors created improvisational scenes through spoken text or songs that were based on words or scenarios that they had been given out during the show. Digby explained further, “That was pretty much it and I wanted just to have some fun and act in stuff like improv, now and then” (Interview 1 p. 1). Digby recalled one improvisation game that I had not yet remembered, “We did freeze, a basic exercise-shit like that. It is not bad to get the mind…because it is the mind that is …obviously once you get out of the habit of improvising, it becomes a lot harder. It is technically easy but it is hard to do well” (Interview 1 p. 2).

Digby recalled one moment on stage that involved improvisation while acting as a soldier in a scene from Brecht’s Mother Courage,

Yeah, what happened was, you know, we were still in the middle of delivering our lines when the fake gun misfired and the hammer- that had the cap on it…I don’t know maybe the trigger got jostled or something but the thing went down and it went off and I was …unfortunately our solution turned out to be to yell, “Bang” (We laugh). (Interview 1 p. 2)

As I rewrote this portion of the chapter, two monarch butterflies flew in half arcs upwards and downwards, creating invisible circles through their flight pattern. As one butterfly flew to the top, the other flew to the bottom. Eventually the butterflies disappeared again. Perhaps their dance conveyed Digby’s thought processes as he tried to decide how he could resurrect the story line after the gun had misfired. Digby clarified his thought process during the scene with Kattrin on the roof,

Yeah well, that would have involved running back stage and reloading the gun so I was at a point where there were two thoughts in my mind, ‘OK, I can buy us some more time for somebody to reload this. I can flub my line and act like this is part of the script or I can just bite my tongue and see what happens’ (Laughter). I can’t remember who was actually holding the gun. I think it was Isabelle. I was going to say to her, “On my mark, you moron or something” (Laughter) (Interview 1, p. 3).

As it was, the gun prematurely went off and someone did yell, “Bang” at the time that the soldiers were to shoot Kattrin from the farmhouse roof, preventing her from warning the rest of the townsfolk that the soldiers were advancing.
With respect to Digby’s role as Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Digby did not mince his words, “I hate the play, honestly”. His comment referred not only to Shakespeare’s script but the costume design, my adaptation of the play, how characters were cut and the main characters’ roles were divided so the young actors could share the larger roles. Digby’s dislike of Shakespeare relates to how he considers the language and humor irrelevant to most modern audiences. In terms of remaining in our drama group, Digby persevered, “I enjoyed the year. I just think the play was rather terrible. We were in one of the three final performances and I was sitting there in the middle of the play and I am thinking, what the hell! What am I doing—the door is just there I should just go” (Interview, 1 p. 5). And yet I reminded him that he came back for another year and he replied, “The show must go on” (p. 6).

**Humor Values: Commedia Dell’Arte**

Digby’s love of comedy helped to cultivate nuanced perspectives on the Commedia dell’Arte tradition. The commedia explored unrepressed selfishness and instinct, hollow intellectualism and bold scatological humor. As I have reiterated, the commedia masks were used to draw the young actors away from an energetic presence in their heads, downwards into the expressive body that moves without analytical thought as a primary guide. Bakhtin (1965/1984) writes that the mask is “the most complex form of folk culture”. The mask connotes, “transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries”, and, “it reveals the essence of the grotesque” (p. 40). While Digby did not perform a full commedia play he experienced little trouble recalling the characters or describing the significance of putting on a mask, “I think the mask was just awesome. I really hated the way that he (Pantalone) was supposed to stand all the time. It was really hard on the back”. Digby however remembered Brighella and identified the value of literary tropes,

…just these reoccurring themes throughout literature for as long as we’ve known it, you know? Obviously tropes change over time and we add new ones to the book and take old ones out, when they are no longer used, metaphorically of course. I don’t know if anyone has a big list. (Group Inquiry 1 p. 11)

During an interview I asked Digby to clarify his understanding of the archetypes in the commedia tradition,

Yeah, obviously…the greedy one plays off of the greedy one archetype and the lazy one plays off the lazy one archetype. They are basically just a compilation of
character traits that the characters always have, regardless of what bugs bunny situation you put them in this week. (Interview 1 p. 8)

Digby understood the value of trying on and playing with the darker regions of human consciousness, “I like that. I always wanted to play bad guys but I never got those roles. It was a good chance to play around with these character traits”. Digby thought that bad guys were, “Just cooler and they got the armor and the capes and the giant cauldron with the spikes sticking out. You can’t fuck with that...aahhh (Laugh)” (Interview 1 p. 9). With respect to the commedia characters, Digby mentioned his enjoyment of Brighella, as I have mentioned, the character was probably one of the darkest of the commedia characters.

Breathing, Meditation and Transformations

Digby expressed a brief but practical view of the breathing and voice work, “You have got to have good lung control and you have to have a good voice…then of course breathing exercises are very good at helping people to annunciate” (Interview 1 p. 5). With respect to the meditation circle, Digby responded, “When I wanted it (mind) to be cleared…it is easier to focus on a topic kind of thing. It is easier to bring a mind to bear on the issue at hand. It was a form of meditation …it was way to clear your mind and reflect on something” (p. 5). Digby did not recall feeling any accompanying physical sensation. Digby claimed that Transformations helped, “A person to open up a lot more… I found it just helped to strip away the self-consciousness of what you are doing. It becomes really easy to overanalyze… you are out of character when you start to overanalyze every little nuance that you are doing”. (Interview 1 p. 11)

Energy Play

As a young adolescent, Digby had been open to experimenting with meditation and energy play. However, recently Digby has been careful not to ascribe any mystical thinking to the energy practices. He associates energy play with paranormal activity and various other unexplained phenomena,

I have always been kind of fascinated with that kind of stuff, even long after I stopped believing in most of that kind of shit. I would still sit down and watch the space specials, whatever the latest-whatever crazy thing they are pretending to try and scare us with now you know. They go through their little cycles sometimes, aliens and ghosts and lens flares that show up on crappy cameras and that pop up frequently. Rods turned out to be just small insect things. Do you remember rods –small insect things? (Interview 1 p. 6)
Digby called rods “little phenomena” that people claimed to see through their camera lenses, “They look like lines like wavey things going through. They are in bundles … it just looks like something that is kind of twisting and turning. These things are just tiny insects because they are beating so fast, they are flying…” (Interview 1 p. 6).

During the rehearsals for *Alice in Wonderland*, the drama group began to experiment more intensely with energy play. When Digby was an adolescent, he seemed to be a keen participant, relaying stories of how he experimented with energy at his martial arts class and with his mother. Sometimes he would show us how to experiment with creating energy balls and how to play with energy with another person. The following are Digby’s views on the practice now,

Kelli: What was the exercise that you used to do with subtle energy?

Digby: That is an interesting little phenomenon that has something to do with muscle memory and it is easy to visualize a ball in your hand and eventually it kind of sort of feels like … there is something between there. It is an interposing force.

Kelli: And do you feel that?

Digby: Hmm?

Kelli: Do you feel that force?

Digby: Well I mean sort of... There is...it has a lot to do to with muscle memory. Of course there is a kind of feeling of resistance where you go to press in and the hands go and the hands will snap to a more realistic position for how you hold something that you are visualizing in your mind, right? Because that is what your mind is expecting. You are tripping yourself. You are using mentalism. You are tripping yourself into potentially believing you are holding a ball or what have you.

Kelli: Any accompanying sensation would be...

Digby: This would be like elastic between your hands. This is some sort of comparable experience depending on basically how you are viewing it at the time.

Kelli: Yeah, so you think that the body takes up the thought. I am thinking about the ball, then my hands will feel the resistance and then they might even feel the sensation.

Digby: The mind is a powerful tool man.

Kelli: Is it?

Digby: The mind is a very powerful tool. The placebo effect is… it is actually incredible some times what people will physically experience. When you know
they shouldn’t … people going through withdrawals to non-addictive substances or actions. They eventually convince themselves that they have some sort of illness or what have you. You can start to manifest preliminary symptoms. If you are thinking you are sick long enough and you will feel that your body will fall into a fever and stuff like that. The mind is a powerful tool.

Kelli: Is the body powerful?

Digby: Well…the body is as powerful as you can make it within the confines of what is and what is not humanly possible. (Interview 1 p. 7)

This interaction shows that Digby interprets energy play as a mind over matter phenomenon. Bruce Lipton (2005) provides numerous studies on the placebo effect. The studies show how healing occurs as a result that the patient’s believe they are receiving a pill that holds the medicinal power to heal.

*The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*

Digby had some interesting things to say about his experience with *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*. He maintained that unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, it was an “awesome” script. It was the family’s economic condition that he said, “freaked him out”, specifically, the fact that they lived in a storefront with newspaper plastered on the windows. He wondered how the family could even afford the rent for the storefront. The play, *Gamma Rays* includes an all female cast, so we adapted and expanded two roles for Digby.

Sir Digby Chicken Caesar explained his understanding of interconnectedness in *Gamma Rays*,

My point is that, to use a rather simple example…wheelchairs are often made from melted down pop bottles or pop can tabs but it really doesn’t fucking matter that it used to be pop can tabs, beyond the fact that that is how we are fundraising to make these things…now it is a wheelchair. The same thing with us maybe at one time some atoms in our body were a star thousands of millions of miles away but the fuck, who cares?…It was just a well written play…The prose of it…The dialogue was good. (Interview 1 p. 13)

Although the play did not endow Digby with a sense of cosmic interconnectedness, at least not the kind that Tilly conveyed, the play did evoke a sense of empathy towards the family’s economic condition.

Digby developed the character through the costume he requested that his mother purchase. She bought a tie-dye shirt and this seemed to trigger a connection to the character.
Building a character from the look and feel of a costume signifies the “outside in” approach to character development and it is this particular approach to acting that remained with Digby. Even now Digby refers to actors who lean too heavily on psychological approaches to character development as, “people on happy juice”. Digby described his preferred acting method, 

I recall with this method, it was first about consciously taking out all the things that are a part of your own characteristics. For example, the way that you stand, vocal inflections, little impulses and ticks and working on completely eliminating them and then getting into a neutral state and then applying characteristics from the character that you are going to play... until you get the full character. (Interview, 1 p. 15)

In an attempt to designate further what might be vital to acting curricula, Digby noted, “I don’t think it matters so much ...that you are actually in the character...so long as everyone else thinks you are in the character” (p. 15). Digby speaks to the danger of over analyzing one’s performance,

Yeah, you start thinking, you know, “What do I do? Should I pick up the cup? Should I think of this, should I twirl this around my fingers and then you stop to think, you know, “What would my character do”? And then you think about your nervous habit thingies and your nervous habit thingies start to show through and then you are not really in the physicality anymore. (Interview 1 p. 15)

Digby continued to explain what happens when an actor becomes too analytical,

It becomes harder to concentrate on it. Then all you are doing is sitting there waiting for your next line...(Laugh). You take the interaction out of it. It becomes the case of, I’d say talking heads but obviously the analytical guy is not so much a talking head as a boring guy who can’t sit still. (p. 15)

Digby described how second-guessing and a lack of concentration come from being overly analytical about playing a character. He makes a point with respect to how the dynamic between actors is affected when one actor is lost in his or her thinking. Interaction becomes “waiting for the next line”. This reflection points to the need for balance between the interior and exterior forms of knowing.

Alice in Wonderland

Although Digby maintained that he was ready for a more challenging play than Alice in Wonderland, his character work was simply outstanding. Digby played the role of the White Rabbit, the Dodo and the Mock Turtle. Sir Digby had created distinct body rhythms, vocal tones,
gestures and delivered it all with a confident sense of comedic timing. His role as the Mock Turtle was a winsome embodiment of melodramatic grief and humour,

The Gryphon: What fun!
Alice: What is the fun?
The Gryphon: Why, she. It's all her fancy, that. They never executes nobody, you know. Come on!

They walk to the Mock Turtle
Alice: (Pointing to the Mock Turtle). What’s his sorrow?
The Gryphon: It’s all his fancy, that. He hasn't got no sorrow, you know. Come on! This here young lady she wants for to know your history, she do.
Mock Turtle: I'll tell it her. (Pause and elongated sigh) Once I was a real Turtle (Sobbing). When we went to school in the sea—yes, we went to school in the sea, though you mayn't believe it--
Alice: I never said I didn't!
Mock Turtle: You did. We had the best of educations—in fact, we went to school every day--
Alice: I've been to a day school, too.
Mock Turtle: Well my school had extras. We learned Reeling and Writhing and then the different branches of Arithmetic—Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision. There was also Mystery and Seaoigraphy.
Alice: And how many hours a day did you do lessons?
Mock Turtle: Ten hours the first day, nine the next and so on.
Alice: What a curious plan!
Gryphon: That's the reason they're called lessons, because they lessen from day to day.

The Seventh Year Review

In The Seventh Year Review Digby had proposed doing a scene from the movie, The Fight Club with another male member in the group. I thought the scene brought forward something subtle in Digby’s ability as a young actor. It was the first time that Digby had tried authenticity in a conversational dynamic on stage. This role called for a level of realism that Digby had not yet tried. Digby was not happy with his performance and claimed that he did not really understand the character well enough. That year we had also tried a scene from Bertolt Brecht’s Mother Courage. Not being a fan of acting methods that rely too heavily on emotion, such as Stanislavksi’s method, Digby said that he had wanted to “poke around” in Brechtian theatre for a while.

Summary

It was his love of improvisational comedy and the Commedia dell’Arte that helped Digby remain open to learning in the drama class. In this context he could experiment with darker character traits. Digby revealed many of his mind/body insights through his understanding of
how to become a character and how to remain present to the other actor. Many of these insights conveyed the notion that an emphasis on interiority and analysis interrupted the actor’s ability to stay in his or her body. Digby’s body/mind awareness connects to his understanding of the movement of thought. Although he does not recall images or felt sensations from the meditation circle he valued the calming effect of the circle and the way in which *Transformations* could dissolve self-consciousness and create a feeling of openness.

"Joy & Sorrow are inseparable ... together they come and when one sits alone with you ... remember that the other is asleep upon your bed."

Kahlil Gibran

**Phase 2: Nature**

*Fall*

From the outset, I wanted the group members to attend to nature and cultivate an understanding of how it felt to live inside their bodies, to allow their imagination to be freed through this attentiveness and to develop language around describing these experiences. However, when I started the first interview with Digby, he responded to my questions about nature with, “I was under the impression that nature just kills the weaker” (Interview 1 p. 1). Digby continued to clarify his comment,

Well not the weaker, but the less apt...I don’t think anyone is going to argue that a vole is stronger than a thirty foot lizard but apparently voles survive a whole lot better...It wouldn’t really be right to call it (nature) a destructive force …construction itself is a construct of humanity, the concept that something is built and has permanent lasting value is entirely a human construction and doesn’t exist in nature” (Interview 1 p. 1).

Digby also stated that nature and human nature are not separate and so refused to talk about nature as if it was somewhere separate from humans. Digby explained his position on using my terminology, “I don’t like getting sucked into words that have double meanings. That is a little Orwellian you know … to go around and decide words that already have different meanings in order to obfuscate that point-in order to better sell the ideology” (Interview 1 p. 1). From the beginning I understood that although literary tropes were of interest to Digby, he was adamantly
rejecting the notion that he had to adhere to my language and meaning. The following section is devoted to Digby’s views on religion and spirituality.

_Nature, Religion and Spirituality_

Although Digby wanted to be involved in the research inquiry and showed interest in participating in a vision quest, Digby claimed that he was an atheist and that he is opposed to the kind of religious fundamentalism that investigates issues without a commitment to provide facts and evidence to support beliefs. Openness, according to Digby means a willingness to question, to hear the views of the other and to search for and consider the facts. Additionally, Digby’s response to my questions indicated that he does not focus on the distinction between spirituality and religion when it comes to fundamentalism. Digby understands the distinction between spirituality and religion but communicates a similar skepticism towards both,

Sir Digby described his thoughts on religion,

It is easier for these (religious) institutions to brain wash children. You go around telling something to somebody and you know after awhile, it doesn’t matter how crazy it sounds people start to believe it. I mean you know, for thousands of years people were afraid to go on the particularly deep trenches of the seas because they were afraid of being mauled by a serpent or something or just fall off the edge of the earth. I mean you know...(p. 3)

Digby’s critique on spirituality was primarily aimed at the new age industry and touched on how he believes that new age spiritual teachers manipulate people’s beliefs,

Spirituality is entirely about people who think they have more right to speak on the subject and have you tricked into believing it. People who talk on the subject are unabashed entirely, obvious frauds like Sylvia Browne and Edgar Cayce, who is the worst of them. These people who go around cold reading in front of an audience and pretend that they speak to spirit and shit. You know starting a media empire based on that…(Interview 1 p. 3)

Although I was not in the habit of seeing ghosts, I did not divulge to Digby that for two years prior to this research I gave “cold” or intuitive readings at a Spiritualist church. Digby continued to critique the possibility of the existence of spirits,

If they (spirits) exist they clearly don’t do anything because there has never been any recordable provable case that stands up to scientific inquiry. No one has proven anything beyond a ratio that would fall into other than happenstance anyways…(p. 3)
And I did not mention the night that several members of the drama group claimed they encountered the ghost.

