

## ABSTRACT

Title: A SELF-STUDY EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CREATIVE DRAMATICS WITH URBAN YOUTH

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Teachers' lack of ability to bring creativity to their classrooms and students' lack of motivation to learn have captured my attention in examining my own implementation of the concept of creative drama, specifically with urban youth. As a practitioner and now teacher/researcher, I am an accomplished leader of creative dramatics; and this self-study addresses the primary research question: What techniques associated with my implementation of creative dramatics have been proven effective with urban students? Creative drama is a vehicle for developing active learning experiences, especially for urban classrooms where there is need for creative initiatives in the curriculum. Therefore, this study examines my instructional practices in order to provide an understanding of creative drama as it relates to the role of teachers as leaders in urban education. In researching my own practical application of creative dramatics, I had three primary goals: first to better understand my role as a leader of creative drama with my urban students; secondly, to examine the characteristics of urban learners by gaining insight into urban conditioning; and lastly, to know if creative drama engaged and empowered my students to learn with more purpose. This was of significant importance especially since these very same students had been disengaged and had shared disempowering learning

experiences. Once I integrated creative drama into the curriculum, my urban students engaged the subject matter and became independent thinkers during the creative process.

Additional goals concerned the need to examine the relevance of accessibility and subsequent outcome assessments resulting from urban learners. I wanted to examine the need to offer urban learners creative drama. I found that the creative drama sessions empowered my students to take charge of their learning process. I also captured how elements of the creative drama process transferred into their everyday lives. I discovered that creative drama captured the elements of spirituality, harmony, and individual expressionism that motivated urban youth to take control of their learning experiences.

I document how my journey as a leader of creative dramatics with urban youth elevated my level of understanding of my instructional methods, how this enhanced understanding was manifested, and the effectiveness of creative pedagogy. Lastly, but more importantly, this study illustrated the significance of offering creativity to urban youth and documents the success that is captured best in the hearts, minds, and behaviors of my students. These students, as benefactors, offered creative and enlightening information to this study. A contribution of this study to the field of arts-in-education is to provide novice teachers an understanding of how the use of creative drama strategies can help them become more creative and effective in the classroom, especially when working with urban youth.

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DRAMATICS WITH URBAN YOUTH

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## DEDICATION

To my husband Lennie, my children Linwood and Layla, and the living legacy of my grandmother, Irene Smith for being the wind beneath my wings!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Dr. Joseph McCaleb for supporting me through many years of this academic rite of passage. I also acknowledge my Mom and Dad for their constant love and support. I render thanks and give all honor to my Lord and Savior from whom all blessings flow.

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## **CHAPTER I: Introduction**

As a member of the urban community, I have witnessed as once an urban student and now an urban educator the dearth of creativity in our schools. After fifteen years of practicing and teaching the importance of creative drama in diverse settings, I am still amazed at the low level of imaginative experiences for students in urban school districts. It is clear to me that students are spiritually tired of preachy, didactic, and non-challenging teaching. Therefore, this study will examine my instructional practices in order to provide an understanding of creative drama as it relates to the role of teachers as leaders in urban education.

Jeffrey Wilhelm's (2003) work offers a cogent discussion of the viability of creative drama as a way of reaching students facing academic challenges, having attention-deficit, or requiring a more interactive format to stay on-task and process information in their environment. In studying my creative techniques with my students, it was essential to understand the varied characters, such as administrators, teachers, and past students who helped me formulate my present story that mirrored both my present teaching practices and my students. In examining my journey as a lived experience, I projected several initial goals to be accomplished in addressing the primary research question: What techniques associated with my implementation of creative dramatics has been proven effective with urban students? First, I wanted to better understand my role as a leader of creative drama with my urban students and my need to grow as a teacher by considering diverse teaching strategies. Second, I wanted to examine the characteristics

of urban learners by gaining insight into urban conditioning rather than making assumptions—based on my being from a similar community—that the same cultural nuances were still present. It was essential for me to dig a little deeper and to find ways to address the diverse learning styles of my class.

Third, I wanted to know if creative drama engaged and empowered my students to learn with more purpose, especially since I have observed urban youth frequently disengaged from their classrooms and sharing disempowering learning experiences. Lastly, I wanted to examine the need to offer good creative teaching practices for urban learners in order to increase academic enrichment. I was curious to find if my classroom space created a safe place where my students could explore different characters like positive empowering role-models similar to Harriet Tubman and truly experience what it means to express their inner voices and make-believe.

In the following chapters, I describe how I discovered that once I integrated creative drama into the curriculum, my urban students more quickly engaged the text and became independent thinkers during the creative process. These chapters reflect and document the story of how my journey as a leader of creative dramatics with urban youth has elevated my level of understanding the power of knowing what is going on, how it is being manifested, and the effectiveness of creative pedagogy. Lastly, but more importantly, this study illustrates the significance of offering creativity in a classroom and documents the success that is captured in the hearts, minds, and behaviors of students who are the benefactors of such a creative and enlightening story. The contribution of this study is to provide novice teachers an understanding of how the use of creative drama

strategies can help them to become more effective in the classroom, especially with urban young people.

### **Personal Empowerment through Creative Dramatics**

Another song with no singers  
Lyrics/ no voices & interrupted solos  
Unseen performances  
Are we ghouls? Children of horror?  
The joke?  
Don't tell nobody, don't tell a soul.  
- Ntozake Shange (1977)

It is essential to explore how the role of creative drama affected my life and the effect it can have on students. Growing up in an urban community in the Washington metropolitan area, I experienced some great times even in the midst of some of the horror in the streets, especially during the late seventies. I grew up in a loving home with a mom, dad, and grandmother all filled with Christian principles that helped foster good morals in my life. Fortunately, the school that I attended at that time provided me with safety and a chance to explore new ideas.

As a native Washingtonian with a life-long passion for arts in education, I received as a young adult Young Achievers Award and A Salute to Black Women Recognition Award from the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc. Since then, I have studied intensively over a period of years in the field of theater and education. I have worked and consulted for more than twelve years in education, communications, performing arts, and drama/dance therapy. The interventions and strategies that I designed were geared to help individuals, families, and school institutions enrich the

quality of their lives and organizational capacities. I have been able to work in various school districts by freelancing as an educator and writing proposals that gained entry for me as a creative dramatist. Often, it was the receiving of grants that enabled me to work in a creative capacity with urban youth. The positive result was that freelancing gave me the freedom to shape and formulate my own curricula.

My field experiences with creative drama began when I was a young participant in Howard University's Children's Theatre Company. I then went on to study at the University of Ghana Performing Arts and as a graduate student Van Lier Fellow at New York University. Professionally, my creative drama experiences included working for an educational theatre company in New York City where I was a full-time actor/teacher working in all five boroughs. The Creative Arts Team is an educational theater company in residence at New York University. My five-year tenure with this NYU company afforded me a wealth of exposure to creative dramatics and many techniques of drama-in-education as well as theater-in-education with a focus on the work of Augusto Boal. As an actor/teacher, I worked with elementary, middle- and high-school-aged children in the public and private schools.

For the first two years, I worked with elementary and middle school ages. The storylines were typically centered on a king and queen and the citizens of the kingdom, and there were other dramas that focused on other fairytales but were placed in the city in an updated version. My next two years were challenging working with middle schools; and as actor/teachers, we had the opportunity to develop our own storylines dealing with important parts of history. The storylines we selected were usually war stories and scenes

related to historical events in Great Britain, which I found to be very limiting at times. I believe in distancing the storylines in the dramas but not to the point that young people can't relate to the story or that as they come up to that critical decision portion in the drama, they feel powerless, as if their decisions don't matter. I noticed that it was often difficult for the students to come from the drama and transfer the material to their daily lives.

During the latter part of my tenure with the troupe, the focal point of my work expanded to include behavioral health education (i.e., HIV/AIDS awareness education through drama programming with high school students) and clinical workshops with special populations (i.e., sex-offenders at Riker's Island). My experience in the company was just the beginning of my professional work in the field of creative dramatics, but it provided an almost unprecedented foundation for creative dramatics application and core principles for knowledge and skill building.

As I continued my work in creative dramatics with the company, I was offered a program directorship with Youth Organization, USA (YOUUSA), a youth achievement program in Englewood, New Jersey. As Program Director, I helped to facilitate two major theater-in-education productions dealing with adolescent substance-abusers. In addition, I held a part-time job on weekends in Washington, D. C. as educational director for the African American Male Coalition. In both organizations, I employed drama techniques such as role-play, "hot-seating," sculpture work, and improvisation, predominantly with adolescents and some juvenile delinquents who were given the opportunity to explore critical- and independent-thinking skills. I had the chance to see individuals and groups of

people, young and old and previously deemed isolated and unreachable, actually open-up, connect, and become receptive to the input of others. Because of these and similar experiences, I came to believe so strongly that creative drama helps us as practitioners in the field to provide a learning environment that fosters socio-emotional competences and civic responsibility in an entertaining and empowering format.

After leaving New York, I began to feel that something was missing for me in this work. There was not enough play activity and not enough processing of the central ideas. There was a lack of responsibility by some of my colleagues in the field. For example, although most of my colleagues in the field were of Euro-American culture, often I think we missed-out on some really teachable moments—because, in my opinion, my counterparts were not open to crossing the cultural barriers and embracing those subtle yet prominent ethnic nuances. There were times when we worked in the field together and I felt that the students didn't play enough and didn't interact enough with the assigned literature. The drama at times appeared too controlled, and the students were led along with the drama as though they were robots or puppets. We had an agreed-upon goal in rehearsals, but once we went into the classrooms with the young people and started to present the various creative dramatic exercises, I wished we could have allowed them to uncover, discover, mold, and make the drama their own. However, we were so under-the-gun by having to stick to the clock that just when the young people were really involved in discovery, they were told to stop, or they were told that sometimes their playing seemed inappropriate and unacceptable. It was as if the delivery of the creative process was done in a condescending and controlling manner.

Secondly, there were crucial moments of the drama when the young people were asked to make a democratic decision; however, when some of their decisions were not in-line with what we had originally agreed-upon as educators, the young people were ridiculed, preached at, and lectured to. For me, this was in opposition to what our original teaching objectives were. When I reflected on questions like question number 4 (Does my ethnicity play any part in my teaching style?) and others in Appendix A, I recall those experiences in which the moments of empowerment and enlightenment were tainted. I couldn't wait to start devising my own creative drama sessions with young people. I felt that the creative drama lesson plans prepared behind closed doors among ourselves without the students were just a cultural mismatch once we actually implemented them in the classrooms. This is not to say that the drama lacked substance and quality and innovation, but it did lack what I call "allowing the drama to come to you." Heathcote (Wagner, 1976) cautions us as teachers to be mindful that every classroom has its own way of dramatizing, so we have to be willing to make changes on the spot. I believe that if we don't get students to play and become interested in the themes of literature, we miss the main goals and objectives of teaching and learning. For me, the main goal is to move the students closer to understanding the content, text, and main idea to the point that they build their cognitive skills, social competencies, and possibly even change.

An example of the power in arts in education was noted in a recent report from the California Arts Council (CAC) showing that the arts are integral to improving student learning and academic achievement, increasing parental involvement in a child's

education, and enhancing teacher understanding of the visual and performing arts standards. The report, "*Arts Lab 101: the Results Are In,*" shows that students who participated in the CAC Arts in Education Demonstration Projects demonstrated improved academic achievement, artistic ability, and artistic knowledge in tested evaluations. Nearly 75% of the projects involved efforts to increase English language proficiency and literacy skills and increased parental understanding of the value of the arts in their children's education (Tschannen-Morana & Hoyb, 2001).

Having practiced many aspects of theater and drama, I strongly believe that my approach to educational drama intervention empowers the powerless, yields a voice to the voiceless, offers hope to the worried, and brings joy to saddened hearts. For these reasons, it is urgent that this research project examine new ways of thinking and finding the appropriate evidence needed to help illustrate and reinforce the concept of using creative drama in a culturally responsive manner. Because of my experiences, I came to believe so strongly that drama helps us practitioners in the field to provide a learning environment that fosters socio-emotional competences and civic responsibility in an entertaining and empowering format. My belief comes from what I think is too often missing in creative drama leadership—sensitivity to the whole experience and coming into the work with prior knowledge without prior prejudices.

From all of these experiences, I consider myself an experienced educator in creative dramatics and uniquely capable of carrying-out this study. I am led by a cause that could benefit others to also see the importance of using creative dramatics as a model to educate urban young people.

## **Understanding the Context of Urban Schools**

As an African American teacher who grew up in an urban community in northeast part of the city, I have empathy with urban youth and what they face daily, and I am therefore motivated to do this research. Urban school settings are typically characterized negatively as owning a laundry list of deficits. Although more than fifty years removed from the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, minority youth are still in a strange and paradoxical state (Beachum & Blanchett, 2005). The main premise of that case was to ensure equal quality education for all people; but, in my opinion, in the midst of the advances, we have become less integrated and more segregated in urban education. Most urban school districts are a microcosm of economic, political, and social phenomena (Beachum & Blanchett, 2005). According to Chin and Kameoka (1994), the majority of urban learners are of African-American and Latino descent. Families migrated to the cities with hope for improved quality of life but instead, throughout the years, have seen injustices interfere in their quest for high-quality education.

Maeruff (1988) offers a significant report on urban schools which reveals that learners lacked motivation and perceived little reason for attending school, demonstrated atrocious attendance habits, engaged in low-level school work commensurate with teachers' low expectations, and did not recognize that their academic progress reflected less than grade-level work (p. 221). Chung asserts (1996) that urban students have also been characterized as a group of people with poor socio-economic status, poor behavior, and such health issues as alcohol, cigarette-smoking, illicit drugs, emotional difficulties, short attention spans, high truancy, family conflict, and parent-child relationship and peer

group problems.

Interestingly enough, in this list of deficits, there is one major factor that plays a large role in the decline of the urban learner—self-concept. It is my belief that if we look more closely at the causes of urban learners' lack of motivation, we can start to address real problems. It is documented (Chung, 1996) that many inner-city children are at high risk of dropping-out of school because of poor perception of self-efficacy—consequently leading to a downward spiral of self-destructive lifestyles.

I argue that as researchers attempt to study and analyze urban education, we must not look through the eyes of a deficit model (Ogbu, 2003) but at what causes the academic achievement gap and at possible future interventions. It is important that we start to investigate urban learners through a more culturally responsive model. The urban community in itself is a culture worth studying with honor, hope, and discernment. When urban educators start to focus on the ills of the urban setting, there is little or no room for aggressive progress. I argue that if we start to look at the enriching complexities of urban culture, we urban educators can make meaningful connections with our students. If we continue to create solutions based solely on deficits, we ignore what is innately present.

Politicians and educators who look at what is wrong with urban education seem to misplace, mismatch, and send intelligent inner-city students into overpopulated special-needs settings. The misplacement and mismatching of urban youth cause diverse learners to be overlooked and devalued.

Professor Martin Haberman (2003) asserts

The growth and maintenance of 120 failed urban school districts miseducating diverse children in poverty for over a half century is a predictable, explainable phenomenon, not

a series of accidental, unfortunate, chance events....The larger society provides the institutional and cultural setting which protects, preserves and enhances these failing urban school systems for the purpose of providing a broad spectrum of constituencies with a priceless set of unearned privileges. The most valuable of these is access to economically and ethnically segregated forms of schooling for middle class Whites, which is effective and does lead to careers, higher education and improved life opportunities (p.1, 2003a).

It is my belief that taking in information and processing it based on a deficit model results in placing blame on individual schools and urban students. This perspective limits future resolution and restricts growth. Furthermore, by emphasizing blame on urban students, we don't place enough emphasis on the urban educator. The urban system's structures are set-up in a way that prevents their rendering proper support to the urban teacher. Throughout my research and findings, I am confident that the major concern of urban learners is to increase self-concept and improve motivation; however, there are many positives, such as their sense of spirituality, their rhythmic abilities (Boykin, 1983), multicultural competencies (McAllister & Irvine, 2002), great language play (Lee, 2001), diverse learning styles (Gay, 2000), and dramatic language, (Lee, Rosenfeld, Mendenhall, River & Tyree, 1999). Focusing only on deficits tends to make one miss the strengths and positive nuances of individual classrooms. Most teachers without knowledge of urban culture go in with a mindset to "fix things" rather than enhancing students' strengths (Gallien & Peterson, 2005).

In order to be successful in urban settings, teachers regardless of race must be open to increasing their ability to accept racial differences (McAllister & Irvine, 2002), to appreciate the influence of racial attitudes on people of color, and to exhibit less racist behavior toward them, especially in the learning environment. On the other hand, there

are urban schools that provide effective instruction, employ highly qualified and caring educators, and have high-achieving students.

However, in those urban schools with students unmotivated and prone to misbehavior, there may be teachers unprepared and unfamiliar with the culture of urban classrooms and therefore unable to face the challenges of urban school curricula (Manning, Lucky, & MacDonald, 1995). For this reason, I strongly propose a close look at creative drama as a strategic model that can accent the strengths of the urban learners.

### **Challenges Facing Urban Students**

Despite the aim of the 2000 “No Child Left Behind Act” to be inclusive of the arts by making them a core subject, the arts remain largely outside the curriculum. The pressure on teachers to raise and maintain scores and their limited time and space lead to a lack of motivation to admit alternative teaching strategies. Oreck (2004) sees now as the time more than ever before to provide teachers with support and training in order for them to move from theory to practice. Clearly, we have left a large number of youth behind.

Unfortunately, as a result of slavery and the conditions that followed, descendants of Africans in America were denied opportunities and also were unable to maintain their cultural traditions. Consequently, the various myths, truths, and customs needed to build strong individuals, families, communities, and cultures were lost. Wilson (1990) expressed his concerns about the survival of black youth: “The results of this loss can be seen today in high unemployment, high rates of poverty, poor health care, low levels of education, and high rates of teenage pregnancy” (1990, p. 15). Perhaps the greatest loss,

however, is the individual's loss of self-concept and a general lack of control over his or her destiny, which commonly ends in drug and alcohol abuse, physical and psychological abuse of spouses and children, and crime, specifically, "black on black" crime. More needs to be said by those who are most affected by the problem and bear the brunt of its anti-social effects.

The nature of violence has a domino effect with urban school children. Children view violence as a means to an end. First, there is recognition of a conflict in the school, home, work and/or social environment; then, there is a tension-builder based on financial status, social class, educational background, poor health services and a host of other jeopardizing circumstances that affect their lives. Violent portrayal of children involved in shooting each other on television has increased rapidly over the years, prompting the necessity for parental guidance in censoring what children view.

A large percentage of these black children are so consumed by anger and violence because of the environment in which they live that their situation is a key factor in their personal development. Amos Wilson states that it is not just an urban black problem: it is an "American Dilemma."

In its oppression of Black America, White America faces a major American dilemma. Hence, when we look at major American institutions relative to African-Americans, we observe the following reversals: the economic system keeps them poor, the criminal justice system mediates injustice; the educational establishment creates ignorance and intellectual incompetence (1990. p.33).

The period of the late '90s to the present has seen a surge of studies examining the reasons for the epidemic of failure within the urban public school system in the city. The findings have been stark, compelling, even shocking. Surveys and reports have offered

canny insights gathered from administrators, teachers, students, and parents that repeatedly report an eroded learning process that has resulted from so many students' lives being so complicated by violence and social problems that even those teachable moments are increasingly interrupted, if present at all.

Violence is also considered a leading public health problem resulting in significant mortality in urban systems. In the Big Urban's Youth Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (1995) for the year 1997, homicides were a major killer of youth ages 15 to 24 and account for 80.8% of all deaths in this age category. In 1997, there were 887 families reported to Child and Family Services Division for physical abuse involving 1,501 children, with 240 of these abuse reports substantiated. In 2001, 37.4% of this urban school children were engaged in a physical fight and another 10.3% attempted suicide. Big Urban Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment and Control (September 2003) reported that 68.7% of boys and 67.6% of girls have tried smoking. Also, 71% of the youth surveyed reported drinking alcohol, 52% using marijuana, and 25% obtaining an illegal drug on school property.

According to Every Kid Counts, in the Big Urban survey, the Washington metropolitan school system must undertake a multifaceted initiative to improve the state of education in our communities. The survey revealed that just 12% of African-American 3<sup>rd</sup> graders have reached proficient or advanced reading levels, while 61% have yet to reach the basic level. Many black 17-year-old students graduating high school have the math skills of white 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The region's retention rate is especially poor: one of three African-American students in seventh through twelfth grades has been

suspended or expelled at some point as opposed to 15% of white children. Such statistics suggest that the educational, mental, and physical health of school-age children in the city places challenges on the learning environment, causes teacher apathy and burnout, and makes a traditional curriculum almost impossible to deliver efficiently.

### **Violence in the Urban Community Affects School Systems**

An emergency alarm should sound in the hearts and minds of all concerned as the innocence and security of our nation's children are threatened by unsafe communities and schools. As the economic crises of this country worsen, their impact is affecting our younger population. Economic uncertainty has created an environment in which less attention and response are directed toward the younger generation. Recreational and cultural arts programs are the first to be cut during economically 'tough times.' The effects we see are destructive as youth substance use/abuse and violence plaguing our community spillover into the neighboring school districts.

Today, we see vivid evidence of violence. For example, in the East Terrace section of southeast Washington, two young boys ages 15 and 11 were shot while playing basketball on a neighborhood court. The next day there was so much mayhem in the area public school that the teaching and learning process was interrupted. This type of violence results in community shock, disbelief, sorrow, and grief. Reaching-out through prayer brought some closure and answered a few questions as to why such an act took place. If we are truly concerned about the children in our society, we must address the issues of safety, violence prevention, and intervention in the schools most affected today.

Teachers utilize a number of methods for engaging their students in the content of the curriculum. The increasing numbers of students who present behavioral and attitudinal issues, coupled with additional testing requirements, have often rendered traditional classroom methodologies obsolete—too didactic and preachy, filled with repetitive drills often devoid of emotion. Drama attempts to put some of this forgotten emotional content back into language (Maley, 1978). “Like all forms of play, drama is a natural way to learn” (Wilhelm, 1999).

The rationale for this study results from the social issues that young people, particularly in the big urban system, face and have major impact on their motivation to learn and to complete their education. It is in this context of offering hopeful alternatives to combat some of the concerns facing the urban conditioning in the city and other schools that I propose to view educational drama as one credible solution. In responding to the needs of low-performing schools such as these in the big urban system, it is incumbent upon us as educators to look closely at the inner-city schools in surrounding areas.

Unfortunately, violence in communities is a precursor to low literacy levels and escalating school dropout rates. Alleviating the low achievement levels and the competing demands for engaging the emotional, physical, and cognitive energies of students is among the most pressing issues facing schools today. Providing innovative strategies that have been shown effective in challenging settings is crucial to the survival of the local school system and its attendees.

It is generally acknowledged, almost to the point of being conventional wisdom,

that public school systems all across the United States have come under severe scrutiny and criticism for their failure to design programs and curricula that provide teachers and administrators with a suitable platform to implement teaching strategies that offer parity in the learning environment and promote academic achievement for all students.

### **Breaking-In Creativity in the Schools**

I know that trying to implement a project aimed at deploying creative dramatics in the Washington area classrooms is going to be a challenge at best. As a product myself of an urban public schools, I know firsthand that my task is not going to be an easy one. The system today is burdened by more obstacles than ever before. The sheer violence alone in the city continues to spillover into the culture of the classroom environment, making violence-prevention initiatives essential.

Another key area of exploration for my work involves assessing how children learn, what circumstances are best for cognition to take place, and what methods are most effective in teaching inner-city children. Tangential to this analysis is the role of perceived self-efficacy and the factors surrounding this phenomenon. However, Oreck (2004) cautions teachers who teach in the educational drama arena to become more reflective about the transition of one's own self-efficacy when working with students on a regular basis. "Teaching efficacy links the self- perception of competence with the situation-specific expectation that the teacher can successfully influence student learning" (p. 60). Although self-efficacy is an important characteristic for both inner-city learners and teachers of specific populations, I will not be proving this particular link directly to

creative drama in my study; however, I believe that it is an important quality to possess when teaching urban youth.

With regard to education and training, evidence abounds that learning opportunities are drastically decreased for young people when their self-efficacy beliefs are low (Chin & Kameoka, 2002). And, more specifically, inner-city children are at even greater risk because of the influences of peer group dynamics and involvement situations where self-derogation and self-destructive decision-making are applied. Therefore, if teachers endeavor to instruct and educate their specific population of children, the modalities, treatment, and teaching styles must dovetail with the individualized needs of the children. Such needs call for a variable number of pedagogical areas of concentration.

Here in the big urban district, the matter of troubled schools and failing students is of particular concern for a system in which a large portion of the student population is not of the dominant culture. Having innovative teaching methods, tools, and strategies in the classroom is critical. There is a dire need, particularly for the newly-elected Superintendent (Sept., 2004) to address the increasing demands on the local educational system brought about by school budget cuts, a rising cost-of-living, and a diverse student body comprised substantially of students of color and immigrants for whom English is a second language. Many students are too depleted of energy and distracted by violence and its aftermath in their communities to even begin to study and learn. Learning the three R's often, by necessity, takes a backseat to the sheer needs of survival for many students in this urban area. Moreover, when you add additional universal distractions for youth such as video games, portable music devices, and other electronic media, the

situation is exacerbated, both locally and nationwide.

Secondly, since modern technology has become integrated into the lives of young people, educators must be prepared to deploy more technology and interactive media in the classroom or be creative with pedagogy by opening more doors for innovative methodologies and approaches to teaching. Hence, offering teachers the opportunity to train in a model such as creative drama could expand more alternatives when practicing the strategies in classroom. Furthermore, creative strategies can give youth the chance to think and feel through situations. It also can help students to combat issues as self-derogation, self-destruction, and poor decision-making by practicing certain skills within a specific context.

In conclusion, sadly, I have found a lack of literature on human agency relative to teacher/instructor self-efficacy. So much focus continues to be on the student/pupil/‘end-user.’ So this study will address what “teacher as leader” means specifically when it entails using the techniques of creative dramatics in the classroom. We understand our students—or at least desperately attempt to—whether they are individuals, families, or communities, in terms of our theories; and we define their identities and respond to them based on our conceptualizations of who they are. In turn, our students take-in what we think about them and respond to us according to how we behave toward them. Thus, the theories we use regulate the information we receive from our students and, similarly, have an enormous impact on them. It is because our theories have such an important impact on what we are able to accomplish in the classroom that my research is predicated upon a paradigm shift from mainstream theory and strict quantitative analysis toward a

more qualitatively-based self-study research design.

The first and fundamental distinction among self-reflective practice research strategies concerns the extent to which the observer is also a participant in the program activities being studied. There is not really a simple choice between participation and nonparticipation. The extent of participation is a continuum which varies from complete immersion in the program as full-participant to complete separation from the activities observed, taking on a role as spectator. There is a great deal of variation along the continuum between these two extremes.

My review and analysis of the literature coupled with successive academic studies and actual professional practice helped to crystallize my own thinking about the critical need for new paradigms in research and practice in secondary school education. Chapter II of this dissertation contains the review of the literature and analysis of findings. This section has made reference to a series of studies whose findings are particularly relevant to the rationale for my research project.

### **Overview**

In Chapter II, the literature review, I discuss relevant studies and explain the theories that shaped my philosophy of creative dramatics. I then look at what theorists are saying about urban learners and potential influences of creative dramatics. The literature review details the importance of understanding creative drama as a phenomenon and as a potential model for urban young people. It further examines leading practitioners in this

field and their perspective of emphasizing the need to study creative strategies and leadership of creative drama by exploring interactions in the classroom that can aid in improving student motivation and academic success.

Chapter III presents the research methodology and provides a rationale for the utilization of an innovative, non-traditional format—the self-study design. This Chapter outlines the chosen methodology of the research project. It discusses the need to address the research question by using a qualitative design including self-study and narrative methods. It further describes the protocol of data sources to address the research question and the process of collecting and analyzing the data.

In Chapter IV, I provide a first-look at my entry process, myself, the site, and the selected students of my creative drama experiences. I discuss my reflections on past events, on my insights into drama, and how I have fostered that passion and negotiated relationships along the way. This Chapter turns to my personal perspectives of creative drama and how that clashes with the perspective of school administrators. I also address the importance in living and retelling my story by examining how my story intersects with the lives of my students when exposing them to creative management techniques and a mutual contract in the classroom.

Chapter V provides my findings on the effect of how creative dramatics engages active learners, which emerged as two major components of my teaching practices. The Chapter first examines students' and teachers' need to be motivated to accept information. I then expand on the importance of processing with my students and the benefits that emerged from this study. I was able to document several areas of how

culture and diverse styles of leading creative drama exercises acted as pre-texts for learning. Lastly, I illustrate actual students' dialogue that provided more insightful moments which they found meaningful as well.

Chapter VI emphasizes moments of classroom enlightenment which emerged from both my and my students' observations through class interactions, video and the journaling process. This Chapter explains how inviting students to play and interact in a creative format can stimulate such moments of enlightenment to take place and bring about awareness and change when combined with a specific content area.

Chapter VII's main premise is to provide more information about how I negotiated power when leading dramatic teaching strategies. This Chapter demonstrates how allowing opportunities for empowerment through creative play was a significant concept for urban youth. In this Chapter, I focus on the main curricular activity, the processing of the experience, and how letting-go my role and status as teacher and allowing students a sense of ownership over the curriculum really offered a sign of hope and increased empathy toward themselves, others, and the designated pedagogy about oppression.

In Chapter VIII, I share new thoughts that came-up during the study. I reveal my level of understanding of how I have come to recall, retell, and celebrate my own story as a creative dramatist inside the classroom. Furthermore, I present some of the limitations that I faced which could help others to implement new strategies in the design process. I make recommendations which were evident in the data as I expressed my lived experience on multiple levels, backward, inward, and forward. Lastly, I close with re-

emphasizing the relevance of bringing culturally responsive strategies to urban youth which emerged directly from studying this model of creative drama as viable for novice teachers.

## Chapter II: Conceptual Underpinnings of Creative Dramatics

*He who works in marble,  
And finds the shape of his own soul in the stone,  
. . . is nobler than he who ploughs the soil.  
~Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet*

This Chapter explores the research that supports the proposition that creative dramatics can be effective particularly in the urban classroom. During my research, I discovered the presence of creative dramatics in the school system to be very weak, particularly in light of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's declared devotion to curriculum reform (Hertzberg, 1998). I begin with discussing how even leading theorists in the field have different ways of defining creative drama. This Chapter also reviews the literature that examines the philosophical contributions of practitioners of creative drama and the influence the technique might have on leadership in the classroom.

The second part of this Chapter examines the influences that creative dramatics has on urban learners' development. This section is followed by a review of how aspects of the implementation of creative drama are particularly suited to urban populations.

### Defining Creative Dramatics

One of the difficulties in using creative dramatics is coming-up with a clear definition of the term itself. The following terms have been used interchangeably: *developmental drama* (Cook, 1917), *creative dramatics* (Ward, 1930), *educational*

*drama* (Way, 1967), *mantle of the expert* (Bolton & Heathcote, 1995) *informal drama* (Wagner, 1998), *process drama* (O'Neill, 1995), and *framed expertise* (Warner, in press). These terms can be overwhelmingly confusing at times, especially when one is seeking to understand the roots and context of drama integrated into curriculum.

In the United States, Winifred Ward (1957) in the 1920s-'30s is noted as the founder of creative drama whose central focus was to enable participants to unlock their individual creativity. Ward defines creative dramatics as “an inclusive expression designating all forms of improvised drama, dramatic play, story dramatization, impromptu work in pantomime, shadow and puppet plays and all other extemporaneous drama” (Ward, 1957). Ward was known for working with story dramatization technique with students and teachers in the elementary curriculum. Her special ways of devising, implementing, and rehearsing were generated by the story dramatization, but this technique dominated thinking in educational drama for the next thirty years. This timeframe set the stage for other creative dramatists to make unique contributions to the use of drama in the classroom—for example, Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote, and Gavin Bolton. Throughout this Chapter, I will refer to them and the critical sources they provide in the field of educational drama within the context of creative dramatics. McClasin (1968) offers the definition adopted by the Children’s Theatre Association of America: “creative drama is an improvisational, non-exhibitional-process-centered form of drama in which the participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon the human experience. Although creative drama has been thought of in relation to children and young people, the process is appropriate to all ages” (McClasin, 1968).

Creative dramatics uses students' imaginations and willingness to act or pretend as a means of reinforcing academic, emotional, and interpersonal objectives (Bolton, 1979). Most importantly, educational drama and various other art forms help students build solid connections with other academic areas and with the integration of the learning process (Heathcote, 1976). Drama in and of itself (Johnson, 1998) promotes cross-cultural, interdisciplinary learning, and interactive inquiry-centered instruction, all of which help foster intellectual curiosity, self-discipline, and perseverance.

Creative drama differs from theater performed as scripted dialogue on a set in front of an audience. Instead, drama-in-education often involves an entire class in improvised roles within an imagined context or frame (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). As a result, these dramas do not sharply distinguish between actor and audience: the learner is both participant and observer, playing roles while interacting with others in roles. The drama is facilitated by the classroom teacher who builds on the actions and reactions of students-in-roles to change, or reframe, the imagined context to create an episodic sequence of dramatic action (Levy, 1987).

Mirrione (1998), co-founder and playwright-in-residence of the Creative Arts Team/New York University, defines drama-in-education as a marriage between the academic regime and the creativity of the performing arts. Combining theatrically-based activities with a child's studies can effectively meet the academic needs of youth. It is implied that techniques such as improvisation and role-play can evoke change if presented within the school curriculum.

Koziol and Richards (1996) provide a different perspective in describing what

is meant by *Informal Drama*, a term which can be interchangeable with creative drama. “Informal Drama is often called play or improvisation at the elementary level and improvisation or role-play at the secondary level” in countries such as Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. Some of the types of informal drama activities offered by Koziol & Richards (1996) include imagination exercises, movement exercises, sensory exercises, verbal exercises, pantomime, story telling, choral reading/reader’s theater, dramatization, improvisation, and role-play.

On the other hand, Rijnbout (1995) suggests that creative drama falls under the umbrella of educational drama. He further recommends that as users of educational drama, we recognize that although different age ranges may respond to different techniques, creative dramatics offers warm-ups both physically and emotionally and restores the element of “make believe” in the classroom.

I tend to accept Bolton’s concept of educational drama and creative drama practices in that drama practitioners endeavor to help secure an emotional engagement of the student that underlies the desired learning area, which is not to say that the student’s involvement with the activity (the form) should be gained at the expense of the meaning—the content. The drama should function on three main levels of meaning for the participants. Bolton (1979) describes it best as “the contextual, the universal and the personal.” Therefore, I discovered from Gavin Bolton, an educator/artist from England, that the in-role discussion of language has to project a summation of the whole experience, not only because it focuses on the feelings of the participants but also because creative dramatics can offer a visual image that remains in one’s memory, carrying contested, universal, and personal

meanings simultaneously.