Digby does believe in truth and essence. While responding to a question regarding the nature of an essence, Digby maintained that while he believed in essence, it was impossible to name an essence, “We are not…it is not that we are incapable of naming it (essence) because for whatever reason we have an aversion to …the core truth of things. We love to put our own little spin on things and it distorts our perceptions of what is” (Group Inquiry 2 p. 7). I wondered and have never asked if it was after the *Gamma Rays* year that Digby “stopped believing” in unexplained phenomena.

*Fall Group Inquiry*

Contributing to a discussion on meditation at the fall inquiry, Sir Digby explained that it was easier to calm his mind while moving his body,

I was just saying that if for some people it might be easier to perform repetitive physical activity to achieve a meditative state rather than do a more sedentary activity. Like you mentioned sitting in one spot for two hours with your eyes closed. It might be easier to walk a distance or perform an exercise of jumping jacks or push-ups, something like that. Just something that your mind…put yourself in an uncomfortable position, not in an uncomfortable position so that your mind doesn’t want to stay focused and it can zone out and then you clear your mind of thoughts…(Group Inquiry 1 p. 1)

Aside from Digby’s skepticism with respect to spirituality, religion and his commitment to atheism, he was open to practicing meditation. Digby has developed his own approach to meditation through his knowledge of himself, his experience in the drama class and his martial arts training. Digby believes that meditation can occur both in stillness and through movement and affirmed that it was easier for him to enter a state of calm in a comfortable position.

After listening to the nature experiences of Angela, Isabelle, and Dylan, Sir Digby asked, “Am I the only one who is not a natury person” (Group Inquiry 1 p. 2)? Nonetheless, Digby seemed excited at the thought of a vision quest, “Wait …did you say, a vision quest in nature? Now that is my territory” (Inquiry 1 p. 4). Digby added a parameter, “…So long as I don’t have to go camping (Group Laughter) (Group Inquiry 1 p. 1).

It’s just…I don’t like wilderness type areas. Whenever I go to my grandparents…Whenever I am there (grandparent’s farm)...I just go *stir* crazy …I don’t know it just takes me over on the first night, between the crickets at night and the birds in
the morning I can’t get to sleep…(Dylan laughs)…like nature turns me into a crabby insomniac. (Group Inquiry 1 p. 3)

From this statement I sensed that a deep experience in nature for the group, meaning one that might take us into a forest for a period of time would not be compatible with Digby’s comfort level. Digby also described what it was like for him to look over the side of a boat, “Yeah, then there is a nagging feeling that you are looking down a ten thousand foot grave” (Group Inquiry 1 p. 2). Not only does nature cause Digby irritation but also bodies of water evoke anxious feelings. Although this comment was delivered in a comic tone, Digby’s fear of water was expressed numerous times throughout the inquiry group discussions.

However, Digby did reveal his sensitivity towards holism. Digby offered Gwen a sympathetic statement when she expressed her desire for her social work studies and creative passions to come together. He encouraged Gwen to connect her social work and creative interest, “Bring them together-become a whole, man” (p. 13). Digby continued to fulfill his comedic role when asked, despite his proclamations about not being a natury person, if he was willing to move outside to attend to nature, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is full of chili” (Inquiry 1 p. 1).

Synchrinities

Digby recalled his experience of synchronicity; “Almost anytime I learn a new word it appears in commercials over the next two weeks. That happened the first time I learned the term for nosebleed section (Group Inquiry 1 p. 6). Digby’s experience of new words and their random appearance on TV may provide insight into his future interests.

Later on in the inquiry I had a dream about Digby’s chapter, after struggling numerous times over how to understand what was occurring with him. I could see that he was spending a lot of time on his own, that he would sleep late into the day. Several times I waited for some time before he came to the door.

Let me explain the dream. The dream took place on a small tropical island. There was a rustic barn like building. I was participating in a celebratory event. I had to bring a dish to a family party. The furniture was overcrowded and arranged in a higgledy-piggledy style in the room. Later I found myself going down to the ocean to find a wet suit that fit a young adolescent boy that later I knew to be Digby. I resisted this dream; not wanting to admit that I had not yet understood Digby’s experience and therefore the chapter I had written was not an adequate representation of his experience. I thought my empathy towards Digby was enough to inform the structure, but clearly and perhaps even now the various threads lack a connection to the essential
nature of Digby’s experience. And up until recently I had been even unsure as to the essential nature of this work until considering Digby’s need for warmth while diving into the depths of his own metamorphosis.

I also saw a film called *Agora*. *Agora* unfolds as a disturbing allegory that presents Fourth Century Christians in a similar light to the Taliban. In 391 a.d. the Christians brutally killed Hypatia, a female philosopher and mathematician whose refusal to adopt a belief system beyond the cosmos became a threat to the burgeoning church. The film, although not historically succinct, conveyed the barbarism of unflinching beliefs that refuse to explore or question. For the past few mornings I have gazed up into the sky, while the moon and stars are still visible. It was this upturned gaze that brought me a different understanding of Digby and the aesthetic quality of his beliefs and thinking.

*Fall Group Meditation*

Digby continued his comedic role during the reflection on the fall meditation. To the other group members’ descriptions of moving energy he offered the following metaphor, “Like one of those fast forward hoollah doll things”. To Dylan’s description of the breath, he responded, “Forming a maelstrom”. When he shared what he experienced he revealed, “I have trouble calming the mind. I didn’t achieve that meditative state” (*Fall Meditation*).

Although Digby did not outline a spiritual or religious belief system, his desire to be free to question phenomena is tantamount to making concrete his ontological orientation. Below is Digby’s first writing sample and it was after reading the excerpt that I felt impressed with his intellectual aliveness and intensity,

In society, we measure our lives by unquantifiable values. We are the Paladins and the heathens; the defenders and the invaders; the cures and the plagues. Artificial titles for the artificial constructs of our manifest destiny, the truths we accept are not truth by definition, but rather sad realities created by the caged psyche of an uncaring world; lumbering forward in an echo of the past, always in motion, yet static at the core. That which is true hides only in metaphor, lurking in shadows, quantifiable, but untested. Some see humanity as a cancer on the world, a senseless force of destruction breaking all in its path. But what are we breaking? Is it the world? This is a world that we have created, forged in our own image, and then set in motion, placing another cog in a machine too bloated to function as it is. To fix our precious machine, we build, as we always have (perhaps instinctually), which too is a human conception. To build is to change; one thing becomes another, and this new creation is (as mentioned previously) set in to motion.
But when, during the creation of something new, does the raw material cease to be what it once was? When is a pencil no longer a tree, or a cloud no longer a lake? The truth is that they were never any of those things, for those are labels we use to convenience ourselves, and too often this is taken for granted. We are not making anything, we are not changing anything; only moving them around like a child with lettered blocks. The truth remains untested because nobody is willing to test it—so enamoured are we with our own perceived creation that to deny its existence is unthinkable, because we are material. The only things we have ever truly created are ideas, and we want them to corporealize so badly that we project them on to our world, our lives, and our society.

We are the products of a fantasy world that we refuse to acknowledge we live our lives in, because it too is material. Its existence is proof to us that it is real, and reinforces our faith in the fantasy. But existence and non-existence are not truth and untruth—often correlated, but not the same. The question still stands: what then, are we breaking? Only ourselves, and the fantasy we live in. Living our lives to the grinding of the cogs we have added to our beastly machine blinded by the illusion of the material—the superficial. We satisfy our animal hungers with our day-to-day rote while the person inside slowly goes numb, terrified by the revelations of truth and fleeing from epiphany. But try as we might to make real what we imagine, in the end, we are all prisoners of our minds, and only there can we truly find solace. (Fall Journal Excerpt)

Digby’s writing reveals his ability to think, to write and to work through his need to reconcile truth and fantasy. Although I cannot offer an in-depth perspective on Digby’s writing it is clear that he is grappling with rigid ideology.

Winter

Adding to the winter group inquiry discussion on the nature of journaling, Digby commented on his fall writing contribution, “…I am not a journaler. I am a writer, so I sit down and it reads like something that should be longer than a journal entry” (Group Inquiry 2 p. 11). Continuing to speak along similar lines, Digby and Gwen led the discussions on the imbalance of power and economy on the world stage. Digby provided valuable insights into world health and poverty issues, questioned the proper handling of resources, such as water and food and accused pharmaceutical companies of distorting their scientific research for their own profit,

It is incredibly exploitive of Third World countries and because of that, the way that we are going I mean it is unsustainable and it’s not unsustainable for the reasons that most people think it is unsustainable. So they are working at the wrong things. They are working on reducing the amount of water we are using like that is fucking going any where and yet we are not working on things like exploitive labor policies in Africa (Angela: Yeah)…Clean water is an issue because people who don’t have water treatment plants are getting kidney parasites and stomach parasites and dying young and that is not right. Access to clean water
should be a right; it shouldn’t be something that privileged people in privileged countries can have. (Winter Inquiry p. 1)

The above comment is, I argue critical and empathetic. These two elements are not separate in Digby’s nature. The above comment shows Digby’s concern for the health and wellbeing of people around the globe. Digby also used humor to demonstrate his support for the other members’ feelings in the group,

  Gwen: I feel like the other, like I feel I am being Otherized.
  Digby: Just remember the First commandment, Thou shalt not suffer the insufferable.
  (Wild laughter)
Again, Digby showed his empathy through humor,

  Gwen: My meditation breaks all the time.
  Digby: Is it a lemon? Do you want your money back?

_Dreams_

Digby did not keep a journal that explored his dreams but during the inquiry discussion provided what Jung would consider a dream series on his evolving dream perspectives. Digby recalls that as a child he was an observer in his dreams and that his dreams were always in black and white,

  My dreams have always been really weird. When I was a kid I would always dreamt in black and white and I was never in the dream. I was always like a camera in the dream. I was never like a character. Now I dream in colour and I am me. I am always me and I am never somebody else and (Angela: Hmm). (Group Inquiry 2 p. 14)

During this childhood period, Digby also remembered a black figureless character, “When I was a kid I would see an utterly black figureless person in the corner of my eye kind of thing and that was a little upsetting” (Group Inquiry 2 p. 16). Although the black figureless person seems to have disappeared in Digby’s dreaming, he now reacts to “the lack of focus” and linearity in his dreams,

  Another thing that is weird is there is never any focus ….I could be dreaming and sitting down and like talking and going on about something and then I will go to another room to grab a snack or go to the washroom or something and when I go to that room, it will be an entirely different scene with maybe the same people, maybe not the same people but something else entirely is going on and they don’t have the same personalities that they did in the previous scene. It takes me awhile to adjust to that in a dream because I am still kind of stuck in the previous mode
until something makes it obviously clear that this is the new topic at hand of what is going on. (Group Inquiry 2 p. 14)

Digby’s dreams show how he is presented with the opportunity to respond to new situations in relation to the new contexts or personalities that turn up in his dreams. However, Digby admits he either takes awhile to adjust or refuses the feeling that the dream evokes, “There are times dreams are trying to like throw a curve ball at me and I just refuse it. Situations that should be nightmares but they never phase me in the least …I remember this one time where like I went from one room and when I closed the door after me I was in public and naked or with my underwear or something like that and then I just looked around and like whatever” (Group Inquiry 2 p. 21).

Digby traces his understanding of dreaming as he moves from a childhood recollection of black and white dreams to colour and then to where he feels he only embodies himself in the dream. Digby also notes the curved, non-linear quality to the events while he is dreaming and his ability to refuse or attune to the new circumstances. The following dream presents Digby’s understanding of a dream about Jesus and also reveals how messages from the unconscious can balance an everyday orientation to thought and belief,

There was a nightmare and once again it shouldn’t have had any emotional impact. I am an avowed atheist and all that stuff. I was having a dream where I was at Jesus’ funeral (Angela: Wow) or something like that. It was just like a normal thing and all of that. It was all of a sudden I just woke up and it was dark. I was in a cold sweat. I am like, “That doesn’t even make sense. A, I don’t even care and B, it wasn’t as if I was grieving in the dream”. (Group Inquiry 2 p. 22)

Digby did not think that his cold sweat could be interpreted as a reaction to Jesus’ death. His body communicated a physiological message nonetheless, even though Digby’s rational reaction to the experience resisted the intensity the dream conveyed.

In the same group inquiry meeting Sir Digby attempted to reconcile another kind of non-rational experience,

Gwendolyn: It is like Katie’s thing with the beach. Before Katie said that she got really, really happy with the beach. I have a similar experience with the forest. I get happy when I go to the forest. But the beach, the beach makes me melancholy so …like well sometimes…but like Katie’s essence of the beech and my essence of the beach are totally different things and so the beach can’t have …the beach’s identity is totally different.
Digby: Because our emotional connections to it don’t actually have anything to do with the beach. It is something that we project onto it.

Angela: That is all perception.

Gwendolyn: You can’t really say that. It could have something to do with the energy at the beach too and how that energy affects us. It is a huge body of water.

Digby: So like gravity?

Gwendolyn: Well… water creates electricity. Constantly moving water might have an effect on energy don’t you think?

Digby: But it couldn’t do that in a way that actually affects our brain synapses though is the thing.

Angela: How do you know that?

Digby: Energy is not actually, is not transferred into us, it is transferred around us. That is how electricity works. (Group Inquiry 2 p. 11)

This exchange illustrates how Digby interprets an emotional reaction to nature, as a projection and that there cannot be an energetic flow, or transference of energies between the observer and the object. 

**Winter Meditation**

After a silent meditation, chanting and experimentation with the Tibetan singing bowls, we went outside to have a few moments to attend to and wander in nature. The inquiry members walked around the land on the edge of the bluffs; the lake in full view, a cliff on the other side and a light layer of snow covered the ground. In his writing, Digby made one humorous reference to our toning, the singing bowls and the silent meditation, “I have learned quite definitively why it is that I should not sing” (Winter Inquiry). During the wandering time, Sir Digby focused his attention on two objects, one was the other side of the bluffs, and the other was a brick home,

I first reflected on the cape opposite the precipice. I found the imagery to be profoundly disturbing on some fundamental level. The worn down fence and the crooked trees gave the impression that this area would tear down that which was shaped by man. My next and last focus was the brown-bricked house two doors down. This domicile had a lived in warm feeling, which I found comfortable. The evidence of constructive, sentient influence felt soothing. (Group Inquiry 2)
It is true that the piece of land on which Digby focused has been deteriorating for years. In the 1950’s there was a dance hall there and pieces of the bluffs have been continually eroding and collapsing over the edge. Digby intuited that nature was going to take its course, regardless of what stood there. Instead he turned his attention to a house. Unbeknownst to Digby our community was attending a Christmas party at the same house. Later we learned that the family living beside the house where Digby drew “constructive sentient comfort” had lost their son the night before. Their twenty-two year old son, who struggled with a crack cocaine addiction and depression, took his life shortly after 1:00 a.m. A neighbor later told us that the young man wrote beautiful poetry. The group was somber as we heard the news and drove to everyone’s respective homes.

Spring

Coming Down from the Research Agenda: Conversation by the Lake

Digby could not attend the spring gathering (2009) at the park and so he and I met a little later in the spring and hiked down to the lake together. We had made arrangements after chatting on the phone. He told me he had an appointment with a psychologist and he would be free after his appointment. I told him that sometimes I did not want to see anyone after an intense session with a therapist, but Digby said he would be OK. I knew that he was struggling to find his way and to understand his future but did not probe any further.

Presence in the Field

Throughout the first year while meditating on Digby, I felt an overwhelming sadness and yet I felt this powerful comfort when I was in his physical presence. I cannot give a rational account for these emotions, neither their power nor meaning. At first I wrote, “For months I hoped that some glimmer of meaning might emerge to explain this mystery. But it has not”. Perhaps I was entering into a healing relation with his energy field. What was healing about Digby’s physical presence? I feel it was the intermingling between the sacred and the profane as it was evidenced in Digby’s humor.

The following is a poetic representation of the time we spent together, sitting on a rock listening and looking at the lake,

Walking along the street, we were still in an awkward talking space. I hear my internal voice, “Walk and stay with the silence”. The weather was beautiful, unseasonably warm and sunny. Girls walked for the first time in the season, barefoot in flip-flops. A child across the street looked outside from his front doorstep. This little boy shook his head from side to side and then allowed the
shake to ripple down and back up through his spine. There was another small three-year-old child sitting on a porch with her Dad holding a newborn. The Mother was tidying the front yard. I stretched out my arms in a gesture of openness to the young child and she mimicked the movement. I did it again and she gave back my gesture. I shrugged my shoulders and she shrugged her shoulders back. She then tried it again for me. She shrugged her shoulders again and then I did it. ARCHETYPAL MIMICRY

We eventually made it down to the lake, after leaving the road, we walked through squishy, marshy mud ON THE PATH. Gripping our food against the wind, we sat on the rocks that lined the shore. The waves were crashing. PULSE. I could hardly hear Digby. A few of his words, perhaps many were lost to the sound of the lake and I was forced to listen, to sometimes say I had not heard. LISTENING WAVES

Looking out onto the water, there was a large tanker, moving along the horizon. We just kept looking and talking. Every now and again I noticed a bird in flight. One gull flew over our heads. It pumped its wings and for a few seconds seemed as if there was something else keeping it in the air. WINGS PUMP AND STOP AND GLIDE. I made a comment and Digby said, “Yes, that is the way they fly.”

Digby mentioned radioactive and electromagnetic currents and Tolkien’s imagination.

A small white tern dove into the lake, like a torpedo. FOCUSED DIVING/SEEING LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Digby talked about the ants that march around in a line and then in a circle, together they look for food. We laughed. What happens to the ants when they don’t find any more food? He talks about the queen ant and its mating capabilities. The queen ant can affect the fertility of the other females. CIRCLING ANTS

“When you were a child, did you believe in imaginary friends?” I asked. Digby replied, “If I got to tell my parents my pet rabbit required another bowl of ice-cream, I did”.

Then he talked of moles, I said, “Why are they blind?” He said that they are blind because they are not exposed to light. They need light to see. “Oh, of course”, I said. FEELING THROUGH THE DARK

POLARITIES: RECONCILING DARK/LIGHT

“OPEN UP TO THE WORLD AROUND YOU”
Digby knows if a shark bites you,
You can bop the shark on the nose
And the shark should let go
Digby pointed out two loons bobbing on the lake
The woman whose jaw drops while gazing upon a tree, shouts “TWO MOONS?”
He might have said, but didn’t, “Two loons, moron, two loons”.
“Oh, two loons”, she said dreamily
TRAVELLING back from almost being swallowed by the horizon.
DIVING INTO THE SUBCONSCIOUS

We climbed back up the hill. The rocks were hard to sit on. There was a group of young people ready to have a party. There was an elderly man, dressed in an old black suit, walking down the hill at a fast pace. I looked at a dark form that turned out to be a plastic bag that was on the path in front of the elderly man. I thought that he would fall. The elderly man did not trip on the bag; he tripped on the pea gravel that sits on top of the cracked pavement. He slid slowly to the pavement like a board that has leaned too long on a precarious angle. As the man in the old black suit fell down I proclaim, “Oh, Oh Oh…Are you OK”? The man did not look at us. He did not acknowledge our presence. Digby shrugged and said, “I guess so”.

RIGIDITY TRIPS DOWN TO THE LAKE

Summer

Digby did not enjoy the summer solstice walk down to the lake. It was a sweltering day and there were bugs that swarmed around in droves. Water is also not his favorite element. He wrote the following poem when asked to describe what he attended to,

Spiders, crawling across the beach
Darting from the cover of one rock
They quickly make their way to another
One stands on a rock, basking in the sun.
But it quickly rejoins its subterranean kin

After we stood as a group at the edge of the water, toning and looking into the horizon together, Digby said that he did not hear the instructions to gaze into the horizon and to allow his imagination to carry him into the future. So instead he stood with us in silence and that was enough.
**Final Inquiry**

Digby combined the sounds of nature and culture in the following poem,

Dog barking, children playing, mosquito by my ear.

Child crying, barking lessens, more mosquitoes

Crickets chirping, child is comforted, plane flies overhead,

Barking starts again yet more mosquitoes, child resumes crying—crickets still chirping.

Another plane flies by.

A voice instructs me to cease.

Eyes Open.

And this poem is all I had hoped for, a simple description of the moment.

**A Conflict**

A bird of prey, too distant for me to identify, glides on the thermals and circles around the water below. The final inquiry meeting threw me into a tailspin, although we all seemed happy to see one another, after doing an intense transformation exercise there was an edge to our talk. Rather cavalierly, I told the group that I recently had some colleagues use scripture to argue that nature was perfect. My story gave Digby an open door to air his views on religious fundamentalism. His comments seemed to stir up an old wound of Isabelle’s. Below are a few excerpts from the transcripts of that final meeting,

Digby: If you quote scripture you are fundie. If you quote scripture you are a fundie. If you go around saying that the bible says so, then you cannot converse with these people. They are living in a bubble.

**Kelli:** Can you be a fundie while being an anti-fundie?

Digby: I very strongly adhere to the belief that religious principles are completely detrimental to society and have nothing but an ill effect. I have never seen anything corroborated… I have never seen something that religion does that is positive…

Isabelle’s church had allowed us to perform *Alice in Wonderland* on their stage. As Isabelle pointed out, many churches house Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Isabelle replied, “You are probably not looking for that. That is what I disagree with. If you are looking for one thing it is probably what you are going to find” (Final Inquiry p. 3).

Isabelle began providing counter arguments for Digby’s points, one of which stated that there was not any need for an institution like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), because there was
not any evidence to support its effectiveness. Isabelle argued that it was impossible to research AA as its membership is bound to anonymity. You could see the red fire in Isabelle’s cheeks and the polarities began to entrench themselves in the atmosphere. A language of war emerged, as Isabelle proclaimed, “I have just slaughtered every point you have been trying…” In the car ride home Isabelle’s primal rage emerged to the point where she was emphatically swearing.

*The Aftermath*

I will not forget that evening. What I thought might be a warm and gentle final gathering became an initiation into conflict. The following day I was physically ill, my body refused to move. Three days later, before Isabelle went off to university, I listened to her talk for three hours about her time with a psychologist and her session at a sleep clinic. I wanted to see if she would ask to get together with Digby. Perhaps they could talk. After she left, I took Digby out a couple of times with yet another agenda, to see how I might budge him from his views on fundamentalism. Even after my coercion Digby insisted that he had a right to speak. I gave him several scenarios, what if situations, to see if he would adjust his delivery according to the context. I wanted him to understand the value of looking at the person you may be directly affecting by the expression of your ideas. Isabelle was equally resolute, while acknowledging that she knew Digby was having a hard time. Isabelle offered several points of self-recognition. For example, she admitted that of late, she had not been sleeping and had been walking around feeling like a loaded gun. How ironic that they both held a gun that prematurely went off during a performance of *Mother Courage*.

*The Body Speaks: Love is Not a Victory March*

I reflected on Digby’s and Isabelle’s respective transformation exercises. The conflict occurred minutes after the *Transformation* exercise. During the exercise, Isabelle marched her feet rhythmically, throwing her hands up in the air while laughing ecstatically. Her arms wind milled around her body as her legs enacted the movement of a well-trained soldier. Digby made a small repetitive movement with his feet, shifting the weight ever so slightly back and forth, slicing the air with his arms, up and down as if hammering away at something. He did not vary this movement and I do not recall if he made a sound. He could not move the energy down from above his shoulders and neither could Isabelle allow the ecstatic energy to transform the way she connected to the earth. I mourned all of this, the conflict, the fall that our group took from a space in my mind that had been sequestered a little too tightly. Now this group seemed released into a wild repetitive tension between two archetypal energies: ecstasy and militancy. I began a
contemplative poetic exploration of these energies, as suggested by Bill Plotkin (2007) that is included in the appendices.

*What would take us forward?*

Later the following summer we all gathered for a potluck dinner. This, in my mind was a gathering to enjoy a new step in our relationship, a maturing into just being together. Some people brought things to eat, we laughed, caught up, ate while looking at the lake. Within minutes of gathering around the desert table inside, I opened up a conversation about the nature of forgiveness. I did this for personal reasons, but felt intuitively that it was important to talk about it. Immediately Gwen began to sob, the transformation in her life continues relentlessly, a boyfriend’s brother is killed and her father has decided to leave the family.

We all shared our thoughts on forgiveness; Isabelle explained the need to see the person in a broader context. Digby said that it was important to adopt an attitude of gentle teaching. Then, through Gwen’s quiet weeping, Angela’s hand on Gwen’s back, Digby said, that he didn’t want to be trite, but he knew that everything would be OK. The rest of us sat dumfounded. I think because it was so straightforward and bell clear.

*Summary*

Digby articulated his enjoyment of drama as one that relied on humor values. Although he does not recall images or felt sensations during the meditations Digby could describe the exercises in terms of being able to calm, create openness and to help a student gain focus. Digby described himself as an atheist. He is open to meditation, realizing that he requires a moving meditation in order to allow his mind to slow down. Digby also acknowledged the power of transformations to reduce analysis. Digby’s insight into the art of becoming a character revealed a refined understanding of mind/body consciousness and the challenges encountered by the tension between physicality and thinking.

Although nature turns Digby into “a crabby insomniac” he engaged in each wandering meditation and entered into the exercise according to his comfort level. He simply said that he did not reach a meditative state during the fall meditation circle. The conversation by the lake showed me that just being in nature, can soften resistances and agendas. It is sometimes enough to simply absorb an experience in nature as it is shared. After struggling to reconcile his future direction both educationally and through his career choices Digby came to a group dinner having just enrolled in a college program with the view to study writing.
Now as I write, I want to affirm the ways that Digby sorts through his lived experiences. For Digby, being in the research group rendered few self proclaimed victory statements, or conclusions of remarkable learning. From the beginning, I enjoyed his humor but I think the part of me that was waiting for him to take up the language of the project never quite disappeared altogether. Each meeting with Digby, there must have been a part of me waiting for him to say imagination, spirituality, or energy in a hallowed tone. Digby resisted my dreamy thoughts. He participated fully and authentically in the inquiry and meditation just as he always had with the plays and rehearsals. I think our experience together reveals the importance of attempting to understand and accept the ontological orientation of a student. Digby’s journey of finding his authentic self needed protection, adjusted expectation and an honoring of what he could offer the group, which in my view was a critical perspective, a perspective which is needed in any kind of learning setting that wishes to activate global consciousness. The dream about my search for a wet suit shows that diving into the unconscious, through attending to nature and dreaming still requires a process that is suited to the individual’s ontological orientation. If the mind/body gentling process, explored throughout this inquiry truly softens rigidity and alienation, the wet suit as a metaphor replaces the habit of armoring oneself against the pull of the other. It is warmth and not distance that offers regenerative protection.
Chapter 10: Emerging Patterns

True thinking is more like the motion of eagles, the tempests of storms, the sound of nightingales, the flight of larks, the swooping of falcons, the beauty of swans, the movement of the wind than anything that trails along following thinking as its trail of frozen content. Ideas fly. The flight of ideas. Wandering thought. The sign of true thinking is not in the content but in the vibrations, the resonances, the tones, the overtones and undertones it sets off as it swoops swiftly by.

Sardello, 2010

The overall research intent was shaped by a question posed by phenomenologist Vivian Darroch-Lozowski (2006), “what happens when we attend to nature feelingly?” The primary focus of this research inquiry was to explore how these six youth, who have experienced a creative mind/body curricular approach in drama, apply their understanding of felt sensation and the imagination while attending to nature. In this chapter I will draw the findings of this study from the participant reflections on their childhood and young adolescent experiences, while focusing on the imagination, thought and felt sensations and an understanding of self in relation to culture and the earth. There is another aim to this part of the inquiry and that is to make a contribution to the holistic education field, in particular to highlight how to honour the ontological orientation of a student. The findings will be discussed primarily in dialogue with the literature from the holistic education, eco-depth psychology, transpersonal, somatic and energy medicine fields of research.

The second phase of the research draws the first phase findings forward and places them in relation to our evolving understandings of a gentled relatedness to nature. This phase will take into account the descriptions of the group inquiries in nature, dreams, reveries, synchronicities and discourses from the group inquiries. I will address the questions in the following order, 1) How do the six youth participants articulate their experiences of mind/body receptivity or openness? 2) How do the participants describe the relationship between the felt body (energy) and image? 3) How does mind/body consciousness and an attention to nature relate to these youth’s understandings of place? 4) What holistic curriculum insights can be drawn from an ontological understanding of development?
A Developmental Model: Nature and the Human Soul

Dylan explained that the mind/body activities were experienced within the context of the student’s development, “Like we went through it but when we were growing up…most of them (the exercises) made you think about yourself and like what was happening in your life”. The responses of Dylan and Isabelle regarding the need to view the mind/body exercises within the participants’ development guided me to situate the insights of this research within the developmental stages of Bill Plotkin’s (2008) book, Nature and the Human Soul. Isabelle added another dimension to Dylan’s admission that the exercises fostered a connection to the self. Isabelle addressed the developmental and group significance of Transformations, describing this exercise as, “…the microcosmic representation of what we did together, was simply the transformation of the person into the transformation that everyone goes through in life but it was represented in a moment”. During the nature phase of the inquiry Isabelle struggled with making sense of the meaning of the group and exactly what the group aimed to achieve through looking at our history and attending to nature. Isabelle concluded that we were attempting to understand, “a new way of being and learning”. This phrase was a resonant expression of my experience with the Owl where I felt that a connection to being was necessary for a regenerative relationship to nature.

Plotkin’s (2008) model addresses healthy soul and ego development. Nature has provided a template for the wheel that is divided into four directions/quadrants, with each quadrant representing a season, “The Wheel’s template is the quadrated circle” (p.49). Individuals do not choose to mature into the next phase; rather Plotkin insists that mystery guides an individual through the stages. During the first three stages, a parent’s influence is central to the maturing process. The Innocent in the Nest is a stage beginning with birth and lasts until age four or five. The Nest is a protective space for the psychological and physical growth of the infant. The central responsibility or task for the parent is, “the preservation of innocence and the formation of a healthy, intact, culturally viable ego” (p. 76). The gift to nature and culture is “luminous presence” and the central archetype of this stage is the Fool.

The Explorer in the Garden

The Explorer in the Garden (approximately 5-10) stage is helpful to understand the archetypal energy of the participants’ childhood drama experiences. The stage begins at approximately five years of age and lasts until early puberty. This stage, “witnesses and
celebrates” the birth of consciousness in the growing child. The task involves, “Learning the
givens in the world and our place within it (discovering the enchantment of the natural world and
cultural ways)”. The gift to the larger community is wonder, “The world for her is a garden—both
cultivated (shaped by culture) and wild (self-arising from nature)” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 115). The
central archetype is the Explorer. For the first stage of development, I will summarize the
participants’ key insights into the early drama years, placing specific emphasis on reflections that
address feeling and the imagination. I am directly addressing the first sub-question.

Make your ego porous. Will is of little importance, complaining is nothing, fame is nothing.
Openness, patience, receptivity, solitude is everything.