In addition to this way of thinking and approaching creative drama, Ward (1957) too places emphasis on the motivational feelings that drama activities should embrace. She writes,

What children enjoy in creative dramatics is the emotion aroused by what they play. The safety dramatization should have something of suspense, of danger, if it is to appeal to them. A trip to a farm means fun as they feed the pigs or ride the horse, and this needs to come into playing. Excitement a-plenty will be characteristic of the dramatic play which follows a visit to the fire station. Make-believe that concerned crossing the street on signal, gathering eggs at the farm, or polishing the engines at the fire station would require something more than the action itself to appeal to children. A leader should always remember that it is the feeling that motivates the action which counts (1957, p. 14).

This type of dramatic play is generally geared toward elementary students, but the structure of how it can move from subject to skill building can also be easily transferred to most middle school students. The above example is merely one way of explaining how drama can be used, but more importantly it sets up a platform for learning to take place. Following is a synthesis of goals and objectives of educational drama that are generally held as tenets by its practitioners.

### **Culturally Responsive Goals of Creative Drama**

I adopt some of the following goals of creative drama presented by Kelner (1993) because they embrace the diversity of how drama can be used. Furthermore, her suggested goals are critical because they invite one to understand creative drama as a viable tool that can be integrated across various academic curricula. In summary, Kelner's (1993) goals consist of focusing on creative drama as a means to promote imagination and creative and critical thinking, explore problem solving and interpersonal skills, stimulate language development, and strengthen comprehension

and language retention by involving all the senses as integral parts of learning.

I support Kelner's (1993) concept that self-expression is the basis of creative drama that helps students build or regain confidence in themselves and can further reinforce their self-concept. Out of Kelner's suggested ten goals of creative drama, I assert that this study focuses more intensely on goals six and nine: Goal 6. Creative Drama increases empathy and awareness of others. Through role-play, students are able to see situations or problems from varying perspectives. Goal 9. Creative Drama provides instructors with a fresh perspective on teaching. This dynamic approach to teaching helps instructors to integrate traditional and new, cutting-edge materials in an innovative, creative, and effective manner (Kelner, 1993).

As educators, we are constantly asked to project goals and objectives for our students while making sure that we meet their needs, but it is important that we look to our teaching capabilities and take the time to expand and broaden what is considered good teaching by becoming reflective, responsible learners ourselves. However, I don't think Kelner addresses several key components—engagement, cultural diversity, and empowerment. Engagement, cultural diversity, and empowerment are all key components of creative dramatics that I argue can be achieved through the dramatic play key to urban learners. It is my belief that creative drama can promote social change in its learners when it is incorporated into subject matters.

In practicing creative drama with urban learners, it is essential to give them a sense of empowerment. The strategies that I use, later described in my key terms on pages 30-32, have shown me the value of allowing students to have ownership of

their learning processes. Gallien and Peterson (2005) assert that African American learners, in particular, must see that their learning experiences in the classroom is applicable to not only their individual lives but also impels them to contribute to a specific cause in their community. Therefore, salient goals for me are as follows: (1) to provide creative strategies that promote empowerment, (2) to offer a sense of respect that captures and fosters culture and diverse learning styles, (3) to use creative drama as a vehicle for social change and academic advancement by increasing engagement and empathy.

Often, creative drama is done in the classroom without allowing the students to draw from their personal experience. Most practitioners focus so much on distancing what is happening in the drama from the youth's own sense of self in fear that it might strike up a conversation that touches on sensitive and controversial issues. I too believe that we must provide safety nets in the drama for the students because we need to be responsible educators and to protect the emotional, symbolic, and physical well-being of the child. However, once the drama is over and the sense of make-believe is over, it is also the responsibility of the teacher to guide the child to transfer the knowledge and then allow her/him to tap into her/his own unique way of thinking, believing, feeling, and listening to what truth is for them.

Perhaps as more of us in various subject areas start to pinpoint how and why certain pedagogical decisions are made and what influences certain choices, decisions will become more teacher- and student-driven. Heathcote would argue that drama in the classroom is not complete until the right questions are asked (Wagner, 1976). Although there may not be right answers all the time, techniques should be in-place

so that we can at least be open enough to engage the students through questions that help inform and deepen their understanding of the drama experience. Sometimes when classes are filled by a majority of dramatic learners, the climate is so intense that there is insufficient time to even ask the questions either the teacher or the students may wish to ask. This situation is one of the reasons that self-study is needed in education.

However, before any critical questions can be determined and answered, an understanding of the goals and functions of the drama must be gained. Secondly, one must assess the extent of learning achieved through a dramatic experience as a direct result of questioning. The “open-ended question”—or what Dorothy Heathcote (Wagner, 1976) calls the “freeing” questions—promotes curiosity and frees the child to wonder. This is an extremely important point and aids in providing safety nets between the teacher/facilitator and the trust factors between the teacher and the students. Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990), author of *Free Play*, highlights the importance of freeing-up the suggested participants in order for them to receive information. Nachmanovitch concludes, “unblocking one's subconscious to a point where it can stimulate the conscious level of one's mind brings the discovering process to the surface.”

Questions in drama have a very different purpose from the kind of traditional questioning that is often used by teachers. Heathcote's suggested modes of questioning are simple and specific. There are questions that seek information or assess student interest, including those that define the moment, those that stimulate research in books, or call for asking adults for information:

Questions that supply information  
Branching questions, which call for a group decision between alternative courses of action  
Questions that control the class  
Questions that establish mood and feeling  
Questions that establish belief  
Questions that deepen insight (Wagner, 1976)

The second mode of questioning is often a difficult one in a class with students who have low self-esteem and poor attention span because their raising their hands to give an answer where there is a specific right or wrong response to their thought becomes troubling at times. However, in the drama experience there is so much information being given-out that once they come out of the drama and have to act to be themselves, they seem to freeze for a moment and slowly begin to realize that they know the answer; and this moment allows new students to realize that they too can comprehend.

Over the years, I have established my own style and a system of beliefs that enable me to design, implement, and engage my students. I have provided below a list of terms that capture some of my favorite strategies that appear to work well with my students. Secondly, I also make reference to all these creative strategies throughout the course of this study.

### **Key Terms of Conceptual Constructs**

While the meaning evolved for me through the process of conducting this research and is best understood with the texture of the examples given in later chapters, key terms are defined here as a means of providing guidance to readers.

#### *Engagement*

Engagement is a somewhat intangible emotional and physical process involving

readiness. It leads to quite understandable feelings set out by a teacher as necessary to teach steps or other particular manners of moving in a direction (Bolton, 1976).

Some of the key attributes of engagement for me throughout this study were expression of emotions, strong physical and mental presence, and verbal and social participation in the ritual of the creative process. *Engagement* is elaborated in Chapter five.

#### *Enlightenment*

Enlightenment means that students make a special kind of meaning out of their learning experience. They take in and process information and start to digest the content in a space where they begin to become particularly introspective and sometimes even confrontational. Sternberg (2000) asserts that when participants in drama are enlightened, it is a cathartic moment that involves the purging of emotions.

*Enlightenment* is elaborated in Chapter six.

#### *Empowerment*

*Empowerment* is a major concept which I discovered to be significant when working with urban populations. In the context of this study, it means having students striving toward a place where they begin to feel their own sense of power and they take control in a positive, active way. It is the coming into knowledge of one's own voice and a freeing of the expression of it. Furthermore, empowerment meant my students seeking control and being able to act and accomplish the content on an intellectual, personal, and communal level. Boal (1993) views empowerment as a major outcome to have when working in and outside the drama. To him it serves as a platform that not only elevates self but also can get the participant to be led by a cause that

enlightens others. *Empowerment* is elaborated in Chapter seven.

### **Key Terms of Creative Drama Strategies**

The selected terms defined below represent a few key creative drama strategies and applications in curriculum and instruction that I use most often with my student participants.

#### *Movement and rhythm*

Children can use movement and body language as forms of self-expression. Often it is easier for a child to convey a feeling or idea through actions than through words. The goal of the teacher is to teach children about the drama inherent in movement (Wagner, 1976).

#### *Hot-Seating*

In order to discover details about a character, the group interviews individual participants who remain "in role." The inquiries may be made in a formal question-and-answer session format, or improvisations may be "frozen" in time and role-players "released" to answer questions put forth by the educator/facilitator (Rijnbout, 1995).

#### *Tableau*

A frozen picture (photo, painting, cartoon, sculpture) can serve to crystallize an idea or communicate a concrete image. These images may be sculpted into another image, brought to life, or captioned. A prime example is a newspaper photo accompanied by a headline (Rijnbout, 1995)..

#### *ShoulderTouch*

ShoulderTouch is an extension of Tableau/Still Image in which students select four parts from a Shoulder Touch. The student holding the 'frozen' position is tapped on the shoulder by the teacher as a signal for the student to express the thoughts of the character or prop she/he is portraying (Rijnbout, 1995).

#### *Snapshots*

In Snapshots, a story or incident is selected and a frozen scene is created for each part. Typically, the teacher has students choose significant or controversial moments from a story in order to further illustrate these moments (Rijnbout, 1995).

#### *Freeze-frames*

Freeze-frames are a series of tableaux or still images which type a sequence of events

in story (Rijnbout, 1995).

#### *Mural or Frieze*

Mural or Frieze is also a series of still images; however, in this type of Tableau, the images are shown simultaneously (Rijnbout, 1995).

#### *Role-on-the Wall*

An image of a character is drawn on the board and students are asked to fill-in the diagram by brainstorming the strengths, weaknesses, characteristics, appearances, identifying hopes and fears, and listing the many roles the selected character may have to play in society (Basom, 2006).

#### *Leader-in-Role*

An individual who interacts with the participants (audience members) takes-on a role that might control the action, excite interest, invite involvement, provoke tension, challenge thinking, create choices and ambiguities, or further develop the narrative (Rijnbout, 1995)..

#### *Pantomime*

Pantomime is the start of movement/hip-hop dance, strategically used to define truth. This technique focuses on the meaning revealed by the physical gestures and movements of a character rather than by vocal communication (Rijnbout, 1995).

#### *Role-Playing*

This involves the spontaneous enacting of scenes, experiences, ideas, responses, and interpretations based on roles that are reasonably defined through previous discussion or text; in responding to issues or problem situations, children make choices based on their understanding of the characters (Koziol & Richards, 1996). The entire group is given specific roles, designed by the leader, in order to explore the situation of the drama. These roles can be defined by occupation (family counselors), relationship (members of a family in crisis), location (inhabitants of a small town), or attitude (political protesters). The group can assume the same roles or a combination of roles, depending on the needs of the particular workshop (Basom, 2006).

#### *Improvisation*

Improvisation is similar to pantomime, but the participants use dialogue. It involves a brief, unrehearsed situation or scene from a story in which the characters speak spontaneously. Impromptu speaking and acting can stem from situations, objects, sounds characters, ideas, problems, and unfinished stories. Puppetry and role-playing are two types of improvisation (Rijnbout, 1995).

Leading theorists and practitioners have approached these strategies in different ways and are the basis for how I developed my conceptual framework.

Garrison (2003) advocates that such techniques be used due to the climate of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and those who emphasize that when drama is used across the curriculum not just in the language arts, it has proven to be an effective tool. Gallien and Peterson (2005), based on research that looks at African-American behavior, say that improvisation is a cognitive process with expressive, goal-directed, and problem-solving aspects. Anderson (1992) also suggests that improvisational activities show students ways to organize and control their conversational behavior. Such skills can empower African-American adolescents to change the consequences of their social and academic experiences.

### **African-American Learning Styles**

Urban classrooms are enriched by cultural tendencies. Culture anchors learning during the very early stages of life: by age 5, certain cultural socialization and ways of acquiring knowledge are already in place (Gay, 2000, p. 150). Moreover, it is clear that different learning styles are key aspects of how students from varying ethnic groups process information and demonstrate learning. Cultural ethos, according to White (1984), is a system based on guiding beliefs that specific groups of people use for teaching, learning, and interpreting the world.

In order to satisfy the cultural qualities within urban education and make the connection to educational drama, it is important to highlight Boykin's (1983) description of what can be considered "Black cultural learning styles." Boykin (1983) describes the nine qualities that are rooted in African belief systems and that

influence learning behaviors (Gallien & Peterson, 2005). The nine styles are identified as (1) spiritual, (2) harmony, (3) movement, (4) verve, (5) affect, (6) communalism, (7) experiencing individualism, (8) orality, and (9), social time perspective. Gallien and Peterson (2005) echo that when learning styles that come out of one's culture are incorporated in instruction, then effective teaching/learning processes begin to soar, and that is really what it means to meet students' needs. The nine qualities can be easily seen in varying multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2000) as well as some of the basic principles set-up by Heathcote (1976) when implementing creative drama.

Boykin and Bailey (2000) conducted an intriguing research study which discerned that African-American students were most comfortable with non-didactic instructional modalities. It was determined that they held a particular preference for applications which included sharing of knowledge and materials and that involved working and studying together in a communal fashion. Vibrant learning modalities such as music and highly energized techniques were determined to be highly desirable for this population as well. Similarly, a study by Bochner and Kelly (1974) determined that African-American students were more physically and socially active than Euro-American children. In contrast with the traditional staid, didactic, and sermon-like lecture formats combined with the competitive 'go-for-the-jugular' approach so prevalent in many of today's classrooms, expressive fluidity cries-out for implementation. It is evident from the studies above and others that instructional methods used in schools are often incompatible with the cognitive styles of many African-American students (Anderson, 1998).

When working with urban youth in predominantly African-American communities, effective and mutual communication modalities must be deployed to facilitate discussion in one-on-one and group settings. This is critical in effecting an awareness of commonalities and differences (such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and religion) among youth of diverse backgrounds along with appreciation of those of varying learning styles and ideology.

### **Creative Dramatics and Urban Learners**

A decade-long nationwide study of youth organizations espouses drama programs' power to instill strong values for language and relationships (Armbrust, 1998) and especially with at-risk youth (Nelson, 2003). The field of drama-in-education has been developing a rich tradition of practice that is separate and distinct from the literature of educational and cognitive psychology. A recent article (Andersen, 2004) highlights the linkages between the practice of drama-in-education and cognitive theory, while focusing specifically on the area of situated learning. Referencing studies in which drama was utilized for instruction, the author cites greater cognitive gains for urban youths than for students in a traditional classroom environment.

“. . . rather than confine learning to the context of the classroom setting, the pedagogy of drama in education seeks to frame learners within art “as-if”(make-believe) world where the instructor creates scaffolding that allows legitimate peripheral participation of learners in roles that are developmentally appropriate” (Andersen, p. 282).

I argue that not being sensitive to the cultural attributes of one's classroom

can create conflicts in the classroom that can cause learners—especially culturally diverse learners—to feel restricted in being creative, learning, and trusting the learning process. Studies indicate an increase in academic achievement of students when instruction is modified and matches the cultures and communication styles of culturally diverse students. Gallien and Peterson (2005) explain that cultural mismatch theory suggests that when basic communication between the students and teacher is not culturally congruent, there can be adverse outcomes for students. Therefore, it is critical to note in this study the importance and relevance of “cultural connections” between teacher and students that provide great impetus to investigate the pedagogical-social strategies of creative drama as a viable model for learning, particularly by urban learners. Creative dramatics helps bring cultural competency and relevancy to bear in the classroom to build bridges and to help discern individual goals, interests, concerns, and competencies, and to engender a supportive appreciation of community.

Studies (such as those conducted by Lee, Rosenfeld, Mendenlav, Rivers, & Tynes, 1999) based on a cultural modality framework clearly illustrate the relevance of innovative learning facilitation in academic environments. The literature underscores the viability and efficacy of offering creative dramatic strategies to urban youth and illustrates how doing so can enhance motivation and accentuate strengths and undergird the knowledge-acquisition process. The 1999 study explains that a prevalent aspect of African-American discourse is a reliance on dramatic language as well as field dependency. Both feature heavily in the techniques that I attempt to demonstrate through drama in my classroom, such as character development through

verbal and non-verbal exercises as well as role-play.

The study also describes dramatic language as expressive and explicit in word and sentence structure. “Field dependency” is defined as the tendency to put one’s self inside a situation and to view elements relationally (48). What is perhaps most salient about these findings is the illumination of how inner-city urban students are able to be engaged in ways that capture their interest to the extent that they not only understand the characterizations in the story but also readily transfer the information into their own lives. Through imagery, narrative writing, and analysis, the young people did well describing through their words and sentence structure what their thoughts were as well as how their relationships to the larger community were affected. This information directly supports the dramatic strategies that I employ with my students, especially during role-plays as described in detail on page 35.

Basom (2006) emphasizes that creative drama can provide learning outcomes when teachers integrate drama into instruction with active learning experiences in the classroom. Basom (2006) and Heathcote focus on cognitive skills that they believe to be gained from informal/creative drama strategies. The learned foundational skills include concentration, imagination, perception, and self-control. Personal skill I have rated as a major priority, directly in line with my already-described way of understanding creative dramatics. I too firmly believe that we can expect students to acquire an array of personal skills that Koziol and Richards (1996) outline: expressiveness and fluency, flexibility, adaptability, and cooperativeness. The third heading is advanced thinking skills: asking questions, inferring, analyzing, predicting, speculating, restructuring, comparing, and evaluating. It is important to keep in-mind

that certain dramatic activities support the learning development of students based on the designated drama activities that are being incorporated in instruction at a given time regardless of subject matter.

Creative dramatics has been observed to aid in both curriculum-design and the process of engaging students—in academic and behavioral health instructional formats. And student/teacher communication can be sharply enhanced as well. As a result, student interest increases in topics such as violence prevention, leading them to see its relevance to the world around them and motivating them to learn more. Creative dramatics invariably serves as a springboard for meaningful dialogue in post-performance group discussion. Students identify with particular characters, accept the characters' points-of-view, feel they can discuss things with them, and care what happens to them.

I strongly believe that creative drama and interactive theater workshops aid in knowledge-transfer and skill-acquisition through enhanced core curricula applications that create unique learning opportunities for students who are high achievers as well. This process occurs because students engage in learning in a variety of ways that enable them to develop multiple areas of their intellectual capabilities—encouraging diverse modes of analysis and comprehension (Wilhelm, 1999). Implementing school-based drama instruction can afford parents an excellent opportunity for involvement in students' learning process because of its interactive, participatory nature.

In an unfortunate trend, schools today seem to over-emphasize factual recall at the expense of emotional and personality development. Jerneral Cranston's

*Transformations through Drama: a Teacher's Guide to Educational Drama* decries the fixation on just the cognitive aspects of learning, noting that didactic modes of instruction need to be balanced by a renewal of the old-fashioned idea of “learning by doing” (Cranston, 2000). Heathcote and Bolton (1995), among the leading practitioners in bringing creative dramatics to the classroom, suggest that drama is about man’s ability to identify with oneself and the learning objective. It doesn’t matter whether you are in the theater or in your own sitting room. What you’re doing if you are dramatizing is putting yourself in somebody else’s shoes.

This technique calls for inviting students to see a total picture. Urban youth tend to lack empathy with and the penchant for making the emotional connections to literature, particularly through classroom material. The instruction of literature is often sterile and non-engaging. Pictorials were used to make the students aware of the moral problems associated with humanity. These types of strategies offer opportunities for students to begin to learn skills but more importantly to practice the skills while having an emotional connection to the learned concepts. Thus, these innovative instructional techniques implemented in curricula have success in motivating students to understand an important message at a time when traditional educational system approaches are not effective.

An example of how classroom drama offers a way of forging a problem and creating a context based on the discourse from the drama technique is Meyers & Phibin (1991). Their examination reveals that drama strategies support the very nature of social studies in an elementary school classroom. The study shows the strength of drama when it is integrated into a historical context and reveals that students respond

well to the dramatic techniques. They are attracted to dramatic improvisation because they can respond actively by naturally incorporating their play activities and inherent emotional content into a social studies context. It is comforting to know intuitively what drama can bring to a classroom; however, as researchers, we need to look more closely, close gaps, and advance to another level of research in a given field.

Again, the article does support my perception that dramatic play is effective. I am concerned with the fact that I do not know how it attracted students or why they all were attracted and motivated to learn the social studies work. Did it take place for every child in that same moment? What role did the teacher take in making sure the learning process was facilitated and fostered appropriately?

Although I bring new sets of questions that were not necessarily the intentions of this particular article, they provide me with the impetus to search for more answers. Meyers and Phibin propose that drama in social studies classes is effective because it can be used for these purposes: (1) comparisons of contradictory accounts of differing critical statements about the same historical, cultural, or sociopolitical event; (2) class discussions; (3) role-playing, in which students attempt to express an alternative attitude or point-of-view “from inside” by temporarily adopting that point-of-view as their own.

### **Creative Dramatics’ Influences on Urban Learners**

As a practitioner, student, and now researcher, I have observed the demise of the traditional school system as a viable means for educating America’s youth. The strategies often deployed by teachers seem outdated, or otherwise limited, in terms of

meeting the demands of today's challenging student populations. This situation is particularly apparent when one continually observes students who seem unreachable by the monotonous regime of such didactic instructional modalities as the lecture. During my field investigative work on the self-efficacious behaviors of inner-city youth, I quickly observed an intrinsic pattern of low self-concept, poor self-worth, low-test scores, sub-level academic achievement, and marginal career goal-orientation. Having attuned to this situation as a professional, I could not help but wonder about the inherent role of the leader in the classroom in helping to mitigate these circumstances; specifically, the concomitant expectations and the reciprocal effect of teacher self-efficacy levels on student cognition and performance.

It is critical that educators, particularly those who deal directly with urban youth, develop and implement curricula that address issues of cultural competency including linguistic self-concepts, musical and lyrical preferences, and other socio-cultural factors that are relevant to the communities in question.

*Socio-Emotional Factors:* Academic self-efficacy levels tend to vary widely among inner-city youth. It is difficult consistently and accurately to assess measurements of this construct and generalize findings because of the myriad complexities of race, ethnicity, and varying socio-economic status, especially with marginalized youth populations. Findings gleaned from the literature suggest that academicians and trained professionals can derive enormous benefit from exploring the relationship among creative dramatics, educational drama, and self-efficacy phenomena. An example can be found in a recent study of African-American males (Okeck, 2002) that examined their relationships and perceptions of ethnic pride (i.e.,

black consciousness) as determinates of self-esteem and academic self-efficacy. The studies specifically looked at the correlation between the subjects' sense of racial identity juxtaposed against their level of academic achievements and their awareness of racial identity and ethnicity, discovering that academic performance was impacted. A study by D'Amico & Cardaci (2003) revealed academic achievement levels that were influenced by self-efficacy-belief between both Latino and African-American school children.

A meta-analysis study (Podlozny, 2000) illustrated that children known to be at risk from low socioeconomic families are far more likely to benefit from drama instruction than are students from average populations. The need for creative drama is an undeniable fact, and so it is critically important to research ways to advocate more teachers' use of creative drama techniques in the classroom, especially for students in need of non-traditional learning techniques. Gardner (2003) suggests the use of drama as a way to reach a variety of intelligences because it connects to the audio, visual, and, especially, the aesthetic learning styles.

Most of my students are from urban communities and come into the public school systems with an array of documented needs. The literature exemplifies the harsh realities of children and youth of color: low socio-economic status behaviors such as alcohol use, cigarette smoking, illicit drugs, precocious sexual activity, emotional difficulties, low grade point averages, high truancy rate, family conflict, parent-child relationship problems, and negative peer group influences (Manning, Plucking, & McDonald, 1995).

A strong proponent of creative drama in curriculum applications and noted

authority Jeffrey Wilhelm (1999) regards this modality as a premier, and direct, instructional tool. Creative drama has been implemented with notable success in teaching English, foreign languages, political science, history, and conflict-management skills. Wilhelm's research has also highlighted the fact that creative drama techniques have been successfully deployed to reach students who are otherwise disenfranchised by offering an innovative, multi-faceted, and dynamic route to academic and personal achievement. Wilhelm's significant work, *Drama as a Tool in Reading*, underscores this fact—offering a cogent discussion of the viability of educational drama as a vehicle for reaching students facing academic challenges, attention-deficit issues, or requiring a more interactive format to stay on-task and process information in their environment (Wilhelm, 1999). Herein is the crux of why I propose this study: through my years of leading creative drama, I have observed the power, hope, and fearlessness my inner-city students appear to have when they are engaged with dramatic techniques. Interestingly enough, I have witnessed how some of my past students have been able to transfer the learned skills from the creative process. These very same students have been able to make better decisions about school attendance and have appeared more visibly motivated to engage in school activities by their teachers and parents. It also has come to my attention that there is something unique about leading creative dramatics with this population, especially those the system has labeled “at-risk youth.”

## **Traditional Creative Drama to Theatre of the Oppressed**

Theatre of the Oppressed (TOP) was conceived and coined by Brazilian theater director Dr. Augusto Boal. Theatre of the Oppressed was a movement that came out of political concern in Brazil during the 1950's-1960's and rapidly spread across Brazil to Peru and to all of South America. Theatre of the Oppressed is now practiced in more than 70 different countries. TOP first started as a way to address local problems facing communities and then moved into a literacy program and from there Boal realized that his work started to take on a life of its own because many communities and cultures could identify with some level of oppression.

Boal (1993) asserts that a dialogue that becomes a monologue is itself a form of oppression. In other words, Boal's work cautions educators to make sure to creatively illustrate how even in our day to day conversations one can become controlling and how our different communication styles can be considered oppressive. It also cautions us as educators to not be so preachy and didactic in the classroom because it could lead to a very dictatorship type of learning environment which can be viewed as oppressive. Therefore, it is important that as we teach our students that we allow them to become introspective as critical thinkers. Theatre of the Oppressed consists of Newspaper Theatre, Forum Theatre, Invisible Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, Cop-in-the-Head, Image Theatre, and Legislative Theatre. Boal's (1993) main intent with all of these styles of theater is to get the spectator actively involved with the performance. Boal's main premise for games is to get the participants of the experience to heighten their senses. His concept of creating a rehearsal for life is embedded in the fact that in order to be fully engaged we must

listen, feel, touch and think more deeply before we can change, discover, and see new alternatives.

Theatre of the Oppressed uses many of the strategies of creative drama, but Boal's mission in TOP is to empower and enlighten individuals to action in their lives.

TOP has two fundamental linked principles: first, it aims to help the participant/spectator transform him/herself into a protagonist of the dramatic action and rehearse alternatives for his/her situation, so that the individual may then be able to, second, extrapolate into his/her real life the actions he/she has rehearsed in the practice of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1993). In addition, the pedagogy of Theatre of the Oppressed moves dramatic play and action to a dialogue that addresses a specific topic with dramatic and introspective conversations.

### **Transformative Pedagogy: Culturally Responsive Creative**

#### **Drama for Urban Youth**

In my work as a creative dramatist, I merge the fundamental beliefs of both creative drama (Ward, 1930; Heathcote, 1976, and Bolton, 1979) and the philosophical principles of Boal's work because it embraces both dramatic art and cultural diversity. The merging of these two concepts allows me to extend the play, theatrical exercises, games, and storylines into a place where my students can explore both dramatically and verbally what it means to transform themselves within the context of the curriculum.

Therefore, it is my assertion that this study examines culturally responsive creative drama for urban learners because by blending some of the components of traditional creative drama and Theatre of the Oppressed, I can look at how this dramatic pedagogy can invent ways to help humanize my students, to free them to express themselves in an artistic social, pedagogical, and political manner. Furthermore, it is my hope and desire that integrating this creative model into curriculum will allow both teachers and students to engage with the abundance of cultural forms so that the classroom can be regarded as a transformative learning space.

After reviewing the literature, I am of the opinion that I have set-out to create a new concept, a new way of thinking, and a new way emphasizing the relevance of being culturally in-tune with and sensitive to the dramatic arts integrated into pedagogy. This review has illustrated what creative drama is in terms of the terminology, the mechanics, and what experts have understood it to be. Secondly, this review has discussed the various African-American learning styles (Boykins, 1983) as well as how urban learners learn regarding different levels of intelligences (Gardner, 2000). I further explained how creative drama can attract and stimulate urban learners by looking at what the literature has shown to be key influences on the urban learner. Wenger asserts (1998) that when we are with a community of practice, we learn certain ways of engaging in action with other people.

Therefore, it is my understanding that if we are going to motivate both the teacher to teach and the student to learn, we need to understand the people in the classroom and to look at it as a community in need of engagement in order to act in

the teaching and learning processes. This is why I stand on the theories of the fundamental principles of traditional creative drama, The Theatre of the Oppressed, and cultural diversity as ways to focus on a new paradigm that promotes culturally responsive creative drama. This study addressed not just the need for such a model but also the relevance of knowing that it can potentially impact an entire community in a transformative and humanizing way of teaching and learning.

### **Conclusion**

This Chapter discussed how I came to move the theories of creative dramatics into classroom practice. This Chapter offered a discussion of the relevant dimensions of creative dramatics, particularly for an urban classroom environment. There are several areas where we as educators can benefit from the idea of make-believe and become dramatically and actively engaged and empowered through pedagogy if we have the appropriate guides, scripts, and stories of success.

Chapter III will show how I attempted to place myself as the center of the activities set-forth in the self-study design. The self-study design captures the picture of the research project, but the components of narrative design will help me format the telling of the story. Chapter III details how I determined to bring a deeper level of understanding to the application and benefits of exercising creative dramatics with diverse students. This next section presents my methodology and describes the design that this self-study has evolved into, which illustrates the importance of understanding the phenomenon of creative drama more in-depth for the sake of empowering and educating children as a whole.

## Chapter III: Methodology

### Introduction

#### Wild Geese

Wherever it was I was supposed to be this morning--  
Whatever it was I said I would be doing—  
I was standing at the edge of the field—  
I was hurrying through my own soul, opening its dark doors.  
I was leaning out, I was listening.  
~Excerpt from *Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver

In search of the ideal approach that would fit my study questions, I was drawn to qualitative research methodology. Based on my primary research question and the vast changes that happen day-to-day in my classroom, I knew that I needed to find a qualitative design that would illustrate rich and substantive descriptions in a flexible manner. Therefore, I was quickly engaged by the self-study design. This type of research study allowed me to look closely at my own way of leading creative dramatics but more importantly aided in how I approach my future practices so that my students learn more. I believe this study contributes to the field in numerous ways and strengthened my need to look at the actual moments that took place during my class interactions. It is important to bridge the gap between planning and instruction, but it is even more critical to look at why certain students were engaged and able to be successful in the classroom.

This Chapter describes the logic behind my methods and procedures. It further explains why I decided to use a collaborative approach and describes both self-study and narrative design. Next, I provide a discussion of my research questions and how my data sources addressed each question by describing my data collection protocol and analyses of the findings. My selected methodology was a good fit because it

helped me examine individual moments by looking at my teaching decision-making and in-the-moment judgment calls. Sometimes we don't have time to reflect and recall, so we "factualize" why certain choices were made. This type of investigation could help build confidence in my teaching practices so that more students can benefit in the future, but it also could provide information for teachers who have not used creative dramatics and have the typical fear of "getting off the script."

### **Defining Self-Study**

I chose a self-study research design in the belief it best serves as an inherent restraint on approaching the effort with pre-conceived questions geared to provide answers as to how the study will end before it even begins. Self-study is a method mostly used in education. For over a decade, educational researchers have used self-study methodology as an effective tool for both teaching improvement and knowledge discovery. This form of inquiry has made significant inroads in recent years at local, national, and international levels (Clarke & Erickson, 2004). Dinkleman (2003) inquired about what contributed to his success in using certain methods in the classroom and selecting different techniques of instruction. From extensive research, Dinkleman suggests that his success grew out of this belief: "a large part of the difference is accounted for by knowing something important about my practice that I did not know before, something I only came to know about as a result of self-study" (p.7).

Self-study—sometimes called teacher research or inquiry—is a legitimate

form of inquiry and valued source of knowledge about teaching. It is a relatively new phenomenon in educational research (Clarke & Erickson, 2004). Dinkleman (2003) defines self-study as intentional and systematic inquiry into one's own practice. He sets forth one rationale that I adopted as a framework for my research design. The rationale rests on

- the congruence of reflection with the activity of teaching
- the potential of self-study for knowledge-production, of value for both local contexts and the broader teacher education research community
- opportunities to model reflective practice
- the value of self-study participation for pre-service students
- possibilities for programmatic change (Dinkleman, 2003).

Last, he notes that self-study research practices would go a long way toward education reform, individualization of practice techniques, and contribution of validity and relevance to the classroom experience. Below are examples of self-study designs.

There are several studies that have used self-study design as a means to explore the significance and the diversity when examining the role teacher leadership and creative strategies in education. Below I provided a charted summary of other researchers that have used different variations of self-study design and their key outcomes throughout the course of their studies. The charted summary of selected works is found on page 54.

### Summary of Selected Works on Self-Study and Teacher Research

Author	Title	Nature of the study	Unit of Analysis	Data Collection	Key Outcomes
Lang (2005)	Teaching drama planning through a self-study lens	Study of drama lesson planning and instructional practice	Graduate Instructor and 25-30 pre-service teachers	Weekly drama journal entries for instructor and students. Class assignments, instruction plans, notes on instruction course evaluation; e.g., reflection-in- action	Refined instructional abilities, better thinking “on my feet” engaged in reflection-in-action, stronger relationships between drama education-my beliefs and the practice as teacher educator
LaBoskey (2005)	Capturing the Complexity of Critical Reflection	Supervisors acting as mentors generating caring, effective relationships among themselves and student teachers	One main supervisor and four other mentoring supervisors	Dialogue journals, transcripts of supervisor meetings evaluations and one questionnaire; e.g., reflection-on- practice/reflexivity	Analysis provided the opportunity to consider equity, evidence of cultural accommodation encouraged teacher reflection based on student need
Strong-Wilson (2005)	Self-study-White female teacher arrives in native community with trunk and cat using self-study to investigate tales of a traveling white teacher	Examines “exile” in relation to experience as well as a story structure common to white teachers	One white teacher and another teacher on a similar journey	Autobiographical narrative. A series of short essays/stories	Being private has its benefits and stories like these should become more rigorously self-reflective and more public. Honoring own story. Writing the memory of experience and including the doubts and contradictions.
Szabad-Smyth (2002)	Self-study through an exploration of artful and artless experiences	Focused on the meaning of art through one’s lifetime from different perspectives, from childhood on-up to teacher. Reflection on lived experiences	Educator and four women teachers, all around 40 years old, with 7-26 years of teaching experience	Two phases I. Self-reflective writing, biographical data sheet. II. Two semi-structured interviews audio taped; later included series of photographs	Increase awareness about the marginalization of art in elementary school. “And now I’m doing to kids exactly what was done to me as of what I feel was grade four. And I’m not allowing kids that opportunity to fly and experience and have fun with and enjoy stuff in an artistic way (p. 79)
Biddolph (2005)	The Monochrome Frame: Mural-making as a methodology for understanding ‘self’	Centered on sexual orientation and being comfortable in a heterosexual personal and professional identity in an academic environment	Teacher/Researcher Selected colleagues (Teachers) and students	Black and white photographs, journals, and notes from colleagues and young people; collection of images and words representing the public vs. private conditioning of sexual orientation	Difficult to manage identity in education environments. Awareness of social/political conflicts Murals created meanings that conveyed powerful images that were sometimes hurtful brought to life a human system that is unkind

## **Defining Narrative Design**

This dissertation also used narrative inquiry research methods as a means to examine how I implemented creative dramatics with urban youth. The self-study technique allowed me to become more reflective about how I made certain decisions in my practice. It also enabled me to look at the possibilities of gathering information on a personal and professional level that could be carried-over and valued by both local contexts. It further allowed me to do what Dinklemen (2003) emphasized as significant— to offer insight to the broader teacher education research community.