Rainer Marie Rilke

The Explorer

We explored drama within the context of theatrical history, tracing the evolution of
performance beginning with Greek theatre, commedia masks, classical plays and clown.
Improvisational scenes were generated while performing fairy tales, fables and myths. Plotkin
(2008) explains that the explorer is engaged through excitement, “The explorer archetype
constellates what is exciting, engaging and inspiring about middle childhood” (p. 117). Plotkin
claims that the Garden stage cultivates consciousness while the child explores various bodily
movements and perspectives. A young child requires opportunities to live in his or her body
experimentally and playfully, to spin for example, so that they are free to experience a multi-
dimensional array of bodily feelings. Isabelle began her first interview by repeatedly affirming
the feeling of free exploration in the drama class, “When you are given a character, it was just so
much fun to explore…”

Isabelle, Angela and Gwen affirmed the feeling of newness and endless discovery during
the early years. Angela described her first few years in drama, “…it was as if we were exploring
something new which held the potential for endless discoveries”. Endless discovery also
underlines how open exploration does not identify one destination or one possible discovery but
holds a variety of unnamed possibilities. Isabelle enjoyed the “quasi” script and the freedom to
create her own story while trying on the commedia characters. Isabelle reconciled the description
of the character with her own interpretations. Isabelle’s explanation implies a rhythmic
hermeneutic, or simply a going back and forth between objective meaning and the meaning that
begins to arise within the self. Digby also expressed his need for the lack of destination in reference to his interest in improvisation.

In the *Cinderella* production Angela described her engagement in the class as, “very open, free, exciting and bouncy and fun”. This description affirms that movement was integral to Angela and fulfilled her need to fully engage her body. The embodiment of the Fairy Godmother was created by two words that arose from Angela’s thoughts about the character, royal and magic. The archetype of Plotkin’s earlier stage (The Innocent in the Nest) emerged as Gwen recalled playing the Fool in the Big Stone and named several circumstances where the Fool appeared throughout the play texts over the years. Embodying the Fool showed Gwen how certain ideas can be turned on their head, flipped into a handstand, spun within a cartwheel, bounced on toes and snuck beyond royal ways of knowing; a mockery to the potential sovereignty of the ego. Gwen looks to the Fool archetype for rejuvenation even now in her adult life.

In reference to the commedia work, Isabelle also added that drama offered the opportunity for a non-competitive approach to being in her body. Angela supported this comment while describing Arlecchino who was, “…on the balls of his feet and is light, jumpy, ready to go- ready for anything, Yeah”. Also appreciative of Arclecchino’s readiness to act before thinking, Dylan recalled that one of her favorite exploratory exercises was one that required mimicking the physicality and gestures of the characters but doing this as her classmates walked around the room, engaged in the same exploratory exercise. Later this sense of exploring creatively on her own, but still surrounded by people became an important atmosphere for Dylan’s emerging ideas.

Angela, Rose, Gwendolyn and Digby explained that it was fun to try on the darker character traits of the commedia. Angela claimed, “There is something, I don’t know, maybe because we are supposed to do all those good things in life, maybe there is a relief to do the opposite”. Isabelle acknowledged that commedia offered the chance to freely explore “Greed…being self absorbed, cheating, lying deceiving all that fun juicy stuff that you don’t- it is not socially acceptable to explore that stuff like that, in and of itself…” According to Angela, exploring the darker character traits later contributed to her sense of empathy towards the character Ruth in *Gamma Rays*. Gwendolyn acknowledged that working with the commedia helped her to see and challenge the moralistic ways in which she saw herself. She even came up with an archetype of her own that she called, “The Lofty Jerk”. When I prodded Dylan to explain
her connection to the darker instincts of the commedia, she repeated Arlecchino, and then in a moment of unconscious self-recognition, identified that she connected to his need to please people.

**Humor: The Weird, the Silly and the Fun**

Humor also engages the body and frees the child to follow the impulse of a laugh. A good guffaw can affect the gut, bend a person over at the middle, loosen and shake the shoulders. Digby was direct with his description of how he was drawn to drama, “…but at the time I wasn’t really interested in anything without humor values”. Digby and Isabelle explicitly described the value of trying on darker character traits in a humorous context. Digby’s desire to explore the “bad guy” was notably more expressive than his drama classmates.

Gwen acknowledged the strangeness or weirdness of the activities, “It was a whole lot of new things” and, “We did all sorts of weird things”. Dylan also highlighted her interest in being silly, “I liked having fun and being silly”. Silly under the guise of playing a character helped her push the boundaries beyond what she thought was socially acceptable. Dylan went on to explain that in social situations she was always conscious of whether her silliness was too much. Dylan also said that at this age she wanted opportunities to try on whatever she imagined.

Rose later referred to being able to embody the silly side of her nature through playing Nick Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Rose was a serious and gentle child who identified with my own seriousness. The role of Nick Bottom gave her the opportunity to try on an inflated and melodramatic ego. I interpreted Rose’s depiction of this character as a necessary existential freeing within Rose’s nature. Rose valued the experience as a high point in her acting narrative and also acknowledged it as an important opportunity to show her comic abilities.

Gwen was drawn to the weirdness of the *Clown Bus Stop* exercise, which involved among various other skills exploring both a vulnerable, still energy and sounding out a wild expression of a bodily impulse. Along with the commedia mask tradition the clown exercises were a beginning way to connect the student to acting out a quick and sometimes wild impulse. Angela recalled the joy of blurting out spontaneous weird gestures and sounds. “It feels fun” is a typical response for Angela. She has not stopped making random noises as she makes random Blip and Bloop sounds. As an adult she has added a GRR to her compilation of Blip and Bloop noises.
Place: Awareness of The Group

“The paramount task in the Garden is to become a full member of one’s family and of the world” (Plotkin, 2008 p. 116). Gwen, Angela, Dylan and Rose acknowledged the group dynamic as they recalled group creative problem solving. Rose affirmed the group feeling as bonding through hard work and a sense of overcoming challenges. Not only was the experience of overcoming challenge valued, Rose maintained that she remembered transferring that knowledge on to future challenges. Gwen and Digby brought forward the importance of experimenting as a group with respect to how an object could become something else. Gwen also highlighted the wonky aspect of the decision making process within the group. The group was willing to collectively travel through the possibility of failure to the recognition that a solution thought to be adequate for a time was no longer so.

Rose conveyed a profound memory during this stage of development, “Do you ever wonder what your place in all of this is?” In the creative context, place during this stage is explored bodily, with optimum moments for students to try to experiment and expand beyond the confines of what is typically considered socially acceptable. It is the body in the creative act that provides an opportunity for a child to experiment with his or her relation to other. Closely connected to the comment Rose made to her mother was her feeling of wonder in response to the Shakespearean stage, “WOW…a kid would really like to be on that stage (exhales)”. Membership or place cannot occur without a sentient feeling of self in relation to the group. Exploration allows the child to feel this dynamic. Laughter creates the atmosphere for accepting the weird, silly, strange and dark.

Emerging Mind/Body Awareness

In general, the memories for this period were primarily about fun, open possibility and pushing the boundaries of the strange and weird. A few reflections emerged that exposed a memory or an awareness of thought and the imagination. Perhaps these memories represent glimmers or flashes of the seed potential for mind/body awareness in the future. Dylan’s early dance memory showed her as a child lost in her own imagination. Dylan maintained that she was drawn to drama so that she could act out whatever she imagined. Gwen also conveyed that at the age of six and seven she was a leader and created her own stories and performances.

Gwen highlighted how the early transformation game introduced a simple question, how do I stop thinking? Through trying to meet this challenge, Gwen understood thinking should not
plan the action. In the interview with Gwen I wanted to know what not thinking meant when she was ten. Gwen responded, “Don’t sit there and decide to go quack and then, go quack”. Dylan also responded to a similar urging to try and put aside thinking and just breath. During the early colour exercises Dylan tried to picture white as a way to empty her thoughts. Angela also commented on the calming effect of early breathing exercises, “I think that while I was breathing and picturing the colours swirling around my body, and going out and that, it helped to gentle me…it was a relaxing exercise and training to be able to focus…When we were doing the breathing and the colours it was just generally good to focus on the breathing and feel the connection with the body”. Reflections on the early years show that the imagination is explored through trying on characters and stories and that the preparatory exercises cultivated an awareness of the benefits of calming the body through the breath. The mind/body warm-up exercises also initiated a beginning awareness to thought.

The Shadow Side

Rose’s experience of not returning to the drama class after her first year indicated that the work was “too much” and that the presence of the explorer archetype disappears when the work load is overwhelming at this stage. Although Rose’s understanding that learning to overcome difficulties was an important and transferable value, I believe Rose missed out on play and free exploration from my over crowding the curriculum that year. There was also a shadow element to creative exploration as Isabelle acknowledged. Sometimes a strange feeling emerged as she tried to reconcile the gap between what was happening in the drama class and how her family lived their lives in more goal oriented ways. Exploring mind/body exercises within a less goal oriented creative environment meant that Isabelle did not always know the instrumental relevance between the explorations and the final outcome.

The Thespian at the Oasis (Early Adolescence)

I want to burn with the spirit of the times. I want all servants of the stage to recognize their lofty destiny. I am disturbed at my comrades' failure to rise above narrow caste interests, which are alien to the interests of society at large. Yes, the theatre can play an enormous part in the transformation of the whole of existence. Vsevolod Meyerhold
How do the participants describe the relationship between the felt body (energy) and image?

Plotkin (2007) identifies the archetype of this stage as The Thespian and defines the task as developing “a social presence that is authentic (the nature task) and socially acceptable (the culture task)” (p. 166). The “gift to the community” is fire. This stage draws the awareness of the adolescent to the emotions, the body and to a more differentiated view of their identities in a community that is not their immediate family. The participants practiced not only the archetype of this stage which Plotkin maintains helps to cultivate a feeling for the authentic self, but the actual embodiment of a thespian. It is for this reason that I will begin with the insights of the participants on the act of becoming. This is a brief examination of the way in which these students have constructed their own views on becoming a character. This section also outlines the subtle interplay between whether the character emerges and is enlivened through an initial thought/image or whether the character is enlivened through bodily feeling and rhythm. I then provide an in-depth view of both Transformations and the Meditation circle with the aim to address how the participants describe the relationship between felt sensation and image.

I will offer a brief explanation of the various acting theories the student’s received. Constantin Stanislavski’s theatrical method and the much more physical, symbolic and presentational principles of Vsevold Meyerhold were explored. For example, Stanislavski would examine the character’s history and encourage the actor to connect his or her own psychological insights, inner conflicts and motivations to that of the character. Meyerhold would use the body to evoke the emotional intensity of the character by repetitive movements and gestures. Highly experimental, Meyerhold’s theatre was a reaction against social realism. Bertolt Brecht created theatre for social change, sculpting his actors on stage by creating gestures and images that expressed both the inner dialectic of the character and the social tensions of the time.

The Act of Becoming

Dylan explained the need to think and feel like the character, “You have to think like the character and kind of feel like the character in the situation instead of thinking in the ways that you would do”. Refining her acting philosophy from the simple joy of trying on whatever she imagined when she was a young child, Dylan revealed that it was possible to experiment with voice and gesture until the character “seeps into you”. Dylan recalls three strategies for exploring a character; (1) Jumping into the character with wild abandon as in the case of the commedia (2)
Slowing down and carefully attuning to the character’s power as she experienced with Desdemona (3) Finding the voice of a character while experimenting with and freeing bodily gestures as she demonstrated with her recollection of embodying the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Digby contributed detailed comments on the acting craft, which addressed the need to balance the physicality of the character with thought processes. Digby also identified the effect of over analyzing every moment on stage. Over thinking takes an actor out of himself and out of relationship with his fellow actor. According to Digby an actor who succumbs to over analysis is a boring guy who unconsciously moves a lot. Digby was the only member of the group who articulated a definition for the archetypes, “They are basically just a compilation of character traits that the characters always have, and regardless of what bugs bunny situation you put them in this week”. Digby explained his preferred acting process, (1) First consciously eliminate all aspects of the actor’s personal characteristics, “For example, the way that you stand, vocal inflections little impulses and ticks and working on completely eliminating them” (2) The actor then attempts to assume a neutral state (3) Steadily, features of the character are worked through and absorbed in the actor’s movements until the full character is animated.

Gwen maintained that during her late adolescence, she was feeling discouraged by how her high school drama experience was unfolding. Gwen wished that she could go back to the days in drama where she felt the emotions of a character simply, “That was the place I wanted to go back to in my acting because it was just so obvious and you didn’t get caught up in all sorts of ridiculous things. OK the character is sad right now …how did I feel when I am sad? OK we’ll be sad. It was just simple and you could just do it. You don’t have to worry about whether you are being sad. You just do it”. Gwen also identified the need to be in a place of non-judgment towards a character that was engaged in behavior that the actor does not condone. Implicit in her description of becoming Beatrice was a going back and forth between Beatrice’s life issues, for example drinking, and her own awareness of these issues as they appear in her life history.

Isabelle revealed her reason for wanting to play Juliet, “I was attuned to her passion, the passion…the intense passion, the double edged sword, the extreme love, the extreme violence and how that plays into a person who just wants to love somebody”. Isabelle offered her insight into the difference between psychological approaches to acting and the commedia’s physical demands,
That was a lot harder to remember when you are talking specifically about mind/body practices because it is so much less overtly physical. Acting Shakespeare is much more like real life interaction I think than commedia is. Commedia is meant to specifically embody greed or longing or something like that where as Shakespeare you have real people supposedly real people in real life situations. We didn’t say OK physicalize love, or physicalize hatred it was more, what is this character, like what is this character Lady Capulet experiencing right now?

Isabelle described the tension between acting the commedia and Shakespeare. She explained that the commedia called for physicalizing an emotion or drive and Shakespeare’s text called for understanding a character’s internal motives and experience in the moment.

Angela explained, “Yeah, for me it was like this, one way is to discover the inside of the character, their mind and their dialogue and then discover how their body might be. Then it is really neat to do it the other way”. Angela concluded that her primary approach to learning was the visual approach. It was better for her to see something, for example an image than to hear a description of the character. She acknowledged that The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds was a much more emotionally complex play. At first Angela did not want to play the character of Ruth as she claimed it was a “boring” role. Eventually her understanding became more empathetic as Angela realized that these characters were “needing of love”. Angela’s experience identifies the internal and physical requirements of attuning to the character as well as becoming sympathetic to them.

In a moving portrayal of her process of becoming Ophelia, Rose expressed her understanding of becoming a character. Her acting philosophy has been refined and further cultivated by her present acting experience. She perceives a sympathetic “match” between the character and herself. She worked through coming into the emotional depths of Ophelia, understanding that there is a need to flow with emotion as a part of the journey. Rose also encountered an important experience, which brought her into a deeper understanding of the relationship between body and emotion during her rehearsal process. She learned that the journey was not only about her ability to show an authentic feeling but a realization that this process is deeply affected by the presence of the audience, “I felt so free and open and I wanted to show that to the audience. I wanted to let them into that and affect them. It was the moment I realized
that acting was about having an experience witnessed. It wasn’t re-enacting an emotional situation; it was about taking the emotional journey every time you go through those lines and stand in front of the audience”.

Within the act of becoming a character there are numerous complex mind and body interactions. Six assertions highlight the rhythm and eknosis of the act of becoming,

- Work rhythmically within a continuum of jumping into the character’s impulses and working slowly through gestures and sound to find the core energy of the character
- Understand how to pare down to the neutral self/body and stay in relationship to the other actor
- Work with what the text or theatre genre demands with respect to physical or psychological approaches to embodying the character
- Within an attitude of love for the character, experiment with their internal thoughts and bodily images
- Attune to feeling simple emotions and be in a place of non-judgment while understanding how one’s own life relates to the character’s life
- Instead of portraying emotion as a state of being allow emotion to flow as a journey and realize that the actor is really entering into an experience that is witnessed

In conclusion, the embodiment of a character as an exploration between image and felt sensation is founded upon rhythm, internal and external modes of trying on the character, working through neutrality, feeling empathy, and realizing that emotions flow inside of experience as it is witnessed.

**Colour, Meditation Circle, Transformations**

Plotkin (2008) suggests that adolescents require rituals that initiate them into a deeper relationship with self and their calling in the world. The exercises that we practiced, namely breathing, colour work, meditation and transformations are appropriate classroom activities for drama or any curriculum that requires in-depth creative mind/body inquiry. The exercises are appropriate for a holistic learning setting in that they do not require a set of religious beliefs and are more easily guided by the spirit of inquiry than ideology. In this next section I will highlight the insights drawn from the mind/body exercises, paying specific attention to the comments relating to thought, the imagination and felt sensation.
Angela claimed that she benefited from knowing the mechanics of the breath and could not understand why her classmates at school did not know that the abdomen rose on the inhalation and fell on the exhalation. Gwen and Angela also confirmed the calming and focusing effects of the breathing exercises. Digby acknowledged its practical application, that the breathing was good for vocal training. Rose has deepened her connection to breathing through her current voice and acting work as she experiments with her knowledge and sensitivity to the resonators. Gwen also maintained that she was aware of how resonance felt in her body. She drew on her awareness of her body while breathing for a primal scream at a remembrance ceremony. Cultivating awareness to the breath is an activity that is simple to integrate into any classroom, although, as Digby maintains it has a direct and practical application in a drama class. In the field of holistic education there is a growing body of literature that supports the use of meditation and breathing in the classroom as a relaxation and focusing technique (Miller, 2010).

**Colour and Breathing**

During the third phase of our work together the students visualized the seven colours of the chakra system. I introduced potential meanings for the colours based on Brennan’s (1993) and Andrews’ (1992) systems. It is clear that the students did not recall any association between the colours of the chakras and their meanings. For example, orange was introduced as the colour of embodiment. Gwen has responded to the colour work by doing the exercises at night even now as an activity that could be relaxing and centering before sleep. In reference to my questions regarding the colour exercises Gwen stated, “For some reason like a pinkish colour is coming to mind, like a rosy color that I don’t really like is coming to mind and a silvery colour”. I asked Gwen if it was easy for her to see these colours in her imagination. She replied, “Some colours are always easy to see, like green is easy to see and blue is usually easy to see. Like orange… no, I can never see orange”. Gwen wrote in her journal in 2009,

> I have been sitting in the colour purple a lot. It seems to be coming really strong. I must need something from the colour, or maybe some part of me lives in purple, needs something, maybe healing. My mother says that the purple chakra is about connection with higher spirit and finding your place in the world. I am going to take the colour purple as a good sign. I really like purple.

At the age of 15, Rose made the following connections to breathing and the colour exercises, “Colour and breath work have helped me to find my centre and work on expressing emotions
dramatically. It has helped me to establish my base (earth, water, air…etc) and further use that to later portray emotions realistically”. Isabelle also reflected, “I remember seeing different colours and associating different colors with certain feelings at the time but not ones that remain constant…like I would not constantly see yellow or think of it as joy or happiness… I saw blue and associated it as being very healing and very positive”.

Angela acknowledged that working with colour helped her to focus on the breath. Dylan described the entire exercise, recalling the progression of colours in the order that they were introduced. Dylan explained that she could see red as a vapor but that she could not see, as Gwen also mentioned, the colour orange. Later on in Dylan’s teen years as she was listening to music and experimenting with the exercise on her own, she began to see the colour orange. Dylan still does not know why this occurred or what the colour orange really means to her.

Adding the visualization of colour to the breathing exercises has an overall calming, centering and focusing effect. Isabelle and Rose associated the exercise to feeling and emotion. Rose identified that it fostered her awareness to certain areas in the body. Gwen and Dylan noted that seeing certain colours was easier than seeing others. Eventually, Isabelle and Gwen developed a beginning interpretation of what specific colours might mean to them. For example, Isabelle believed blue was healing and Gwen interpreted purple as a colour that fosters a sense of place. I think greater significance could be drawn from this mind/body exercise if an emphasis was placed on connecting the student to his or her own feeling response to specific colours. However, not being able to visualize a colour should not be deemed as a failure or shortcoming. From an energetic viewpoint, every colour possesses its own wavelength and frequency.

Meditation Circle

I will primarily address the meditation circle with some references to visualization and Tibetan singing bowls. Gwen explained her feeling towards the meditation practice, “I was always really interested in it…Cause well it was something that was new. I don’t know… it is hard to remember what I really thought about it. I don’t remember thinking too much about it, just feeling. I always wanted to do it. I remember being interested in it”. Isabelle also stated that she wanted to engage in the activity because the images revealed something about her life, “The meditation exercises prompted a shift…it led me to question so much of what was going on in my life…”
Gwen provided an analogy for the meditation circle that designates the circle as a rite of passage,

I am trying to think of something that would describe the feeling… well... I don’t know if it is at all helpful, but it is kind of like the first time you are allowed to light a candle or light a match. You kind of have the idea that this might be something important. But it is not a child’s thing. It is not a kid thing. It is something you have to take seriously. Yeah kind of like that.

Gwendolyn was not the only one who had a sense that the meditation practice was unique and that it called for a different level of maturity and intimacy between self and other. Dylan acknowledged that holding hands with people and sitting in a circle was not something that was normally done. She was aware that newcomers might think that the meditation practice was strange.

At the age of 15, Rose wrote, “It has helped me to discover myself more”. As Isabelle witnessed images she also learned that the meditations were showing her a glimpse into other dimensions of her self. In a description of the Tibetan bowl exercise Rose tried to illustrate how meditation made her feel, “Like you are just present in that moment with that feeling, that sound… But I don’t think like words can really describe it like they just …I don’t think they can really be adequate”. Later Rose noted that she felt as if listening to the sound evoked a feeling of diminishing into “the emptiness that is you”. Dylan also explained that the practice made her reflect more about who she was and what was going on in her life. She connected the value of the practice to her everyday life and outlined how she now chooses to reflect on challenges or issues arising from the day as opposed to tuning out and watching TV.

Isabelle brought forward the notion that perhaps the meditation practice and the other mind/body practices needed a more concrete connection to acting curricula. The practices created some confusion within her as to how to relate the knowledge that arose during these exercises with acting. Isabelle also expressed a concern over what others observing the class would think of the mind/body practices. According to Dylan’s thinking, the uniqueness of the meditation practice also may have contributed to a closed or impenetrable aspect to the group dynamic. Angela, Dylan and Rose revealed that they believed their imaginal experiences were not as rich as others in the group. This is where more discussion aimed to facilitate a connection between student experiences; ontological orientations and curriculum aims might be useful. For example, perhaps the student feels the experience in the body as opposed to seeing imagery. I will now
outline the participants’ reflections while addressing how the meditation circle fostered thought and the imagination, felt sensation and group awareness.

*Clarifying Thoughts and Calming Body:* Digby explained that the meditation helped to calm and clear his mind. Isabelle also brought this point both in relation to the practice and in connection to her knowledge of research on the calming effects of meditation. Rose admitted that she was not antsy during the practice, “Meditation helps me to relax and relieve tension”. Dylan and Rose spoke directly to the power of the meditation circle to clarify thought. Rose claimed that it was a chance to think, “like a lot more, a time to clarify and reflect. I guess it was for me not like your normal chaotic thought process that I had. It was like, “OK, it’s going to be constructive and clarifying and this is the time to lay everything out”. Dylan agreed with the clarifying quality of the experience but explained it in a different context. She expressed the need to sit and think as a group, then we could, as a group, focus on the rehearsals.

Isabelle also used the term antsy as she described her felt experience in anticipation of the meditation. She experienced a ball of energy in her stomach during the meditation. Angela acknowledged her antsy feeling just prior to the beginning of the circle. Throughout her explanation of the practice, a greater level of calmness was achieved after coming to terms with the fact that her experience did not necessarily have to compare to others in the group, “I wanted more after the experience but at the same time I was still excited with the meditation and I liked doing it”.

*You must give birth to your images. They are the future waiting to be born…fear not the strangeness you feel. The future must enter into you long before it happens…just wait for the birth…for the hour of new clarity.*

Rilke

During the interviews, I was attempting to pinpoint whether the participants experienced a set of symbols that had begun to inform them in their personal development. There would be two major sources for generating symbols and that would be the meditation circle and the guided visualizations. In light of Dylan’s comment, that the state of awareness during the meditations was dream like and that recalling these experiences also reflected what it was like to remember a dream, I understand that recalling specific symbols is fraught with similar challenges to that of recalling the details of a dream. Isabelle recalled many symbols and I believe that this was due to the fact that she wrote down her experiences and continues to engage the imaginal realm.
Isabelle remembered, “Churches, pastures, a girl, water, spirals of air/water substances, Grandma, sunflowers, blue ribbons I saw it all”. Isabelle’s vision of the church is also featured in her chapter. This vision included the four elements, a burning cross, coloured glass and shapes, a church, the sea and the sun. Her second vision included a cave, a fountain, a desert, a crone, a column and a child and is featured in the first chapter.

Dylan recalled a lot of circles, “…like people in a circle …I remember gorillas drinking coffee in cups”. Gwen remembered indigenous scenes,

I saw pictures, scenes played out in my mind and they started with the usual tribal jungle scenes…I remember people with spears and they were muscular…and red…not a really colourful red like fire engine red, but its not conceivable that skin could be this colour but just a little more redder than skin would be…and always trees. They were not jungle trees but they were like coniferous trees…like Canadian forest trees…

Angela could not remember the symbols she saw. I recall Angela’s contributions to the circle and remember moments of being in awe of what she experienced. I also remember her shrug as she explained that she did not see anything but colour or shapes. Rose claimed, “I remember they always made sense. But I don’t remember having anything that I thought, ‘I don’t know how this connects here. I don’t know what this means’. I don’t know what symbols were but they seemed to always fit in…” Rose recalled one significant image from a forest visualization of a clearing, a fireplace and light.

**Felt Sensations:** I want to focus on drawing together the ways in which these youth specifically described their felt sense of the circle meditations. Angela recalled, “… the one thing that I felt was that I felt energy during the circle”. Angela acknowledged that she felt the presence of energy in the “air in and around” the circle. Gwen described the nature of this energy as, “a tingling in my back, kind of a tingling feeling but not like spiders running up your back, but like something solidifying. Tingly, like a column or like fuzzy feelings in everyone’s hands” Angela described her energy as, “Settling in and like energy building…It was warm. It started in the hands”…Angela went on to describe how this energy was a focused energy, “the air is thickening and hovering in this in between sort of space and I felt that when we did meditation”. There seemed to be a direct similarity between Dylan, Gwen, Rose and Angela with the description of a “tingly sensation” in the hands. Rose also refers to the felt sensation of the circle as magnetic heat. Isabelle explained that circles, “always have a relaxing energy and almost a power to search for what is on your mind and ease things that could be troubling you”.

Feeling the Group Connection: I am also acknowledging Angela’s felt sense of the group energy. Rose also acknowledged the feeling of a group connection during the meditation circle. Dylan and Gwen claimed the experience fostered an awareness of the presence of the group. Isabelle recalled that she enjoyed the palm-to-palm contact. Gwen actually felt a second circle spinning as she later connects this experience to the fall nature meditation. Isabelle explains, “meditations as a group…and there definitely was a group consciousness and a group awareness and I think a sense of comfort that the group harboured…” Dylan identified a point that spoke to the specific time in the group’s development, “…bus and rules and stuff like that, and it was just… it was a time to incredibly just chill out and to just think and share it after”. She also distinguished between the breathing and the meditation in that breathing seemed to be an intensely private experience whereas the meditation circle made her aware of the other members of the group.

Sharing Experience: Dylan claimed that she emerged from listening to others talk about their experience in the meditation circle activity, wondering why she thought what others thought. Gwen stated, “I can’t believe you saw that too…you know what I mean? That was always really shocking to me. I always wondered if it came from me or it came from them? Did I catch a piece of me or did I catch a piece of you? Is that possible?” This occurrence as Gwen explained caused her to question and value the nature of consciousness. Another example of sharing a similar experience in the meditation circle for Dylan and Gwen, was seeing the ghostly figure. But there is another aspect to the notion of sharing that emerged. Rose articulated a similar feeling to Angela, “like in comparison to what I heard other people talk about in the visualizations it was like mine weren’t quite as vivid as theirs. Like I always had different images that would pop up but it was never these clear stories. It was like I sort of had to in some ways guide it” (p. 11). Angela also claimed that when people shared their experiences, each person would take a turn around the circle, “and they felt as if they mattered”.

Awareness of Different States of Consciousness: Not only were a few members aware of the fact that the meditation circle was giving them insight into other states of consciousness, Dylan claimed she was experiencing thoughts from her imagination. She explained how she understood the state of awareness in the meditation circle, “…A state between sleeping and dreaming in contrast with day to day thinking when you have so much to think about”. Rose stated, “It has helped me develop my method of acting more and further investigate my dreams/visions during meditation”.
Transformations

My curricular aim during the Transformations exercise was to create a context for in-depth mind/body exploration where the body was permitted to lead the movement. The focus in the interview was to question whether there was a moment that the student could sense their body leading the movement. Isabelle offered the following, “….that sort of exploration and pushing your boundaries…The transformations were sort of the physical embodiment of the work that we did. It was about being able to surrender your comfort zone, go to a new level and see what happens… see what you discover without, without having any specific agenda”. To the second focus Isabelle responded, “I think after people became more comfortable with the exercise you could start to see when the body emerges and the mind kind of took a step back. I can’t remember a specific action or specific time or a specific person but it definitely had to do with comfort level and being able to just let go.”

Opening Up, Letting Go and Taking the Plunge: Digby acknowledged that transformations helped, “A person to open up a lot more… I found it just helped to strip away the self-consciousness of what you are doing. It becomes really easy to overanalyze… you are out of character when you start to overanalyze every little nuance that you are doing”. Rose offers, “…like the moment before, so it is like I am preparing myself for the moment before. I like take the plunge into it…and just sort of be like, ‘I am going to let go and I am going to go, ready set go’, kind of thing…and its just like that preparation and merging into it”. At another point Rose explains that you have to “dig into it”.

Witnessing the Other: Dylan revealed that finding the pathway into the transformation was difficult and to find her own way, she needed to follow Gwen’s example. Dylan followed Gwen’s example because Dylan felt that Gwen was free when she was moving in the circle. Dylan knew that she could let go and mimic Gwen’s movements until it was possible to trust her own instincts. Rose also explains how to witness transformations, “Well I think it’s like- It’s not- its like connected to the visual but its not so visual, its instinctive but its sort of energy-connection like group dynamic. I guess or like the amount of concentration you are putting into their work- you have to have that, that whole faith and witness it”. Rose also brought forward the point that this connection is best examined when movement and sound come together in the exercise, “There is a point where you can hear a disconnection between the body and mind but its difficult to pinpoint the time”.


Development

The main element for the Thespian at the Oasis is fire. It was throughout exploring this phase of the drama years that emotion naturally emerged in the interviews. Passion was referenced in connection to the various characters and theatre styles. For example, Digby showed his passionate dislike of Shakespeare and his desire for other texts which he deemed more relevant, for example Anne-Marie MacDonald’s and Paul Zindel’s plays. He also wanted to explore theatre that relied less on interiority, preferring theatre that focused on social change, like Brecht’s theatre. Isabelle revealed her desire to revisit Juliet’s monologue for the extreme love, violence and passion in Juliet’s circumstances, as well as to attune to her own desire to be loved. Gwendolyn recounted her story of getting into altercations with boys on the subway, becoming depressed and questioning and railing against everything to do with gender stereotypes. Gwen acknowledged how female psychic pain had been passed down in her family. She preferred to play characters more aligned with the warrior archetype. Rose also encountered a serious gender challenge at the age of thirteen after being assigned too many male roles at a critical time in her development. Both Rose and Angela appreciated being able to unleash darker feelings through the role of Ruth in Gamma Rays.

Drama offers a unique opportunity for a student to learn through their body, to try on the light and dark energies of being human, and learn to explore creatively as a group. The early years show the presence of the archetypal explorer within the energy of lightness and humor. The early adolescent years reveal a more nuanced understanding of the mind and body relationship. The participants highlighted the benefits of the mind/body exercises as calming, focusing, being engaged with the imagination, awareness of energy and the group and for some, a beginning insight into the nature of consciousness. Rose’s image of a fire situated within a clearing is a powerful symbol for the Thespian. Our conversations about creative embodiment addressed one of Plotkin’s tasks: “Learning the social practices, values, knowledge, mythology, and cosmology of our family and culture” (p. 120). The other task, meant to balance the energies of this stage is “discovering the enchantment of nature” (p. 120).