Connelly and Clandinin's (2000) methods of narrative inquiry and collecting data support my self-study design. Connelly and Clandinin stressed that narrative inquiry is far more complex than merely the telling and writing-down of one's story. They assert that narrative inquiry also elaborates how the story is actually negotiated and portrayed and so has more meaning and social significance. In my case, the story is about how creative dramatic strategies led both the teacher and students to an emotional and empowering place to learn and to be free. It is important for me to bring richly detailed accounts of experiences that draw the field texts forward to retell individuals' stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Furthermore, Connelly and Clandinin offer examples and caution researchers to collect research texts that illustrate how the social narrative of professionalism shapes the professional knowledge landscape and gives form to teachers' cover stories. For example, my research text provided insight about my reflections of how I performed as a teacher outside of the dramatic session and inside the dramatic episodes in the classroom.

My reflections set the stage for me to ask questions about my teaching

practices by utilizing questions that are outlined in Appendices A and B. This provided me with a structured format that acted as a guide in helping me review, respond, and reflect on specific moments in the classroom; for example, the question What was my primary focus when working with creative drama? This process helped me to explore my role as a leader of creative dramatics with urban youth and simultaneously provided a context for discerning meaning in my personal/professional experiences and reflections (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Second, selecting aspects of narrative methods offered me a way to position my field texts within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Connelly & Clandinin, p. 131) and helped me to analyze the data, which assisted me in uncovering, reshaping, and examining some of the personal tensions and perspectives in engaging in self-reflective practice. This process is the essence of self-reflective research.

### **Why a Collaboration in the Design?**

It was hypothesized that creative drama practice provides a model for urban classrooms where new initiatives and collaborative tools are especially needed to leverage knowledge of innovative strategies for future practices. The research is that of my own teaching practices; moreover, as the study unfolds, my students will observe, respond, and evaluate specific teaching and learning moments in the classroom setting. Therefore, my search of literature included selecting a research design that facilitated an investigative process. The selected self-study design and components of narrative design enabled a close look at the leading techniques that I used or did not use when teaching my students with creative dramatics. Given these considerations, my review of literature led me to conclude that a combination of self-

study and narrative design was best.

This design enabled me to get closer to my own thoughts, actions, feelings, and fears in working with creative drama strategies with inner-city youth. It supported my need to respect the confidentiality of personal information of the participants in the creative drama. It also allowed others to look closely at the choices and decisions I made in the classroom on a moment-to-moment basis. It also allowed me to analyze this instruction and to articulate the attributes related to leading the techniques that might benefit future educators, particularly when working with urban youth.

Additionally, this self-study design contributed to my understanding of self-efficacy changes that I encountered in both myself and my students. It opened up the creative drama process so that others could also reflect, respond, and evaluate the processes along with me. Studying these specific teaching strategies and allowing my students also to comment on the experiences about my teaching practice led me to a deeper understanding. This method confronted the question of what it really means to engage in creative drama as a way to educate and empower inner-city youth. It helped me reduce any biases that I had as a primary subject, the leader, and the researcher.

Self-study research into teaching belief and practice utilizes a variety of perspectives and explores pedagogical questions. It allows educators to renew their instructional tools as well as discover new tools to convey the rich and changing complexity of knowledge in a discipline (Shulman, 1986a). A self-study design format was exactly appropriate for this investigative study because it allowed my focus as researcher and subject to remain open, objective, and observant regarding all facets of creative dramatic modalities. For example, some self-study techniques

already are familiar to faculty members who employ videotaping, journaling, or self-reflection to improve their teaching practice (Louie, Drevdahl & Stackman, 2003). It is within this structured framework that I as main investigator worked to make appropriate choices along the way.

This study involved various research, data gathering, and analysis activities and took place over a period of approximately six months. Some data were culled and analyzed directly from classroom sessions. This study emerged through a combination of methods; for example, reviewing past work and audiotapes based on a suggested questionnaire of my work; self-reflective notes on the creative process, which included responses-selected students; and any sort of documentation that spoke to when, where, and how I, as a teacher, proceeded toward bringing creative dramatic experiences to urban youth and learned what results from creative drama interactions in the classroom.

This process helped me explore my story relative to the role as a leader of creative dramatics with urban youth and simultaneously provided a context for discerning meaning in my personal experiences and reflections (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Secondly, selecting aspects of narrative methods offered me a way to position my field texts within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry of time, space, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, p. 131). It further helped me to analyze the data, which in turn assisted me in uncovering, reshaping, and examining some of the personal tensions and perspectives in engaging in self-reflective practice. This process for me has been the essence of self-study design. Self-study-design can help overcome such methodological barriers as inter-subjectivity.

Last, inter-subjectivity, or the problem of how to reliably know both one's own and another's subjective experience, has preoccupied social scientists, philosophers, and clinicians throughout the ages. Self-study design can help counter this phenomenon and others in research study and practice.

### **Research Questions**

As I moved toward greater specificity involving the primary research question, the construct of teacher practice became critical because one must embody a sense of discovering knowledge and improving instruction in order to communicate the qualities of effective leadership rather than appearing authoritarian or strictly didactic. The primary research question is therefore

What techniques associated with my implementation of creative dramatics has been proven effective with urban students?

Additional research questions derive from this primary question:

- 1) How does the teacher's reflection influence and reshape the use of creative drama?
- 2) What constitutes a moment of illumination when implementing creative drama techniques?
- 3) Which standards, or body of theory, does the teacher find most relevant in the design and use of creative drama in varying settings?
- 4) How would my teaching and understanding of creative drama technique and dramatic learners change because of this study?

These secondary questions explored teacher interactions and reflections and how they were impacted by creative drama applications. These questions involved certain elements of creative dramatics—the moments of engagement, enlightenment, and empowerment.

Matrix—Sources of Data that Addressed Research Questions

<i>Research Question</i>	Journaling of field notes w/o video	Journaling of field notes w/video	Field notes/students work in classroom	Focus group sessions w/video	Informal Interviewing	Visual Images
What does 'teacher as leader' mean in a classroom employing creative drama strategies?	(Classroom observations) X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Situated in Place</b>						
I. How does the teacher's reflection influence and reshape the use of creative drama?	X	X	X		X	X
<b>Backward</b>						
II. What constitutes a moment illumination in the actual act itself of engaging in creative drama techniques?		X	X	X		

<p><b>Inward/Outward</b></p> <p><b>III. Which standards, or body of theory set forth by Heathcote and Boal does the teacher find most relevant in the design and use of creative drama in urban settings</b></p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>
<p><b>Situation in Place</b></p> <p><b>IV. How would my teaching and understanding of creative drama techniques and urban youth change because of this study?</b></p> <p><b>Forward</b></p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>

## **Participant Selection**

I selected myself as a key participant/subject because I can best articulate my own thoughts and my sense of my creative drama processes with urban students. I described my own “positionality” early in Chapter I. In this study, I obtained information from (1) my teaching practices and my analysis of how I perceive the effectiveness of creative dramatics; and (2) four former students, chosen from my class, who will be participant/ informants and provide responses and reactions using video and stimulated recall as a means to their reflecting on their experiences with creative drama techniques. The selected students were members of the Big Urban Public Schools (BUPS). The selected students were part of a special project initiated by BUPS. After I received permission to conduct the study, I provided the students an overview of the study (see Appendices A and B). I am no longer these students’ teacher, so there is no connection to their grades and schoolwork. I assured the students that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time during the course of the study without any effect on past or future grades. I used four of my past students because they have interacted directly with the curriculum on a daily basis. I also selected students who expressed a willingness to volunteer in their spare time and responded well to the various creative dramatic sessions in my class.

## **Sources of Data Collection and Data Analysis**

### **Data Sources**

This section is significant because it elaborates how the data were collected

and analyzed, thus enabling others to understand my process as a road map for similar studies. I collected all the written data (listed below) that focused on examining my practices as leader in the classroom using creative dramatic techniques with the students. The main aspect of my research process was making certain that I was able simultaneously to collect data and process information, which supported my analysis of the materials over the course of six months.

The data collection consisted of such methods as 1) journal reflections, 2) self-reflective practice, 3) videotape, and 4) informal interviews of my teaching interactions in the classroom and placed emphasis on instruction that was provided during a three-month period with students. My goal in this next section is to explain the nature of my data sources, the frequency of their collection, my collection methods, my analysis of the data, as well as the challenges I faced during the process.

### **Journal Reflections**

My reflections set the stage for me to ask questions about my teaching practices by utilizing questions outlined in Appendices A and B and thus provided a structured format that acted as a guide in helping me review, respond, and reflect on how I was drawn to creative drama, teaching practices in diverse settings, and my present philosophy in engaging urban youth. The journaling process also established an awareness of my practices and my space in working with urban youth during creative drama by reviewing the past notes and videotapes of my teaching practices. I documented my reflections in my journal entries that embraced my thoughts, beliefs, concerns, hopes, and fears about what it means to be an educator using creative strategies. Additionally, my journal reflections included my feelings about what I

observed over the years in relation to my planning and implementing and my personal responses about the creative drama curriculum that I used with students. Appendix E provides a log of how I itemized and grouped the journal entries used throughout my data results chapters.

I transcribed the journal entries throughout the entire three months by categorizing feelings and themes reflected in my writing. After transcribing my journal reflections, I was able to organize my data chronologically, which helped me understand the time and events that took place in and outside the classroom. I soon started to analyze elements of my story by choosing which parts needed to be retold and restored.

Analyzing the data helped me in restoring aspects of the story that incorporated my actual reflections of teaching strategies used in-class. This was essential because it helped me understand certain choices and decisions that I made as an experienced teacher using creative techniques. Last, I analyzed the data by using a backward motion of understanding the data which captured the spirit in the classroom space and moments out of the classroom space which was illustrated in my writing in the journal and how I analyzed what constituted as past and reflective moments. Weekly transcribing enabled me to reflect on my past story, the backward component as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). It further provided an opportunity to recall aspects of my past story and compare it to my present classroom practices.

### **Self-Reflective Practice**

My self-reflective practice was the process of making notes at the end of each session based on my teaching practices. This reflective activity took place over 25

creative drama sessions. However, due to school interruptions and other classroom distractions, I was able to retain reflective notes about myself which represented 21 different class periods. I collected all the notes during certain times in the class, but most of my reflections about my teaching practice were made immediately after class. Collecting and transcribing the data went hand-in-hand at times, although there were those days when all I could do was collect the data, and the transcriptions took place at a later date.

What was effective about reviewing my self-reflective notes was that it gave me specific insight into my style of teaching creative dramatics over the course of 21 different class periods. I was able to retain data that exemplified my leadership but, more importantly, my students' live responses to the creative process, thereby moving me from examining my past experiences to both my inward and outward elements of analyzing the data while at the same time gaining many verbal and non-verbal notes on how my students reacted to certain moment-to-moment teaching strategies.

My self-reflective experiences really emphasized the place, space, and time of actual classroom interactions that were quite enlightening to me because I found myself including actual statements from my students. Specific examples are provided later in Chapters V, VI, and VII. My personal and professional reflections also helped me to articulate how and why I made specific choices when transitioning from one portion of creative pedagogy to the next.

The transition from transcription to analysis was fluid because at times it was simultaneous. For example, after going-over my journal reflections, I was soon able to hone certain themes of the creative drama experiences, such as engagement,

empowerment, and enlightenment. Although these themes came-out of moving from selected words to highlighted quotes and specific scenarios, this phase helped reinforce the selected unit of analysis, such as dramatic activities, participation, leadership, and imagination. Although I moved from several themes to grouping them into categories and then collapsing them in order to pull-out the relevant concepts and highlight the multiple perspectives and voices, all of it started to neatly overlap into what I started to see in my students' actual responses, details of which are provided later.

I had so much data at one point that the piles of papers, clipped and marked sheets, and charted material sometimes became sterile and started to lose the synergy and texture of the human spirit that I had originally projected and captured in my self-reflections. Therefore, it was good to review that my initial grouping of themes still mattered at the end of six months.

The analysis of the self-reflective practice also allowed me to list certain responses from both me and my students in way that helped themes to emerge rather than simply the number times an incident occurred. The analysis at this point further moved me to group certain episodes of classroom interactions into categories. For example, I was able to organize and see consistency in my voice and the voice of my students during the analysis process and therefore created charts (see Appendix F Charted Focus Group Responses).

### **Video and Focus Group Analysis**

In addition to the other data sources described thus far, it was critical to collect data by using video to capture and re-examine moments in the classroom that

were already illustrated in other places but, more importantly, to see other incidents that might have been missed. This step in the data-gathering process was unique because it incorporated the opinions and personal perspectives of my students. I selected four students (1 female and 3 males) to participate in the focus group sessions and to review and examine the video segments with me. The focus group sessions provided an opportunity to listen and discuss openly what worked for them in class when engaging in creative drama.

My selection of video segments was based on specific creative drama strategies that appeared most engaging (mostly during dramatic warm-up activities and highlighted discussion of role-playing) and exemplified moments of empowerment (most appeared during the follow-up activities, dialogue which included specific homework assignments) which were apparent themes at this point in my other data sources. Second, I focused on reviewing and examining certain segments that demonstrated what experts in the field of creative drama consider good teaching styles when using drama in the context of the classroom. For example, it was important to show illustrations of warm-ups, role-plays, voice quality, and the processing of information. I administered a written protocol to help the focus groups run smoothly. (see Appendix C for suggested questionnaire).

After five weeks of collecting the data from the various focus group sessions, I found myself so excited by the results that I had to transcribe the information immediately. My transcriptions at this point happened in the classroom after the session or at home. At this point in transcribing the material, I was able to add to the other organized charts and separated categories while still able to remain open enough

to be informed and led to new ideas, concepts, that generated additional themes and new categories. I then started to analyze my local data that came directly from the guided video stimulated protocol (see Appendix C entitled Questions for Focus Group Sessions).

The video analysis was broken-up into four to five sections with four breakpoints during every group session (see groupings in Appendix F Charted Responses of Focus Groups). I was able to establish that the same guidelines and principles that I used to analyze the other data sources helped shaped my thinking process in choosing how to group the video segments. The rigidity at this point was evident, but it was a smooth transition because other aspects of my inquiry and analysis of additional field text were already in place. However, this was the largest portion of local data. I believe that what was beneficial to me at this step was that I used the order of sequencing what it means to implement good and effective creative drama from leading practitioners such as Heathcote (Wagner, 1974), Bolton (1976), and Kelner (1993). The units of the video segments were broken-down into four key components of creative drama as pedagogy in the classroom: (1) warm-up(s); (2) main activity, (3) processing (4) closure. Although my students as well as my responses, reflections, and comments did not come in such a systematic order as I had projected, I decided to use analytical units such as, engagement, enlightenment, and empowerment. I used these three components as another means of ordering and structuring my thinking throughout the analysis process.

The next step in this phase was to corroborate my reflections and responses with the four students. It was important for me to understand that along with

discovering and synthesizing the data, I also wanted to keep the individuality alive and present as I moved the analysis from an inward/outward way of thinking about how to transition my field text to research text. During this step, I was able to note just how vibrant and eager the students were during the process by interpreting their facial expressions and body language on videotapes and during day to day class periods; for example, how they started out during our initial sections and how it emerged in the latter sessions. I needed to make sure that I conveyed that same type of energy at this step in the analysis process. I did so by writing notes that represented in each person's individual personality and her/his own non-verbal and human subtleties. Furthermore, it was important that I conveyed how my thinking was at times in direct alignment and sometimes in contrast to the students' level of inquiry and understanding. When engaging in this step, I was able to highlight how my students and I described certain exercises and activities of the drama we found interesting, as described in Chapter V. I also pointed-out questions raised and how the students constructed explanations that were communicated from their level of knowing and similar at some level to my own and yet very different on other incidents during the video segments.

### **Informal Interviews**

Although I stated in my original proposal that I might need to create room for informal interviews with my students to help clarify or better understand a concept, it turned-out that I had more one-on-one interactions than expected. Taking notes and transcribing information from my students' classroom assignments included some of their own journal entries that became quite helpful to my findings; therefore, there

were times when I had to go back to clarify certain points that I later discovered to be a part of a one-on-one conversation. The transcriptions for the students were also challenging because at times I could not keep in-line the selected students' responses specifically for this study and pulled-out only the information from the video while paralleling it to our focus group.

I eventually transcribed some of my other students' reactions by making them part of the assessment of my overall class response documented in daily self-reflections. I never anticipated performing informal or unstructured interviews during this study. It wasn't so much that my selected subjects could not answer the initial research questions; rather it was that I set-out to establish enough data collection based on the question by addressing it from different styles until one day the unexpected yet timely incident happened in class. This situation led me to a new way of thinking and caused me to rethink certain aspects of the retelling of my story even though I had a great deal of data that I could triangulate based on my own collected data and the students' voices and perspectives.

The initial informal interviews started from a tension in the classroom which resulted from my noticing a tension and uneasiness in the drama. The experiences took me by surprise and were so unsettling that I soon decided that day to ask a couple of my students to remain after class to discuss about what had taken place. I did not have a set agenda with set questions but rather improvised dialogue which turned into an informative conversation I knew had to be included in my data collection. Although it was one occasion that started me to gain more insight about classroom interactions, especially leadership both good and bad, I soon discovered

that it was a good fit to my overall research question. As highlighted in Chapters VI and VII, I placed specific examples and described parts of my story by including specific data analysis that came directly from this unexpected data. This unanticipated but needed data layered my thinking and caused me to embrace the fact that I was not just tuned to the positive aspects of my teaching experiences but to those incidents that appeared to be bad but actually were positive as well.

### **End of Data Collection**

After closely examining the local data and juxtaposing the material back and forth with my documentations and the students' information, I repeated my analysis in a strategic manner—categorizing the information using backward, forward, inward, outward, and situated-in-place as the dimensions of 3-D space outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). I wove all collected data and analysis together and drew several conclusions. Additionally, I made a connection between my primary research question and my assertions. The results of my findings and how I synthesized the data and moved my field text to local data and then to research text are described in Chapters IV, V, VI, and VII.

Last, not only are the events and happenings described in story form but also the analysis is extended to involve interpretations (Boykins, 1983, Wagner 1976, Boal, 1976, Gallien and Peterson, 2005) which assisted me in understanding my own “professional knowledge landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Analyzing the data in this manner enabled me to analyze my collected journals and teacher's notes on both a personal and professional level in and outside the classroom. In addition, it

enabled me to conclude my students' responses once juxtaposed against my own revelation as the core of this self-study. My students who started out as mere characters to help me corroborate *my* story became major players in what I rigorously analyzed as *our* story.

The final step was the validation of findings by triangulating among such data sources as journaling, self-reflective practice notes, video, and informal interviews which included students' responses and feedback, my insights, and responses from the focus groups, video observations, and semi-structured interviews. This phase of the procedure supported my efforts to determine the credibility of data and analysis.

This study's design, tasks, and analysis did not interfere with my regular classroom sessions: there were no known emotional, social, or psychological risks associated with subjects' participation. Subjects' names were deleted from data instruments and replaced with designated pseudonyms, as discussed in Chapter IV. This study was approved and described in detail the processes and protocol for how I access consent and discusses issues around confidentiality by the Institute Review Board. The following Chapter IV is the beginning of my results chapter and illustrates my self-understanding as a leader of creative drama and highlights the different perspectives of my entry process as well as how I came to know my students through drama.

## **Chapter IV: Setting the Stage for Creative Dramatics**

### **Introduction**

This Chapter also highlights two main components which I found to be essential for my urban students—creative management techniques and a mutual contract in which I established a safe and trusting place for my students to be creative. This information was pertinent because it explained how I coaxed my students to get out of traditional classroom norms and helped them facilitate a new way of learning and understanding.

The goal of this Chapter is to illustrate the initial processes used to start the study. I discuss the challenges that I faced with myself, administrators, teachers, and my selected class group in embarking on this study. I reveal how I set-out to educate a number of administrators on creative drama in my efforts to dispel some of their misconceptions. I further explain how once I gained access to the study site I communicated the relevance of bringing this type of creativity to the classroom. I also describe who my selected participants were in the study, for they became major players in supporting me to gain insight into my use of creative drama.

### **Personal Revelation**

After receiving approval from my defense committee, I was given a difficult challenge. I was inspired to look a little closer, to go a bit deeper into areas concerning who is most impacted by creative drama, my students. They immediately reminded me to discuss those aspects of me in the work which my proposal omitted. It seemed so simple, but it was so germane to my overall purpose of teaching and my

mission in life to be in tune with my ethnic identity. I had simply left it out. I really do not think that I made one reference to it and that is the very core of who I am and why I am so committed to alternative ways of instructing young people.

My committee appeared taken aback by the fact that I wanted to do this study of my teaching strategies with predominantly African-American students but that I did not give myself permission to bring those cultural nuances that support the constructs that I was attempting to strive for in the study. This is why this study is so important: it is my hope that other educators can see how embarking on a self-study may cause one to venture into areas of thoughts, feelings, doubts, insecurities, and memories that one doesn't necessarily realize get played-out in daily classroom practices. Furthermore, I soon realized that dismissing identity is a major flaw in researching urban education, and I have found it to be a double flaw because it rejects the very notion of what creative drama stands for. One of the main premises I discovered about creative drama is that it is important to be able to sensually understand the outside world by first understanding where one fits into the larger picture of what we call the universe on both a social and emotional level. Therefore, this study has shown me that vital element of embarking on self-study and particularly arts-based studies: one must locate what connects one to the phenomenon.

My proposal defense hearing was really the first day of implementing the study. For example, the changes that I made to the study were subtle but permeated deeply with me. Instead of simply focusing on other people's philosophies of how they implement creative drama and the definitions that they used, I was empowered to

zero-in on my specific population and my specific perceptions relevant to creative drama as an integral part of academic processes in my urban school district.

### **Understanding Teacher as Protagonist**

One of the pivotal moments for me in the field of creative drama was my beginning to design, release, and implement my own curriculum with students. I needed to understand what it meant for me to be “teacher as protagonist,” especially since I noticed that the main spine of my story was about empowerment and understanding that some of the components that I stood on dealt with positive leadership and positive self-image. My primary focus when working with creative drama processes was on black-on-black violence.

### **JOURNAL ENTRY #12**

*As I reflect on how my work evolved, I geared my lesson plans toward character development and dealt with sensitive issues such as anger and death. Heathcote, on the other hand, might say that I was bringing the drama too close to the students’ personal situations and not allowing the distance between what was real or not real to exist. She might have the opinion that I was not trusting the work, not giving the students a chance to make the leap by themselves and on their own terms. But what I was discovering then and have discovered even more since is that this population is in need of what I call “on- edge drama.”*

*This is not to say that they did not have the intellect to make the leap, far from the truth; but they had so many other socio-emotional barriers that got in the way of their ability to express and imagine that it was the responsibility for me as their leader to guide them into making certain leaps. Most of the children Heathcote worked with are of European descent with average-to-high literacy skills and high appreciation for historical facts and awareness of political affairs. My children, however, considered the minority in this country, have poor-to-no literacy skills and have already lost an immediate family member by the time they entered 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. So, culturally, there are these nuances that make a dramatic difference on the implementation process as well as on the outcome and effects.*

One of the questions that I asked, found in Appendix A (Suggested Interview Questions for Self), was Does my ethnicity play any part in my teaching style?

*Answer:* When I reflect on my instructional strategies, I do bring my ethnicity with

me. My Southern ethnicity and cultural tendencies of the African-American are quite evident in my work; however, they do not get in the way of spontaneity of the creative processes but rather are stylized at certain points. For example, the vernacular choices that I make in- and out-of-character are subtle but immensely significant. For example, when I say, “You know what I mean, um,” when I say, “You feel me,” *etc.*, my students are so in-tune that getting to the core of the drama is faster, faster in connecting with them in going through a trust exercise; and we are drawn to the unknown at the end of the drama because we take the journey in the story hand-in-hand with honesty, laughter, and humility. They know that I am real in terms of my body language, my eye contact, and my communication style and that I really care about them in and out of the drama’s voyage. As a student once said, “Keep it on the real tip, Ms. Carmen, let’s not go there”(Journal #2).

By “on the real tip,” that student was pushing me to stay honest, true, and authentic; he was cautioning me that if I’m going to be acting or not acting in the moment and I have brought the students to a real yet sensitive place, then don’t detour. I sometimes find myself going to places in character that I would never dare to go as “Ms. Carmen,” their teacher.

In other words, the strategy of teaching in character is emphasized not just by the technique but by my students’ will to take risks as well. I have found that if I am true to the character—meaning my voice tone, objective, and physical attributes are present— my students buy into the process, and a sense of integrity and trust is manifested in a way that my students coax me to go further and the drama is enriched in an improvisational and unexpected manner. It is my responsibility as their teacher

to judge when the technique of playing a particular character is no longer appropriate or no longer supporting the overall learning objectives. I discovered that I am always conscientious in making sure that my young people are setting me up to miss the rest of class activities and that we are all for the most part still genuinely true to the stakes placed in the drama during that moment.

Secondly, through my experiences, I have a deep understanding of the population. Heathcote and Boal both emphasize the fact that you should know your audience, know your participants, so that you don't go over their heads when presenting the drama and do not condescend in your presentation. Since I know my population, I also know the importance of fostering their thinking and creativity in the drama so that they can take that leap I mentioned earlier as a key ingredient. What I mean about knowing my students is being able to be in touch with their social and emotional sense of being. I know my students' highs and lows, good days and bad days, and I know their cultural ways of being and expressions of language. I took this type of knowing for granted. For example, understanding the content of their desired music, popular books (which change from season to season), TV shows, cartoon favorite characters and even habits at home and in the streets informs my choices as how to organize my lesson plan for the day which enhances both the designated content on a personal and universal level.

Additionally, my ethnicity comes-out in how I filter information: when students asked me questions, though I was in-role, there was a belief system that guided me in what to say or not say, when to say or not say, and how to say it or not, and to which student to say it. This is the key part of knowing my population. This

issue is weighty because I really never realized before just how salient it was that cultural responsiveness has such an essential role in how I led creative drama.

### **Journal Entry #9**

*My musical choices for classes were based on knowing my population and specifically understanding their culture. For example, having music in the classroom supported the learning for some students and helped change the atmosphere and understanding of the mood for drama for all students. Some of my music choices included artists such as the late rapper Tupac, gospel singer Yolanda Adams, R&B singer Hope, go-go artist Chuck Brown, and tunes from Broadway like the Lion King.*

My materials and assignments were also culturally relevant—newspaper clippings, hard cutouts, reading assignments, and website tasks. It was important to note that I did not just create culturally relevant creative drama lesson plans because of my training. Ironically, my training in creative drama was quite broad. I trained with NYU's Dr. Nellie McClassin, whose focus was children's theater and free-play and with John Hodgeson of England's GYPT Theater Company who taught using Shakespeare and creative drama as a way to bring social issues to the surface as well as expanding the number of young readers to the classes.

My response to Question 6 of Questionnaire Appendix A reads as follow:

*Me: In my work, I use creative drama, character development, and theater pieces similar to the approaches offered in Theatre of the Oppressed. I have discovered that the more tools one has access to the more choices one has in working with the mind, body, and soul. I developed much of my style in using drama in educational settings by listening directly to students' needs, concerns, and suggestions. For example, many of the lesson plans that worked well in New York did so because the young people were motivated to participate in the theme. This motivation came out of creating incentives—hot topics that dealt with music—and from there I devised and implemented lesson plans that take them to a new place of learning and new concepts to explore.*

## **Dispelling the Myths and Misconceptions of Creative Drama**

Initial contacts with schools in my quest to seek permission to integrate drama into the curriculum were surprisingly disappointing. It was as if I was speaking a different language. I received several suggestions from administrators and other colleagues, and the one common comment was that most principals are under the microscope and it is hard for them to think about anything new; the other suggestion that most of them gave me was to ask if they had a drama or theater component in their curriculum. Having time to process some of these suggestions and based on trial-and-error, I created some new strategies.

It wasn't until I started to "change the script" that I received my first positive response. Trying to find my way in by understanding what they were already offering wasn't working. For example, I would explain some of the outcomes that would benefit the students, and I always shared my love and compassion for working with the students, and none of that really went-over well. They seemed to become more intrigued when I mentioned that test scores would improve and school absenteeism decrease. From a more immediate need, they appeared more open when I turned my language to the fact that they would have to work less and some of their short-term problems such as drug use/abuse, high rate of promiscuity, and conflicts in the classroom would diminish. I needed to do a transfer of creative dramatic goals and objectives to the overall mission and personal desires of the school.

Throughout my meetings, I discovered a new discourse when interacting with several school administrators. Below, I have documented some of the running questions, comments, statements, and concerns as well as my responses, suggestions, and

reassurances.

**Administrator:** *“Is this like theater arts? We used to have one of the teachers from Duke Ellington to help us in the afternoon to work on plays.”* I received this and similar questions in at least 4 of the 5 meetings.

**Researcher:** *“No, it really isn’t focused on the product of performance but rather the process of discovering what drama as literature is all about. I really place emphasis on specific learning objectives based on a given curriculum.”*

**Administrator:** *“Now, how is this (creative drama) going to help this school? What makes you think you can handle the students? Does someone have to be in there with or do you do think you do this thing alone?”* Three of five contacts yielded these concerns.

**Researcher:** *“Well, here you will see that creative drama has the capacity to reach several goals offering a variety of outcomes.”*

I typically said that these goals depended on the school and what the selected classes needed at the time. Then, I discussed the follow-up with “If you allow me to implement my curriculum while tailoring it to fit your needs, what would success look like to you?”

**Administrator:** (Responses from the three who finally allowed me to work in their schools) *“We have a great need for our students to pass these test that are coming up and we can’t do that unless they come into the building, and those that are in school are fighting and there is just so much conflict during the lesson period because some of our teachers don’t know how to keep the kids’ attention.”*

**Researcher** (internal response): *“Bingo! That’s it! That’s my in right there!”* After describing how I thought we could make this a win-win situation, I then responded to some of their logistical concerns, or they would bring up that subject themselves.

**Researcher:** *“I don’t have a problem working with different populations.”* [Provided past teaching background.] *“No, I don’t need anyone with me but the one teacher.”* [Further explained the role the teacher would take and the importance of setting up a teacher’s orientation.]

**Administrator:** (Four out of five asked this question.) *“So, how much time is needed and how many classes can you work with at one time?”*

**Self-Reflection Notes:** At this point during the conversation, I felt good because I

knew that I had passed that negative threshold. However, I had to protect the integrity of my work and tell them about the maximum number of students that I could work with at a time. If I didn't make that clear, based on past experiences, they would use me as their next guest assembly person with 50-100 students at a time. Due to the high level of interactivity and one-on-one attention that should be given throughout the course of the curriculum, once you have more than 20 students, you get into the dramatic strategies being used more as a management tool than as a vehicle for teaching and learning opportunities. An additional concern that came up during my access meetings was that I could not choose the class that might work with me.

The selection process is critical because it brings certain dynamics to the creative process. Some of the schools placed me either with classes of disciplinarian teachers or with teachers who had no control whatever over their classrooms.

Interestingly enough, when I reflect upon my personal choice, particularly when I felt that my self-efficacy levels were being fostered, they were the teachers who appear to be less restrictive and controlling. The other aspect of the principals' selecting the class for me appeared to come out of their own biases.

**Researcher:** *"I know that space might be an issue, but I normally like to work in a large space with moveable chairs and detached desks, and I will have the room back to its original setting after each class. So, where do we go from here?"*

**Administrator:** (Usually, the schools in an inner-city environment were heavily populated and space always an issue, but if the principal or vice-principal were invested, there would be a typical response): *"Call me and I will see what I can do, but we don't have a lot of space unless you use the cafeteria."*

With successful site-entry, when I knew that I was scheduled to return for teacher orientation, there were some main components of the conversation that seemed to work well for me: (1) must provide a clear and succinct understanding of educational drama; (2) familiarize oneself with school's population and surrounding neighborhood; (3) transfer the goals identified on page 34 to their academic goals and personal missions; (4) inform them that we are creating win-win situations; (5)

understand the school's limitations when seeking space, equipment, time, emotional support; and (6) provide a clear plan of action that addresses strategies and indicating that they will receive a copy of the outcomes and findings.

A helpful way to transfer their goals and objectives into the content goals and objectives of creative drama is to use the three different categories developed by Koziol and Richards (1993)—(a) language skills; (b) personal skills; and (c) higher order thinking skills that will not just help you out in trying to bring an awareness of what and how creative drama can fit into their school's paradigm but also will strengthen the overall presentation and provide specific rationales for some of the goals that you would like to achieve.

### **The Setting: People's Middle School**

The study was eventually conducted in one of the a regions of the big urban middle school under the pseudonym "People's Middle School." The students, ranging in age from 12-14, formed a homogeneous class. Ward 4 has not only one of the largest African-American populations according to year 2000 data but also the highest Hispanic/Latino population second only to its Ward 1 neighbor. The school is one of the most culturally diverse educational institutions in the city. Unfortunately, in the past three years, Ward 4 has experienced an increase in gang activity, ethnic conflict, and school violence.

The Ward's specific populations are often described with a host of troubling data, statistics, and negative classifications. Some have conduct disorders; little-to-no social competence skills; poor communication skills; and low self-concept. Some have such special educational issues as illiteracy, poor comprehension, and lack of

motor and cognitive skills. There is a strong need in the big urban school system to reduce the high levels of anxiety, paranoia, attention deficit, and poor impulse control in our youth.

Urban public schools have a richly diverse student population with more than 112 different home languages representing 138 nationalities. Approximately 12% of the student population belongs to a language minority group, and another 7.7% are classified as limited English Proficient (LEP) or Non-English Proficient (LEP/NEP) learners: (1) African-Americans-84.4%; (2) Hispanic-9.4%; (3) White-4.6%; (4) Asian-Americans-1.6%; (5) other-0.5%.

An urban youth's background is often described with a long list of troubling data, statistics, and negative classifications. The backgrounds of most of my students are inclusive of the following: single-parent-home to no-home-roots at all; high drop-out rates; unhealthy relationships with peers and adults; heavy drug use; sexual abuse; deep involvement in sexual activities; and unstable, volatile neighborhoods. Beyond the familiar lifestyles of this population are the documented levels of poor individualized skills.

Although my classes appeared to be regular education classes, I had a very large number of special needs students in my class during the course of this study. The total enrollment of special education students in the city as reported by city's Office of Educational Accountability Fact Sheet is 12,135. Of the total enrollment, 76% are public schools and 24% are in non-public residential and interagency programs. In addition, 46% of the students have learning disabilities, 18% have emotional disabilities, and 13% are students with mental retardation.