Nature and “ The Wanderer in the Cocoon”

The real problem is that if we loose our forest we loose our souls. If we lose the singing of the birds, we lose our souls. If we can no longer see the stars because of the artificial light of our cities, our children lose their souls and their imagination. Thomas Berry
This discussion is passing into another phase of Plotkin’s model, which is referred to as the *Wanderer in the Cocoon*. Anticipating that the stage may be relevant to this inquiry, I provided a review of Plotkin’s description in chapter two. Now I will review the stage briefly. Plotkin posits that our disconnection from nature is contributing to egocentric development, which is primarily fed by an over exaggerated identification with culture. Plotkin’s model instead attempts to strike a balance between culture and nature. There are two tasks in this stage, “Leaving the ‘home’ of the adolescent personality (the culture task) and exploring the mysteries of human nature and psyche (nature task)” (p. 232). The stage archetype is The Wanderer. The movement into this stage shows a shift from the “emotional and social life to the life of the soul” (p. 233).

Our gathering in the fall of 2008 introduced a unique encounter with energetic feeling and the imagination. This was one of the spontaneous emergent happenings of the nature phase of this inquiry and it seemed to resonate with the feeling of our former meditation circles. It was our first meeting and the participants requested that we meditate and although it was not my intention that evening to lead a meditation, it turned out to be one of our most powerful energetic experiences. Throughout the subsequent meetings, although the individual reflections contributed to the overall question, this nature meditation experience was one of spontaneous emergence. Its emergence uncloaks the aspect of being in nature that this research directly addresses and the meditation shows how moments of resonance in nature may be experienced collectively.

*Feeling: Energy and the Imagination*

I am highlighting the following experience as an emergent experience of flow and pulse. Gwen revealed that she began first to look up at the stars. Gwen’s attention came down and rested on a nearby pine tree. She began to imagine herself attune to the height and the strength of the tree. After identifying a metaphor for the feeling, Gwen described a heightening and rooted sensation. She also reported feeling energy encircling the group. Three directions or pathways for the energy were noted; up, down and around.

Gwen, Dylan, and Rose, felt energy pass like a wave around the circle. Isabelle did not use the term wave but described the energy as a pushing and pulling on either side of her. Isabelle was able to distinguish from which side the pushing and pulling came. All of these young women felt a sense that their feet were rooted or planted. Rose exclaimed, “Yeah, maybe I am going to fall but my feet were so-planted”. Rose also felt as if she had to look down in order
to recover her sense of equilibrium. Rose’s shift in gaze usually indicates that she is experiencing a shift in consciousness.

Dylan felt as if she was divided into three distinct parts; her feet, middle and head, “I felt like my head was in one place and my feet were in another place and my middle was going, ‘Wow’ …”. Dylan’s imagination was activated, “And I also pictured everybody’s breath hitting the middle like streams of breath, hitting the middle at the same time”. Dylan also claimed to have felt like a bowling pin.

Isabelle’s experience activated her imagination. Isabelle explained that she saw Gwen swimming in a triangle filled with a substance of air and water. This substance often appears in her visions. As I am considering further the symbolic nature of these experiences and follow Gwen’s description of the imagination and feeling, I do see a triangle that resonates with Isabelle’s image. Isabelle also felt an energetic presence on her back, which she compared to the feeling of a hand resting there.

Angela experienced energy in both directions, “Shooting up, rooting to the ground,”. Although Digby admitted to feeling as if he did not reach this meditative state, he played his role by giving a metaphorical expression to some descriptions. He suggested that Dylan’s description reminded him of “fast forward hoolah dolls”. Rose felt an unusual warmth, “It is hazy because it is dark but I thought I could see my breath and even though it’s not that cold and I didn’t feel as cold because I could feel people’s breath”.

*The Wave: Unpacking The Unexpected*

Darroch-Lozowski (1999) writes, “Thought occurs above the brow, perception or sensation between the mouth and brow and “visceral proprioception and the proprioception of our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are tap-rooted in the torso” (p. 12). Knowledge flows in an energetic loop through the vegetative regions. Bakhtin’s (1965/1984) description of the movement of thought in the body mirror’s Darroch-Lozowski’s (1999) suggestion that thought loops as movement throughout the body, a movement that not only transforms low and high moral conceptions of nature and culture, but continually and rhythmically moves through feeling and thinking.

Barbara Ann Brennan (1993) explains that the Hara exists “in a dimension deeper than the auric field”. Hara is a Japanese term that indicates the lower stomach region. Within the Hara
there is a central point called Tan Tien, which is “the center of gravity” in the body (p. 288). Brennan explains how to work with Hara lines as a way to align a group’s purpose with cosmic energies. The Hara operates as a support to the chakra system and is conceived as an energetic line joining the earth core energy to the cosmos. We experimented with this exercise in the last two years of our time together. When Gwen, Isabelle, Angela and Rose were in their late teens we worked with this concept for a few classes.

Brennan (1993) also claims that this exercise places a group into alignment with synchronicity and harmonizes the group to the universal energy field. There were numerous instances of synchronicity, which I have addressed in the participant chapters. I will explain the Hara exercise in order to illustrate the similarities between Brennan’s description and our experience. A hand is placed on the heart and on the abdomen. The exercise involves visualizing being rooted to the earth’s core and also visualizing energy rising up through the energy centres. A connective thread is imagined, beginning from the middle region of the body, moving horizontally into the centre of the circle, as was illustrated by the description of the breath by Dylan and Rose. I would like to state however, that this was an experience of emergence and it was guided by following the flow of feeling and the imagination and not by the instructions that Brennan offers. On the night that this energetic sensation was felt we stood in a circle with our hands at our sides.

Throughout the remainder of the inquiry Angela commented most frequently on her experiences with energy, both in her journal and in our conversations. I want to draw an emergent question from this connection that I think is worth posing. How can her label, as a person who has been diagnosed with an anxiety of life and her capacity to work with energy relate to one another? Angela initiated her own imaginal experimentation, similar to Gwen’s experience with following a line from the stars down through the tree. Angela remarked that when she did yoga with her friends in a natural setting in the park the energy was “collecting”, and “hovering in an in-between place”. Angela’s in depth explanation and language while she describes her energy experiences, both in her backyard and during her description of her summer gaze into the horizon, show how the imagination and feeling can be followed while paying attention to nature. As Angela proceeds through the exercise one can observe that the imagination and energetic sensation flow into one experience and that experience furthered her understanding of living in an interconnected universe.
Isabelle’s experience revealed that she was beginning to feel energy looping between her abdomen and chest. I wrote in her conclusion: “Three times in Isabelle’s writing she described felt sensation in gradual movements between her chest and stomach. First, energy began in her stomach and rose to her chest. In a subsequent entry she referred to energy passing through her chest to her stomach. Finally the last reference to a rush of energy referred to how the energy passes through her in a rhythmic loop between her chest and stomach”. Digby also showed how he followed his feeling during our winter wandering, “The evidence of constructive, sentient influence felt soothing”.

Unpacking this unexpected energetic experience revealed that over half of the group felt a wave like movement. As well, over half felt a rooted feeling. Our discussion showed that there were multidirectional forms of energy passing through and around us. There was a horizontal energy that occurred in a wave-like pattern and an up and down energy that seemed to stretch and elongate. The wave like direction of energy connected to Isabelle’s cross vision.

**Emotions**

Plotkin (2007) also recognizes that felt sensation is an important complement to describing experiences in nature. I want to refer to the emotions evoked while attending to nature in connection to their energetic activation. The participants referenced various emotions in their personal journal reflections. Research shows that experiences in city parks, gardens and wilderness areas render health and healing benefits (Davis, 1998). John Davis (1998) suggests that the research in the transpersonal psychology field describes how encounters with nature lead to experiences of “peace, joy, love, support, inspiration, and communion with the natural world that are exemplars of the natural world” (Davies, 1998, p. 2). The written reflections just after the meditation and wandering time during our group inquiries were focused more on energetic sensations and perceptual explorations. These reflections also conveyed an almost childlike buoyancy and a heightened connection to the senses. Journal reflections written through memory were more focused on the emotional dimensions of the experience.

Emotional states of being align with the research that has already occurred in the area of peak experiences in nature. For example, Dylan’s recollection of being at the beach focused on feelings of happiness. Later in the inquiry her experience in nature deepened as she moved from ecstasy to an appreciation of beauty while skiing on a mountain. In a forest, Gwen noticed that initially she experienced giddiness, her senses sharpened and eventually she felt calmed and
happy, “If I stay there for a while obviously I calm down, but things easily move me. Everything seems more beautiful and I take the time to enjoy things”. Dylan’s winter experience also expressed a heightening of the senses and a feeling of gratitude,

I was almost sad that it was over. I was also so happy and I felt lucky to have been there. I think generally this is the feeling I get when I am in nature. It’s like when I told you about when I go to the beach and I feel so happy. I am at home (and I made that little sound and gesture). I guess it just makes me more alive and more aware of my surroundings; more observant. It also makes me think less about everything else. I can only think about what I see and if I do think about anything else, it is calmer. (Fall Journal)

Rose conveyed her sense of happiness as she sat on her front porch and watched the trees and felt the wind. Angela also noted her feeling of happiness in the spring at the park. I am not suggesting that happiness is a goal for developing attentiveness to nature, but it is an important experience and one that is tied to the experience of the heart. Beauty seems so closely related to an experience of happiness.

_Awe, Beauty and Ecstasy:_ Awe was expressed by Isabelle in the Canadian wild forest. Dylan was drawn to the vastness of the water. Angela referred to the trees as, “magnificent”. Awe, according Kirk Schneider (2009) is an integral part of existential presence and the rediscovery of mystery. Moore (1992) quotes Japanese Soetsu Yanagi who describes beauty as something that gives “unlimited scope to the imagination” (p. 278). Moore does not consider beauty to be about form. Beauty is for the soul an experience of “absorption and contemplation”.

Isabelle and Dylan poetically described ecstatic experiences. Ecstasy was felt after absorbing the beauty of nature. Dylan notes a feeling of acceleration after she is moved by a winter scene, “I wanted to go faster, the cold didn’t feel as cold, and I just felt ecstatic”. Gwen also claimed she reacts to the energy of the forest as Dylan responds to the beach, to the extent that she feels her soul sing. Peak and ecstatic experiences are “defined by euphoria, noesis, harmony or union with the universe, a profound sense of beauty and love, and ineffability” (Davis, 1998 p. 1). Davis cites Kaplan and Talbot (1983) in a research study that explored the reflections of teachers and children on wilderness tours. After examining participant journals, Kaplan and Talbot concluded that “the wilderness inspires awe and wonder, and one’s intimate contact with this environment leads to thoughts about spiritual meanings and eternal processes” (Kaplan and Talbot, 1983 p.178). Isabelle and Gwen’s reflections on nature directly expressed a
sacred feeling. Angela’s experience of interconnectedness is also a cosmic and sacred expression of her relationship with nature.

*Loosening the Comfortable:* Digby’s good-humored admission that nature makes him feel crabby, irritated and uncomfortable is an energetic activation of different kind. As we walked down to the lake he revealed some of his anxiety about being in nature by wearing a heavy sweatshirt to protect his arms against bugs. During Digby’s first wandering experience, he focused on the bluff edge and this image evoked a feeling of unease. Transpersonal or depth psychology studies do not focus on the revealing or exposing aspect of being in nature but it is clear that there is a rhythm between the comforting and dis-comforting effects as Angela also indicated after her yoga experience. Rose also gave a compelling account of how attending to nature made her aware of how she was anxiously living outside of herself.

Balancing the relationship between the pleasurable aspects of being in nature with the discomforting aspect of being in and attending to nature would perhaps help to foster deeper or more nuanced connections to nature. I do not think that nature exists only for our comfort, in service to our happiness or for the purpose of showing us what connectedness feels like. The group inquiry discussion explored this issue in the example of the film, *Into the Wild.* The film follows the story of Christopher McCandles’ two-year journey to Alaska where he died from malnutrition and cold.

In order to draw a complete picture of Digby’s relationship to nature, I return to the comments that he offered with respect to his experiences on the farm. Many mouths dropped in shock when Digby suggested that Isabelle’s mother would need a firearm to keep her chickens safe in a coop on a remote island. The audiotape revealed a brief exhale, a moment of shock seemed to wave through the group. I remember looks of incredulity—the word “gun” had been uttered. However, upon listening to Digby’s reasoning, I began to see that our dis-comfort seemed dependent on our naïve understanding of the ways in which nature and agriculture interact. Although reticent to drop too deeply into his interiority, felt sensation or the imagination, Digby could provide in-depth descriptions of animals and insects. Digby’s fear of water in general revealed the boundaries through which he could relate to nature. From my day-to-day gazing into the horizon, at trees and intently watching birds fly overhead, I understood that an energy so beautiful can sweep through the body, something so powerful at times I could feel an arresting downward pull. It is for this reason that I did not focus on going deeper into nature as a group with these participants. When I attempted to organize a trip to a wilderness
area, I could not reach a group consensus on a day where all could attend. In retrospect I agree that wild nature is a space in which we all could benefit, but this process of gentling through the mind and body should be entered into with caution and slowly. In *The Healing Flow*, Schnetz (2005) writes, “that we need to respect the limits of our being (p. 239) and if the person is suffering from fragmentation or “a disruption of the continuous flow of energy” (p.239) establishing a balance between the part and the whole, should become the central focus. I believe that Digby was in the midst of a deep transformation process, the details of which I was not privy. Perhaps our dynamic reflected the dynamic of teacher and student, not therapist and analysand. A teacher should be able to read an individual’s ontological development and create expectations accordingly. In other words, a teacher’s responsibility is to ensure the psychic safety of their students.

I make a final submission with respect to the issue of making connections to nature that foster a flow between the outer and inner worlds. Wilhelm Reich (1973) posited that there is an actual body armor that protects and distances an individual from life energy. I am proposing that an open imagination and an activation of feeling in nature is dependent on the gradual dissolution of that body armor. However, I agree with the empirical findings of Csoli (2009) as she researched young women’s spirituality and found the young women required a form of psychic protection, for example a talisman. Opening to nature also requires a form of protection that does not require rigidity or distancing. My proposal only offers a symbolic solution. When combining an attention to nature with an activation of the unconscious, the flexibility, buoyancy and warmth of a wet suit provides a metaphor for the kind of psychic protection an individual may require.

*The More than Human World: Trees, Animals, Insects, Weather and Rainbows*

I want to honour the appearance of the more than human world over the course of the inquiry. On a very simple level this is a list of the animals, insects, birds, weather and landscape that were encountered, visualized and dreamt about. Ellen MacFarland’s (2008) work is written to address childhood trauma. MacFarland suggests that a physical interaction with a being or element in nature also holds symbolic and imaginal implications. MacFarland maintains that according to Jung’s description of the transference field, an energy transfer between symbol and the individual also occurs in a similar flow. I am also suggesting that Schnetz’s notion of the dialogic healing flow is activated when the individual absorbs an image and then finds words to describe that image. Schnetz (2005) maintains that initially Ken Wilbur argued that healing the
split between the unconscious and conscious is important for the individual to utilize his whole mind. However, Wilbur concedes later that the healing process needs to go beyond healing dualistic splits, to address deeper understandings of treating the whole person.

Various birds appeared during the talk I had with Digby down by the lake. A plethora of species of gulls flew overhead. Gulls are typically seen in this area but a tern is both harder to distinguish and more rare. The tern torpedoed straight into the water only a few feet away from us. In contrast to a mole’s way of living, terns are a species of birds that are exposed to the greatest hours of sunlight. Digby noticed two loons. Loons are also not seen every day. We also talked about the fertility practices of queen ants and a mole’s ability to live without sight. Although Digby’s fear of being bitten by bugs was present, the imagery of the remarkable behavior of ants and moles was also present during our conversation. During the summer equinox meeting, Digby wrote a short poem about spiders. Digby and I spoke at length about his love of fantasy novels and the genius of JRR Tolkein’s Lord of the Rings.

Two hawks outside of Gwen’s window reminded her to feel strong and calm. Trees outside her window also evoked memories of childhood and the imagination. Gwen feels the strongest connection to nature in the forest. Illustrating the calming effects of attending to nature, Gwen watched two squirrels chase each other around a tree trunk. This then carried her into a visualization which placed her at home in a forest. An encounter with a rat activated a sense of compassion and critical thinking with respect to how individuals are marginalized and labeled. Even a squirrel at a park initiated an imaginal dialogue that gave her permission to deflate her hero archetype. Gwen’s dreams revealed a moose that chased her, a bird that pecked at her legs, her pet bird that was sick with cancer and a spider dream. Gwen also saw a snake coming out of her mouth during a toning exercise.