### **Selected Characters in the Story**

After receiving approval to do the study, I went into my class sessions thinking about the students whom I would like to assist me in evaluating my ability to lead creative dramatics. Initially, I wanted to have a mixture of females and males; but after the first two forty-five minute sessions, I was so impressed with the boys that I decided to select three young males and one female. The females typically are stronger in the drama sessions than the males, but this class really had many energetic and willing young men who appeared just as open and engaged as the females. As I stated earlier, I was looking for those who appeared to be more engaged; and I was able to identify the young lady (whose pseudonym is “Sheree”) because she responded well to all directives, was helpful to other peers when they needed to be prompted during the drama, and the other two young males were just as helpful, a bit silly at times but never missing a beat from beginning to end. The other selection I made out of curiosity because he entered the class both days with a relatively flat affect and left with such a big smile on his face.

**Subject I:** *Terry* is an African-American male, age 14, who is a very gifted and talented student with the capacity to memorize information very fast and who always appears eager to learn. He does, however, have difficulties controlling his aggressive behavior and at times appears sad. He holds a high B average. He is organized and turns in assignments in a neat condition. *Terry* also has leadership potential. He received all aspects of creative drama lessons very well. He comes from a single-parent home and has two siblings. He is known in the school for bullying his peers

**Subject II:** *Sheree* is an African-American female, 14 years old and extremely bright. She has a bright affect and a B average with the capacity to be an A student, but her grades tend to decline because of poor attendance. She has great writing and reading skills and enjoys the creative drama process. She loves excitement, likes to have fun in class, enjoys competitive activities, and acts-out by becoming manipulative when she gets bored. She loves to dance and listen to music. Her mother is a recovering alcoholic and she has two younger siblings. She has difficulties with her sexual identity and tends to mask her intelligence in front of her peers.

**Subject III:** *Jose* is a Latino male, 13 years old, whose parents are from Puerto Rico. He is quite shy and introverted but lights-up when involved in the creative drama process. He has a low-B average and a reputation for skipping school. He comes from a two-parent home and is the first generation in his family to speak English fluently. He is known for his shyness, not talking, and often sleeping in class. Although he drifts off into his own world at times in the drama sessions, he responds well when asked to work with his hands. He can be very creative when guided.

**Subject# 4: Thomas** is an African-American male with a C average. I found him to be a high- achieving student and was known for being too serious and having some anger issues. He loves to keep track of time, so I usually gave him the role of my timekeeper throughout the drama sessions. He has been twice held-back in elementary school. He is the middle child and has a passion for sports and selling drugs in his spare time. He was quite resistant toward the creative process but made a major transformation in the process.

## **A Safe Place To Play**

After a few introductory exercises and processing the anticipated drama experience, I introduced the students to my creative classroom management techniques. I have personally known on some level that these management techniques appeared to work well, but this study clearly emphasized just how receptive my students too felt about the creative techniques; and by reviewing my self-reflections, I now know some of the reasoning behind why it was so effective with my urban population.

I led the classroom management material at this point because my students were now more open to receive information, thus increasing the trust factor. The classroom management techniques were as follows:

**Self-Reflective Practice:** I explain to the group that they will be working as a team for a number of sessions to explore the issues and to develop skills and qualities within themselves. This is a good time to introduce such management techniques as “Freeze,” “Focus,” and “Ago Ameye.”

“**Freeze**” is a call only the teacher can use; and once stated, everyone must freeze. I said, *“There is to be no talking, walking, and blinking with eyes. The only thing you can do is breathe.”* In viewing the video, I made several key observations in my self-reflections. It is very important for me as a teacher to freeze as well. So I am constantly modeling for them what I need them to do. I introduce the freeze concept by saying, *“Only Ms. Carmen can relax and everyone else must continue to stay frozen. Let me test you guys out.”* I then go around my frozen statuette students, messing and playing around with them, trying to get them to break their frozen positions and trying to break those serious faces. The only way I can get them to get

out of the freeze mode is to say, “OK, relax everyone.”

**Journal Entry #3:**

*I love introducing the freeze concept. I usually count “1, 2, 3, and freeze.” What has been fun and yet challenging for me is to see how the students try to put on their serious, hard-core “Don’t mess with me” attitude because as soon as I walk around the room and start to test their ability to remain frozen, they start to break into laughter one by one. But then there are those students who I noticed always try really hard to play tough guy and tough girl. I have had students freeze so hard and refuse to break character that their bodies start to tremble. So then I have to dig a little deeper into my bag of tricks and bring out the disgusting gum collector and glue collector character. I start to pretend that I am trying to free them from this web of sticky stuff and in the process I start to get stuck to different parts of their bodies. Now the real hard core ones lose their minds and start to come-out of the freeze. It appears that the intimacy of my approach throws them off.*

**Students’ Reactions:**

**Terry:** *“That’s not fair, Ms. Carmen. Ms. Carmen, you can’t do that. I don’t believe she did that.”*

The thought of a teacher getting that close to a student really gets into their spatial privacy, and the intimacy of it, especially for my young males, makes them lose their minds and break-out into laughter with the response of “Ah, man, she got me.”

Heatcote makes reference to leaders of creative drama when she discusses the distance threshold of tolerance, suggesting that it is important to know just how much risk you want to take when dealing emotionally and physically with students. The fact that I am very comfortable with my spatial and distance dynamic with my kids does not mean that they are comfortable.

**Journal Entry # 5**

*See, sometimes it’s good;” It’s all good,” as my students say, to allow creative drama to make them feel uncomfortable. It is interesting to watch how their vulnerability turns into security. As a good leader, I know when to push and not push. As I watched the video last night, I observed that early in my class sessions I already start to see those whom I instinctively push and those whom I hold back on. I look at their eye*

*contact levels, I listen to their vocal tones and inflections, and I start to assess who is shy, more introverted and less apt to take risk. Then after a number of other instances such as who raises hands often, who is the natural-born leader, and the ones who appear to follow, even who moves slow versus fast across the floor, I watch how I just take it all in. I was able to laugh at myself because I saw myself take deep breaths, smile at times, shake my head, even make peculiar sounds. These were all nonverbal events that just come out, and I am not always aware of them. Sometimes I know that I wear my emotions on my sleeve and that it may not be good to expose myself too much to my students. However, it also informs them to some level that I'm human and honest and very much in-tune with every little thing that they do and don't do. It's just amazing to see the things one does in the classroom that one isn't aware of as a part of how she/he leads in that class. And I notice thus far that it's the small things that matter just as much as the grand ways of communicating with my young people.*

Of course, there are those whom I just can't get out, as evident in the video, and I said, *"Alright class, let's give them a hand for staying in the freeze frame and you may relax now."* This particular management technique is not used as much as the other ones. I generally use this only as follows: 1. The noise level has passed my tolerance level and is no longer focused noise as Heathcote discusses; 2. If a drama exercise appears to be unsafe; 3. If we are at a dramatic point or at the end of the drama improvisation and I freeze to help with transitioning and or to get important information out.

**Journal Entry #2:** So when I say "Freeze" after this point, I don't have a problem with my students' freezing. Most of the time when I have to say "1, 2, 3, Freeze," my students are still in a competitive mindset toward each other.

**"Focus"** is the next management technique—getting all class members to pay close attention to specific items, concepts, persons, or anything in drama that calls for students to concentrate. Actual documented responses from my students: *"Do you all know what the word "Focus" means: to look at, to pay attention, or to be still."* After I affirm all of their responses, I then provide the description of Focus; then I say,

*“Let’s practice focusing, everyone. Everyone focus on Sheree, focus on the ceiling, on the window, the floor, oh no, I didn’t say focus on the floor this time.”* So here we were all able to put the technique right into practice.

As documented on the video, this is one management tool that the young people can use themselves, unlike “Freeze” and “Ago Ameye.”

**Journal Entry # 2:**

*“I often use the call of “Focus.” It’s not as big as “Freeze,” but it is intense enough to quickly pull everyone into a mode of paying attention and staying on-task. Although I use this one often, my favorite management technique is “Ago Ameye.” The last one I introduce is “Hands Like This.”*

**Journal Entry # 2:** *I love this one in particular because we go into a kind of chant that echoes back and forth for three rounds. If everyone doesn’t respond by saying “Ameye” the first time, at least by the third time we have all got the message. It’s highly communal and spiritual, and the call and response is honored by my students because I have given them in the past a brief history about the respect that comes with it like when called out by the kings of the villages in Africa.*

**Self-Reflective Practice:** With “Ago Ameye” (Swahili) only the group leader can say “Ago,” which means, “May I have your attention?” The students respond with “Ameye,” which means, “Yes, you may have our attention.” This is a call/response technique that works extremely well with my urban population.

Gallien and Peterson (2005) assert that call and response reflects oneness, interdependence, participation and attempts to bring together the speaker and the listener (p. 78). I have seen this particular management tool used with my students in varied settings as class outings and during play rehearsal in a large gymnasium, and it works very well. “Ago and Ameye” attracts African-American students because it allows them to be rhythmical and repetitive in the process, which works wonderfully when one is trying to foster a creative environment.

After placing management criteria, I have my class establish a contract together which comes out of the first main activity. The contract is a mutual

agreement designed to create an atmosphere of trust, honesty, commitment, and safety.

### **Creative Drama builds community in the classroom**

Immediately after I discussed the class management techniques, I moved into the next phase of creative drama—the main activity. The main activity as explained by the American Alliance for Theatre & Education is that it is an integral part of the curriculum which uniquely integrates major aspects of other fields of study into itself. Systematic continued drama experiences in education provide learners with opportunities to master basic skills, to inquire and discover, to create, and to explore values.

**Self-Reflective Practice:** I have my students remain at this point sitting in a large circle. I explain to the group that this class session will involve several important concepts that will help everyone work together better. For the purpose of this lesson, the two concepts involved will be identifying the qualities between our community and responsibility and juxtapose them with the community of slaves during the mid-1800's.

**Journal Entry #5:** *I used to start-out having students define neighborhoods; but because that brought so much tension that was not necessarily in-line with my objectives, I changed to defining community and/or a club. Yesterday, during the course of this study, I used club. At times the young people were comparing a club to a gang, but I was able still to foster my goal of understanding the issue of what it means to bond with a group of people. It went well because the students were able to share their views of what makes a good club and the rules. It was quite a productive main activity.*

**Self-Reflective Practice:** After we discussed/defined the terms of being in a club and requirements of what makes a club run smoothly, I went into asking the young people to brainstorm a little more and I asked who can play the role as recorder. I then defined what that person was supposed to do. I used a large poster board and then started to build the list together. This contract helped me to negotiate what is going to take place in the space of learning and imagining.

**Me:** *"What is a community?" and "What does being a member mean?" I say, "...in order for a community to be strong and become successful it has to be responsible for each member. Club members have to hold each other accountable for the success of the entire team. The attitude, behavior, or actions of each member reflects the community as a whole. Today we will have a unique opportunity to act as key players in the club and develop our own norms? What do you think about that? Can we create our own guidelines and place it on our contract?"*

**Students' Responses:** *"Yeah, that's better anyway because usually they are already there for us and we have to just follow them."*

After I defined what the difference was between a rule and a norm and the importance of establishing healthy group norms, we started to write it out on the contract. (see Appendix G for a sample of an actual contract used in the study). Names were purposefully blurred-out on the poster board.

When soliciting suggestions of norms for the club/class to abide by even if they come up with negative ones or words such as "never" "not" or "no," it is the responsibility of the teacher to make the guidelines positive. For example, no gum-chewing, no hands in your pants, no cursing. When placing it down on the position, I instruct the student recorder to write it down: "chewing gum is unacceptable"; "it is inappropriate to place hands in pants"; "the use of profanity is prohibited." This was a positive way of saying don't do the suggested behaviors instead of just saying no. It is my style of choice. I also use other ways of expressing the guidelines, such as "We will be respectful at all times." However, it is important that I do not change too much of the young people's vernacular because the contract guidelines must come from them as much as possible. After completing the contract, I said, *"Come on and give Nicole a big hand for being our recorder for the day. Didn't she do a good job?"* *Most of the students clapped and cheered others took this moment as a time to bang on desk but it was their way of celebrating and releasing of energy. As long as it was*

appropriate and in line with what was being asked of them, I did not take much issue with how they praised their peer.

**Journal Entry #6:** Praise is excellent for my class. My personal joy in working with the drama and incorporating it into the classroom is being able to see my students quickly respond to short-term versus long-term rewards and incentives. For example, when doing scene work or even something as simple as being the recorder or the reporter for a given class period and after hearing the class applaud them, it is an instantly motivating booster for my young people.

**Self-Reflective Practice:** I explained to my class: “Now that we have our official contract and we all agree with the new norms, I just know that nobody will break these guidelines.”

**Me:** *Listen, everyone: if you break the contract, you have consequences (see real sample of my class’ contract on page 89 and in Appendix G). We now need to come up with three consequences. What are consequences?”*

**Students’ Responses:** *“Consequences is something that happens when you get in trouble.” “It’s like a punishment when you do something wrong.”*

**Terry:** *It’s like the after-effect of something, that’s it.*

**Sheree:** *I’m glad we are going to have the consequences because it’s not fair when other people are doing right and other people make it hard for you to see what’s going on and then you can’t learn and enjoy yourself. So the consequences kind of keep us straight.*

**Jose:** *Oh, it was ok I didn’t do any of them. I just did what you told me to do and most of us did that.*

**Self-Reflective Practice:** I must provide my students with the definition but then I share with them that you can have good consequences too.

**Me:** *So what should our consequences be and how are going to make it more difficult if you break the contract. You go to consequence number one; then, if you break it again, the second consequence is more complex; and if you break the contract for the third time in a row, you really suffer. This goes for me too: if I break one of the norms and someone catches me (I laughed to myself), I too must abide by our contract.”*

Rarely do my students get to the third consequence. During the course of the study, I did not have anyone get to level three. Only levels one and two did I have to visit and only a couple of times. It is important that I explain to my students that they are

responsible for making sure that each new member of this club knows the norms and how they were established (this *is very empowering. See next Chapter*).

**Self-Reflective Practice:** I then pulled-out my music box and started to turn-on the sound track of “The Lion King.” Although my students are older, some have never heard the “Lion King” soundtrack, and others brighten-up because they can’t help but recall that memory of goodness when they experienced the music or the movie for the first time. I love turning the music on during the signing of the contract because it creates a sense of ritual. During this time of the study, I noticed in the video that I started playing the music first and talking over the music, providing instructions about the importance of everybody’s signing the contract using his/her full names just as you would do in real life.

**Me:** *“Everyone please sign in cursive your first and last name; no nicknames or initials. I will sign at the end and we will read off the whole contract and say our names out loud afterwards.”*

### **Conclusion**

In summary, it was clear that the school system is not clear about the role creative drama can play in students’ education and just how important it is for the social and emotional development of the whole child. Secondly, there needs to be more research on the effect of alternative education so that when creative approaches come along there is a stronger platform to defend the validity of the work and its measurable outcomes (see sample proposal in Appendix I).

In addition, the students I selected played a major role in helping me to understand in their own words just how critical it was for them to experience creative drama as away to learn. I was also able to see the significance in using creative

management techniques to help reinforce the learning structures of the classroom and how yielding power and ownership to my students in creating their own contract can be quite beneficial, particularly if when making it apart of the class protocol on a daily basis.

## CHAPTER V:

### Creating Opportunities for Engagement through Creative Drama with Urban Students

#### Introduction

This Chapter focuses on creative drama activities that engaged my students in the process of learning. I begin by explaining my perceptions about the power of engagement and what it means in relation to my urban students participating in creative drama. I further delineate throughout this Chapter my analysis of my self-reflections, video observations, and journal writings, all of which speak directly to specific re-enactments in the classroom and how creative dramatic exercises were used to support African-American learning styles and cultural identities. I demonstrate the achievement of this engagement by describing actual classroom episodes that exemplified these moments of engagement. I further provide a rationale for these occurrences based on how my students responded in those engaging moments, which came from daily classroom interactions, focus group sessions, and informal interviews.

A great portion of this Chapter is an analysis of my role in implementing creative drama that provided my students an opportunity to be engaged. This Chapter also argues that *engagement* is significant particularly for urban students when involved in creative dramatics and can help build their motivation to learn and expand their ability to express their emotions. Some of the highlighted exercises demonstrated that selected students Jose and Thomas, with very low self-concept and poor ability to express themselves, once engaged, increased their level of engagement

and were then able to embrace contextual constructs such as trust-building, individualism, and communication development. This chapter then turns to how I as teacher was engaged to become a better teacher and to offer more students chances to be engaged. There were several strategies that I implemented that evoked striking responses from my students as well as through my own observations that revealed several creative drama exercises direct link to certain skills being practiced and thus enhanced. The Chapter concludes with an analysis of how certain components of my process of selecting creative drama exercises were carefully adjusted to fit the needs of my urban students.

### **Discovering power in engagement**

For purposes of this discussion, *engagement* is operationally defined in the context of its relationship to creative drama. Engagement is an intangible emotional and physical process that leads to quite understandable feelings that Bolton (1976) identifies as set-out by a teacher as necessary to teach steps or other particular manners of moving in a direction that makes connections with students. Some of the key attributes of engagement for me throughout this study were expression of emotions, strong physical and mental presence, and verbal and social participation in the ritual of the creative process.

*Engagement* is a predominant theme that resonated throughout my journaling, self-reflections, observations of video segments of classroom sessions, and, of course, responses and feedback from students. I have discovered this theme through self-study and close examination of various aspects of my chronicles in the context of

leading creative drama sessions. My claim is that creative dramatics sets the stage for this type of meaningful occurrence of the expression of emotions and increased verbal and social participation that were made through various creative drama exercises. The creative drama exercises and theatrical strategies which deployed elements of music, movement, drama, visual art, poetry, and discussion, created an atmosphere for trust and personal connection—*engagement*—to occur. Another vital claim is that engagement was the element that attracted students more closely to the context and motivated them to learn more and understand while making connections with themselves and the world on a socio-emotional level (Bolton, 1976).

I also viewed engagement as a process that helped my students make a connection to the content, which was self-concept and self-expression; and they also were drawn closer to one another in the process while observing their peers just as engaged in the process as they were. The content of self-concept and self-expression is embedded in the overall curriculum of understanding the journey of Harriet Tubman. Most of my students, especially Jose and Terry, had great difficulty expressing their voice, inner emotions, thoughts, and staying on-task. My lesson plan set-out to capture the students' understanding of their own sense of tapping into their own stories and then sharing with others. Self-concept and self-expression are the ability to embrace oneself as a positive and capable being from the projection of vocal abilities to the processing of feelings that can be expressed in an imaginative and empathetic manner.

## **Creative Drama a strong modality to engage urban youth**

I noticed at the onset of the study that moving my students from the traditional classroom experience to a creative structure was going to be a challenge; but after a couple of rounds of the early creative exercises, they were already showing signs of engagement. They were vocalizing ideas and becoming more socially inclined with one another in a positive manner. This section explains how as the leader of creative drama I set the ritual for students to be engaged. It also provides a rationale for why creative drama should be used in the classroom and acts as a strong and appropriate model for urban students.

At the beginning of this study, I became keenly aware of the low self-esteem and low affect that urban youth present on a daily basis. I noticed that many students entered the class with bowed heads, saddened facial expressions, laden with anxieties about academic achievement and peer pressure—not to mention those who appeared unkempt, who hadn't eaten breakfast, or were just not interested in school at all. On the other hand, I got the ones who woke me up in the mornings and came in with high-energy, smiles, singing, hugs, jokes, hungry to learn—present with books and pens in-hand. Unfortunately, the latter groups were few in number in comparison to those students who seemed disenfranchised on a day-to-day basis.

It was the third day of our sessions together and there was an automatic imbalance in the classroom environment within the first ten minutes of class, and I was left with a Herculean responsibility to teach. From one end of the room, I had absolute chaos and on the other end, solemnity. And somewhere in the middle there were those who appeared indifferent because they had great difficulty balancing their

attention span among competing stimuli and difficulty finding motivation to be in school to learn. They seemed to benefit from the creative exercises in a number of ways. The engagement that comes from basic free-play moments encourages consistent participation, group identity, and loyalty.

Having viewed the video of how my students initially walked-in and communicated with one another, I was drawn to the fact that these highly interactive and participatory exercises grabbed them right where they were without judgment, and they were engaged in the process. An example of one of the creative drama exercises that significantly engaged my students was called “add-on-story.” The “add-on-story” engaged them to listen more deeply and reflect on what their classmates created on the spot. I posed another question that received telling responses from my students. Their responses revealed to me just how engaged they were and how they were able to recall the story and make sense of a very abstract story.

**Self Reflective Note:** I encouraged everyone to form a circle. I stood in the center of the circle. I asked each student to begin telling a story, explaining that when I clap my hands, the student to the right of that person picks up where the other left off. After the second student continued the story for a while, I clapped again, passing the story to the next person. Everyone contributed, creating a story as a class. My teaching objectives were

To stimulate imagination and promote creative thinking

To encourage students to explore their expressive language skills

To encourage students to be alert and attentive and promote receptive language and listening skills.

**Jose:** *The story was, you know, all over we talked about the hallway in our school and then the streets we walked in. I don't like the dark so I kind of, you know.*

**Me:** *It's ok, Jose, share it, ok?*

**Jose:** *(He raises his shoulder as if to say no, so move on) “I can't say” (with a smile).*

**Me:** *You guys did a great job. I mean if we could give our story a title, what could it be?*

**Thomas:** *“Nobody Bothers Me.”*

**Student:** *“Words Can Hurt.”*

**Sheree:** *“Monsters and Tigers and Bears Oh My” (with a little laugh as she looks on her other peers laughing; and even I laughed.)*

Below are examples of data that exemplified actual classroom moments and my intentions, along with transcribed data that indicated just how engaging the students found the various techniques employed. The data were captured because they really demonstrated other students, similarly to Jose, being very involved and connected to content. This next set of data captured other students’ responses and how they were engaged based on “add-on-story.” I have used “add-on-story” to address many objectives. I have used it as a review, to brainstorm a new subject, and particularly to encourage storytelling, language development, and presentation skills.

“Add-on-story” was an exercise designed to encourage participants to tell original stories. I always encouraged my students to stick to stories that have truth and meaning to their lives. I intentionally introduced the open-ended exercise so that every student had a chance to create, listen, and share his/her own imaginative twist to the story. The only qualification I made was that we needed to make it a realistic story with the subject being a day in the life of school kids.

My students showed strong engagement in their participation in the discussion after exercises that spoke to their willingness to share, express, and project their understanding of both the context and content. I was able to get my students through this exercise to start to become more critical about stories and to develop their own perspective about their own stories.

**Me:** *How did you feel about this activity?*

**Jose:** *“It was hard to make something up.”*

**Sheree:** *I thought it was fun.”*

**Me:** *What skills did you have to use to follow along with the story effectively?*

**Student:** *It was cool creating a story and hearing what everyone else had to add to it.”*

**Student:** *I needed to focus and concentrate.*

**Jose:** *I really had to listen.*

**Me:** *What tools did we need to make this story interesting?*

**Thomas:** *I needed to be open-minded*

**Sheree:** *Our Imagination*

**Student:** *Creativity*

**Terry:** *Shoot a sense of humor*

**Me:** *Can anyone remember the main idea of the story?*

**Jose:** *I think it was to protect his friend from other people saying mean things about him and Mike wanted him to know that even when he feels like scared and stuff he was not alone.*

**Student:** *It was about standing up for yourself, not listening to what other people might say even when it hurts.*

**Terry:** *They were beefing that’s all; they were just trying to survive like us. That’s why the other guy, um, Daryl, was like you got to at least act like you’re not afraid.*

**Me:** *Where was the setting placed in the beginning and how did it move to a dream state?*

**Sheree:** *I don’t know how we started out from school being over and going outside to crazy stuff under peoples bed at night back to walking home from school with your friends and people hating on you.*

**Jose:** *The story was you know all over we talked about the hallway in our school and then the streets we walked in I don’t like the dark so I kind of you know.*

**Me:** *It’s ok, Jose, share it, ok?*

**Jose:** *He raises his shoulder as if to say, “No, I can’t say, so move on,” with a smile.*

**Me:** *You guys did a great job. I mean if we could give our story a title, what could it be?*

**Thomas:** *“Nobody Bothers Me.”*

**Student:** *“Words Can Hurt.”*

**Sheree:** *‘Monsters and Tigers and Bears Oh My’ (with a little laugh as she looks on her other peers laughing; and even I laughed.)*

I discovered that certain creative drama exercises were most successful in engaging urban youth. I briefly describe what I call my guaranteed cadre of highly engaged moments, consisting of five exercises that worked in this study. They were

(1) “All around the City”; (2) Zip, Zap, Zop; (3) Add-On Story; (4) Detective; and (5) Team Count Down (see Appendix H). Many of these very same creative drama exercises can be found in the literature; but based on my targeted population; I tailored them specifically for my urban students. Later in this chapter is an illustration of this “Fruit Salad” which I decided to call “All around the City.” An example of what the next section illustrates is how I transitioned from the typical way of doing “Fruit Salad” to “All around the City,” described in more detail in Appendix H.

The directions for the creative drama exercises are generally uniformly described, but what is usually missing is a description of methodological-outcome of how I actually led the exercises, what techniques were demonstrated, and how my students responded to the activity.

After reviewing videotapes my work, I was able to list some specific techniques that coincided with what Heathcote (1976) calls *registras*. I also had a chance to consider other details, such as the immediate reactions of the students, questions that were posed, and how I, too, have changed and added embellishment to the actual creative drama exercise that is so effective with urban students. In other words, my self-reflections and notes have enabled me to be descriptive about specific strategies that have had winning results of engagement with my students. (see Appendix H for other detailed examples).

### **Teacher’s reflections on setting the space for engagement to happen**

In watching the many video segments, I saw clearly that segment number one brought to life the images of my students being engaged. This section illustrates the

significance of some of the ways in which I analyzed and fostered the engagement of my students through creative play. The data informed me that by looking at how they shared emotions, attempted to be in-tune to the process, started to show individualism, and were attentive with a strong physical and mental presence were key types of engaged interactions that happened in my classroom.

**Me:** *Remember that during fruit salad, there's to be no pushing, bumping, shoving, tripping, and blocking of chairs. You cannot move to the same seat that you got out of and you cannot move to the seats right next to you.*

After everyone got the concept of doing “fruit salad,” I moved them into what I call “*All around the City*.” I modeled it first in an engaging fashion. I used energy in my voice, I expressed emotions of being excited and stood up in front of them with a strong physical and mental strength as I provided directives.

**Me:** *Move if you have ever been on the honor roll. If this pertains to anyone, get up and move to another seat. Whoever is left stuck in the middle is the leader and must do the next call.*

#### **Video Observation Note:**

**Me:** *If you are stuck in the middle during All around the City, whatever you say has to also pertain to you. For instance, you cannot tell people to move if they have ever been on the honor roll, if you yourself have never been on the honor roll.*

I provided the class with other examples, such as “*move if you are wearing blue; switch places*.” Then everyone wearing blue stands up and switches to another chair. One person is always left standing in the center. “*That person is now it*.” Now it was Sheree’s turn to say one thing that was true about herself, repeating the same format.

**Sheree:** *Move if you are wearing glasses (her peers started to move). “Switch places.”*

After several rounds of the game, I raise the stakes by saying, “Now tell us something true about yourself that we can’t see.” For example, “Move If you were born in this city, switch places.” When the participants got the hang of it, I increased the risk factor by saying, “*Now tell us something that is true about yourself that we might not know.*” Then I said, “*Move if you ever felt afraid.*” Only a few moved and switched places. I noticed myself constantly reinforcing the rules in a coach-like manner. “*And remember if someone says ‘All around the city,’ everyone has to get up and switch chairs.*”

The objectives and skills practiced are to 1. increase awareness of others, 2. build rapport and stimulate senses, 3. increase positive peer interaction, and 4. boost morale. Some of my questions used after the warm-up exercise during the processing phase were 1. What are some of the things you learned about somebody in the group? 2. What do you have in common with someone in the group? 3. How did it feel when you were left standing all alone without a seat and had to stand in the middle?

### **Video Observation Note**

The class was seated on chairs in a circle. I continued to stand in the center and took in all the kids’ various reactions by breathing. Some were still laughing, catching their breath, and talking to one another about the exercise. I was impressed with their quietness and stillness, even those who resisted earlier when I started to talk about the learned skills that were needed in order to be successful in the exercise. I documented in several moments of classroom sessions that it was essential that I as the leader of the exercise model the exercise and participate right alongside my students. One main self-reflection was that when I stated the directions, my physical stance was reassuring, almost maternal, yet firm and resolute when processing the exercise.

**Self-Reflective Practice:** While the students were engaged in the creative drama exercises, I remained in-tune with them. For example, I was able to see those fully participating, those who were resistant at-first getting up from their chairs, and other students refereeing me to see if I was playing the game fair and square.

In viewing the video, I was able to become more reflective about my practice and able to see some things for the first time regarding my students.

**Video Observation Note:**

It is important to note that there are very seldom times when my students resist this activity; and if they did, I can help correct it or let the students assist as well. For me as a leader, it is detrimental when I am not attuned to the energies and attributes of the students participating with such a physical and often loud activity. Safety is always in the forefront of my mind, but being in-tune with the students allowed me to hear them in other forms outside the laughter, the loud comments, the yelling-out of suggestions, and those apprehensive about letting-go. Secondly, being in-tune with the students allows me to know when I needed to introduce other levels, directions or modifications to the exercise. I usually stopped the exercise in two ways: I purposely, without letting my students know, get stuck out in the middle; I stop it at the apex of their excitement. As the leader, it was important to establish an element of suspense and to cut it off at a point where they still wanted more. That got them wanting for more. It was almost like presenting them with a feeling of a cliffhanger. Most of my students, as emphasized in my journals, loved movies, video games, and television, so high-impact activities work well—but even better if I leave them hungry for more. The feeling is the same as the one I got when I used to watch “Dynasty,” the old TV show, when the commercial came-on just when the storyline was getting good.

After making my video observations, I noticed similar findings in my self-reflections, which I documented after live sessions:

*Me: I then interjected by praising my kids: “Give yourselves a hand for being so good at following instructions, for focusing on your peers and for having fun.”*

*Terry’s Response: “Come on, Ms. Carmen, let’s keep going, one more time, why we gotta stop now? That was fun: I’m feeling you, Ms. Carmen.”*

What was so significant about this type of warm-up was that now the students had an idea of the basic concept of the activity, which is very similar to musical chairs; they then start to take-on a little more ownership of the exercise. I witnessed students who were apprehensive or seemed nervous about being left-out in the middle of the circle wanting to pose a new category under the “move-if…” statement; others

immediately related it to their personal lives, and a few may start to overpower the situation by making themselves lose a chair and stay in the middle with pre-meditated statements of “move-if...” in “All around the City.” At this point my teaching objective is to expand the students’ social and emotional sense of being and knowing—a critical moment for me as their teacher because I am getting them to experience hearing directions, responding to the rhythms in the activity, and being able to respond in a true kinesthetic manner in front of their peers. Some of my students have great difficulty following directions, and this activity does increase that skill of responding to directives; but this activity, although highly energetic and fun, does provide the students the opportunity to exercise their social and emotional skills. Furthermore, the students in their individual calls offered each other a chance to explore cultural identities and spiritual connections, and they started to develop a sense of community in a noisy yet controlled and safe situation.

Having had several conversations with administrators, I am keenly aware that some of them might say that “the drama stuff” is taking time from learning because all the students are doing is having fun and that doesn’t help increase test scores. This line of thinking is so far from the reality I have attempted to bring to the classroom. In focusing on just the technique and structure of the exercise, there are several ways to make this exercise applicable to other learning objectives. For example, there were several times in the class when my young people were so familiar with the exercise that we were able to explore our reading assignments and the central themes that dealt directly with the subject matter of slavery and oppression. Once students have done their assignments and listened to the discussions in the classroom, they are able to do

very well in the exercise. The fascinating aspect of this creative drama strategy is that if students are not familiar with the subject at hand they cannot really fake what they don't know and therefore cannot fully enjoy participating in the exercise.

One day we did this same exercise, and I did "All around the City" and used as my thematic base homelessness, which came from one the storylines and discussion when getting them to understand the various angles of oppression. My students did so well with creating calls based on the story and moving to other people's calls on the floor. Interestingly enough, those who did not do the assignment were able to move on the parts that addressed personal understanding of homelessness but not to specific calls; however, one of the great qualities in this exercise is that it acted as a review for the ones who did do the assignment and listened during class discussions and informed others of what they had missed.

**Me:** *Ok. Remember the theme is homelessness and we really need to keep in mind the article we read. I'll start. Are you ready? Move if you thought the antagonist in the story could have been you?*

### **Examples of Students' Calls**

*Move if you felt bad for the protagonist....*

*Move if you wanted to get the Mayor for closing the shelters...*

*Move if you know all the names of the characters...*

*Move if you have ever treated a homeless person mean before?*

*Move if you know a homeless person?*

*Move if the couple really wanted to be homeless?*

*Move if you ever given to homeless people before?*

*Movie if you know what Ms. Carmen called homelessness?*

Of course I got a lot of “All around the City” that day, but there were some other outstanding ways of processing the story that truly let me know they read the material; for example, “Move if the law about children and mothers going to separate homes from men should change if you have a father?”

**Self-Reflection of Practice:** This was a touchy call for me to observe with my class because the majority of my students did not know their fathers, and those who knew their fathers did not have them living with them. I had to make sure that going back to this question not to open-up old wounds but just addressed the different opinions to try to help them find closure. Here is another of example of my taking responsibility for areas that the creative process will stir-up. I love this because not only do my kids love this exercise but they want to be part of it so much that I get a high rate of assignment completion and nice, well-rounded conversations that move from what the text says and what their heart feels on the matter.

When administrators have doubts about my reaching academic goals, I typically simply show them how my students are so engaged that I tend to see the goals and objectives that I aim for as being of academic importance. In regard to creative drama, Wilder (1977) writes that we can’t measure most of this (socio-emotional, communication, self-concept and academic growth) or prove its values on a national test score or change people who have other ways of teaching deeply ingrained in them; however, recognition of the values of this kind of Drama-in-Education is spreading (p.3).

### **Engagement through Creative Dramatics fosters African-American learning styles**

The data led me to link together relevant research that helped me clarify significant evidence and supported my argument about just how pertinent it is to have

creative drama integrated in urban classrooms. The type of strong engagement levels that took place attracted my students on emotional and spiritual levels. Initially, after reviewing and recalling my teaching practices, I soon realized that there was a huge overlap in what I was doing in using drama and some of the fundamental principles that are already embedded in urban culture and quite similar to my teaching style, the “black learning styles”—spirituality, harmony, movement, nerve, affect, communalism, expressive individualism, morality, and social time perspective (Boykins, 1983).

I was immediately taken-in by the literature on movement, communalism, experience, and individualism; that all changed after I did the study and went back over my notes.

“All around the City,” one of the most popular creative warm-ups I do with all of my students even in the most difficult classroom environment, evokes student praise. So after analyzing my practices and juxtaposing them with the well-known standards of Heathcote and Boal, I think the reason this exercise has such great outcomes is that it embodies simultaneously elements of surprise, suspense, and imagination. Almost all of my warm-ups are done in a circular formation so they are intensely communal. And the drama evokes a spirit in the students to become very expressive in an individualistic manner.

Again, this study revealed more salient concepts than I had thought I would find. The videotapes helped me see other aspects of my teaching interactions when using creative drama. *Spirituality* was present in the dramatic warm-ups. The name-game exercises are always precarious as to how people speak and move; but more

importantly, it is the time when students are asked to share their names and share a bit of their own personal stories, and most of the time I do not have to initiate words about God, church, or fellowship. Someone will start the dialogue interwoven into the exercise, and it takes on a whole new energy.

However, what the videotape showed me was that as fun and physical as “All around the City” is, a couple of students placed calls on the floor that motivated their peers to think in a spiritual way. For example, “never if, you sign on the junior choir, more-if you like to go to church and more-if you like Kirk Franklin” (a gospel singer).

I never knew that part of my leading certain strategies involved *harmony* until I reviewed the videotapes. *Harmony* on my part was overlooked in the study; and after much reading and reflecting on my data, I learned that the harmony that swept through the classroom was an unexpected, unanticipated, quiet yet very clear quality present in almost all the warm-ups. I found that my role was to make harmony of the discord between drama (not real) and what was real on both an academic and a personal level.

This sense of harmony was important for my urban students, but harmony as a quality is pertinent to Black learning styles and supports Black academic success. It was just as important for the leader to hear a harmonious spirit when interacting with the drama techniques as it is for the students. I came to understand this type of sound because it was filled with positive energy and the tones of children all yielding bright affects and sounds of joy. Sometimes the sound was balanced by other quiet students, who were less verbal, but their behavior added to the harmonious process and even in

their silence I heard the harmony.

*Movement* needs little explanation since I have discussed the mechanics of the power of creative drama in general and specifically the “All around the City” exercise.

During the research, I had been enthralled with the idea that my students, who come from many hardships and disappointments, love to play. The element of surprise, suspense, and the unknown ignited my special populations in urban settings across the board.

This past summer, I made some reflections in my notes about a past student who was considered a troubled youth at the time and was highly medicated. He stopped me in the grocery store and behind me said, “banana, pear, apple,” rapping it out in my direction. I turned my head, looking over my left shoulder, and I recognized his face and said his name and he smiled at me and we both broke into a big laugh. “Oh, Ms. Carmen, you’re still doing that stuff, that was fun. We had a good time.” This young man proceeded to tell me that he passed his GED test and is training with Federal Express. Although this might appear a sidebar to my study, it is extremely relevant. This young man, while I was working with him, was labeled an out-of-control child. Most of the other teachers could not work with him, but the drama experience, not I *per se*, connected with him in such a profound way that he was able to respect those once-memorized lines and had a positive physical and emotional response to the dramatic activity.

Movement as a designated quality that Boykins offers as a prime component to be included in reaching African-American students really brings attention to the many dramatic activities that I led, even after the warm-ups. The movement aspects

motivated my students because many were naturally rhythmic and soulful beings, and thus any movement warm-up grabbed them at their very core even when they resisted the rare directions. But even when that occurred, there were moments when their peers and I as their teacher were so engaged they couldn't help but fall into the play.

### **Self-Reflection Practice:**

The whole classroom was jumping, smiles were contagious, and signifying had decreased, students lent helping hands to one another as well as the teacher, and the one or two who had resisted with all their might started to respond to the impulse to add to this jumping moment. Today was a great day!

There was something for me as the leader of the exercise that I did not fully understand until seeing some of the interactions on videotape. For example, I never make it acceptable for students not to participate. This was a conscious decision, but I did not always understand the spillover at the time. However, in video segment #1, I was able to observe just how important it was to move my own body around the activity itself, to make physical contact with students (this can be risky; a handshake, a high-five, a shoulder tap, and student-initiated hugs), to verbally encourage 100% participation, and to provide positive eye-contact (that at times may have looked stern, but eyes can speak more volumes than mouthing things)—all of which worked very well with urban learners.

I encouraged verve in the drama and strongly considered it even in the planning and after the session when I wrote-out my thoughts, feelings, and observations. For example, in preparing my lessons, I often thought about what would work for different personality types and especially their preferences in relation to their dominant learning style. Then, of course, during the session, there were times I made certain that all students were with me so that I could help them receive, give,

and maintain information.

### **Engaged students were motivated to learn**

The use of “All around the City” helped to demonstrate my findings regarding how creative drama can set-up for learners of varying learning styles a chance to connect with the exercise on some level. Those who are logical and think first are attracted to the tactile style of my giving directions and then entrusting the students with what the expectations were that fed their cognitive skills. Another technique can quickly become boring with games and exercises, especially if the activity has no purpose or appears to be only a pass-the-time exercise. So for me as the leader, it was vital to keep it purposeful, at times changing the themes/categories and by making the goals/objectives clear while referring to them throughout the exercise if needed.

Some learners respond very well to something like “All around the City” because of the call-and-response strategy it uses. Visual learners engaged not so much with visual aids but more by observing the formatting and by creating alternative strategies in order to be successful in the exercise.

Gardner (2000) labels the kinesthetic as one of the multiple intelligences. This mode of perception is explored in the hands-on nature of the exercise itself, a physical exercise. This mode connects with those who like to have fun first, then learn, those who feel it, then learn about, and definitely with those who love to take risks.

*Affect* was also an important part of my technique. Since I regarded emotions as important in how I operated in my own life, I made it a large part of my drama warm-ups. I made several notes on how the warm-up was the heart of creative drama

sessions; it was really the emotions and the interpersonal and intra-personal affects that connected my students to specific learning areas.

This study revealed that the young females I observed embraced the idea of exploring feelings more than did the guys. However, several times in videotape and in my field notes, I observed my young male students saying things like, “You feel me.” I feel that these slang expressions from the urban culture fit right in with what I would encourage all students, but especially my boys, to feel, open their hearts, and share their thoughts in an emotional manner.

As a leader of creative drama, it also was important for me to underline the fifth quality presented as pivotal by Boykins (1983). I think that one of the main ideas behind my thinking why imagination and playful and competitive warm-ups were mandatory in order to move into any aspect of the main drama storyline was that urban learners really came into my class with very strong emotions. There were even some students who had been hurt or disengaged, especially in school, for so long that it was harder for them to be open to positive feelings that represented that bright affect I noted in my sessions.

Outside the vocal techniques that I used to communicate messages, I think a great deal of what I now know is about learning what teaching styles and techniques support these moments that seem unpredictable, but it was important for the leader to at least try the exercises, to listen not just with ears but with the heart and soul.

Another fascinating finding revealed by videotape was the idea of *tradition*. I have always known in the very core of my being and from my many different classroom experiences that tradition is important for my students. I treated it as an

understood fact by endeavoring to design creative drama strategies to help support the learners in a way that enabled them to feel that I worked to create *safety*. I am always mindful that I need to make my drama experiences safe enough for all students to find their entry and departure points sufficiently to allow openly honest discourse.

It is ironic because in one of my journal entries, I write, “*The kids are so distant they seem loud, unhappy, and there is a feeling of uneasiness in the air so that I need to calm this tension (Journal #4)*.” I expounded on this earlier; then it dawned on me that I was trying to come-up with an exercise that would help neutralize the climate.

Harmony too was facilitated so easily in the warm-up “All around the City” because it gave the learners a specific task with a certain amount of time to accomplish it and gave the learners something they could connect with given the context of the exercise.

### **Engagement through the eyes of Jose and Thomas**

*Engagement* was a salient find for me because once I used certain strategies in class, I noticed a much more attentive and participatory classroom environment. This section discusses how two very different students were engaged in the creative process and became more socially, emotionally, and vocally present in their academics. Creative drama exercises acted as a way for me to grab my students where they were and take them to a new place of knowing and expression; and the evidence clearly indicated that the ritual processes of creative strategies increased students’ sense of self-concept and self-expression.

An important example is Jose, who exemplified how once engaged in the creative process he was able to break-out of his shyness and articulate his questions

and responses in front of his peers. Jose was an extremely quiet young man who started-out in the class saying only one or two words, like “yes,” “no,” “I agree” or “OK.” Jose’s engagement was not only drastic but, I later discovered, carried over to others of his classes. He was able to articulate that he became more self-confident in the process because the creative exercises helped him practice skills such as sharing emotions, experiencing trust among peers, and being able to accept his strengths in the process through the sensorial exercises that caused him to be more self-reflective and by examining other characters such as Harriet Tubman.

After I started to know my story, Jose’s story came pouring-out not only by my own awareness but also by other teachers and students who also watched him open-up and become an active learner. Jose was able to retain information about the various exercises, such as the directions of certain exercises word-for-word, and he was able to discuss the skills that were practiced and improved during later sessions. When asked to review such of our terms as self-esteem, poor self-imaging, the importance of eye contact, and the importance of voice control and projection, he raised his hand and was able to shout the correct answers.

**Jose:** *You said that eye contact shows that we respect others and ourselves and that people who are confident in themselves can make positive eye contact with one another.*

**Me:** *Can you give me an example of one of the exercises that we have done in the past when discussing self-concept.*

**Jose:** *(without raising his hand, yells-out, and he never speaks out-loud) Like when we did the game zip, zap zop we had to make sure we looked at the person in order to*

*give what's, that's um...um, clear messages like to look right at the person who you want to send the message to. . . .*

As we went further into the content area after reviewing self-concept and self-expression, it was easier for him to remember other key terms in the sessions such as *oppression, oppressor, freedom, protagonist, and antagonist.*

Jose was the type of student who was very shy and seemed to daydream during class time. This affect was evident in all of his classes until he started to get attracted to creative drama. Jose was known not to do his class work; and if he did start it, he would not complete it. He was known as the slow one by his peers. Jose never seemed interested in his class work or other classmates and was not part of after-school activities. After three of my different forty-five minute sessions with creative drama techniques, Jose went from being disconnected to being connected to both his class work and his peer group. He told me during a conversation that he was amazed that he enjoyed my class so much.

During our informal interview, Jose said that he wondered why oppressed people seemed to repeat habits that keep them in the same type of place. I was confused with what he was asking me. So I asked him, "I am not sure what you are speaking of, Jose; what habits?" Interestingly enough, he was speaking of the oppressed character's lack of ability to change his situation: Jose said, "Like me and family, the language, if you know people can treat you mean why not try to go somewhere and learn English." I saw Jose relating the definitions and characters in the class to his home situation and he seemed frustrated when speaking. I later learned that Jose was the first person in his immediate family to speak English and

was often used as the mediator for his family. Jose was able to express his feelings and verbalize them to me while processing the new terms on a socio-emotional level. I was impressed with him because he did not go into blaming those who seemed to oppress his family and the systems around him: he was so engaged that he was motivated to start to think and reflect on possible alternatives.

Jose's engagement was visible to me in how he physically and emotionally changed over the course of the thirty sessions. He went from saying no words to asking me questions to answering questions. Jose's engagement relating to self-concept and self-expression was quite evident in how transformed he appeared to me. He went from walking into my class with a flat affect to having such a bright affect that he even started to take-on a role in the class as the organizer of my spatial arrangement. I was later informed half-way into my sessions that Jose was so withdrawn that teachers in group meetings actually discussed ways to reach Jose so that he could complete assignments and stay on-task long enough to at least have a dialogue that would express his strengths and weaknesses. However, somewhere during the creative drama sessions, Jose had a "moment of engagement."

I remember that I came to believe that it happened because I could feel it with my heart. It was during the creative exercise of zip, zap, zap that he became so connected to the rhythm, the physical movements, and the competition in the exercise. Jose wasn't the only one engaged, but his engagement was illuminating. It really appeared to me that he had awakened. He just came to life: his very small and slanted eyes were stretched wide-open, he kept laughing out with the joy of experiencing the process, and he was fascinated with trying to speak the words

correctly.

**Jose:** (Raises his hand) *Zip, sip is that right, Ms. Carmen? It's hard because I think I can't say it "sip, zap, szop."*

**Me:** *It's o.k. to say the "s" sound for now but I need all of us to work on that hard "z" sound. Diction is important, everyone, especially if we are trying to work on having a positive image; but for now, let's just work on understanding and getting the sequence down.*

This exchange indicated that Jose was interested in getting the exercise right and open enough to stumble in front of his peers because he was engaged and was able to practice voice and diction work by changing how he positioned his mouth and moved his tongue. It was hard for him not to say the *s* sound but his effort to strive for the *z* sound was commendable. I remember saying to the class *"Ok. Everyone get into a circle."*

I introduced the activity to the class by giving them the pattern of the words used in this order—zip, zap, zop. I repeated the pattern several times and then asked the students to repeat it back:

**Me:** When I say *Zip* you say....when I say *Zap* you say...when I say *Zop* you say *ZIP/ZAP/ZOP* (call-and-response).

I modeled the hand-movement and eye-contact that must be used to deliver the words. Each student takes a word and throws it at someone else in the circle. The student then continues the sequence, building momentum until someone gets confused and says the wrong word.

**Me:** *Remember, it goes Zip, Zap, Zop.*

After a few practice runs, I began eliminating students who said a word out of sequence. This exercise went on until all but one student was eliminated and the one student left standing beside me was a quiet young lady who was so proud that she got to the end:

Me: Give our winner a hand, everybody.

In the beginning of my sessions, I used several creative exercise in order to stimulate my students' senses, to build cognitive skills, and basically to promote focus and concentration.

After the exercise, I processed it and asked the question:

**Me:** *What tools did you have to use in playing this exercise?*

Before this exercise, Jose never raised his hand to answer or ask questions.

After this exercise, he started to raise his hand and answered with a low voice but with a very happy-yet-shy look on his face. He was glowing to me. I remembered that when he raised his hand, not only was it a revelation to me but also most of his classmates were shocked. One student said to me, "Ms. Carmen, he don't know nothing." On the contrary, it was quite the opposite. Jose had a lot to say. It might have been said softly, but it was said and the class was happy for him. Below Jose was able to ignore his peer in a positive manner and continued to answer the question although he was interrupted. This demonstrates the power in how once a child is engaged, he obtains the information and then even starts to identify his own sense of understanding. Jose's comment that is taken from the data reveals his ability to mirror the content of self-concept and self-expression. I was able to make this claim because he demonstrated some of the aspects of engagement that takes place in the drama exercises. Jose's ability to express his feelings and his willingness to want to be there physically with his body and mind showed how attracted he was in the exercise and his will to get it right.

**Jose:** *A lot of focus; we had to pay attention.*

**Student:** *Concentration!*

**Student:** *Eye contact, Ms. Carmen; but some people did not want to look so they didn't have to say anything and get out.*

**Me:** *What did you all have to do in order to stay in the game?*

**Jose:** *I had to be quick and stay focused; man, that was hard.*

**Sheree:** *I had to listen.*

**Student:** *I had to take my time.*

**Me:** *What caused you to lose focus you think?*

**Student:** *When the game started going faster, I lost focus.*

**Student:** *Once people started getting eliminated, I lost it too.*

**Thomas:** *Allowing myself to get distracted by other people that had already gotten out of the game made me lose my focus.*

Most of my students in the beginning did not exemplify comfort at being engaged in creative, imaginative, and physical ways. Similar to Jose, they started to embrace their fears and moved to trusting the creative process with some of its basic pre-requisites for being engaged. Jose's engagement was so intense in that he was expressing feelings more and appeared more motivated to learn. Jose's transformation was so apparent that he was the first of my students in whom engagement with the creative drama process was evident to other teachers. He was shining in his academic courses. His engagement was evidenced by his way of expressing his thoughts vocally and by his greatly increased participation. Other teachers started to take notice, and his grades went-up drastically that quarter. He didn't just go from a "D" to "C"; he went from a "D" to a "B+" in English and from a "C" to an "A" in Health because he started to take more interest in his class work and seemed more comfortable and more trusting around his peers. Such interest and comfort were supporting attributes of engagement. Most of my students had low levels of engagement with class work, participation in discussions, peer interaction, tolerance, and school attendance.

**August 3, 2006:** *I wrote, "I am rarely amazed at the effectiveness of the creative*

*exercises as I've come to rely heavily on this approach—and its success in practice. In fact, I probably wouldn't know what to do if the warm-ups didn't work. However, on this morning for some unknown reason, I was amazed. I could not believe just how fast the designated warm-up helped the students to connect with the creative technique and the expediency it afforded me in building a rapport with the students.*

*The interactive and innovative exercises in particular allowed me to tap into the young peoples ways of expressing their emotions and themselves socially in front of their peers. The engagement, albeit intangible, is quite evident on the faces of my students and in the discourse immediately afterwards. Evidence of solid engagement during the processing phase and in the commitment persuaded me to keep the activity going-on for the whole class period. I was blown off my feet today, and that's a good thing."*

As evident in my journal writing, the concept of engagement was central to my practice. In addition, my students also emphasized their amazement at the creative drama exercises. Captured in one of the informal interview sessions, Jose made an interesting statement:

*Jose: "We've never done anything like this before. I had so much fun. I didn't want it to stop. We were, like, learning too, you know, and we were all doing it. Shoooot, that never happens.*

This comment was taken in an informal interview one day after class when another teacher brought to my attention that this child speaks so little that the teacher thought he did not understand English. Jose even started to complete his classroom assignments in other classes, whereas before he was slow to do his work and appeared extremely withdrawn.

**Self-Reflective Practice:** Jose was alive and willing to share today. After the interview, we closed with his asking me a question, "*Ms. Carmen, when are we going to do this again?*"

I was thrilled to know that for him this meant his wanting to continue to experience the creative process of exploring new thoughts and ideas about self and others in a safe and fun manner. Jose was particularly very much inclined to do zip, zap, zop

over and over again if he could even with his inability to get that hard z sound out of his mouth. The creative drama so engaged Jose that he transformed from saying very little-to-nothing in-class to becoming more vocal and better able to express his thoughts in class. As I stated earlier, Jose went from saying one- or two-word answers to forming complete sentences and asking questions. His engagement was quite transformative. He started out as one who just sat there and stared into space and became someone who was so attentive that sometimes he couldn't stop discussing his feelings and opinions.

In addition, there was Thomas, who also transformed from having little-to-no attention span to staying on-task and completing both his class work and homework assignments. As stated in Chapter IV, Thomas was known in the school for being aggressive. Thomas was placed in my class after just coming-off suspension for fighting in the hallway and being caught with a box knife in his pocket. He has a very short temper and attention span, loves to get-up right in the middle of his peers or even a teacher when reading a passage, and has the habit of joking and hurting his classmates' feelings.

Thomas' moment of engagement happened on several levels. When he came into a room for the first couple of sessions, he walked in like he was upset with everybody and always positioned himself in the room like "Yeah, I'm the man, and you better leave me alone." My experiences with students like Thomas have shown me that that type of attitude does not impel one to learn. Of course, my goal was to strive for 100% participation and it was a part of our agreed contract.

I took notice that my teaching style was to embrace all of my students with a

well-structured and positive tone when engaging the students in creative drama. The first exercise consisted of students' simply stating their names and describing something about themselves through pantomime. The name of the exercise was "The Name and Hobby." I had my students form a circle. Then I demonstrated by first stating my name and then pantomiming something that I enjoy doing; i.e., cooking, exercising, playing video games, napping, *etc.* I never *say* what I like to do—I just pantomime it. My teaching goal here is for other students in the group to be able to figure-out on their own what it is that I enjoy doing and then imitate it. For example," *My name is Ms. Carmen and I like to (pantomime dancing).*" Everyone in the group said it in unison as in a type of cheer rhythm, "*Her name is Ms. Carmen and she likes to (everyone imitated my pantomime).*" I allowed each student to take a turn. Again, some of my teaching objectives at the time included

- To break the ice.
- To get to know and build rapport
- To increase senses
- To increase expressionism

Below I provide data from a session after this exercise that helped me to identify just how much my students were beginning to recognize a difference in their classroom experience. These two processing questions that I asked emphasized this to me. What was so profound about these statements was that it showed the young people being engaged and starting to reflect on the exercises and then becoming consciously aware of their own attentiveness in the process.

**Terry:** "*Yes. I learned that I have some things in common with other people.*"

**John:** "*I learned that I like knowing what I thought about my friends was true but how they did it was wack. I can't believe Jeremiah liked writing poems. A lot of people like the same things that I do.*"

**Sheree:** *“I learned that everyone is different.*

**Nicole:** *“Yeah—there are a few people who enjoy doing the same sort of stuff that I do, especially some of the boys but they looked funny doing it”.*

This was such a contrast for Thomas. Thomas’ demeanor at times appeared apprehensive and he seemed to have the concept that there was nothing in it for him, whereas the other students were soaring and receiving the process with open arms. Thomas’ behavior spoke volumes because he would give the other students, especially the young males in the class, looks like “You are fools for doing this.” His nonverbal behavior was resisting everything we were all doing. Thomas was clearly not buying into the process of letting himself do something new and different and especially in front of his peers; it was as if he needed to guard himself and protect his image.

When it came time for Thomas, his pantomime was poor. All he did was nod his head after he said his name. I asked him to show us something that he liked to do. He just stared really hard at me. I believed that was a sign to leave him alone. I continued to encourage him to do something. I said, “It can be anything you want to do, man” (this was quite risky knowing his past history as well as the type of energy and attitude he was exemplifying at the time, but I went with my heart). I remembered his response very clearly in my head. Thomas paused, looked around, then took his hand and rubbed his face; he looked back at me and then he acted-out the rolling of a blunt and pretended to smoke the weed. My students could not believe it. Some were laughing, others were shocked; but Thomas just stood there as if to say, “You better not mess with me, lady.” However, it was my response to his acting

ability that really started to engage Thomas.

**Me:** *Great, Thomas, you gave us an excellent image of what you like to do in your spare time. Come on, everyone; let's repeat what he did.*

**Class:** (The entire class did it except for Thomas).

**Thomas:** He was frozen in his stance. He looked at everyone as if he could not believe that we were imitating him and doing what he did. He bowed his head down after that and he looked at me and said, *"You are illing."*

My interpretation at that moment was that he was too surprised that I did not perhaps respond in the way he wanted me to respond. After that exercise, Thomas no longer needed me to coax and assuage him to get him to participate in the creative process. Thomas' behavior changed gradually over time, whereas Jose's was quite instant. Thomas started to come around for the better. His level of commitment to the creative approach and exercises shifted from his encouraging himself to unfold his own arms and to take that dry, stern look off his face to encouraging others to get up to participate.

Thomas' level of engagement was so deep that the school counselor asked that she come in to observe one day. I asked her why she wanted to sit in my class. I also asked if everything was ok with what was going-on with my students. And her response was unexpected. She told me that Thomas' poor attendance record was so awful that he stayed back last year just because he rarely came to school. The counselor was so impressed by his willingness just to come to school and hearing from other students that he was really active and participating in "this drama thing" that she just wanted to observe for herself. This allowed me to honor the fact that everyone's engagement happens in his/her own time. Through Thomas, I was able to understand that in his engagement level of becoming more socially and participating in the creative process and with his peers was a huge moment. Thomas from the onset

of this study did not possess some of the pre-requisites of engagement that would allow him to access other aspects of engagement similar to what his peer group was experiencing. If Thomas had those skills, he did not willingly let us in to see them. Thomas did not find comfort in putting his physical body into silly and expressive motions through pantomime, he did not trust that others would not perhaps laugh at him as he would do to others, but he soon came around.

Since I was considered an outsider in this school and looked-on as just someone to implement this study, I did not have all the information and the past behavioral and academic patterns of my students. The only insight that the school allowed me to get was some observation days of the student body in general. The class selected for me was a special class, and they thought some students could benefit from an alternative classroom setting.

### **Students engaged me to teach more**

The young people in the class were so impressive to me because they were the same kids who had been known in other classes as introverted, angry, having poor self-concept, slow, and having short attention spans. This section focuses on the power in self-reflective practice and that this type of engagement helped me to rethink, reshape, and reinforce my style of teaching. The data analysis indicated from focus group sessions of the video and informal interviews that the students too were impressed by the reactions of their fellow classmates. By being in tune with my students, I knew when and where to position myself physically between those too-aggressive and/or too-slow responders; and the students say, “Come-on, play/come-

on, man.” The students’ engagement, investment, and responsiveness are noteworthy:

**Terry:** *“I liked seeing my peers have fun for real, and learning together too.”* (Here a piece of data that directly shows how the student is connecting his creative process to learning)

**Sheree:** *“I liked watching everyone move on the same calls place on floor like when I moved. I learned what I had in common with my fellow peers.”*

**Thomas:** *“I would say I liked the whole thing because this gave me a whole new perspective on playing games learning at the same time.”*

**Jose:** *“We listened to each other and followed the directions. We got to make things up on the spot.”*

**Sheree:** *“We helped each other out when someone got stuck out in the middle.”*

**Jose:** *“I didn’t know. . . liked the same books as me.”*

**Terry:** *“We were rolling because we got to work together. We also had a lot of fun with each other. You know, it was like we weren’t acting when we in the hood with our crew.”*

I learned that students’ engagement and responses were compelling during most of the creative drama exercises. Creative dramatics can affect people in a profound way, creating an environment of safety, encouragement, and challenge in the groups all at the same time. First of all, students felt that whatever they had to say mattered and that however they said it was acceptable, within reason. I observed in viewing the video that there were striking changes in emotional countenance and in long-held thoughts and feelings that may be articulated within the context of the creative exercises. A sense of shared experience and community was invoked, fostering introspection, empathy, and critical thinking.

When looking for patterns throughout my data, I was able to clearly see how engagement was salient when I led the creative play with my students. My leadership of creative dramatics allowed my students to be engaged in a playful, purposeful, and

positive way.

The data indicated that engagement for my students was extremely important during all of the five phrases of my creative drama structure: (1) Checking-In, (2) Warm-up, (3) Main Activity, (4) Processing and closure. Engagement appeared to be more relevant to me and even to my students during warm-ups. Students' comments during warm-ups were often immediate, written-down during journal time, and/or directed to their peers.

### **General Responses from Other Students**

During class sessions, I was able to note my reflections and be excited about those who were not in certain exercises but sat as vicarious learners just as engaged as those who were directly involved in the action. Below are those highlighted responses and reactions that were documented after class time by students other than my pre-selected four participants.

### **Collected Individual Responses from other Students**

*Whew, wee, that was alright (typically meaning "great" for this population); "all around the city" that joint was tight. We were all up participating in this thing (with a smile and giggled).*

*We had a good time, didn't we? [to another classmate]; fun, no fighting and stuff, right?*

*I like trying to do the different cartoon and TV characters and trying to beat the other team to the answer.*

*"I can't pick a favorite; all of the creative exercises were good; I mean, you know, we had fun, all just laughed and learned a lot and it was different, you know?"*

What I have found during the study is that it was essential to take time to set-up the classroom and create both the temporal and mental space important for learning to take place. For me, it is like setting the stage for the actors to come-on and start the

show. Taking the time to warm-up the students influenced their attitudes and behavior. As the leader of creative drama, I have discovered that “engagement” is significant not only for the student’s success but also for a reciprocal effort significant for me as well.

**Self-Reflective Practice:** I was able to observe while leading the creative drama sessions in the first three weeks that I too needed the creative outlet to ignite my role to teach, to help center my thoughts, and to help me build a faster rapport with my students. I became aware that leading the warm-ups was a huge responsibility. I don’t do warm-ups as a mere pastime activity: the warm-ups relate directly to the academic plan or can support my overall objective for the learner’s development (See Appendix I for sample proposal of learning objectives and outcomes).

I was engaged during moments when I witnessed Jose and Thomas playing and engaging in different expressive forms than they were familiar with. I noticed that when both of them received negative responses from their peer group and how they were drawn in with the action in the activity, they were engaged enough to dismiss their negative feedback. The two of them took-on tasks with full participation. However, it was just beginning for me to be engaged and enthralled in ways that made me think how I can be better at what I do and wonder why not every child has this type of opportunity. I knew after such interactions as these filled with engaged moments, not always as loud and evident as Jose’s, were reasons why I too received instant gratification. However, I was most impressed when I asked Thomas about starting to become more involved. He said, “I just was comfortable.”

Another interesting fact about engagement was that I was able to note a clear

distinction between my journal-writing and self-reflective notes after thinking back on the work and actually seeing myself on videotape. One distinction is that when reflecting and analyzing what happened during warm-ups, I wrote from a more technical perspective:

**Self-Reflective Note:**

- (1) “I made sure I introduced the classroom management techniques after I modeled the first exercise so that my students were able to see how it could apply to the type of work that they would be getting involved in for that day.”
- (2) “I liked how fast the kids just did that exercise without thinking too much about it. They were really starting to trust their creative instincts more.”

On the other hand, when watching the video, I was able to really hear my verbal choices and to observe and comment on my own facial expressions. And was I *engaged!* At times, it appeared that I was having as much fun as my students, maybe even more at times. So the process of viewing the tapes helped me to review data from a more intense yet practical perspective.

**Video Observation:** *There were gestures, eye contact, stances, and funny things that I did with my voice and without using my voice. This nonverbal communication was critical and part of the overall modeling of creative process.*

More than 93% of the messages teachers send to students are nonverbal (Gallien & Peterson, 2005). My students respond “culturally” to certain verbal and nonverbal cues. They know a threatening versus non-threatening way of communicating that can pull them in more or turn them away from the message. I had no idea how many times I felt that when the students were engaged, I felt less “in-charge.” Although they seemed to take-over at certain points, I still knew I was the

leader—but not in the typical authoritarian manner. My leadership characteristics were at times very quiet. I gave positive eye contact. I gave positive eye contact even to correct certain students and to bring them back on-task. They responded to the non-verbal gestures, and I knew they got it because they responded immediately.

**Journal #8:** *“It is tough for me to explain but I am always teaching in the moment. It is an uncanny process that is difficult to put into words. However, it is as if I am playing the games and witnessing the warm-ups for the first time. Now having done these creative warm-ups a thousand times with several different groupings of students each day, I still in my leading style act as if it is a new concept; for some reason it is as if I am discovering the exercise right along with my students. For me, this is what it means to live and teach in the moment: the more I believe that the “creative strategy” is going to work, the more invested and engaged the students seem to be. The other day, one of my students said it best: “Ms. Carmen, you act like you enjoy this or something, like you ain’t never done it before. . . .”*

This was truly my style, but I think it is relevant to what contributes to the students’ engagement, particularly urban students. My students know when a person is phony. They can’t stand for teachers, especially, to be phony or to break promises. So if they see the leader of the exercises drifting-off to the side gazing or having a one-on-one with an assistant in the room or even having a distant kind of facial expression, they sense it; and for some of my students, using their imaginations is hard enough already; so they look to their peers and leader to help them to make believe and contribute to the task at hand.

We must create a space for students to learn, and when they are engaged, we can teach them the world. It is so much easier for me to teach them about historical concepts and dates when they are motivated, focused on content, and know that the information matters to their everyday lives. I’d rather spend ten minutes of engaging my students in imaginative exercises before the start of going into the main content areas of the day than yelling, convincing, and bribing the students for the full forty-

five minute period. Lastly, my students' engagement led me to honor my own understanding of engagement. One day toward the end of our drama sessions only having five more days left, a young man placed this poem illustrated below on my desk This just reinforces this reciprocal concept of the power in engagement through creative play.

### **Thank You**

*Thank you is like music to the soul*

*Thank you is like sun to a cloudy day just like the drama that helped me find my way!*

*Thank you is like a river overflowing*

*Thank you is like mumbo sauce to my chicken wings, I enjoyed acting that and pretending things.*

*Thank you is like gravy to turkey on Thanksgiving Day.*

*Saying thank you goes a long way don't you know?*

*So when was the last time you said thank you?*

*When was the last time you opened your heart and mind and reached out to say thank you.*

*Ms. Carmen, some of us have never been taught how to say thank you and the importance of saying thank you. So remembering our drama days together on this day I say thank you Ms. Carmen its all been good.*

*Because this class in every way was like the life saver to Some of our rough days.*

*So I'll say it if they don't, thank you.*

*Thank You!*

By: aka. Country

### **Reflecting on engagement as a vehicle for learning**

This section identifies my journey and the personal and professional underpinnings of my leadership in teaching. Throughout my findings it was apparent in the video observations and my self-reflection notes that some of the drawbacks to some of the creative warm-ups were that a few of the students at the beginning of the lesson are too cool, tough, too “thugged-out” to do the exercises; and that can impact the on-task students. Those students made comments to me such as—and I'm

paraphrasing—“This stuff is for kids”; “this is stupid!” “Am I going to get something out of this? Some points or something?” I note this situation because it is the reality of the youth I work with, but the good results always outweighed the negative attitudes.

As the leader of all the exercises, I was fully aware of the drawbacks, so I paced myself. I quickly did enough to keep the tempo upbeat and didn't leave too much time for questions, and I didn't talk the exercise too much. I moved right into it. So by the time the cool ones started to exercise their powers, the exercise was already in motion. In addition while leading, I found it was important to try to combat as much potential noise and conflicts as possible so that all students could find their own way and experience a time to be engaged in the process. However, a fair amount of dissonance is actually healthy. And I tried not to run afoul by way of directives and input.

During the study, I made a significant number of repeated references in my journaling to this one question, “Is it worth it?” I cannot recall each and every time that I revisited this thought, but the documentation and observed curriculum at the time assured that it wasn't about being physically tired, but rather the question came out of my sarcasm. I was getting great returns on my investment, which reinforced the premise that I allowed the creative strategies to lead my teaching decisions—so much so that I just could not understand why other teachers wouldn't get the same highly positive responses from their students. At times, I would assume that teachers whom I noticed and listened to were choosing the easier way of instructing their pupils, but I quickly discovered that what I was doing did require effort on my part; but it made

my teaching practices easy and worth doing everyday. To the rhetorical question “Is it worth it?” my response was, “Absolutely.”

I came to believe in this notion because I see dramatic changes in my students on an individual level and the class as a whole. The videotape actually captures, as I described in Chapter IV, students coming in with dragging energies, negative dispositions and just not motivated to learn. When I am able to see them come into my classroom preparing the chairs and desk to start the class work for the day and disciplining their other peers, especially the newcomers, it is clear that a transformation had occurred and I started to know that teaching is worth it. Additionally, I get constant feedback from other teachers; and when my students make sure I meet their parents, and their parents greet me with “My child is doing well in your class?” in the form of a surprised question, this is also how I come to know teaching is worth it.

As I revealed some of the key techniques and attitudes that helped inform and support my implementation process of creative drama leadership, I was thrilled to note that some of the self-reflections I made while working with my students and recalling specific examples were captured on tape. I observed that the main reason that my urban learners engaged with such bright affects and high levels of participation was that the drama as a modality and the techniques that I strived to demonstrate in the classroom coincided with what I referred to in Chapter II as presented by Boykins’ (1983) nine qualities that make up the attitudes and behaviors of African-American culture that directly influence students’ behaviors, particularly in academia.

## Conclusion

From working with the various creative drama exercises and revisiting the data, I discovered that although the objectives and goals that engaged my students may not be the same goals of the administrators nor always easy to articulate exactly how and why the engagement through creative modalities is effective, I know more than ever that it is significant enough to offer to all students. It is essential to bring creative approaches to varied content matters that invite students' experience of new concepts. It is vital that we take time to engage students holistically and academically in order to capture the hearts, minds, and spirits of our young people so that they can reach a state of academic success with strong socio-emotional well-being.