Although Isabelle conveyed few encounters with animals or birds, she shared a story about snakes that moved into a wall of fieldstone that her mother had constructed. Isabelle’s place of comfort was by the water. Isabelle took a trip into wild nature and attended to the landscape and the elements. The comforting aspect of trees was introduced to her in the beginning of the inquiry as she stopped to breathe with a tree during a particularly difficult exam season. In the summer she began to attend to clouds and eventually she felt as if she was interpreting their movements. A blue bird opened Isabelle’s chapter and a vision of two blue birds closed her chapter. Eagles appeared in Isabelle’s visions. Isabelle imagined the eagle was
coaxing her to take a risk. Metaphor and symbol also explicitly appeared when Isabelle began to refer to the earth and the seeds under her feet.

Angela’s attention was primarily drawn to trees and water. During the first inquiry a spider dropped down to rest on Angela’s head. Angela wrote about her affection for trees, and the friendly, special and magnificent energy she derives from paying attention to them. While focusing healing energy on her back, Angela experienced a spontaneous vision of a raven during a Tibetan singing bowl session. Ants and flies appeared in circular patterns during her peace rally dream and she dreamed about a unique epic journey through various seasons. Angela also imagined numerous black horses galloping from the horizon, an image that resonates with Black Elk’s visions.

Dylan is happiest at the beach. She had a profound experience in nature on a mountain in late fall. Spiders attempted to climb into Dylan’s purse as we sat together on a rock by the lake. Swans also floated by. Dylan typically focused her attention during the wandering meditations on the water, which helped her empty her thoughts. She recalled her childhood connection to a backyard tree. In spring, Dylan listened to the sound of a bird and began to reflect on her need to slow down. Dylan’s experience with a rainbow activated within her sense of childlike spontaneity. During the final inquiry meeting, Dylan explained that she now watches nature more intently.

Rose also seemed to note the weather in relation to her inner state, especially rain and storms, explaining that there was a relationship between how she felt inside and the weather outside. In spring Rose noted that the trees and animals seemed permanent and motionless. The effect of feeling this outside/inside relationship was comforting. The trees and wind reminded her, “When it’s stormy outside, I feel safe inside and calm. When there’s an emotional storm inside, if nature is calm I’m comforted that the world is not ending. Taking time out of a busy life to attend to nature for long enough calms me. We need one another, and nothing else, to keep us going in life”.

**Emergence: Synchronicities and Resonance**

Lorentz (2006) offers another definition for synchronicity, “In these experiences, one event becomes linked with another in a way that we do not expect and couldn't predict rationally based on evidence. The moment of insight may seem like a release into an imaginative and
visionary state that transcends the normal rules of space and time” (Lorentz, 2006). Isabelle’s two visions provided symbolic direction for this work. One vision followed the journey of a burning cross. The journey introduced the rising and falling movement of transformation. The other vision was situated in a cave and revealed a process closely aligned with Jung’s explanation of alchemy. The image of the green vegetation is an image that informed this work.

Isabelle also experienced resonances between her dreams and the research methodology. Isabelle and I started with a dream synchronicity that symbolically aligned with numerous aspects of the research process, for example my role as researcher and her role as the first participant. She also encountered an emergent experience with an elderly woman who pointed out the fall colours. Angela’s first experience in nature was also a synchronicity. Yoga and meditation in the park directly mirrored the activities of this inquiry. That experience was shared with her vocal colleagues and revealed the benefits and challenges of the gentling process in nature. Her second synchronicity experience was a dream that followed the four seasons as an epic journey, ending with an image of a pond with green vegetation emerging from the bottom.

Gwen and I experienced direct synchronicity through our primal yell, while she was helping to create a memorial for the women who died in the Montreal massacre. While I experienced a dream about a wall where a familiar crone archetype was said to reside, Gwen wrote about her awareness of the archetypal child who exists at the wall between her lower abdomen and chest. Another experiential synchronicity involved an unconscious sabotage of our technological devices. Gwen also conveyed a whimsical story about wading in a muddy pond with green plants. Although there were numerous synchronicities, I am outlining these synchronicities as symbolically informing the study, mirroring activities and making resonant connections between the imaginal and physical circumstances.

It is the image of vegetation in water that has emerged three times in this research; in Gwen’s celebratory family event, in Isabelle’s vision and Angela’s “epic” dream. Although synchronicity deserves a more in-depth examination these three examples show the various modes of consciousness activated through emergent and synchronous experience. Lorentz (2006) explains the theory,

Jung talks in several articles about learning to have an "ethical" relationship to the emergent unconscious, to take up the symptoms, emotional life, and images that arise through synchronicities in us and in the world around us as a call, a vocation, and a
responsibility. This is, to my mind, a very much-needed program for surviving the chaos of the globalized world of the 21st century. Jung's work on synchronicity opens new ways for us to continue to learn about openness, humility, dialogue, and grace, as we face the challenges of building peaceful environments in a new era. Synchronicity gives us a way to imagine communities as interconnected, filled with untapped spiritual potentials, and called to the work of liberation. (p. 20)

It is this image of vegetation that points me back to the vegetative regions of the body and indicates the need for future research into the relationship between vegetative sensation and the generation of thought. Could Reich and Jung share a profound similarity in their respective proposals, even though one system promoted the imagination and the other, bodily feeling? Here is Jung’s position,

Thus we are driven to the conclusion that a nervous substrate like the sympathetic system which is absolutely different from the cerebrospinal system in point of origin and function can evidently produce thoughts and perceptions just as easily as the later. (CW 8, par. 957)

The body’s way of knowing has been extensively explored by Vivian Darroch-Lozowski (1984, 1987, 1990, 1999, 2002). In chapter two I dedicated the discussion to the notion that everything in the universe possesses its own song. If a chorus exists in this research work, it would surely include a phrase that outlined the importance of offering students ways to feel energy. In so doing I think a learning atmosphere that includes energy inquiry can assist the student in cultivating a connection to their essential core.
Chapter 11: Conclusion

The opening chapter outlines the urgent messages of several ecologists and depth psychologists on the environmental crisis. The chapter articulates the need for a new conception of intelligence and development that is rooted through nature (Berry, 1998; Darroch-Lozowski, 2006; Macy, 2007; Orr, 2004; Plotkin, 2008; Tarnas, 2006; Swimme, 1994). One portion of this discussion describes the creative history of the drama group and gives a brief summary of the mind/body exercises. Situated within the field of Holistic Education, the second chapter responds to the first chapter in that it addresses issues pertaining to the need to cultivate imaginal inquiry and sensitivity to the vegetative regions of the body in the classroom. The chapter develops two threads. Energy and the imagination are examined through Carl Jung’s conception of the imagination and Wilhelm Reich’s theories on life energy.

*How do the six youth participants articulate their experiences of mind/body receptivity or openness?*

From a pedagogical view, my initial intention was to prepare the young actor to receive what a fellow actor had offered and to prepare them to give something back in return. In this reflection on the findings from the first stage of development, I have found that openness is activated by the explorer archetype, as the drama student was engaged in physical activities and experimenting with the imagination. The physical feeling of buoyancy, spinning, humor, fun, silliness, weirdness and wonkiness also describe the energy of the explorer during this phase. The warm-up activities that were significant to the participants were body oriented and included improvisation, the commedia mask, the clown exercises, breathing, group experimentation, early transformation exercises and *Walking to the Centre*.

After trying on the darker characters in the Explorer stage, the students showed an understanding of how to empathize with more complex characters as they matured. During the Thespian at the Oasis stage, the fire archetype is activated in the feeling of intense emotion and awareness to the flow of emotion. I think that the openness in this phase to some degree relies on the young adolescent’s freedom to connect to their passion and to exercise their freedom to express their preferences. The meditation fostered a sense of openness to psychic imagery, felt
sensation in the body and to a desire from some of the participants to explore their own interiority. In sharp contrast to the intense emotions felt in this stage of the participants’ development all of the participants acknowledged a feeling of openness and calmness in relation to at least one of the mind/body activities. Transformations became an important mind/body exercise to cultivate openness and the coming together of movement and sound as it is informed by impulse.

During the *Wanderer in the Cocoon* phase, the students began to open to group consciousness through experiences of symbolic resonance in the meditation circle. During the wandering experiences while attending to nature new insights emerged which were also connected to felt sensation and the imagination. The rhythm and sounds of nature evoked a deeper listening and ability to express the nuances of sight and sound. An emptying of mind chatter also occurred for some of the participants. The most powerful experience of imagination, rhythm, energy and metaphor occurred during the group fall meditation. When I consider the many shifts in awareness throughout the participant’s mind/body development, it is clear that nature expands perception, fosters sensitivity to rhythm and sound, calms and activates the senses and the imagination.

*How does mind/body consciousness and an attention to nature relate to these youth’s understandings of place?*

Miller (1996/) has described soul as a mysterious energy. Plotkin (2008) posits that place is a relationship to space that uncovers the “the mysterious core” of identity (p. 35). Gwen began her journal by writing about an outing where they stopped to wade in a pond together. During that reflection Gwen noted how nature carries her back into the feeling of being a child. Gwen proclaims, “I am better in a forest”. This is a statement that resonates with Jung’s question, “Why not go into the forest literally? Sometimes a tree tells you more than can be read in books” (cited in Moore, 1992, p. 281). Gwen’s sense of place was expressed through her feeling of connectedness, her feeling of wholeness and desire for balance. Gwen also felt a sacred connection to the forest, “my soul starts to sing” and “everything about me is better because I feel more connected to the world”. Gwen will attend graduate school in gender studies.

Angela worked through her lived understanding of interconnectedness. Her explorations brought her to a new understanding of how she wanted to exist in the world and how she viewed the process of interconnection with compassion. Angela described her desire to live in the in-
between when she travelled on the street or subway. Angela also experimented with energy and the imagination; “Eventually I stopped singing and just sat still and observed my surroundings for a while. Then I closed my eyes and tried to really believe that I was connected with everything in the universe (sounds really cheesy, but oh well). On an intellectual level, I do believe that. But I wanted to really grasp that idea at a deeper level’. Angela believes her calling involves singing for peace.

Dylan situated herself in both nature and culture similarly, stating that being at the beach and being immersed in the city connected her to emergent thoughts and synchronicity. Dylan understands nature as a place that she can bring herself back to life and slow down. At the spring gathering Dylan claimed that she wanted to become confidently set in who she is. She also holds a phantasy for her future where she can foster community through the arts.

Isabelle also expressed a sacred connection to the water, “My true place of comfort and meditation has always been the water. It will NEVER leave me…but now the wind is calling. Let the laughter begin. Have you ever felt the wind laugh inside of you?” A gentled attentiveness to nature brings a new perspective and feeling of comfort. Gwen explains, “The world is bigger than my exams”. Isabelle almost echoes this statement verbatim, “The world is so much bigger than exams”. Isabelle believes her calling is involved with healing. But now she will explore how to wander as she travels through Switzerland for six months.

During the summer inquiry Rose grappled with the relationship between humans and nature in a reflection that revealed her understanding of the mind/body relationship “…they are able to feed off one another and focus themselves as well. We are free to exist side by side without forming a relationship and yet you are always connected. I guess what I want to say is that we need one another without really thinking about it. We shape and affect one another but cannot control one another”. Continuing to elaborate on how she feels about herself while in nature, Rose explains, “When I’m in nature, really sunk into nature, I don’t feel badly about myself either…” Rose referred to a similar feeling of an improved sense of self when she began her personal inquiry into how to absorb an experience within the understanding that she was drawing in energy from the environment. Her experience with connecting to nature and place focused on a process of attunement which led to a feeling of being washed clean of any negative mood and a feeling that she was not as isolated from herself and others. In the spring, she felt
that her deeper self desired a better understanding of trust as she connected to nature’s permanence. Rose continues her studies in acting.

Digby’s place is described in the truth he finds in the admixture between nature and culture. It is described in the compassion he shows to people in the world who do not enjoy the economic and environmental privileges that we do in this country. Digby has recently enrolled in college and will explore the relationship between language and culture as he studies writing.

**What holistic curriculum insights can be drawn from an ontological understanding of development?**

Each person in this inquiry contributed a key element to the central research question, what happens when we attend to nature feelingly? From the beginning I knew that some of the connections we were about to experience would include energy. In the classes we were activating a felt sense of the body with freeing the imagination, two integral experiences of the visualizations, the meditation circle and transformations. Christopher Bache (2008) begins his explanation of teaching and learning by explaining how he works with the quantum field, through prayer and noting resonant experiences in his undergraduate psychology classroom. Bache conveys an experience of seeing an image in response to a question that was posed by his student as an expression of the shift in perception he has experienced while being open to this field.

The following section is an overview that briefly answers the ontological aspect of the inquiry from each participant’s contribution. Isabelle’s statement, that we are discovering a “new way of being and learning” called for the need to articulate the aspect of being these six youth have shown. I am proposing in this next portion of the chapter the ontological findings and connections to holistic curriculum. But first I want to align the ending with a few reflections that have arisen from my own experience and reveries in nature.

*Witnessing the Dawn’s Early Light*

It is fall and there are only a few days left where it is warm enough to write outside. It is just after dawn. There is a golden early morning light that streams through everything. One sailboat on the lake below responds to the gentle morning wind,

Every dawn as it comes is a holy event, and every day is holy, for the light comes from your Father Wakan-Tanka (the Great Spirit); and also you must remember that the two leggeds and all the other peoples who
stand upon this earth are sacred and should be treated as such.

--Black Elk, Oglala Sioux Holy Man

This is a reminder that from the beginning the mind/body gentling process in nature was engaged to cultivate empathy towards the sacred other (Darroch-Lozowski, 2006; Tacey, 2004).

Listening to the Voice of Hearing

Below the trees of the ravine flicker their leaves in response to the wind. The branches sway—birch, elm, willow leaves are turning their fall hue; yellow, orange and red blaze on the landscape. The waves are moving over the rocks and I can hear their gentle collision, water and stone. Finches are diving to catch insects. Sometimes they fly close enough under the drooping branches of the willow overhead that I can hear the beating of their wings. A chickadee perched and chirped on the arm of the chair, another sign of returning winter. Throughout this gazing and attending I have hoped to become gentle enough to feel the wind pass through me.

The shadows seem longer and yet I know they are vulnerable too as time shifts the way the light cascades through the trees. Vivian Darroch-Lozowski (1984) writes, “It is as important to hear the endings of tones as it is to hear the beginnings. The word-monochord is yet saying: The voice of hearing is a voice that asks to be kept alive” (p. 65). Dylan described how she felt in response to the end of a sound during the group toning exercise. She compared the feeling to losing a sense of security, like the momentary loss of home. Isabelle said that the group felt like a safe harbour. I believe that the soul first senses the loss of home. What is hearing speech? “A speech, which hears not only itself but is founded on the sound of others on which it is founded” (Darroch-Lozowski, 1984 p. 87). As David Abram (1996) also notes, language needs to be founded upon “others” from the more-than-human world.

Dream Symbols

Robert Romanyszyn (2007) explains that the soul grieves for what is missing. He also explains how dreams can reveal the unfinished business of a work. From the beginning it has been my aim to include the unconscious and now I am presenting this ending with what is arising through dreams, reveries and emergent happenings. Appearing in a dream, my Grandmother rolled out pie dough and said, “Everything is not perfect”. She pressed and rolled the dough out to the outer edges from the centre. It is impossible to hold an image of the whole in an exact sense but one can feel connectedness, as Angela showed, and that connectedness is primarily
investigated through movement. This is one of the central lived understandings of an attention to nature; Press into attending to nature within a feeling that we are intricately involved in creating the whole. Rose most directly addressed how to press into a mind/body experience by describing her process of digging into or sinking into the mind and body. Rose also requires the engagement of voice and sound within the understanding that that there are others that are witnessing the experience. For holistic curriculum this means that mind/body inquiry is as much a group endeavour as an individual one. I believe that this research shows, not only the importance of the collective imagination as it was experienced in the meditation circle, but collective feeling as it was shown in the group meditation in nature.