Dr. Wilder (1977) asserts that creative drama extends a key—the key to unlock limitless feelings, dreams, and possibilities. It can help lead a human being to become a creative person capable of activating changed, productive, socialized adults. My results indicated that engagement occurred on many levels in such strong ways during warm-ups that it was easy to extract from my transcriptions just how prepared my students were to move into other the content areas of the lesson plan. The next Chapter reveals how I led other creative drama activities and how *enlightenment* takes place during this phase of the creative drama sessions.

I documented several key areas in the video of my work in which the creative exercises settled the high-spirited students, calmed those who were in distress, energized the downtrodden spirits, and focused all of them on a space where learning can start to take place; in addition, it was important to note that during the application

of the exercises, not only did the students become aware of the self-concept but also cognition and skill-building happened concurrently.

## CHAPTER VI:

### Reflections on Teaching Practices and Student Participation as Moments of Enlightenment

#### Introduction

This Chapter opens with a description of how an understanding of *enlightenment* was a crucial result of this study. The analysis led me to discover the moments when students were awakened and informed—*enlightened*—by the creative process which provided the class the space to gain insight. Chapter VI moved me to provide a discussion of dramatic incidents the class experienced, addressing the central theme of oppression and offering actual scripted responses from data sources. My goal was to help my students learn through dramatic activity in order to explore the autobiography of Harriet Tubman and illustrate what constitutes that moment of enlightenment.

This Chapter also offers a discussion of how students, in DJ role-playing for example, shared and embraced enlightenment. Data analysis made clear that my role as their teacher invited them into these insightful occurrences that were important because most of them needed to know that they could still learn, that they were not failures, and that their lives are filled with purpose. I present examples of the class' enlightenment through creative writing assignments and how students started to reflect on their own choices and consequences in life and realized what we all sometimes take for granted—freedom. The Chapter offers an illustration of Sheree's enlightenment that encouraged her to go beyond the homework assignment and enlightened others in the process. It concludes with a discussion of my reflective teaching practices of creative dramatic activities in the classroom.

### **Understanding the role of enlightenment in creative drama**

I witnessed my students being attracted, hooked, prepared, engaged into the content area, and the local data, also supported by transcribed focus group responses, self-reflections, and journaling notes, revealed that creative drama invited moments of enlightenment. Enlightenment means that students take in and process information and start to digest the content in a space where they begin to become introspective and sometimes even confrontational as they make meaning out of their learning experience. Sternberg (2000) asserts that when participants in drama are enlightened, it is a cathartic moment that involves the purging of emotions. Some of the attributes that the data analysis revealed were that urban students once enlightened knew that they were learning, became excited and anxious about their learning process, and needed the learned material to relate directly to their personal lives and/or community.

Other attributes were students taking pride in their cultural identity and experiencing personal revelations that caused them to create innovative ideas, apparent in their completion of homework assignments and their eagerness to share intimate feelings. The analysis enabled me to identify moments of enlightenment based on my observations of the videotapes which revealed not only what I was hearing and seeing in the class but also what I was, at times, *not* hearing and seeing. My students' non-verbal behavior spoke volumes and their own interpretations of the creative experience really encouraged me to see these moments of enlightenment that occurred in the classroom but which were at times very difficult to articulate.

I soon realized that although there were moments when enlightenment took place throughout the course of my drama sessions, it was during the phase of the curriculum which I call the dramatic activity that appeared to be the most revealing. The dramatic activity for me was to lay-out the pedagogy in front of my students in a highly improvised yet creatively structured format. Heathcote and Bolton (1995) call this phase of the drama “the heart of the creative experience.” I tend to call the dramatic activity “a living journey to the unknown.” This portion was perhaps the most critical for me because it signified the essence of teachable moments, the time when students obtained, retained, and provided information in the process. In other words, this was the time when students got to experience and interact directly with the designed learning objective of the day—to identify oppression.

### **Drama sets the stage for urban youth to experience enlightenment**

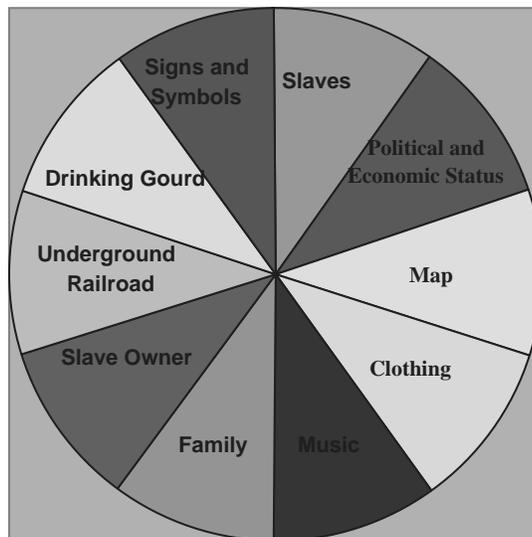
This section focuses on how my practices of drama extended moments of enlightenment for my students. It then sets forth actual quotes by both my students and me that exemplify the awareness of learning taking place in such an experiential manner. Below is an actual outline used in my sessions. In setting-up the main activity to bring forth the dramatic focus, Heathcote instructs that if a teacher uses segmenting as a guide to structure the drama based on subject matter, one is more likely to have a greater degree of success with a class. Segmenting (Wagner, 1976) is a technique used to brainstorm various aspects of a particular subject matter. I use this technique to help me shape the structure of the main concept.

I then took all possible angles until I derived at my dramatic focus. What is so

interesting to me is that I can do this as part of my lesson-planning phase or, as Heathcote does, right on the spot. The students help to decide the appropriate dramatic action. I have achieved this dramatic focus in several ways that have been highly effective. For example, if the atmosphere of the class seems calm and there is a harmonious feel, then I can determine if I can do this segmenting process with the class or already predetermined before I come to class. The segment diagram used for this lesson plan was used throughout the study and is shown below.

### Diagram

#### SLAVERY (Oppression)



#### Self-Reflective Practice:

It is important that my students feel that they are in control. It is about inviting them to learn versus forcing them to learn. There are moments when my students must come-up with a democratic decision and other times when I allow them to think they have helped me formulate my decision as we move to different parts of the drama and the lesson plan.

*Journal Entry: I have noticed that it was much easier to lay-out for my classes what*

*drama was so that once we got further into the lesson, I would have already provided them with a frame-of- reference.*

Although my overall intent was to use drama strategies as a way to educate and empower, I became aware that drama itself became a major component of my content that was new to my students. I needed to go back to make sure that as we continued with the lesson plan, we all could understand certain terminology and how I was preparing them to process and become critical about discussing certain episodes, stories, and improvisations. The questions listed below, taken directly from my lesson plans, were the questions that were received well by my students and acted at times as a script for me. Through observations, especially while viewing the video, I noticed that my leading the students into specific content areas was quite effective when I used these documented questions:

**Me:** *“What is drama?”*

*“Have you seen or been in a drama or play before?”*

*“What are some of the components that make up a drama?”*

*“Name some characters from different TV shows.”*

*“Explain setting, character, and climax in a play.”*

After a modeled demonstration of a pantomime that I do by myself in-role, I then ask them to identify specific components.

**Me:** *“What was the setting?”*

*“Who are the characters?”*

*“What is the main idea?”*

*“Do you feel that the group worked well?”*

**Video Observation:**

**Me:** *“What did you think about how I set-up the creative drama session in the beginning?”*

Some of the students could not recall what it was that I did or said. This is why the video was so helpful: as soon as they saw the first thirty seconds, they remembered

instantly.

**Terry:** *“It was as if we were learning something new. I’ve never in my life ever done anything like this before (He laughed). I was acting and I liked how we learned those new vocabulary words and we were just calling the answers out.”*

**Thomas:** *“Man, I had a good answer because Martin Lawrence did a bunch of characters in his show. So I remember what a character and setting was because we got into it.”*

**Jose:** *“I thought it was going to be like some kid stuff. But when we got up to do it ourselves, it was hard. You got all of us to do it, which never happens in our class.”*

**Sheree:** *“I thought it was cool the way you did it up.”*

Dramatic activity is what I consider to be the moment of truth and a moment of reckoning. My rationale is that even my A-students who have had difficulty maintaining suspending the element of make-believe or the one child who loves to act in order to receive accolades and the one who rarely engages in the drama all come to the place that they forget they are in a drama and unite, agree, and forge through the drama. That is what I consider to be a moment of enlightenment.

### **The class is enlightened as DJ plays the role of Harriet Tubman**

A particularly affecting moment of enlightenment occurred through full student participation; they all “got it”: they were all traveling in character, voicing their own opinions, speaking, singing, and dancing at times on the underground railroad with fully played-out convictions. I remembered that at one moment I had to raise my voice in-role and said “freeze”; we were all engaged and quite loud.

Heathcote cautions leaders of the creative drama experience to be mindful of several technical aspects she titled “registrars.” I embrace the concept behind registrars as the technique that teachers should have in-place in order to be effective. “Heathcote feels each teacher must determine her or his own threshold of tolerance: (1) decision taking (2) noise, (3) distance, (4) size of groups, (5) teaching registers, and (6) status as a

teacher (Wagner, p. 34, 1976).”

Although the noise-level was loud and might have appeared uncontrolled, it was quite the opposite. The noise during this particular main activity was passionate because the young people were communicating their convictions and beliefs. At the same time, my students were demonstrating what they learned, which accomplished both my short-term goals and my long-term teaching goal. The noise-level never went off-track. Heathcote cautions teachers leading creative drama that the noise must be purposeful: having chaos in the classroom just to satisfy dramatic climax is not good teaching if the purpose is being overlooked and swept under the rug just for the sake of being loud and argumentative.

When the character said that he wanted to stop due to fear of the unknown, the emotional hardships of leaving his family, and the taxing experience of what it took to make the journey and perhaps risking his own life, he just thought it would be easier to turn around. So when I in-role froze the drama and then de-rolled, coming back to being the teacher, I processed what was going-on: I gave the students the chance to explore this character’s decision to stop and turn around while investigating the other choices and potential conflicts. Once we processed this scene, I then chose the student who appeared confident enough to role-play Harriet. DJ was such a meek and mild young man, he never caused disruptions in class and always participated in creative exercises but in a cool way. When he spoke, he answered in complete sentences, but his volume was low. He seemed the one who would be more likely to do without too much resistance. DJ got up to do the role-play. I gave him his objective in the role, which was to convince another peer, who too was in-role, of the

importance of not giving-up, not stopping the journey toward freedom, and going back to his enslaved family. It was so powerful and very loud.

DJ took-over the role and was tickled about playing Harriet, a woman he portrayed with great poise. Although he did not take-on the characteristics of Harriet and played a male version of Harriet, his words and actions revealed that he'd read all parts of the assignments, reiterated the verbal sayings that only I did in-role during class time, and got his classmates to sing along with him as well. He did an excellent job role-playing Harriet; at that point, I did not need another person to role-play after that scene.

**Self-Reflection:** I tend to pick two or three different people to role-play the same situation in order to allow more young people an opportunity to experience making decisions and acting and also to allow the whole class the opportunity to view and take-in other alternatives. And perhaps as they take-in the experience, one day that very circumstance may arise and the alternatives or verbal skills of dealing with the situation will be helpful.

Boal says that role-plays offer people a chance to release from real-life experience. This young man did such a great job, the whole class clapped for him, laughed with him, and gave him “dap,” a unique handshake between peers. Going back to the noise level, there was a moment when the young man, whom I will call Sidney, remembered that when I played the role, I carried a pistol. So he demonstrated his communication skills: “You can’t go because....., can’t go back because you will put us all in a risky spot. Don’t you remember what was said in the drinking gourd song.....come on now you gonna make me give you some of that baby potion?”

He went on and on until he pulled-out the gun and said one of Harriet’s famous lines,

“Either go and stay alive, or I’ll shoot you dead, a slave.”

Then, I went into feeling what it meant when the tolerance threshold of my status as teacher was pushed a bit. I got up and said to the class as teacher, “Freeze.” The noise levels also existed when I was playing the role because I got my students in-role to voice their opinions, signifying and amending ideas throughout the drama. After I finally got the young people to calm down, I was able to process with DJ; and he was so involved that he got the class rallying around his moment on the stage in the role-play. He embodied the elements of being engaged and enlightened simultaneously. There again we were loud but at a noise level that was purposeful and controlled until the teacher across the hall came in and asked if everything was OK. I responded by telling her that we were fine and just celebrating, and then I said to her, “I think we found a star here.” Although the main goal of creative drama is the process and is not focused on a production mode of theater, it was good entertainment; but I needed to assure all of us that it was a powerful moment and I had to process the role-play. I wanted to examine if DJ knew what he was experiencing and to debrief the scene. Below is actual dialogue from the processing in class. It was evident to DJ as well that he experienced an awakening, that he discovered new thoughts and ideas in pretending to be in someone else’s shoes.

**DJ:** *I don’t believe I did that (taking the imaginary gun out). I was so much in it that I believed it. I could see that it’s not a joke.*

**Me:** *What about what you did, DJ, made you think it wasn’t a Joke?*

**DJ:** *Man, Ms. Carmen, because you got everybody else to think about and one person could have gotten everyone else killed.*

**Me:** *I can’t believe you brought out the baby portion.*

**DJ:** *I was doing, like, Harriet, like, when she put those babies to sleep I was going to put....*

**Me:** *(I cut him off). Alright now, DJ. Let's not get too carried away. You made me proud for you.*

**DJ:** *Ya'll that thing was scary, but it's like how we living right now for real.*

**Me:** *Ok, let's talk about that since you mentioned it now. What about being a slave is similar to how we live now?*

**DJ:** *The streets, it's like you always looking over your head and stuff and trying to hope your bus transfer is there so you can keep moving.*

All the students applauded for him. DJ couldn't stop bowing. I did not know he had it in him. He was enlightened and bitten by the theater bug. He enjoyed every clap, cheer, shout-out; he was living in his moment of enlightenment. I am convinced that the act of creating those words on the spot caused him to reflect on what it might be like to lead, protect, and care for others while still trying to encourage the other person to keep going-on and not to give up.

### **Teaching strategies enlightened students about oppression**

During my review of the video of the creative drama activities, I was able to take a step back and ask myself a couple of questions that helped me to see and come to know my own form or style of leading creative drama. For example, Heathcote talks about "distance": Does the teacher establish distance between her/him and the students? There were times when I was caught holding the students' hands or leaning on their shoulders, especially setting-up a plan to escape from one side of the river to the other when we were locking arms elbow-to-elbow. Heathcote (interestingly enough, one of the reasons she's one of the master leaders in creative dramatics) has a low tolerance of physical distance: "She wants to sit close to and look right at students, touching them when the drama calls for it." Interestingly enough, when in-

role, I too feel more in-tune with my students. I am able to listen with both my heart and soul.

There were data that caused me to look at how I reinforced a safe and creative environment where my students could perhaps enter a space where they could be enlightened to know that they were learning and gaining knowledge and able to embrace their personal identities. I used many creative drama strategies, but also I used my own instrument as their teacher. I analyzed that I needed to hold my students' hands, that they liked to receive hugs and give me "high fives." This situation was challenging for me because I think that although they liked to be touched and feel embraced, I needed to make sure that I kept certain boundaries in place. I learned that doing the small things such as touching the shoulder, giving positive eye contact, and smiling at them was nurturing to them. I discovered that it was all about making a judgment-call knowing instinctively who needs a hug and when to step out of my box of rules and foster those real human needs that led to enlightenment. There were other technical strategies that illustrated the strength in creative drama as a catalyst for enlightenment to take place.

There were some scenes in the drama where it was important to create and maintain distance. During another part of the dramatic activity, I put-on a hat to portray a new role, that of the slave-owner. It is in this role that we get an opportunity to explore once again the differences between the oppressed and the oppressor. I introduced this opportunity a few times to help build tension as well as to establish mood and realism for students who are in-role as slaves. In this role, I physically placed myself away from the students/slaves; not only did it establish a sense of

realism but also it allowed the students in-role to react to what it might feel like to feel oppressed.

Boal cautions those who do educational drama to examine status and power of any character when developing scenes and improvisation. Boal believes that if we humans start to openly discuss what it looks and feels like to be the oppressor versus the oppressed, perhaps we can start to empathize with both the oppressed and the oppressor and with who might be additional allies in the oppressed situation. So the distance and dynamics were important for me in playing this character but difficult too because there were those moments where as the teacher I wanted to get close to the kids' eyes and really hear and feel that one-on-one connection.

One of the most striking moments in the classroom was when three of my students entered an extremely heated discussion about oppression and the use of the word "nigger." This moment resulted directly from the main activity that I used throughout the sessions to brainstorm, to supply information, and to get my students to move from the cognitive way of knowing to knowing on a more personal and abstract level. This creative dramatic activity is known as "tableau work," which takes certain themes and concepts and gets participants to physicalize the meaning into frozen images. The still picture through bodywork can be connected to other group members or not physically connected. The primary goal is to project a visual image of understanding the theme conceptually.

The day that I examined the central theme of oppression was really one of the most exciting for me. I divided the students into six groups of five and gave each group an assigned setting based on the theme "oppression." Each group was asked to

create a picture or a billboard that represented a state of oppression. The breakout groups included such settings as community, home, school, family, playground, and club.

**Me:** *“O.k., class, remember you need to identify who is going to play the role of the director, recorder, reporter, and performer. After everyone has made a decision, list all names on the poster board and come up with a team name. When you are ready, let me know.”*

I created a healthy competition for the activity so that they were more enticed to do it and I could save time. Every group had to create a T-chart on a board; on the left side, they listed the possible types of oppressed situations based on their given setting; and on the right side of the chart, they listed the alternatives to the oppressed circumstances. The first group to get to a list of ten on each side was the winner.

**Me:** *“Let’s give the power girls a hand, o.k.? Let’s keep moving! Now I want you to help the recorder highlight by circling which one the entire group agrees upon to create the tableau. You have to choose only one and make sure you show the image of the oppression and a possible solution.”*

All the groups did an incredible job when they demonstrated their tableaux. However, there were two groups that stood-out. One group called themselves the “SpongeTastics.” They showed a frozen image of a family living in a big house, but every one was scattered in the house doing his/her own thing because of an abusive father. The young man who played the father stood in the middle of the house with one hand pointed out and the other in a fist-like shape and his mouth wide-open as if yelling. Everybody else was hiding from him doing various activities. When we processed the image after guessing what it was, the young people were so mesmerized by what that looked like in the moment, I chose to learn more about these characters in the picture to enable them to move closer to experiencing a

moment of enlightenment. So I did something called “thought-tracking.” Thought-tracking is touching one of the persons in the tableau and asking her/him to say a word, a sound, or a sentence based on the theme. Below illustrates how my urban students were taking-in information, processing information, and starting to digest the content in a space where they started to become introspective.

**Video Observation:**

**Me:** *“I am going to come around and tap you on the shoulder, and if I touch you I want you to tell me what you are feeling right now.”*

**Father:** *“I’m angry!”* (a few students laughed but most were looking on with intense faces.)

**Mother:** *“I’m scared!”*

**Daughter:** *I’m hurt and mad and I want to leave up outta here.*

**Son:** *“Plssh!”* (throwing his hand out with just a sighing like sound.)

And then there was this hush of silence. And then Thomas said, *“Shoot, that’s nothing right there; that’s me everyday.”*

**Me:** *“Ok, relax, everybody let’s give them a hand.”*

**Self-Reflection Practice:** I remembered wanting to follow-up with Thomas, but because he was so affected by the son’s response, I didn’t have to dig deeper and did not need to make it about him at that time in front of his peers; but clearly he wasn’t the only one able to identify with the situation. It was important for me as the leader to re-direct it back to those who presented and to encourage them to identify what the experience was like for them and if they were able to identify the oppressed person, the oppressor, and the potential allies. My kids were fabulous that day and were becoming more open to the creative drama experience and to one another.

The other tableau that the students presented right in-line with my lesson plan was done by the “Money Crew”: they did an image of slavery. The white slave-owner was hitting the woman with her baby in her hands because she was trying to escape. The other slaves were just looking as though it happened all the time, but one student made the choice to cry while the beating was taking place. This was so powerful because this time I asked my other students, as Boal does in-role as the joker, to give them lines and feelings based on the image. The joker acts as the facilitator of the

dialogue among the student spectators and the actual actors in-role. One of my students, Kevin, said, “The owner probably said, ‘You “N....”

**Video Observation:**

I immediately cut him off—it was just too much for me—but I was so happy that he just thought he could go there. This caused a huge explosion in the classroom. “Look at me. Ago! Ago!” The kids responded “Ameye.” By the third round of “Ago” and “Ameye,” I had regained everyone’s full attention, but this tableau caused such an overwhelming reaction from my students that I had to address the issue.

It was such an enlightening moment for everyone because one of the things that came out of that image was that language plays a strong role in oppression. So we discussed the external versus internal factors of what oppression looks like, sounds like, and feels like.

What I really admired about my students on that day and is so inspiring and moving about this work is that once they started to put it into their bodies and verbalize different words and play different actions, they were more interested in sharing, thinking, and wanting to learn more about the topic. Their alternative tableau was just as interesting as their first image because they did a totally opposite picture: they showed the white slave-owner turning his head and letting her go past him without consequences. Now that was enlightening.

**Me:** *“Is this realistic?”*

**Class:** Some yelling-out “No!” and shaking their heads “No,” but some were saying, *“Yeah, it can happen.”*

As the class continued to dialogue about the main activity, one of the questions I asked was, “Have you ever experienced in your own life someone’s saying that word to you?” This conversation was quite intense. As a result, one of the young ladies said that we all know it’s wrong to say the “N” word; we just try to

make it right. The boys were upset and gave several examples of how we have changed it to mean something good, but only certain people can say it to certain people. I had heard this same conversation in this lesson plan before, so this portion was not new to me. I knew how to push, probe, and play devil's advocate. However, that young lady was so passionate about the use of name-calling that she was in my role: this is what creative drama and Theatre of the Oppressed techniques can do—generate a healthy and informative discussion in which as the teacher all I have to do is keep it safe and productive and move it forward.

At that point in the session, my students were teaching each other; there was great peer interaction happening on every level. One young man, Peter, was so irate that he got two friends to demonstrate his thought by telling them to go into an improvisation about how the use of the word does not have to be oppressive. Now my job became critical at this time because I needed to keep them open, so I allowed them to get it all out; and then I moved them to think about the power of words in general as we reflected on the number of oppressed images that we saw earlier.

### **Harriet's dramatization enlightened urban youth**

This section provides specific classroom interactions that portrayed various times when my students were enlightened. Described below are a few examples of main activities that captured those striking moments of enlightenment and moments when the students made real, meaningful connection to specific content areas that came directly out of the local data of the study.

Heathcote also emphasizes that the size of the group doing drama is critical to

consider when thinking of executing. Heathcote's preference is to work with large groups of students in the class. For Heathcote, in working in her style with her population, "it helps coagulate the group" (p.76, 1976). In the video segment, I am moving through the class in a maze-like formation followed by the whole class except for one student who was at the tape recorder acting as the DJ. I did not have small break-out groups around the room. I selected a group to go on the journey while others acted as spectators. I personally enjoyed the challenge of working with large groups.

**Video Observation:** *"Although I have done this same drama many times before, I've never seen myself on video, looking back at the entire experience. I need some popcorn: I am having too much fun laughing at myself and my students. I'm glad I am watching this alone, or the kids might think that I am laughing at them. I am happy to see that although I've seen this same drama before, I am still able to make it look like the first time. Watching myself say the line, "Oh no, it's starting to get cold and the sun is going down; we need to get ready to start heading-out again. What type of weather do you think we are going to have tonight? Some said, "Rainy" or "cold" or "warm." I then start to choose one. This time I choose rain to make the experience new for me too and empowering for my students. It is as if they become little directors and get so excited when they see us acting out their ideas. What is interesting to me is that everyone is walking in the journey together, and as I look at it, it seems like the more of us using our imaginations at the same time, the more the drama deepens and fosters the needs for others who are timid or too playful to really stay on-task. And, for me, I too am enlightened because I as Ms. Tubman have this mass of people behind me supporting this desire to learn, to discover, and to conquer.*

Throughout twenty of my sessions with the selected class, most of the dramatic activities were centered on the autobiography of Harriet Tubman and the historical lifestyle of slavery

### **Dramatic Scenario**

Below is an excerpt from an actual creative drama session that I adapted from the book *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom* by Virginia Hamilton.

**Harriet:** *Hush children! Don't you tell nobody, don't you tell a soul. This journey is going to appear to be dark and at times, you may get tired, feel hot, excited, scared or you just might feel that you can't go on. But, I am here to tell you that you can go on because... Oh no, my goodness my head It's hurting again, I can't remember what I was trying to say, well maybe you can help me out? What was it I was trying to say?*

**Sheree:** *You were telling us not to be afraid even if we were afraid and to keep on going.*

**Terry:** *You wanted us to know that we are strong and can do anything in life we want to do if we believe in ourselves.*

**Nicole:** *That's not what she was saying, she was trying to tell us we can go for our freedom like Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King, Jr. did and no matter what names people call you, you, you gotta to still keep going, man.*

**Harriet:** *That's right, we are going to do, it's get to that light over there 'cause that's our freedom. Can we make ya'll?* (Some of the students yell out "Yeah!"; some softly agree; others say nothing and stare; and few laugh and (play) in the back of the line.) *Hush, sh, sh, I, hear something.* All students are now fully paying attention and she repeats the line. *Can we make it on the through ya'll?* (All the students said "Yeah!" including the talkative ones! While those who already said "Yeah!" the first go-round ended their "Yeah!" with a "Ms. Harriet.")

**Harriet:** *Well, let's go!* (song and dance begins to *Follow the Drinking Gourd* with students).

When the creative drama was at the end for that day's lesson and I "de-rolled" from playing Harriet Tubman as teacher-in-role to teacher-out-of-role, the applause, onlookers, and the hushed sound from students made one of the best times as an actor to have performed in a class that wanted more. What a privilege to have been able to not just perform in front of spectators but to have performed alongside my students. Words cannot express those precious moments shared on that day and on the days after, but that was a rare moment that the teacher and students had the chance to experience. To have had the opportunity to allow my students to imagine for a period of time to be on a freedom train with Harriet Tubman and to be enslaved, leaving behind other familiar roles such as the role of students, child, son, daughter,

addictions, promiscuity, gang problems, physical and sexual abuse, honor roll status, class leader, class clown, the many roles that they play in their daily lives and to place the roles on hold was a huge moment that only the drama could have allowed us to experience. We were all kinesthetically involved.

Another pivotal moment that took place during the session that created enormous feedback, especially pertaining to the emergent theme of enlightenment, was when I demonstrated one of my personal favorite creative techniques to use as their teacher. I started this dramatic focus by using the creative drama strategy called “teacher in-role,” and I introduced the concept of props.

**Me:** *“In my hand I am holding an old suitcase. Who thinks we should open it and find out what is in it?”*

**Students:** *“Yeah, let’s open it.”*

*“I’ll open it.”*

*“No, don’t open it!”*

**Teacher:** *“Why don’t you think we should open it?”*

**Sheree:** *“Because it’s like opening-up Pandora’s box, Ms. Carmen, and some not so good things can happen.”*

**Me:** *“Well, a good friend of mine wanted to share some things with all of us, and we need to see if we can help the person out. Jose, why don’t you come and open up the suitcase?”*

**Jose:** (Comes right up in a quiet manner and pops up the old clamp and looks serious after he opens it.) *“What is all this stuff?”*

**Me:** *“Each one of us has to figure-out where on earth all these things come from and who might they belong to. The suitcase is filled with varied artifacts from slaves and some possible personal holdings of Harriet Tubman.”*

**Me:** *“Our job, class, is to play the role today of investigator, and we must use these clues to help inform our thinking. Do you think we can do it?”*

**Students:** *“Yeah!”*

**Self-Reflection Practice:** I have noticed that it is important to keep an element of surprise in the creative drama sessions and to control the timing and rhythm of how and when we discover certain experiences and information.

**Me:** *“Who’s going to go first? What about you, Sheree?”*

**Sheree:** (Comes forward and pulls-out an old piece of burlap material) *“This is hard.”*

**Me:** *“Can you tell me how else it feels? So tell me who might wear this type of material. It looks like a shawl, doesn’t it?”*

While discovering the process along with my students, I allow each child to pull-out an object and we process each item. Eventually, we get to everything and during the course of my playing teacher-in-role, I continued to process with my students to help increase suspense tension by exploring several different possibilities. Some of the items in the suitcase included the shawl, an old scarf, a wallet, a map, a tiny bottle of potion, sheet music to “Wade in the Water,” a lantern, drinking gourd, a ransom flier, and paper wrapped around some pictures. The pictures were of family members of the unidentified person, how the house looked, and some of her friends at the time.

**Me:** *“Who might this person be?”*

**Self-Reflection:** I have noted this as the magic question because it sparks interest and powerful discussions among my students.

During the study, it was interesting to listen to how students came-up with their answers and defended their thinking to their peers. Some of their guesses included “an old senior citizen who’s lost her family”; I also heard “a Katrina victim,” “a homeless person,” “someone who is dead and left their stuff in an attic.” Eventually, I get a few to start to think about past people whom they might know; then the students started to suggest such answers as “it’s a man from slavery”; “no, it’s a woman because of her perfume.” This discussion goes on for awhile until I say, “Let’s go on a journey together and let’s find-out who this might be.” And I set-up for them the time period of the late 1800’s and then place students in-role as slaves.

**Self-Reflection Practice:** Before placing any child into role, it is important to give her/him as much information as possible—not too much, just enough so she/he feels ready to play the character.

**Me:**” So while you are all in-role as slaves, I will become someone else and hopefully at the end of our journey today you’ll be able to identify who this person is.”

**Journal Entry #10:** *At this point during the drama, you can hear a pin drop. And those who were talking were quickly asked by the other members of the club to be quiet and still. What was so unusual on this day is that I forgot my main prop, a cane; so I had to use all the items in the suitcase to help formulate and bring this character to life. I usually use just one or two of the artifacts, but this time I used just about everything and my kids just watched intensely—so powerful really; they were so attentive that even if a fight broke-out outside, they ignored it. This is just how invested they were in what was going-on at that given moment. Now the pressure is on me!*

**Teacher-in-Role as Harriet Tubman:** (Monologue to my students.)

Monologue opened with Harriet Tubman on the ground sleeping. She wakes and stretches.

*“Goodness!! How long has I been sleep? A couple hours I reckon. Heh, heh. But it sho did feel good to take a nap like that.”*

She chuckles. *“Sho didn’t feel good to take that heavy blow in the head from master that makes me fall into these deep sleeps in the first place.”*

*“He sho did. He meant to hit Joseph cause he got vex at him you see but he hit me instead. Hit me like a ton of bricks, sho did. Knocked me out stone cold. I ain’t never been quite right after that. And then I gets to feelin’ so sleepy alls a sudden.”*

She yawns.

*“But I’ve lived me some sort of life--yes indeed.*

*Born a slave. Das right. In the year of eighteen hundred and twenty, Dorchester County, Maryland. Right there on the Eastern Shore.*

*I been married twice. My first husband was a free black matters a fact. But he didn’t want to leave the south. I did.”*

I start to daze-off looking up into the distance.

*“Look—the North Star sho is shinin’ bright tonight.” ( To Class: Have you ever seen a star so bright in the sky that you just had to make a wish. What kind of wish did you make (looking at Thomas)?*

**Thomas:** *I don’t know, my family, me... to be ok.*

**Me:** *“Well, I wished for freedom”*

*“Das the same star I followed when I ran away from the plantation—runnin’ away to freedom. I set off one night on foot and followed that there guiding star all the ways to Pennsylvania—all the way to freedom. But I gots to thinking bout my family and my heart got so heavy and so I worked and saved my money and then I went back down to Maryland and got my sister and her chirrun and brought them up North too.”*

*“Oh, I was scared alright but I went back again and got my brother and a couple of other slaves. And I kept going back and going back cause so many of em wanted to be free and I just couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t help them. I had to be brave. I had to be quick. There were safe houses along the way that we would stop at and I came up with all kinds a little tricks so that nobody would catch us. I stole the master’s horse and buggy. I disguised myself. I acted like I knew how to read when I really couldn’t. If some slave-holders came in my path, I turned the group right back around acted like we was going South. But soon as they was out of sight—we was back on our way North. North, along the Underground Railroad, yes sir.”*

*“I was friends with John Brown, Frederick Douglas...fellow leaders in the abolitionist movement and a lot of other conductors in the Underground Railroad. I was known as Moses. That’s what my people called me.”*

*I begin to sing: “Go down, Moses*

*Way down in Egypt’s land*

*And tell old pharaoh*

*To let my people go.”*

*“Yes, I was a Moses to my people.*

*During the civil war I worked for the Union as a cook, a nurse and even a spy. Das when I met my second husband.” She breathes in heavy.*

*“This life sho has been full.*

*I thanks God everyday for using me as a blessing to my people. I thanks God.*

*So who am I?”*

**Students: (The whole speaking at once)** *“Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, that old old lady y’all, Rosa Parks.”*

**Teacher-in Role:** *“Harriet Tubman, thas my name. It was sho nice meeting you. Take care, I’m getting a little sleepy again.”*

Then I said, *“Freeze.”*

At that point, it was important for my kids to see me de-role from Harriet into their teacher again. On the video, I could actually hear most of the kids clapping at this point. Then I moved to processing and, as Heathcote, Wagner (1976), and Boal (1992) have advocated during the question and answer period, it was important to give the students a chance to digest what they just experienced and to reflect on what they did and did not understand.

Heathcote is known for stopping the drama too for reflection. Wagner writes,

“Heathcote’s reason for stopping the drama is never to preach to the class. This does

not mean that she does not frequently introduce a moral element; no human being can ever quite give-up moralizing, but she does it in amusing and not a didactic tone, so that the class often picks this up and responds with affirmations of their own values.” Here are some of my ways of demonstrating musing characteristics: 1) *“I wonder why you think she’d wanted to be free from slavery?”* 2) *“Why was it so important for her after she freed herself to go back out to the other people even though she was injured?”* 3) *“How did she feel about her whole experience being the conductor of the Underground Railroad? (see Chapter VII for more details) The Underground Railroad wasn't just the place of refuge: what else does the under railroad represent?”*

After processing what appeared to be striking to me in looking at my students’ expressions and writing assignments about what they observed, I was able to notice just how much they learned in that short period of time. It’s enlightenment at its best.

**Me:** *“So what did you think about today’s main activity, what was going on?”*

**Sheree:** *“I felt so close to Ms. Tubman, it was like she was my grandmother who had been through so much and we forgot about her; that’s why we couldn’t figure out whose things that was in the suitcase. I learned about the hard times of slavery and I felt sad.”*

**Terry:** *“There were times when I felt like Ms. Carmen was really Harriet. . . it was funny, it was like we were all slaves with her and trying to understand what she wanted us to understand. I didn’t know slavery was right in Maryland. I really didn’t. That’s so close to where we live. I don’t know, it just makes you think and wonder.”*

**Me:** *“And wonder what . . . ?”*

**Terry:** *“Wonder just what would I’d do if I was with Harriet, you know a slave like that. I couldn’t live like that, I mean we hear about it but it’s not the same; like when you were talking to us, it was real and nobody was playing around and stuff.”*

**Jose:** *“For me, I liked the way Harriet talked; sometimes it was weird because I couldn’t always understand some of the things in the words she was saying, but I understood that she was a hero of her people for me to, you know, we don’t talk about a lot of this at school but sometimes I too feel, like you know, I just don’t belong in; I’m different but just like Harriet I just got to find a place like Harriet; she didn’t give up, she was . . . she was a leader. Yeah.”*

I provided this part of the data results in the words of these selected students at this point because all of them at sometime in the drama were starting to come to some sort of awakening about the character's intentions, exploring words of expression, feelings, and thinking patterns. All of the students were experiencing a cathartic moment, which is how I perceive this to be a moment of enlightenment. I moved into closure, a very important part of the process, and provided them with a homework assignment on that day.

**Me:** *“Remember the pictures that were in the suitcase and in the wallet of Harriet Tubman? Those are some of her friends and family members, and what I want each one of you to do is to think about the picture, look closely at the colors of the person whether it's a female or male. Ok, everyone get closer to Ms. Carmen and start to select a picture that you may want to work with. Let's move quickly, everyone: we are running out of time.”*

**Self-Reflection Practice:**

*This assignment that I gave-out today is called “biographies of strangers.” After my kids have chosen from the pictures of people and answered all the questions from the processing, the students are told to write a monologue from the point-of-view of the person in the picture. I provided them with the definition of a monologue and I told them that what I did in class today was an example of a monologue by a character on-stage speaking by her/himself.*

*I said to my whole class: “Ask yourself while writing on the board: 1) What is he/she thinking at the moment that the picture was taken?” 2 “Could this person be talking to another person or to him/herself or to God or to nature? And all you all have to do is write-out the words that the character speaks.”*

**Thomas' creative writings led to moments of enlightenment**

Often after my students are enlightened in the classroom, that same enlightenment does not get captured in the completion of homework assignments. I noticed a great improvement of homework turn around with my students. I observed that in the beginning of the sessions with me, I had about eighteen-of-twenty do their

homework. However, by the end of the sessions, I gradually noticed how my students who never turn-in work now do their work and others wanting to do the work would sit quietly in class and quickly do something and turn it in. I noted that at the end of the sessions I had approximately twenty-four of thirty complete homework assignments. And Thomas was one of those students who never did his homework. Thomas was an intelligent young man and demonstrated that in his class work he still continued to respond slowly to certain dramatic activities and moved at his own pace.

Thomas had a breakthrough in class after about two weeks into our class time together. By Thomas' making the commitment to do the assignments, which was unexpected to me, it was not very noticeable that he was enlightened by his actions to do the work; but it was in his presentation that not only did I witness this special moment but he too came to take comfort in his moment of enlightenment in front of the class. Below is a monologue that Thomas did based on an older boy who was shown in a picture the day before.

### ***I am Not Free***

*Can somebody tell me why I am not free? So many people have to die leaving their families behind. And children all alone, wishing somebody was at home, to hold them and tell them to keep strong and hold on, hold on to freedom.*

*Can somebody tell me why I am not feel. Young people have to go through struggles they seem to have their hearts in one hand and their souls in the other. But...they don't know how to juggle it all.*

*Can somebody tell me why life has to hurt so much? Can somebody tell me why? Can somebody tell me why the world had to become what it is today. People killing each other I mean is there no more love—only hate? Its so much hate and fear when you don't have your freedom. Can somebody tell me why? Can somebody please tell me why? We have poor education, and low or no pay for people with jobs. Can somebody tell me why? Can somebody tell me why communities are so unsafe you can't walk out your front door without hearing gunshots or police sirens.*

*Can somebody tell me why?*

*I think I know the answer. Because nobody cares anymore, so why should I!*

I don't know what was going on with Thomas that made him pick the one who seemed to be the older brother in the picture, particularly since he is the older brother in his family of four other siblings. I place this piece in this section that emphasizes how he was starting to use his class time seriously. Thomas, although very bright, had difficulties at times doing his homework assignment and bringing it to class because he often let his temper get in the way. But this day he entered class with a solemn look on his face. When other students were bringing me what they did and eagerly raising their hands to present their creative biographies, first Thomas just sat still. After five young people went up, he just looked at me with one of his deep stares, and I said, "Thomas, what is it? Are you able to share what you did?" He just kept looking. I then said, "Did you do the assignment, Thomas?"

**Thomas:** *"Yeah, Ms. Carmen, I did it. I don't want to read it."*

I then encouraged him to allow someone else to read his work; he finally agreed. Right at the moment he was about to pass the paper to the other student, he pulled it back and said, *"Naw, I'll read it."* After he read his interpretation of who he thought this person was and what he was feeling, all the kids just sat there with facial expressions that said, "Like, no he didn't!" He was great. He projected his voice and at the end he quickly walked-off and started to sit in his chair. By the time he sat down, everyone just clapped in amazement because Thomas is not usually so forthcoming. As described earlier, Thomas was at first resistant and closed to the creative process.

As his teacher, I was trying to create opportunities for learning and growth. I didn't know who was more enlightened, the other students sitting as vicarious

spectators, Thomas as the one presenting his own work, or me. Well, I soon found out.

**Me:** *Wait, Thomas, you're moving too fast. What do you say when people clap for you? You know they are clapping for you. What do you say?*

**Thomas:** *I don't know.*

**Me:** *Come on now, when someone compliments you, what should you say? You did a great job!*

**Thomas:** (Mumbles) *Thank you.* (he smiles and holds his head down to the side)

Perhaps there was too much attention and he felt put on the spot, but he was able to complete the assignment and present it. I had to continue to work with him because not only did he speak those words he wrote but also he stood in the position that I taught him—his body erect, feet parallel about four inches apart, and one arm down by his side.

**Me:** *Thomas, you know what was so good about what you did was that you were able to show me you were paying attention when we go over our voice and diction work. You knocked it out of the box, Sir. I am proud for you. How do you feel?*

**Thomas:** *Alright, I guess* (this time with an even bigger smile).

It was time for me to process, so I opened it up to everyone to answer in order to bring everyone back into critiquing the piece. After asking basic questions about his presentation and way of writing the biography of the stranger in the picture, I had the class help me create a tableau of a family and the feeling of the mood that we got from his writing. Several hands went-up to volunteer.

**Me:** *So where might an older brother be saying these words?*

**Sheree:** *In his room on the phone.*

**Me:** *What about the situation that may cause him to say these words?*

**Thomas:** *He probably lost a friend or something and he's mad that he has to watch his brothers and sister all the time.*

**Me:** *Ok. So we have some other things to think about here. Who wants to play the role of his mother? OK, Sheree, what about the father? Jose raised his hand. Who's*

*going to play the older brother? Now let's see, we need the other children. What about what is going on outside? How can we create a sense of what he is saying about the outside? I am going to give you all two minutes to come up with a tableau, so think about where people may position themselves in relation to the older brother. We need to give him a name.*

**Nicole:** *What about Deangelo?*

The image that the young people provided really showed just how enlightened they were. The tableau showed a girl looking out a window, the father sitting at the kitchen with the mother, the other kids fighting each other, and Deangelo on the phone. After the discussion of our impressions of what the picture was saying, Thomas interrupted and said, "I was talking about a lot of stuff."

**Me:** *Like what, Thomas? Did we get it wrong?*

**Thomas:** *No, not really. I mean, yeah, one of the boys did get shot, but I was talking about slavery too and how we still aren't free we, like, still don't have peace.*

How excited I was to watch how this young man was able to find his way to discuss his own writing and his thoughts as well as his appreciation of watching the interpretation of his peers. We were all enlightened that day.

### **Sheree's inspired performance enlightened the spectators**

Sheree's moment of enlightenment captured her taking-in information and digesting it in a creative manner. Sheree always did her homework. She might not have turned it in in front of her peer group of girls, but she did it and it was well done. Sheree's execution of the homework assignment and her participation in class during the day of presentation were extraordinary. As I stated earlier in Chapter IV, Sheree presented herself like a tomboy but always participated in the creative drama with a bright affect and high energy. Below is another example—Sheree's writing

assignment—based on the same assignment as that completed by Thomas. It is based on the selected image of a mother in the picture. She did not give her piece a title: *I am ready for a change. Nobody knows the real me but me. I love myself. This place is confusing me—Why? Why am I going through this? I am ready to be free. Only God knows what is good for me. Please return me back to my loved ones. All I can do is keep my faith in God. Always and forever.*

The analysis of the data inclined me to describe how although small, Sheree's writing and re-enactment of her monologue were meaningful and had great impact on the entire class. At first glance, Sheree's monologue was simple until she got-up to present it. Apparently, Sheree was so engaged by the stories and dramatizations about Harriet Tubman that she decided to offer us a pleasant surprise.

As the class prepared to receive each person who completed the homework assignment, it was soon Sheree's turn. I went about my typical routine of selecting someone to act as the director. Nicole raised her hand and said, "Quiet on the set. Actors, are you ready?" and out of nowhere, Sheree said, "No, not yet." She talked about her music not being ready. I thought to myself, "Music is OK. This is going to be different." Sheree got Nicole's attention and gave her the go-ahead. Nicole started all over again, "Quiet on the set. Actors, are you ready? Lights, camera, action!" As Sheree walked in, we all heard the music of Kirk Franklin's "Imagine Me" playing in the background; and Sheree came in as though she had a heavy bag on her shoulder. She slowly put it down and went into a type of African dance. Then, she pointed to her classmate the signal to turn the music off.

**Teacher's Reflection Practice:** It is so important to never underestimate your students. I thought that I worked from the realm of having high expectations. I then realized that this was the same young lady who walked around with baggy clothes and boy-like mannerisms and picked on the girls in my class in her own subtle way. She actually put on a one-woman show. It was important that I praised her for going the extra mile to involve the others in her story. This was another touching and emotional day for me.

After she danced and the music was off, she knelt down to speak her monologue, and on the very last line, she lifted her head and arms upward looking in the air. At the end, we all heard someone crying and sniffing. It was one of her friends. Sheree then ran to her friend who, I learned later, lost her cousin to gun violence. Then, the two of them started crying together. This was truly a highlighted moment in my process of analyzing the data because it was cathartic and symbolized the power of drama and the enlightenment that doesn't simply take ownership and become a selfish element for the performer but extends into those that at that time were not in-role, but as spectators were too very absorbed and capable of being enlightened.

What made this occurrence so special for me was that I had no words, no teaching tools to pull out of my drama bag. It was evident that Sheree was experiencing enlightenment and needed the learned material to relate directly to her personal life in the community. It also was apparent that Sheree's monologue spoke directly to the purpose of interacting with literature. She became her own playwright, director, and actor. Furthermore, although some clapped, it was at the moment when the two girls

embraced that the class was silenced. The silence was heavy and calling-out with emotion. I honored this astonishing moment because as we all watched, processed, and remained still, we were very present, we were listening.

### **Teacher's reflections on creative drama and creative writing as enlightenment**

Creative drama stimulated moments of enlightenment to occur because it allowed my students to take-in and process information and start to digest the content in a space where they start to become introspective and sometimes even confrontational as they make meaning of their own and their classmates' learning experience. The processes of drama activity inspired urban students in such ways that they were able to acknowledge their learning, became excited, and even at times anxious about their learning process. This section presents my opinions and perspective about how I embraced their moments of enlightenment and my own understanding of how the strategies that I used allowed my students to move to a place of academic and personal growth.

#### ***Journal Entry #12:***

*They did it! They really did it! Some of them moved me to tears, but I did not let them see me. I was absolutely amazed; I was the one enlightened. Basically, everyone in the class did the assignment: of 28 students that day, two of them did not come to class, and three of them did not complete the assignment. But after the young people got toward the end of the main activity of the day, the other three had completed the assignment. They were writing the whole time, and I allowed that to happen because the goal for me was for them to complete the assignment. It was so refreshing to see my students who read their own handwritten monologues and especially for those who tried to act-out the character as I did on the other day. They were so creative that some of them pretended to be Harriet's mom, her children, the slave-owner; several created new names and had their characters live in new places and made-up*

*names that I had never heard of. There were no wrong or right answers, just simply their answers of truth, of honesty, of free will. This exercise took up the bulk of my class today; we barely had time to go to the next part of this assignment after each one of them got a theme. For those who really wanted to get-up and present—not everyone—about 17 people got up and performed monologues. I was proud because they were proud of themselves. And I must admit that the writing was just as on-task as the presentations, but I still made minor grammatical and conceptual changes on their papers.*

Wagner highlights the effectiveness of these types of writing assignments through the course of dramatic activity. Wagner states (1991) that in both improvisational educational drama and in writing, the individual is intuitively aware of the relatedness of the self and the object of creation. The process of imagining generates feeling and enables students to align feeling with ideas, images, and action.

I always led the main activity of the creative drama according to how my students responded. While watching the video segments, I made several notes while reflecting, observing, and re-examining some of the choices that were made in the moment. Below is an actual dialogue that I documented regarding how I moved in and out of implementing my lesson plan for the main activity.

**Video Observations:**

I apply the information to the individual classes' and students' needs but more so to understand what they did and did not do, or said and didn't say, and simply my perception of what worked and what didn't work—all quite evident to me during today's viewing of the video of dramatic activity. I tended to look at the class as a whole; for example, I become like an antenna, always trying to assess what the design should be for the next section. I examined if what I'm planning is appropriate, are they ready for it, will it be challenging enough, and is the majority of the students understanding the protocol of the sessions. I constantly reflect on what was accomplished after each session. I looked for enlightenment and asked myself if my students were investing in hearing the information that I shared with them.

In the process of analyzing the data, I needed to go back to my selected

students and ask additional follow-up questions in an attempt to piece-together certain parts of my story by clarifying certain interactions in the classroom that looked like and felt like enlightenment to me.

**Informal Interview:**

**Me:** *“Do you think the class was engaged as much in the main activity as I was in the warm-up phase of the drama sessions?”*

**Students’ Responses:**

**Me:** *So did any of you know when you were learning new information and getting different ideas?*

**Terry:** *“Ms. Carmen, sometimes I can’t tell when I was learning and doing the drama; it was like we were learning the whole time.”*

**Me:** *“Terry, why do think you were learning?”*

**Terry:** *“Because it’s all so different; I mean, I know when we’ve finished the drama thing because we do regular work like write, journal, read out loud; but it’s still all good. It’s just like we are learning the whole time but when you say to process and we do that part, we really get a chance to say what we learned. It’s like we all start to want to show who knows the most, you know what I’m saying?”*

**Jose:** *“It was the same to me. I didn’t know Harriet was what you call oppressed because she did so much.”*

**Sheree:** *“I liked that we had a good time and we were able to talk about slavery. What do you call it? (she thinks)—the creative drama. I liked that we were able to share our thoughts and come with new plans. I did good, right?”*

**Thomas:** *“We were still getting up and doing stuff which made it fun; so it was like we were all learning the same thing to me but different.”*

I am of the opinion that my students started to tell my story better than I can.

Although they may not have all the technical terms and the reasons behind what I was doing in implementing the work, they got it right where it counted the most—in their hearts and minds. They were wearing their enlightened sprits around the school. They were starting to become noticed by other teachers who were once known to count them off as failures.

## Conclusion

Just as Boykins affirmed the importance of movement, communalism, spirituality, and individual expressions, I realized that all these cultural attributes were just as present when my students went through these moments of enlightenment. It was quite evident to me that although we all were seeing the same things, hearing the same images, and feeling the mood of the creative process and discussions, everyone experienced her/his individual enlightenment in her/his own unique way. Some experienced it in a quiet and reflective manner which was sometimes difficult to express, some had quite visible bursting-out of emotions that I could clearly mark as an “Ah, ha!” moment, and others just seemed to do more work and ask more questions with insight in a more substantive manner.

My whole class’ collectively discovering artifacts and creating new experiences together as a unit really echoed the fact that offering hands-on educational opportunities for students is more than just connecting kinesthetic learning: it embellishes hidden attributes of all learners even though we moved from one place to another and discussed certain historical facts and solved problems when conflict entered the drama. It was as if being together in a transformed space provided a type of awakening: introverted students started to see things that weren’t there, a good thing because as a class we got a chance to witness how they made certain decisions, how they connected certain parts of the story together through their eyes, especially the subtleties in the drama that other bright students overlooked. Some of the quiet ones also were really stretching their imaginations. The potential leaders in the class at times were so empowered by the experiences that they started to take-over

Harriet's duties. And at times, I would let them as long as it was appropriate and did not interrupt the direction and the fluidity of the drama.

I discovered from viewing the video segments and from my transcriptions of both my and the students' notes that there were some very profound moments, that what keeps the drama new and inviting is the fact that I listened and let-go of the notion of what it's "supposed to be" and saw that it is really what the students need it to be. In other words, at times it may appear that I lose power, especially when the students make certain decisions and take-charge. But I still have the power even if I appear to be in a powerless position in my character mode. As Shakespeare's "Hamlet" says in *Hamlet*, Act III: 2, "To sleep, perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub."

**Journal Entry #8:**

*My students know that I am the teacher and come with a certain power and status to the classroom environment, so there is no need for me to push that concept over and over again. I know that they are my students who come everyday to my class with their own preconceived notion of what they want out of the class that day. For me to lead them is to understand them first; and once coming to an understanding of every child in that room, I then guide them in a creative format that massages them to at least think they can and should have the ability to lead me. The best part in working with the period of the late 1800's as the drama is that it deals with oppression and the oppressed, so we explore this idea constantly; and then it is my leadership that gets us to the point that they become engaged and see the need to become agents of social change.*

Chapter VI presented analysis of how I lead varied techniques to get my students prepared to go in and out of the dramatic play of the day. The next Chapter will discuss in greater detail the collected data that speak to another so-profound emergent theme—empowerment.

## CHAPTER VII:

### Creative Drama as Empowering Pedagogy

#### Introduction

This Chapter focuses on pedagogical choices I made in order to help my students understand both the realities and the concept of *oppression* and how to achieve *empowerment* as a way to liberate themselves and others. First, this Chapter describes how my reflections on my teaching practices with my students created an atmosphere in which empowerment could take place. Then, I explain how empowerment resonated with my students and the techniques I used in leading the sessions. It further captures how I prepared my students to accept being empowered and the importance of articulating what that empowerment looks and feels like. I also discuss the episodes during which empowerment took place, how effective it was for me to meet the educational goals of the drama, and more importantly just how motivated the students were to move in and out of different types of roles and experience a sense of ownership.

This Chapter closes with a discussion of how the data gave me an understanding of my role as teacher with urban young people and the benefits of using role-plays to empower my students to understand themselves through the learning objectives and how I was empowered to teach each day. Much of the Chapter is analysis of my leading the creative drama that facilitated students' access to empowerment and results of understanding the relevance it has in the classroom.

## **My perspective on empowerment**

From my perspective, empowerment provides a moment when one starts to experience a sense of control. Many interactions in the classroom revealed to me that empowerment was needed in order to take my students to new ways of knowing themselves in order for them to want to know about the content areas I intended them to learn. Empowerment in the context of this study means having students striving to a place where they begin to feel their own sense of power and to take control in a positive, active way. Furthermore, empowerment meant my students seeking control and being able to act and accomplish the content on an intellectual, personal, and communal level. Some of the attributes of empowerment were strong communication skills, confidence, self-control, being able to promote social change, and most importantly having ownership of personal knowledge. A very noteworthy outcome of this study was that when the students observed others being empowered, they wanted to be empowered, encouraged others to be empowered, and in the interim wanted to share their empowerment with others, especially when based on a cause like oppression.

One of the major themes resulting from the transcription and processing of the data was that of *empowerment*. I later realized before making my selection of what to place in the research text that empowerment carried two meanings—one for me as the teacher in- and out-of roles and another for the students who were also constantly in- and out-of-role. Empowerment was a major common theme for me and especially for my selected four students. The theme of empowerment appeared in several areas of the data gleaned from implementing the technique of creative drama, but it became

evident when the strategy of role-play was implemented. Role-play and improvisation were defined in Chapter II. I have found that the heart of the main activity that I call the dramatic action lies in the nature of role-play that comes directly from the improvisation vignettes, merging the ideas to create, learn, and play. My students have shown me in their actions, speech, and daily attendance how successful improvisation and role-plays can be for them. Ogbu (2003) discusses how historically improvisation is an achievement-oriented behavior used by African-Americans in response to the unpredictability of their environment.

As I examined creative drama as empowering pedagogy, I was able to articulate that it was this type of teaching that I was passionate about because it offered my young people the chance to express their opinions, beliefs, concerns, and frustrations on varied topics in a safe and trusting format. Creative drama also brought-out the young people's desire to feel power and to own power but might not always have been exercised in their past lives in the most constructive ways. Below is an example of one of my student's need to be empowered. This young man wrote a poem during one of the in-class writing assignments after a discussion about some of the African-American leaders who have died but left an indelible mark on history.

**What If?**

Man what if I was livin' way back in the 50's  
if I was a part of all of black history  
if I marched with the King  
if I stood next to Ali in the center of the ring  
if on school buildings they read my name  
if I was next to Jesse Owens on the wall of fame  
what if I had dance moves just like Mike  
Or if I was a reverend like Mr. Jackson that would be tight

if I was on the bus with Rosa—I would have sat right there to shield her—she was a natural soldier

If I had dreams like Dr. Martin Luther King

or if Michael Jackson taught me how to sing

if 2006 was just like that

and whites couldn't communicate with blacks

if I tried to create peace and they burned down my house

or if I walked into the wrong bathroom and they kicked me out

I think that's why we should put God first,

cause when He's ready the world will be different.

It's all in His word. We are already free.

by Jeremiah.

Mirrione (1994) defines creative drama as an “aesthetic activity” and a tool for learning. It is one of the few genuinely democratic teaching methods: the emphasis is on active engagement rather than observation and its aim is empowerment through participation.

### **My teaching style fosters empowerment in the classroom**

Placing my students at the center of the learning process and understanding my role stimulates, structures, and challenges them throughout their journey. The processing of the work and artistry can be executed with style, tools, and techniques such as improvisation, “hot-seating,” and role-playing—some of the many dramatic activities that can be used to produce change. In order for me to devise a successful creative drama lesson plan, the focal points had to be clear. If the piece were to provide skills to build awareness of slavery and resiliency, I had to make sure the plan examined the core of the problem—oppression. Creative drama presents a subjective and objective forum through its use of role-play and improvisation. O'Toole (1976) states, "Through the use of dramatic conflict and theatrical role-play, it gives children

some understanding of the complex interplay of self-protest and selflessness, expediency and heroism, compassion and fear, in a moral and physical risks” (1976, p. 7).

**Self-Reflection Practice:**

In setting-out to do the dramatic activity to address a problem or to provide information and empower my urban students, I attempted to be clear about the learning area and to consider in advance the tools best suited for the class. The data revealed that that the art of role-play was extremely effective. When I started to do role-plays, my primary objective was to seek understanding from the other techniques that I could use from the different types of role-play styles and explore my educational goal by selecting which might be more appealing for the majority of my students. I realized that it was so important to hook them into the work in order for it to be a successful journey, so I immediately became aware of the fact that I needed to provide safety nets if I wanted to ensure myself, as the leader of the project, of insights that would benefit the targeted population in the most engaging and effective ways. Since I would be addressing slavery and more specifically the autobiography of Harriet Tubman, I knew that under it all were emotions such as avoidance, anger, and fear. I also discovered from Bolton that the in-role discussion of Harriet had to project a summation of the whole experience, not only because it was a focus for the feelings of the participants but also because I needed to project a more universal image of depicting Harriet Tubman as a great hero.

Interestingly enough, I watched how I had to quickly dispel the myths and misconceptions of those students who just could not understand how Harriet could lead men into freedom and could not believe her bravery. It was here that I started to see my personal self and beliefs enter into the character in the classroom. So I breathed deeply and decided to address some of the gender biases in-role by using the technique of the “one who knows” registrar.

The “one-who-knows” registrar is a technique Heathcote sometimes used and is so empowering. I learned that during role-plays when I acted as another character and a student was in-role with me, it became essential for my students to help them hear the difference between the facts and provide some moral judgment on the

character and the situation. Although this proved risky, it was crucial for my urban student population that I addressed certain things right in the moment of the drama. Heathcote projects that this registrar is different: “It says to the class, ‘Now, you listen, because I know this.’ ” Heathcote typically uses this registrar for times when students are destroying the work of the drama whereas I used it to re-focus the class. I also used it to tell the class when it was time to re-evaluate what we considered to be bad and good or wrong and right. This is a style that I have found to be effective for my students: because of their urban environment and peer pressure, it was pertinent that I addressed certain issues that might not have been confronted once they left my classroom. This spoke directly to having responsibility in- and out-of-role for both my protection as a leader of the drama and to maintain safety and integrity for my students.

After establishing and setting-up the class norm, providing my students with the basic protocols of creative drama, and assigning various roles to the students, I was ready to move students into collaborating on specific themes and issues and presenting their products to the class. After I got students to define familiar and unfamiliar terms and concepts in a new learning environment, they analyzed issues from their own perspective and placed them within a broader social and political context as it related to slavery. I did not have to encourage my students to research and come up with ideas within a sound cultural framework: they did it on their own. I was so impressed with some of the concepts and questions that they brought back to the classroom after having about 79.4% of my kids do their own homework on a consistent basis. This percentage was on the basis of 27 of 34 students who actually

completed the homework assignment. The young people's homework assignments encouraged mixed media resources including texts from books, magazines, newspapers, internet, lyrics, radio, and television.

An example of moving my students to understanding terms and concepts from both the familiar and the unfamiliar was our work about the oppression that occurred in slavery and the types of oppression they might encounter daily.

The assignment came out of another empowering strategy called "" (described on page 35) to help students brainstorm on a specific theme. The exercise was empowering because it extended the chance for my students to voice their opinions, ideas, and beliefs about something that was new in terms of the concept but how they were already experienced and had prior knowledge of the concept of oppression.

**Me:** *What are some examples of how we might see our friends and family feel bad or discouraged?*

**Students:** *"When people call you names." "When they gossip about you and they say things that are wrong and not true." "When people get you in trouble and then you do good and they still don't give you chance." "When you get in trouble for doing something you didn't do."*

**Me:** *Well, today's role-on-the-wall is on bullying, so if we were to create our class bully, what might be the words that describe his actions, behavior, inner feelings. (I write the word on the side of the board, and in the middle I drew a silhouette of a person).*

**Me:** *Now let's give the bully a name. (After hearing all the names, we voted and I placed the name on top of the diagram of the person).*

At this point, there is already a sense of empowerment because there are no wrong and right answers. The students not only were engaged but also were able to get each other to agree on the same name. They finally agreed on the name “Bruce.”

**Me:** *So what actions might we see or hear a bully do?*

**General students:** *Joke, fight, trick, steal, shoot, response play, hurt, etc.*

When we finished, the diagram below was taken directly from the class session.

### **Role-on-the-Wall**



This diagram of role-on the-wall was created with all the students’ answers to such questions as: What happens to the other person when they call them names? Who is in control? How does the bully feel? What are the consequences of the bully? What type of future might the bully have if he continues his actions? Where might you find a bully?

Having fleshed-out and discussed our diagram, we moved to create an improvisation about bullying that we all could identify with.

### **Jose's and Terry's re-enactment led to empowerment**

This section presents how creative drama was an empowering pedagogical strategy because here I was able to observe just how disempowered my students thought of themselves and their peers. It was critical that I offered my students more opportunities to act since they were so engaged in that process which would help them see how words and behaviors can destroy positive self-image and how they can become more empathetic toward others.

**Scene:** I played the bully at first and one of my students who seemed interested in acting with me played my friend; I needed someone to come-up and be the one who was being bullied, and Sheree raised her hand. I knew she could handle the role and we just improved it based on “role-on-the-wall.” The scene was about two people calling another person cruel names and trying to make the person steal another person's coat that the bully knew had a cell phone in it. I stopped the scene when I acted like I was going to hit Sheree's character and she said, “Come on wid it, then.” After I processed the scene with my kids, I then moved into a role-play.

I needed someone to play the part of the friend to the bully and for someone to take on my role as the bully: Jose raised his hand to play the bully role and most of his peers were laughing, some yelling out, “Come on, Ms. Carmen. He can't do what you did,” and a few were cheering him on.

**Student:** “Go, Jose, 'cause you can do it.”

In that moment, I watched Jose take a stance: he looked around, shook his head and after getting the OK from me that he could play my role, he stood-up. Jose was about to step outside himself, take-on a new role with a different type of language and attitude than he had displayed in the classroom. I clapped for him as he seemed to pay his peers no attention.

**Me:** *All I want you to do, Jose, is like you saw me do: convince your friends, the follower, to make him steal another person's coat. You got it?*

**Jose:** *I think so.*

**Me:** *OK. Now who's going to play the friend who we said was the follower?*

**Terry:** (Raises his hand) *I got this, Ms Carmen.*

**Me:** *Wait now, Terry; the objective of this role play is to create new meaning, give us new alternative.*

**Terry:** *What do you mean?*

**Me:** *I want someone to express to the bully that it is not a good choice and that you can say no to your peers and perhaps think about the consequences we liked earlier.*

**Students:** *"He can't do that." "Yes, he can tell 'em off easy, right?"*

**Terry:** (He looked at me) *I got it, Ms. Carmen. I'll try.*

Now with all clear objectives in place, we all said, "Lights, Camera, Action!" Jose with a disguised voice tried his best to be a bully. I thought sarcastically to myself, "I thought he was a nice young man." He took-on the role with confidence, power, and at the end his classmates were giving him dap, shaking his hand, some just sat clapping their hands with laughter. Terry said, "Ms. Carmen, what you think I did? I got it right?" I was so impressed by how empowered both Jose and Terry

seemed to be and how amazed and shocked at their own ability to step into someone else's shoes, to take on a new attitude, that I immediately asked the class:

**Me:** *So, how do you think they did?*

**The class:** *Yeah! Good!* (and clapped again)

I then turned back to the fellow actors, Terry and Jose, "So what was that like for you"?

**Jose:** "I felt big! When I was doing that part, man, you just don't know."

**Sheree:** *"We don't get a chance in our other classes to say what is really on our mind and to feel free to say what we really believe in and not get in trouble."*

**Terry:** *"Now y'all know you better clap for me, I was the bomb!"*

**Me:** *"So how did you feel playing the role?"*

**Jose:** (Smiling with his head hanging-down as though shyness had come-over him after doing the role-play) *"Ms. Carmen, for real I don't know. It was good, I guess, it was like that."*

**Terry:** "It was hard at first, I was like I'll steal" (in that instance I saw him take in a breath and it appeared a thought entered his mind and made him change his thought pattern; he looked and continued to speak), "I just looked at the board, it was hard though."

Although my intentions were to get them to distance themselves by exploring oppression, especially slavery and the journey of Harriet Tubman, but my instincts told me they needed to bring it closer to what and how they experienced some aspects of what it means to be oppressed and the ways of the oppressor.

I provide this overview of how I tried to foster my students' needs and move them to a place where they could be empowered, but what was quite evident was that the other students were able to acknowledge how transformed their peers were when

playing the role.

**Me:** *So, class, was Terry playing the follower able to stand up to the bully?*

**Students:** *Yes.*

**Me:** *What did he say to the bully that you think made him back down?*

**Jose:** *He said he wasn't about all that.*

**Me:** *What skills were used when Terry in-role was talking to the bully?*

**Thomas:** *He let him know off the back that he wasn't a follower that he was a leader.*

**Sheree:** *Yeah, he stood up strong like a man and let him know he was no punk.*

**Me:** *Could this happen in real life?*

**Students:** *Oh yeah.*

This was one of those days when we were all in harmony, connecting and wanting to hold the good of feeling empowered by experiencing for ourselves and by observing others getting the opportunity to be empowered. I actually watched that moment. Terry wanted to regress to his bullying ways. I saw him play a tug-of-war with his words. However, somewhere along the line, it just clicked for him. It was the time he said to Mike, the bully, "Man you know me. We go way back like that time we tied the boy's shoelaces together and he got up and fell; we can't be doing this no more, man. We ain't going no where. . . . I'm trying to graduate. I'm not trying to be in jail."

I have come to accept the fact that you can have made all the right choices as the teacher, but what is more empowering is when the students are able to take on their own sense of power and start to create a dialogue among themselves as they all strive for a place of improvement in a personal and communal way.

### **Teacher's assessment of urban youth leads to empowering strategies**

Although one of my main goals was to get my students learning and understanding themselves on a social and emotional level about self-concept and self-expression through the legacy of Harriet Tubman's story, I soon found in the course of the study that my students did not care too much about other people's stories. My students had so many talents and so much intellect to offer, but they were emotionally and academically bankrupt due to their own stories of drama, burdens, grief, and disappointments. As their teacher, I did not want to just go through the motions of giving information and creating these dramatic vignettes without their wanting to be present emotionally and mentally.

Often, teachers are so pressed to meet deadlines and test scores that we miss-out on honoring the human beings who entered the place to learn and excel. Most of my students, especially Terry, Sheree, Thomas, and Jose were so far removed from wanting to learn and wanting to be in control in positive ways and especially in their classrooms that it was quite relevant that I enabled them through creative self-exploratory exercises to feel their own fear so that I could get them to feel Tubman's fear and need to conquer.

As I gathered information about my own story as a teacher of creative drama, I discovered that my students' stories played a critical role in how I described my story, especially the moment of empowerment. Sheree, for example, was grappling with being a follower in her peer group that she called them her gang and "hang-out crew." My impression of this gang was that it was a group of young girls who were

trying to claim power and be in control by projecting harsh and mean behaviors to other students outside their peer group—to their teachers and to other people in the class. This particular peer group had been empowered in all the wrong ways: they received press coverage in the newspaper, television news, and, of course, all-around the school building. When I found-out that Sheree was a part of this group, I was absolutely shocked. As I described in Chapter IV, she was very bright and also had a pleasant energy about her. Now I asked myself the question, How is somebody like Sheree who assumes she is empowered but shows no empathy toward others outside her group going to absorb a story like Harriet Tubman’s? As her teacher, I had to honor where she was and create a space for her in the class where I could at least invite her through various sensory exercises to see that one can be empowered to feel good, happy, and feminine and to act in ways that show positive behaviors toward others.

My challenges with teaching students like Sheree were some of the same challenges that I faced with more than half my students, so I was not shocked at the challenge but surprised that Sheree was facing the same type of disempowering experiences as I so often encountered. Having selected Sheree early in the study, I did not have that information; but it caused my analysis of the data to be enriched as I concluded the transcriptions of the study.

Second, there was Terry, who also exemplified disempowering thoughts and actions, like many others in my class. Perhaps the best way to describe Terry is as passive/aggressive. His reputation in the school preceded him to my sessions. A couple of teachers made it their duty to warn me about Terry. “Terry seems quiet, but

he is very manipulative, so keep your eyes open.” “Terry is a mess, that’s all I have to say.” A student whom I will never forget said to me, “Ms. Carmen, I don’t want to sit beside him in that circle because he likes to touch me on the thigh and gets people in trouble.” It wasn’t long before this quiet demeanor of his became aggressive when I asked him to participate and perform in the creative exercises.