*Giving The Dream a Body*

The other reason I know that this is the end of the inquiry is that a dream from six years ago has only now come to a full understanding. Dream interpretation is complex, it involves symbolism and time and emergent feeling. In the dream I was walking towards the bluffs with an adolescent female, a young woman who I have had a long history with, perhaps a history that includes several incarnations. Her pace quickened and she said, “Hurry up the leaves are turning.” Upon reaching the edge of the bluffs she did not hesitate and she jumped into the water below. I looked down and saw the sand. As she landed in the water her hair turned a beautiful golden colour. I have not been able to decipher the meaning of that dream to the extent that the interpretation corresponded to my lived reality. Now the dream is gaining a body. Now the dream speaks and says, “As time turns follow the experiences of the other. This will lead to witnessing the sacred in them”. But after the dive, after experiencing the stillness and generative feeling of the depths, what happens? As in the example of Isabelle’s vision of the cross, we glide along the surface and surrender to the rise and fall of consciousness. Falling below the surface and rising again constitutes an orientation to the vegetative regions of our bodies. Another insight for holistic curriculum: Follow the rhythm and movement of experience.

Thomas Moore (1992) explains that in order to draw his analysand from the dualistic ways in which life issues can be interpreted, he encourages them to give their experience a body by staying in relationship to both the dark and light in the challenges that arise. That is what it means to work with symbol and soul. The only way to really know experience is to be present to it, stay in relationship to it and follow it. Last night Isabelle emailed me to say that she is now sending someone she knows golden light. This is Isabelle’s gift, a phenomenological approach to distant healing. I think Isabelle’s experience also shows the alchemical nature of remaining open.
to experience. But so does Digby’s engagement with critical consciousness, his knowledge of the happenings that occur around the world and his humor. I have mentioned both of these participants because they represent the beginning, the ending and a critical conjoining point in the circle of being that I am about to propose.

*Wild Ego or Wild Soul*

Wild soul and wild ego are two different things. On Thanksgiving I observed three incidences on a strip of land that is slowly deteriorating. These incidences involved youth and showed a rise in the urgency of what I am trying to say from the experience of watching young people. During the first experience I watched billowing smoke wafting from the side of the bluffs. The fire had been carelessly left by a group of youths the night before. Earlier this summer I had already called the fire department to respond to a grass fire that was set on the shore below by young people who had had a party the night before. This Thanksgiving Day my husband and I went over to the bluffs and doused the smoldering wood with water. Then, later in the day a young man sat on the edge of the bluffs and viciously knocked chunks of sand from the precipice.

Not only was this young man endangering his own life, but the sand had been shaped by the wind into a sculpture and he was needlessly destroying it. Late in the evening more youth gathered to knock stones with a metal baseball bat over the edge, endangering people below. This happened over the span of one day and this is what I mean by wild ego. Thomas Moore (1992) suggests that the ego takes its power from the hero archetype and operates by gathering strength and instigating strategies to fulfill a goal. Moore adds that the power of the ego and the power of the soul are different. The soul “is like a great reservoir”, or “like a force of water”. Where does the soul draw its power? The soul draws its aliveness from loss, from the imagination and from “living close to the heart” (p. 120).

Romanyshyn (2007) explains the difficulty of writing down the soul, “How does psychology translate the wildness of soul without taming it or breaking up its spirit? How does psychology in its research practices write up its encounters with soul in a way that also writes down the soul?” (p. 310). Alchemical hermeneutics as a complementary research method is a process that, “signifies a path”. This process is subtle and waits for the image that arises from the unconscious. It does not count, weigh, gage, or judge. This method is “a pivotal reality”, one that can be accessed in the gap between mind and matter. Gaston Bachelard also explains, “The
psychology of the alchemist is that of reveries trying to constitute themselves in experiments on the exterior world” (cited in Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 311).

Prospero’s Final Note

I have known these young people for many years and my feeling for them has grown since the beginning of this project. I do not know our future, whether we will continue in a formal or more casual sense. There is still an excitement with all of us when we get together. For the last dinner, I prayerfully considered what we should discuss. I kept hearing and feeling the need for a discussion on forgiveness. As I felt my attentiveness to nature intensify so did the force of my shadowed thoughts. Unresolved issues kept surfacing and for an ending, I needed another letting go. I suspected that others in the group would need this as well. During our last dinner together we spoke about forgiveness in simple terms. A meaningful conversation developed within minutes of our sitting down together. Digby explained that some people needed gentle teaching. Isabelle reminded us of the need to consider a person’s context. Rose agreed. A discussion on forgiveness was our final note.

Let me sound the final group note. I know this image was introduced in Digby’s chapter. Gwen cried almost the entire time we discussed forgiveness because she is finding it difficult to forgive. Angela placed her hand on Gwen’s arm while Gwen released her feeling into the presence of those who love her. In a foreshadowing comment, Gwen made an admission during our second last meeting that this group felt like a family. Now as her actual family changes its circle, we are here. Digby, who sat on the other side of her, voiced a sentiment for all of us, “I don’t mean to be trite but I think everything is going to be OK.” In Digby’s reaching comment his mother was present. In Angela’s reaching hand, her mother was present. This is not just a word-picture. It is an image of reaching out to what is sacred in the other. It is an act of empathy, an admission of humanity within the context of love that occurs over a period of time. What I must remember is that it is a love developed through creative exploration, the opportunity to feel vulnerable with each other and then it is a love guided by nature.

“If this is a transformation myth, it is marked with the freeing of a powerful feminine element: waiting. (Nor is this waiting passive waiting. It has the same power and qualities as reception. Gabriel Marcel conceives reception as a ‘participation in a reality, in a plenitude and a communication of oneself….It is existing which sunders the self” (Darroch-Lozowski, 1984 p. 88).
“A New Way of Being”

HEALING: Isabelle began this research inquiry by sharing two visions and connecting the images she saw in these visions to her understanding of self. Isabelle experienced an elemental connection to nature. When I asked how Isabelle viewed herself in relation to her visions, she saw herself as a leader and associated the colour blue with, “healing the world”.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS: Angela shared her dream about peace and her dream about an epic journey in nature. Using an imaginal and energetic exploration technique, Angela also discovered a unique way of using the imagination to feel energetic interconnectedness.

WHOLENESS: Gwendolyn followed feeling and the imagination and brought forward a symbolic, energetic and empathetic connection to the more than human world. Out of her search for balance, Gwendolyn focused on feeling as she believed that feeling connected her to the larger whole.

CREATIVITY: Dylan offered her approach to authentic creativity through following synchronicity as it arises in both nature and culture. Dylan shows how attending to nature can cultivate awareness to the rhythm and movement of thought. Her experience also shows how she waits for a feeling of emergence to expand patterns of thought.

SUBTLE ENERGY: Rose contributed her ability to follow an impulse, particularly with respect to listening to the sound and rhythm of nature. Rose also offers new language to describe working with the mind and body, for example “sinking and falling into” and “an experience witnessed”. Rose’s experience led her to a personal inquiry that asked how to absorb an experience through following the imagination and subtle energy.

HUMOR: Digby offered his cryptic sense of humor, which not only introduced the idea of the body in the act of becoming but worked to loosen and challenge narrow ideologies. While wandering in nature, Digby followed his feeling and offered a poetic description of nature and culture.
Discussion

During the concluding remarks of Csoli’s (2009) doctoral thesis on the nature of girls’ spirituality, Csoli claims that each of her participants encountered flow according to their unique ways of being open to experience. Im (2010) notes that teachers practicing meditation also learned to live “by the flow of the whole”. According to Im, living by the flow of the whole means “trusting inner wisdom, being humble, being open minded, letting go, and accepting” (p. 206). According to Csikzentmihalyi (1990), “Flow is the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake” (p. 6). During flow the self disappears in an act of becoming fully absorbed in the experience. As Darroch-Lozowski (1984) writes, however, non-intentional waiting, an essentially feminine way of being, “sunders the self”. This study did not depend on goal oriented tasks or attentiveness for the sake of developing skills, greater knowledge or even a deeper connection to the earth.

From the beginning this research was aimed to focus on ontological understandings, mind/body connections, regeneration and healing and was focused on letting go of goals and intentions. Although as the emerging patterns show, greater focus, happiness and calmness can be outcomes of following an experience of energy and the imagination in nature. To some extent the research indicates that a feeling of well-being and one resonant with the notion of sukka can be accessed through attending to nature. Upon researching the thoughts and science of Wilhelm Reich and the contributions of Carl Jung in relation to energy, the archetypes and the imagination, and reviewing literature on the learning tendencies of undergraduate youth and their interest in nature and transpersonal experience I wanted to enter into an open inquiry which waited, with an almost unnerving uncertainty for experiences to emerge.

Limitations of the Study

Given the participants longstanding relationship with me, each other and the alternative learning context this study cannot be considered generalizable. It is common to establish that a qualitative study is not generalizable and even phenomenological studies are not deemed to be so (van Manen, 1997). It has been argued that generalizability in a qualitative study relies on theoretical generalizabilty as the participants have been selected based on theoretical coherency with the aims of the research and not statistical probability as in the case of quantitative studies (Horsborough, 2003). This means that although one cannot match the participant group to
another participant group to replicate the study, theories and methods can be drawn from this study and can be applied to augment both the field of research and the field of holistic curriculum.

**Implications**

Although this research contains a small participant group, the findings reveal the intrinsic value of maintaining mind/body exploration throughout all stages of development. This research holds unique features that address not only the cognitive benefits to mind/body awareness but demonstrates ways in which students can work with the principle of emergence, through drama, meditation, dreams, reveries, primal bodywork, group discussions and an attentiveness to nature.

Romanyshyn (2007) argues that the inclusion of the unconscious in research and learning is epistemologically ethical. However, as this research shows there are tensions that arise between allowing emergence to occur and making meaning. The timing and the complexity of the relationship between these two aspects of receiving messages from the unconscious require further research. The ontological perspectives of the individual provide the boundaries that guide mind/body exploration that includes the unconscious.

The flow of the participants’ development became the first emergent insight as I began listening to the memories of the drama students. Bill Plotkin (2008) identifies the explorer, the thespian and the wanderer as three archetypes of development. Beginning with the notion of exploration, non-competitive body engagement, and a beginning awareness of thought the first phase illustrates the importance of free mind/body exploration. As well as reflections on mind/body awareness from childhood to late adolescence, the study constructs an ontological wheel that shows each participant’s core insights from the yearlong inquiry. The wheel presents an ontological perspective on healing, of interconnectedness, of wholeness, of creativity, subtle energy and humor.

*The Flow and Pulse of Learning*

The next stage in Plotkin’s (2008) model is a stage called, *The Soul at the Wellspring*. The stage archetype is the soul apprentice and the task is “learning to embody soul in culture” (p. 302). I cannot claim that any member of this group is fully living the embodied reality of this stage. Perhaps there has been an initiation, which is now percolating along the surface of all of our psyches. Plotkin writes that the quadrant archetype is the visionary and that the circle of identity in this stage is an ecocentric one. As Dylan aims to live in a diverse creative community,
as Rose continues to perform (she is playing in Euripedes), as Digby learns to write, as Gwen continues her work in social work and feminism, as Isabelle wanders, as now Angela performs her original jazz tunes and I attempt to find other streams in holistic education to which these findings can flow, I imagine the work of the archetypal visionary has already been activated. In the end I am suggesting that working with energy, mind/body awareness and the imagination are integral for holistic learning and development.
References


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Appendix

Desire: An Imaginal Dialogue with the Loyal Solder

Soldier, for how long did I consent
To stay in this quiet cave?
Safe in a predictable play of shadow
I am trying to release you/me
You wooed me into this position
Strategic-so the freeing terror could not rise through me
I was taken by you, swayed by the war you said we needed to fight
I am loosing ground in your war though

For you soldier your power are words, your instruments, tools

Now I am letting go into a deep and quiet stream
Where in my dreams I am holding a child
I sense how to be with the child
The child will say when she does not think
The world she has been born into feels like home

I too have been birthed into water and emerge on the shore with this child
You soldier will not stand at the shore and misunderstand what I am
This child in my arms and this body
Will be as they will be
And lively soldier I invite you to
To set the ground of our entanglement free
I do not need your vigilance anymore

Let this lifetime be
I will be one of the folk
In-between big and small
I will see the wealth in the sunset
I will sense the mystery that has been stored
In a plant just before it blooms
I will watch how the swallow chooses her nest
How the tiniest bright green insect never before seen
Sways back and forth in a sideways rhythm
How even a bird knows when you can feel its presence
How a robin hesitates, glances
Draws your gaze
They are coming closer,
Advancing into the invisible green
And I feel a momentary wonderment
The birds can be heard
Each by their own song
The detail in their feathers,
The way they crook their necks to look, to see
Their hop, their search, their contentment
As they call out from one branch and then the other
Does the branch choose the song?
Does the tree play the bird?
Play on me

No wilderness visioning has brought me here
Just watching in the stillness of place
What presents itself
There is always the song of the birds

Will I become a watchperson of nature’s light?
She watches and holds her vigil with the light and shadow
Watching in wonderment is vigil of another kind
The light and the shadows
Predictable and unpredictable shadowing
Insects sink deep below the surface of the grass
For reasons I do not know
I possess no watchtower there
The words seem to flow from a rhythmic swaying in the heart

My goal, if there must be one
Is to feel life
And then follow the feeling
If I feel a stream then I will be the stream
If on a hot summer’s day I feel a tree then I will become that tree
If I feel the dying I will become that dying

Last night, again in my dreams animus you came to try
And woo me back into that former way
Still a part of me sleeps in the student soldier’s dormitory
I received you but not completely
You desired joining but also wanted protection
Said your two children did not like being out in the cold
And the children should be free to say,
“It is cold outside, encircle me to keep me warm”
And then you left
Left your armor behind without further explanation
Do not be afraid of my desire to live beyond the confines of my encasement

Let me disappear into wild being in a moment
Without the privileged many days immersion into nature’s solitude
Internal stillness occurs everywhere in all spaces

Meaning arises from a solitary place
Answers also rise in their own time
Cradled from within the place of being
It will not be the Answer you seek, traveler
For the meaning that your deeper being longs for does not always conclude in words
Not yet

Today I have seen red birds and my root has been bitten by a fire ant

For inside I have held the stillness for you
Can you soldier help to return me
To the womb of the earth?
No I think you cannot yet
Your armor as protection you cannot bring
For true protection is conjoining
And you can only know this
After you risk interpenetration
Interpenetration is not an act of war

Does a bird mistake a leaf for a worm?
A bird seemingly can be disappointed by
What it thought was a worm but is only a decaying leaf
But that is only my understanding
It is not the bird’s
Perhaps the dead leaf is home to an insect I cannot see
Perhaps the dead leaf possesses some elixir,
Some turning from death to life I know nothing of
Because I only know what I think I see
Then in the healing of this earth let being enact its own relationship to Love
And let my being rest in this mystery
And not in knowledge

Knowledge will be transformed in this renewed relationship

Love does not know your confines or conditions
I do have my own
Release a new understanding of love back into being

Lately in my dreams as I have told you painfully,
I have been sleeping in dorms
You showed me moments of rudeness
I was mapping my way through the many rooms to rectify the misunderstanding
To call other to account
To show them how to say it differently
But my path to fix this was obstructed
Go around the other way a patient in a crowded waiting room said
There was an operation going on

The other way
And so I asked myself what other way
Shut my eyes and he appears
Figure of my inner mystery
Come with me into the garden he said
And so I went
In his hands he cupped a hibiscus flower
There my face appeared
Will you love this?
He said.

I don’t know… this is the other way, the red road way

To come out of militant learning,
Sleeping in a culture of war
Can you love, even your Self.
I left the garden with many flowers dancing in the breeze
And a question
Could I love this lifetime what wasn’t loved before?
The shadow that was left on the black road
It is an awesome question but there is more room in it
My heart moves again
Now I am awakening living in a pink hibiscus flower travelling along a red road

Twelve robins came to pull worms from the ground before a storm

When he spoke of his wife, the elegant dying crone
My friends
Her devoted husband
Transformed by her love
He has held her hand so much he wants to go with her

I have never seen twelve robins orchestrate their dinner before
Plucking worms like cello strings

She is most surely dying he said
(She can see ghosts and
He is an atheist)

And both loved
And then his voice shook and he asked where all the souls go
They are underneath the neighbour’s hands when she lifts his wife after the fall
That ushered her to death’s door
Gentle souls wave across her lips when her voice is too tired to speak
Other souls that move through ask to be released by her freeing
Carry her prayer forward
I want to die she said to him before the fall
That means I am ready to die
Well that is it he said.

There is an ending before a beginning