Terry was a foster child who had watched his sister’s rape and severe injury by his mother’s boyfriend. He became very withdrawn after that incident, and the separation from his family and the placement into his new foster home by social services was eating-up inside this sweet, gentle spirit who once triggered would start to bully in inappropriate ways, usually becoming sexually and verbally abusive. How disempowering for him to witness such a violent act and then feeling that he could have stopped it. His moments of disempowerment were so obvious in how he did not use his voice in class unless it was a loud joke or how he sat with his head down and never completed homework assignments. All I wanted to do was teach them about what I needed them to know, but I was empowered to learn about what I did not know by creative drama, which allowed me to know, allowed them to know, and made us all better.

Therefore, as I analyzed the data, I became aware of those incidents where my story seemed to have been interrupted. There were some transcriptions that just stood alone, as I stated in Chapter III. As I moved from the analysis of classroom interactions that captured my story of creative drama and started to organize my research text, I came to an interesting place where I was empowered to embrace my own madness and understanding in re-examining some of the choices I made as

leader. One main goal that came to mind was that I needed to create empowering opportunities for my students that helped them combat some of their negative self-images, thoughts, and attitudes about their other classmates. Wilson (1987) and Prothow-Stitch (1991) both discuss how most black children have problems with positive self-image and love because they view their fellow peers who look just like them and speak just like them as ugly and insignificant. Amos and Prothow-Stitch assert that such inner thoughts and feelings result in negative self-concept and anger.

I learned from my data analysis that I actually took on the responsibility to combat their problems and help my students by providing dramatic exercises that could stimulate them physically, emotionally, and mentally in order to invite them to experience empowerment. I also remembered when the class applauded for Jose how glad I was to see them allow themselves to give him praise without my having to rally the class around Jose. As a class, they too noticed how important it was to be positive and to give people chances to discover and imagine new concepts. My students' reactions to Jose were enough to motivate me to do more of this work because of the immediacy of changing young people's mental and emotional ways of expression into positive and encouraging spirits and attitudes.

When Jose received the applause at the end of the role-play experience, his shoulders lifted, his head was held-up straight, and his smile was so big that he made everyone feel like winners in his moment of engagement. We were all engaged to understand the power in exercising inner voices and inner thoughts that enriched self-concept. I discovered in that very moment that the applause was significant because it offered Jose a kind of short-term satisfaction. Many of my young people during the

study had been let-down so much that they were not very goal-oriented and self-directed. I was able to understand just how that instant applause can boost their confidence and perhaps act as a major reminder in the future.

With Terry, on the other hand, my recognition of his engagement during the role-play was not as obvious as with Jose but just as relevant. I observed Terry struggling with his mental state of being when he wanted to play the character but could not find the words. I watched him go from his comfort zone of saying what came easily to really trying to do what was asked of him. This was an incident of great significance for me as well as for Terry in the classroom.

Later that week, I asked Terry to speak with me privately, and as we talked I learned that he thought about the that class moment as well. Terry talked about his own ways of bullying others and how it was not easy for him to play the other character, Derrick, who was totally opposite from him. He then felt the need to express to me that he's not always the bully; but sometimes, when he is provoked, hurt, and angry, he acted as the bully did in the scene.

**Terry:** *Ms. Carmen, I want to be like Derrick (the friend). I know what is right and wrong, I want to do the right thing, especially . . .* (he stopped talking).

**Me:** *Especially what, Terry?*

**Terry:** *Since my brothers and sister are starting to get in trouble now and . . .* (he just stopped talking about it.)

**Me:** *So, Terry, what made you get up there in the first place?*

**Terry:** *I don't know, we were all into it like I said, and you were a funny bully and I wanted to be something different and act like . . .* (stopped talking again).

At that point, I was so inspired by my students' own level of figuring-out concepts, reflecting on their own actions, and taking-in moments in and outside the drama that I trusted they would remember and hold onto it. One of the most telling occurrences in the drama session today was when Terry was stumbling over his words. Terry said in our informal interview that he knew what to say when he looked on the board for the answers and that he knew it, but it helped that we discussed it prior to his getting up there. Processing it enabled him to say it better. After getting through some of his old habits and familiar speech, he was able to regain a sense of positive control and composed himself enough to accomplish his objective that was outlined earlier. Terry definitely did a good job at standing-up against his own powerless moment and became quite powerful, even distinguished-looking as he stepped-up and embraced his moment of empowerment.

### **Combating disempowering images through creative exercises**

All assignments and creative activities were focused on generating language development and strengthening inner voice and personal values. In processing the creative drama activity, the questions asked led to positive dialogue. I reiterated such basic drama terms as *setting*, *character*, *improvisation*, *pantomime*, and *theater games*. The next group of sessions after the first five-to-six sessions started with a physical warm-up that included movement and voice activities. We focused on phonetics, diction, projection, and body alignment. We utilized various techniques, such as theater exercises, dance, improvisation, and chanting. We used theater games designed to stimulate imagination, such as group storytelling. In the process, the

elements of acting used were imagination, focus and concentration, emotional connection, and use of body and voice (the actor's "instrument").

The students then had the opportunity to experience directly these fundamental elements of acting technique. For the next couple of sessions, we concentrated on brainstorming and outlining possible topics to be addressed by the group where certain questions would be brought to life by using tableaux and character development. This phase of the session was designed to help each student group use drama and theater activities as a means of exploring oppression as the central theme and related issues which place young people at-risk in their daily lives.

#### **Self-Reflection Note:**

Through participation in-group discussion, brainstorming, theater games, exercises and improvisation, each group acquired the skills that enabled them to begin developing pieces for the class. Most of my lesson plans at this point were developed in an attempt to reach the following objectives:

1. Students will learn basic acting skills
2. Students will develop an understanding of expressing emotions through drama-in-education. Techniques: role-play, round robin, improvisation, role-on-the-wall, and group re-enactments
3. Students will engage in problem-solving activities
4. Students will participate in a minimum of 10 warm-up exercises, designed to relax them and assist in focusing their creative energies
5. Students will construct and perform a presentation based on relevant issues and pertinent themes affecting at-risk students by examining the roles of the protagonist, antagonist, and dominant will.

One unique role-play experience occurred when I decided to use some of the artifacts and one of my student's monologues in which the student selected the picture of a girl illegally reading a book. This experience related directly to the theme of being in an oppressed situation. In-role as Harriet, I selected a group of students to be in-role as

counselors and educators.

**Self Reflection Note:** I asked my students to put their chairs and tables next to each other to create a long conference table. I then told the class to sit at the conference table. But before they were able to sit-down, I quickly placed them into new roles with clear objectives using the strategy of “mantle of the expert” (described in Chapter II). The key to this type of role-play was that I had to ensure that my students took-on the roles of experts. In order to elicit ideas about their expertise, I asked the participants to think about a favorite adult whom they would go to with a problem. Most of my students mentioned roles such as counselor, pastor, teacher, coach, parents, and older brother and sister. I then gave my students choices to pick which expert roles they wanted to play and they had to come-up with a new name. Then, I instructed them to place a *Ms.* or *Mr.* in front of the character’s last name. I divided the pretend conference room into three sections—counselors, ministers, and parents.

**Me:** *Now each of you has a new name, a role, and your job is to help the little girl in the picture who really wants to read but the slave owner says that’s prohibited. In getting my class even more prepared to act-out in-role, I prepped them by asking what type of questions and advice we might give this little girl who is passionate about learning to read but feels oppressed and is starting to act depressed and seems quite lonely.*

**Noted General Students’ Responses:**

*“What is your real name and what would you like us to call you, like a nickname?”*

*“Do you have any friends?”*

*“What do you like to do in your spare time?”*

*“Do you feel you are left alone a lot?”*

*“Do you go to church?”*

*“Do you know how to pray?”*

*“Do you have any brothers and sisters?”*

*“What is your favorite story?”*

*“Do you like to draw?”*

*“Does your owner beat you?”*

**Self-Reflection Practice:** While my students went to their seats around the table, I shook their hands and asked them their names, aiding them to identify more with their characters and informing me as to who was taking it seriously and really focusing on the task at-hand. I was actually proud of my kids that day because they really appeared empowered. Some of them disguised their speaking voices; others used small props like paper, pens, or purses. The questions and advice they gave me in-role as the little girl were outstanding.

**Video Observation:** In watching the playback of the videotape of the same exact activity, I realized just how much I use the “devil’s advocate” strategy when working in-role with my students. For example, Terry said, “Whenever you are alone, just keep trying to read and keep sounding-out the words if it gets too hard.” As the little girl, I said, “Do you read a lot in your spare time?” Terry: “Yes, of course, all the

time; I love to read” (he laughs). Then I said in-role, “So tell me your favorite author.” Another example: “Most of my friends like PlayStation so much that there is never any time to read anything. What would you do if you were in my shoes? Just run away since my master won’t let me do what I want?” Although I knew this to be risky, I also knew that my kids dealt with so much in their lives that their level of tolerance was high and that they enjoyed the challenge. I observed them even taking-in the conversation for themselves vicariously. This was a huge moment of learning for me: if the youth are invested and the drama has encouraged them to be committed, the other kids who are spectators also come to trust that fact.

By the time I left the room and re-entered in the role of the little girl, they were in full control of the meeting. When closing the “mantle of expert” scene, I closed in-character by saying that I would think about some of the things each of them had said. It proved very encouraging to offer validation to all the students’ efforts. There are other situations where I have thanked them for taking time to speak with me and let them know that if I have a problem in the future, I might come back and see them again.

#### **Video Observation:**

**Me:** *“Was there ever a time where you felt you had control or power during our sessions?”*

**Thomas:** *“She let us do what we wanted. It was like being in class, but it was cool.”*

**Sheree:** *“Ms. Carmen was fun, like she did not care what we said and what we did sometimes; you know, like she didn’t get on us and stuff, but she still cares though.”*

**Jose:** *“When I was holding the candlelight and that real gourd, oh I really felt like I was back there in slave time. She trusted us, when she would say things like its o.k. say what’s on your mind, and we just had a ball. I learned a lot. And nobody was fighting ‘n stuff.”*

**Terry:** *“Aw, I was good acting, I was up there doing my thing and everybody was looking at me and I was telling that slave master that you better not mess with us. And what I like was when you let us talk about what happened and then we told you how you should deal with the problem and you . . . some of the things I told you the other day. To one of his peers: “Man, that was tight . . . was like” (placing his hand underneath his chin and posing like he’s on camera).*

My next ten sessions concentrated on 1. the issue of oppression within the various situations, such as school, family, community. 2. the oppressed and the oppressor and potential allies; by identifying who the oppressor is, you know how to change oppression. Questions I used often had the effect on my students of causing good conversations and offering clarity to both them and me. These same questions were noted in my Teacher Observation notes, in my journals, and in my personal

experiences in reviewing the videotapes in the focus sessions. The questions were 1. What happens when people are oppressed? 2. Why is oppression considered to be an injustice? 3. What does it look like to feel and have power? 3. What issues do your peers feel most strongly about as it relates to authority? 4. Is there such a thing as good oppression? 5. Is there a connection between slavery and being enslaved? 6. What other issues are important to students when attempting to solve a conflict around being oppressed?

I have used all these questions before; and even after this study, they have always seemed to create positive tension in the classroom. However, the responses from my students directly involving this study revealed conflicting thoughts and opinions.

### **Students' Responses**

**Me:** *“By a show of hands, how many of you think that there is such a thing as good oppression?”*

Of the 27 students present that day in a class of 32, 5 raised their hands indicating there can be good oppression and the remaining 22 indicated there is no such thing as good oppression.

**Student:** “No, it is never good to have oppression. And if you think that you don’t know what it means.”

**Student:** *“If someone or something oppresses you, like Ms. Carmen said, you are not free, that’s not a good thing so how can y’all sit up in here and say yeah? It depends on the situation. Oh no, that’s we are like we are today because we forgot about our ancestors. I’m sorry, Ms. Carmen, but they are making me mad.”*

**Student:** *“Yeah, I think that sometimes you have to have someone in charge, like our parents: they are in charge so that’s ok; that’s how it’s suppose to be, so it’s not always bad.”*

**Student:** *“Yeah, even here in the school, shoot, they know they are in control these teachers around here so I agree with Nicole [pseudonym].”*

Often in processing techniques, I used theories from Boal(1992). Boal’s forum theater that comes from his Theatre of the Oppressed allows teachers to play the role of joker. Boal (2006) made reference at the Annual Theatre of the Oppressed

Conference, All oppressions are of equal importance...to the people who are being subjected to them. There is always someone suffering more than us, though that is not an argument which should prevent us speaking about our own impressions, even if they seem minimal in comparison with those inflicted on.

I adopted a similar opinion, but as the leader of the creative drama experience, I didn't simply interject my belief. Although most of my kids may have known what I was thinking, it was still in-question. It was not my job at that point to say, "Oh, I can't believe out of all the work that we have done together that some of you think that having an oppressor and a group of people being oppressed is OK." However, it was my job to facilitate the dialogue by supplying safety nets and raising more questions to evoke more responses from the students. There are times when I discovered that it was good to allow the young people to share their own thoughts and opinions and debate without my interjecting, persuading, or silencing them. As teacher-as-leader, I had to coax them to a place of understanding or at least invite them to a place where they were still in search of new ideas of shaping and formalizing new opinions and new thoughts. This was when I as their teacher honored their discussion out-of-role. I must trust the work and the experience of the drama to work.

One of the ways I identified empowerment as a major theme that both informed me about my leadership and suggested outcomes was that I saw many empowering moments come into play when creative drama strategies were exercised. During our conversations about oppression and after discussing certain trigger words of expressions that can escalate a potentially oppressive situation, such as joking,

name-calling, sighing, calling-out profanity, and instigating. After formulating the various lists, we started to process other words that addressed prejudices and racism words, such as *porch monkey*, *honky*, *saltine cracker*, *blackie*, *whitey*, *retarded*, *stupid*, *ugly*, *fat*; again, “nigger,” as I discussed earlier, really created a heated yet enlightening conversation.

Although this dialogue was unexpected, it was my responsibility, having examined the historical biographical story of Harriet Tubman and oppression as related to society. I thought that it was important to have a discussion about certain types of authority that may appear oppressive but which we must know and have respect for, including certain authority figures.

Therefore, during one of my sessions, I assigned students to different work groups which had to come back within one week for class presentations. The assignment was to research their category subject and to provide a 5-7 minute presentation that included a) a scene that demonstrated their understanding of the material and their opinion about what they read; b) a billboard of their own design that advertised the moral/message that the group wanted to say about the issue; c) a performance no more than 30 seconds of a PSA for radio; and d) a report that summarized the information about the subject matter. I divided the class into five groups; each had to do research based on a number of authority figures such as president, police officer, lawyer, teacher, and parents. When the day came to present the project, everyone wanted to be first.

#### **Journal Entry #14**

*Group number three came in with dishes, towels, just all sorts of props for a kitchen; other groups had costumes. I had a few students roll-up note book paper in the shape of blunts. But it was group number four that had all the bells and whistles.*

*They really got where I was going with the assignment and I was able to use this group as a model to help them understand and reflect on the difference between respecting and disrespecting authority. I had the chance to show them that even when there is an oppressive situation, sometimes we have to know when to be assertive and when to be still.*

*This group did a scene about mistaken identity. Although it was funny to their peers, it was so germane to my hidden agenda. Their scene was done in a car. It was a Friday afternoon and they were in the car and one of the young men got out and ran into Popeye's to get some food for everyone; and all of them were wearing black. Again, I never made it a priority for my students to bring in props and costumes, but it appeared that they couldn't wait to do a whole production. One of the things I did was to leave it open-ended as to how they presented their projects. This group used a narrator, and she talked about the role of police, officers how they trained and their mission to protect and maintain peace. Then, the group put their set together. There were four chairs on an angle, two desks aligned side by side, and they did their scene. After their very fast but intriguing scene was over, they went into their public service announcement which included all the bad terms that they hear people say about police officers. They ended with "but they are our blue and white and we should honor them"; like my mama always says, "What happened to plain old "officer friendly"? The young lady who was the narrator walked past with a poster board with pictures of policemen from the newspaper, pictures of their ceremonies, a combination of negative and positive images.*

I present this group #4 as part of my data because this assignment really epitomized my focus as their teacher. This group demonstrated how some authority figures could be powerful and honorable yet filled with inconsistencies, corruption, and misconceptions. I was able to use their scene as a way to process and to role-play with the other students.

### **Processing Questions and Student Responses:**

**Me:** *Who were the characters and what were your impressions?*

**Student:** *There was the police, the boys in the car, and the MC. And the police were wrong, and for real it made everybody angry.*

**Me:** *What was the conflict?*

**Student:** *The police just messed things up.*

**Me:** *Was this a potential oppressed situation?*

**Student:** *Yeah, because the police think they all that just because they are cops but they are crooked, you know what I mean? Then they want respect.*

**Me:** *What was the objective of the protagonist and the antagonist?*

**Student:** *The boy TJ wanted to just chill after school and the antagonist was like oppressing the guys in the car.*

**Me:** *How do you think TJ (the boy) felt when he was asked to stop and asked those questions?*

**Student:** *He felt played because he was minding his own business.*

**Me:** *If you were in the shoes of the police officer, what might you do differently?*

**Student:** *I would have been nice to the police first before I judge people from begin with.*

**Student:** *I would have tried not to look at the boys in the car as thugs first of all just because they black.*

**Me:** *What images might we send off to police officers based on our dress code and body language?*

**Student:** *We just do us, Ms. Carmen, we dress alike 'n stuff; I mean, we like black and blue, so that doesn't make us criminals.*

**Me:** *How can we make this a win/win situation as opposed to a lose/lose, which we have now?*

**Student:** *Well I think if TJ had just shown the man his ID it would have killed all that noise, but you know sometimes it's hard to think when you frustrated.*

**Me:** *We play a role not only in how we use language, but also in our body language and the way we dress.*

**Student:** *I don't know, Ms. Carmen, I think like if you know the cops are like that we should watch what we do, but you don't want to be looking over your shoulder or changing yourself just because of their ignorance. I don't know, It's hard sometimes that's all.*

**Me:** *(to the class) The young men in the car and the officer had the same objective. Who thinks they know what it was?*

**Student:** *(A lot of students raise several answers, but I had to play a little devil's advocate here).*

**Me:** Could it be that all the policemen wanted was to go to work and come back home safely? And the young men in the car, is it possible that their objective was to go to school that day and to return back home safely too?

*There was a silence. I recall some just looking like, "Maybe," but some shook their heads, and others actually commented on the fact that in the heat of the moment you are not thinking about the other person: you are just trying to get what you want. We continued this discussion, and I closed by giving them specific pointers to think about when confronted by the law. I encouraged them to just remain open to what their rights are as young people but to be more mindful of and respectful to authority figures even if it appears to be an oppressed circumstance.*

### **Using types of role-play to support students' empowerment**

There were many types of role-play that I conducted with my students.

Earlier, in the sections on setting my students in more role-plays, I noticed a sense of resistance, as if the young people were shutting-down on me instead of opening-up.

For example, I set-up a couple of improvisations that gave me insight into the students' lack of self-control and how quickly their impulses were acted-out in an irrational state-of-mind. They were irrational to the point of not being able to focus on the future consequences of their actions.

**Self Reflection Practice:** One improvisation I created was a scenario on an elevator with people whom you do not know. I outlined the parameters of the elevator with masking tape. At this point, the students were being asked to get closer together on the elevator. I called-on students to volunteer to take the role of teacher and to get on at the next stop an elevator already crowded; but I left them with no choice because they would be late for the next class. As soon as I said, "Action," there was more pushing and shoving than verbal communication. I had to freeze and relax the improv. I then posed the question, "Is there anything wrong with this picture?" This caused a huge discussion which led us to a similar improv that I already had in my plans, but the students pushed me right into my next beat by making comparisons. The improvisation was the scenario of a person getting on a very crowded bus. Now as teacher, I played the role of a pregnant woman; some students played senior citizens; and other students played student passengers. Then I had to immediately volunteer to be the bus driver. After providing information about the scenario, I said, "Action," and we started the improv. This is the point at which I immediately asked myself, "Why aren't they ready for scene work and improvisational situations?" Before this session, they were playing their objectives out with full convictions, so I knew they were ready to move onto other styles of role-play; but perhaps there was

something currently going-on with my students. There was some type of unspoken tug-of-war going-on that I was not aware of.

Therefore, very early in the process, I realized that most of the students' apathy originated not only from their inability to express themselves but also more alarmingly from their lack of self-esteem. The total lack of trust in their own ability to answer a basic question after being in-role was startling to me, especially when they knew the answer. I took a risk in consciously attempting to build-up their self-esteem in a number of ways: positive reinforcement, using humor in challenging them to express themselves, bringing-up new ideas and ideals for discussion (rap music, images, *etc.*). These were all put into a social context that would take into consideration their cultural background and enable them to view the subject matter as part of a broader spectrum rather than as an isolated issue. By supplying a sense of ritual with the theater games and rap sessions, I got the participants to trust the process more and more and bond with each other as a group. They began to open-up, and, as a result, their communication skills improved, thus allowing them to express themselves more freely. They became so vocal that I could not help but notice new sub-objectives being met. For example, they started to address guilt and denial as barriers to true communication and respect. They acknowledged that generational differences did exist and began to develop acceptance of their own backgrounds and unique style.

**Self Reflection Practice:** I was taken aback, so that day I asked Sheree, Thomas, Jose, and Terry to have a quick discussion about the class. Although it was not necessarily my intent to bring my selected students to a conversation, I decided to go ahead because those were some of the realities that teachers deal with on an ongoing basis with their students. After my discussion with my students, I was once again impressed! They were able to articulate what was going-on in class today while using some of the dramatic terminology that I could only have hoped for in-passing as a by-

product of the experiences but which were actually taking place right there in front of my eyes.

**Me:** *“So tell me, guys. I’m a little concerned about how today’s session went.”* There was dead silence: my main selected group was looking back-and-forth at each other, and I knew then that I should do a huge cord. This is when teaching responsibility in leading creative drama comes in to play.

**Me:** *“Alright now, I know you all very well; now what happened today in class?”*

**Sheree:** *“Nothing, Ms. Carmen, nothing really, just the same ol’ same ol’ .”*

**Me:** *“What do you mean when you say, ‘Nothing’? Somebody help me out here.”*

**Terry:** *“It’s just that just the other day a couple of us had a fight on the bus and that’s why nobody was focusing on what you was saying because some of us were thinking ‘We can’t fight here in Ms. Carmen’s class.’ ”*

**Me:** I laughed so hard because it made perfect sense to me what was going in-class.

*“Thank you so much, Terry; I really see it now, so if any of you have anything you want to say, you can.”*

**Jose:** *“Naw, Ms. Carmen; I’m cool, I was fine. I thought it was wild that you put us on the bus so some of us thought you knew what had happened and was trying to help us with the problem.”*

This is why it was so important that as much planning and preparing as I did in moving them into roles in order to do improvised work be used to help them process out-of-role.

**Journal Entry:** *Well, who would have thought that the live drama presentation today mirrored some of the actual conflicts that were going on with my kids outside the classroom? If I had prior knowledge of the incident, I would not have created a scene that placed their personal situation at the core of my improv. For me, it was a blessing in disguise. Although as their teacher, I want them to be able to transfer*

*information from what occurs in the drama and in the classroom to their own personal space and lives, as the leader of the drama, my main focus is to allow the drama to act as a vehicle for educational and social change. Now if this event yesterday reminded them of what happened in the drama, then I must take-in the information, work around it, and then create tomorrow a different type of atmosphere that will dispel their fears, doubts, and concerns; then, I have to get them to a point where we can laugh at the commonality of the two events and then talk about the learning area and how things could have been different.*

### **Teaching and living in the moment of empowerment**

This next section discusses some of the choices I made as leader that helped both my students and me to trust those moments of empowerment. I never knew where the drama would lead, but it was important for me to be aware too of maintaining the safety nets and knowing when it was time to bring the drama back in and where it needed to go next. There were the occasions when the experiences of the scenes seemed to push something else to coexist in the very same space; thus, it was important for me to know when to pull that back into perspective and place the distance of the drama so the personal self was separate and then to exercise my ability to make certain judgment calls when needed.

The very next day, I decided we were going to do the counting-down exercise where as a whole class we needed to work together in order to complete the goal. When we got to the end after six long minutes of trying, we all laughed, clapped, gave each other high-fives and were proud of our accomplishment. I quickly moved to creating a space where we could pretend to become slaves working in the field. I assigned different roles to the students, so we all were up and involved in the improvisation. I then told them that I would come back in as another character they would need to help because two of them had been ganging-up on my children and I was going to come out as a mother in search of finding-out who among them had

been “messing with my children.” The intention of my character was to establish an off-stage character who offended my children by calling them names, and I was trying to teach my kids how to deal with verbal abuse and physical threats. I created my plans that would help them discover situations and get them to understand that our verbal behavior plays a major role in an oppressed situation.

After providing them with the instructions and order of events, I acted-out as a storyteller who told the story of how slaves working the field had certain duties even when the weather wasn't the best. I told a simple story of how everyone knew and helped each other. And all the students had to do was to act-out the story through pantomime. Since they could not use words, they really started to put their emotions into their bodies. Slowly but surely, the story came to life; and just before we were coming to the end, I entered the room as a new character named Mama Q. When Mama Q entered the room, I was talking to them indirectly while acting as though I was talking to my children, who were invisible characters. Then as Mama Q, I asked their help in communicating what to say to my children when they feared trouble and people were being cruel to them by calling them names. The young people knew I was preparing for a role-play, and they loved acting; but this time, I introduced them to a new type of role-play known as “round robin,” used to offer diverse ideas and alternatives from a number of different students. It was an extended role-play. In other words, while a student was in-role providing information, any student at any time could freeze that student and come in and try a different tactic. This was quite remarkable because some of my students who didn't raise their hands first or those who were good writers but couldn't always communicate their thoughts in front of

their peers had the opportunity to reflect and respond in their own time. The information that came out of this “round robin” experience was huge. The responses below were taken from written student responses after reviewing the activity on the video.

**Me:** *“How were initiative and power passed-on to you as my students?”*

**Terry:** *“She let us make our own decisions. She immediately let us do what we requested.”*

**Sheree:** *“We got to play our own role that we made up ourselves; it put confidence in us.”*

**Jose:** *“She listened, let us do what we suggested. Anything we would tell her, she would go with it and see it from our point of view.”*

**Thomas:** *“By asking for our participation. Then we would make it up ourselves. She gave us control and gave us advice to make it seem like real life. We helped each other out and Ms. Carmen.”*

### **Creating empowering dialogue through role**

The results of this study helped me to formulate my story of leadership because I was able to see just how I as the leader of the drama experience moved in- and out-of- role without jeopardizing the integrity of the drama. Making allies of class clowns and/or designated leaders, reminding them to be mindful of the contract, and allowing the class as a whole to welcome newcomers proved extremely important. There were times when by analyzing the data I learned how I was able to create the set-up of my management strategies, particularly when students became too noisy and

displayed disruptive behavior while keeping the flow of creative drama work alive from start to finish. I made sure that the creative process energized the imaginations of the participants, which fostered a broader awareness of themselves and others in a multicultural setting. I was able to gain insight into how they felt about doing something new and addressing the theme of slavery right at the beginning.

The young people in the beginning expressed their thoughts that the project would not work because nobody would say truthfully how they felt and what they would do in a difficult situation. This myth was quickly dispelled after they engaged themselves as actors who were so believable. The dramatic approach enabled my students to expand their private worlds by yielding a variety of positive choices that could be used in resolving future conflicts in dealing with societal issues.

The rolling-out of the drama was the de-role-ing process. I was glad to see that my leadership played a part in guiding them safely into an imaginative place and shifting them back to reality. In reference to the above role-play that I set-up using the little girl who was deprived of reading and if caught would have been severely punished, it was important for me to stress the significance of some of their questions and advice so that they could understand how they too process information. For example, I asked why they found such questions significant and how inquiries of that kind could help to shed light on the problem. I further had them reflect on how they communicated in-role as experts in their field versus how they might have responded as themselves. During this moment of processing after de-roling, the students spoke of feeling different—feeling strong, mature, and confident. And the overall connection for the majority of my students was the feeling of being important. What

could be more empowering?

Although it was relevant for me to help them transfer information in- and out-of role, I have observed that it was just as important to have them re-examine the benefits of the dialogue for themselves. Somehow, the movement of creative dramatic play in the classroom at certain moments allowed the students to own power and invited the teacher to at least appear powerless. I found that in order to meet the needs of the students, I had to first extend a chance to understand what the needs were and by not assuming, or guessing, and/or reading the past labels in their student records. I have noticed that the strategies inherent when engaging the students in drama are moments that appear to create “win-win” situations from three key ingredients—teacher, students, and curriculum.

Boal in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* explains how questions are set in-motion to do the following: test commitment, build relief, challenge assumptions, move the drama on, and promote reflection. In his open forum, Boal uses jokes as the facilitator of information. Looking at the joker's role in the open forum work, I noticed that one main function is to solve the problem rather than to engage others to solve the problem. This work is an important response to handling the conflict. In reviewing the videotapes of my classroom practices, I noticed that through my use of theater in the classroom, through interactive dramatic activities, students discovered a wide range of possible solutions instead of remaining in what I called the “conflict zone.” Once the students rendered their possible solutions, they then had a great opportunity to test their ideas and ideals. It was truly what Boal calls “a rehearsal for life.”

Another aspect of rolling in-and-out-of role-plays was that I allowed students

time to reflect, even if that meant having dead-space for a moment. In watching the video, I was able to see and hear just how dead-space on stage feels because you think something needs to be going-on and that something is going-on; and as a teacher, I saw myself honoring the silent moments in the classroom even when I felt that a child might need help. And somehow it always worked out. This also had much to do again with trusting the work. In creative drama, it was important for me as a leader to make good observations during the entire process but particularly when selecting students to go in- and out-of role. I didn't believe in just throwing my students into role: I had to allow them time to explore what it meant to be working from the inside-out. Once they did this, the idea of being off-script was less traumatic and more dramatic. My students really became little "hams" throughout this study.

If a teacher were given an option to create a role-play or a character, I believe he/she would select to do the role-play because there would be more safety nets provided. Therefore, it would make the experience less taxing; and the more structure one has, the more flexibility there is in the development process. This is not to say that acting lacks any kind of safety because it is a fact that there is technique when engaging in acting; it's just that the concept of the two, including misconceptions, makes it harder to see sometimes just how elements of the two overlap.

A major difference between acting and the actual role-play is that the role-play causes the participants to have compassion for the character in a way that general acting does not. One way participants can show more pity and fear for the person in-role is by having an intimate dialogue and a chance to shape and change the character viewpoints. Both an actor and a teacher have objectives to achieve, but they are

different in the approach and in attaining the objective. Actors usually have one overall objective and a sub-objective. Through the use of scripted lines, they tend to create their own tactics in order to meet the needs of the character. Actors doing the work normally ask such questions as How? Why? Where? and What? in creating the roles they are playing. In role-play, the intention is to raise questions and provoke response. Unlike in acting, the majority of the time you are interacting with the participants.

Overall, role-play and acting have many similarities and some differences: they both have characters, settings, objectives, and motivations. Bolton (1979) also explains that techniques and tactics are key functions in both role-play and acting. He also notes the importance of having structure to every drama activity in order to evoke freedom and more fluidity in the learning process. They both get different responses from the audience and different outcomes. Technique and tactics are key functions in both role-play and acting. However, in executing role-plays, the educational components must be in place. There is a level of questioning that must come-out through the character that does not have to be there for acting from a script and/or in improvisation. The beauty of participating in a well-structured role-play is that one is able to confront and challenge the other in-role. This is one aspect of watching the educational elements explode and manifest themselves through the drama into new and innovative discoveries.

***Journal Entry:*** *I cannot express just how much not having sufficient time destroys the whole experience of the session for me. There were a couple days during the study when we had some major interruptions. The outside forces from our being part of the school sometimes spilled-over into our class mood. Once, we were interrupted by a fight outside our door; another time, we had an emergency announcement; and then there are other miscellaneous events that got in the way of closing the drama, moving*

*my students back into the mindset of continuing their work, and giving them a chance to digest the entire experience that we have had together for the 45-or-90-minute period.*

The closing activity gave me a chance as the leader to quickly assess what the students got from the class—what the mood was and how their affect changed. Were they able to connect to certain learning moments? What was so impressive for me was that I didn't have time to do the closing because the role-plays and discussions afterward went overtime. Ironically, this was the day Thomas, who is my time-keeper in and outside the drama, was absent. And one of my students said, "Ms. Carmen, what about our closure? Come on, we can do it on the way out; come on, y'all." I was frozen for a half-second. Apparently, the closure is also important for them. I think I will ask my four students specifically about the dramatic closures.

An example of one of the closure activities is the students' standing in a large circle, shoulder-to-shoulder. Going around the circle, each participant shares with the group her/his name and the group norm she/he values most.

***Journal Entry #19:***

*My personal favorite closing activity is "hands like this": we all are hugging ourselves, and I say, "Now repeat after me: 'I am special, I am very special, and I love myself and you can't do a thing about that.' " Then I say, "Peace and hair grease," and they bust out with a big laugh. I don't care how many times I say it with them, they still get a kick out of it. But what is even more profound is when I forget to close-out or we don't have enough time and a student always appears to remind me that I forgot and will even volunteer at times to lead the closing activity. I get a personal kick out of that. For me that is an "Ah, ha!" moment because it speaks to the fact that they are aware of the creative drama protocols in the classroom, that they enjoy the process, and that following and maintaining tradition is important to them. And for teenagers, that is very rare!*

**Teacher's Observation Notes:** I gathered them together in a circle and began to throw a ball around; and as each participant caught the ball, he/she affirmed exactly

what he/she felt about the workshop and expressed any personal revelations that may have occurred in this first time together. I quickly noticed that the students began to develop an understanding of some of the basic techniques of educational drama, which not only gave them a full meaning to share with their peers but also brought a message to the class about their ideals and concerns that came from identifying themselves as the oppressor or the oppressed, depending on life's circumstances. Although I focused predominantly on my four students for the study, I included my observations of other students who also revealed moments during creative drama when they felt and spoke directly of feeling or being empowered. Listed below are some of the verbal responses made by students and documented in my self-reflection notes after each class and during my journal process.

**Selected Students' Responses:**

**Terry:** *"I got to express my opinion and we were all focused, which, you know, we don't always, you know, Ms. Carmen, and you gave us compliments and praise and we had the chance to tell you that we worked hard and completed a task."*

**Thomas:** *"We listened more at this part and we were able sometimes to talk about how we acted that day because before we couldn't act at all; we were pitiful."*

**Jose:** *"It was good because we got a chance to go over what our whole day was like and then I knew I learned something. It was always exciting and uplifting."*

**Sheree:** *"I like when you would compliment us on being on-point. That made me feel good."*

## **Conclusion**

I came to understand that creative drama did offer my students various moments of empowerment and that they too spoke of feeling powerful. As I reflect on the entire experience, I realized that empowerment was not a mere by-product. Providing creative teaching strategies that placed them in a space that allowed my students access to empowerment was significant to every one of them. Although the data analysis primarily focused on my four selected students and me, I knew that there were other voices and characters who could have helped me define and tell my story of urban students in the classroom.

As I re-examined my teaching practices, initially I thought that empowerment, although a critical outcome, was the end-point of using creative drama. But after this process, I soon realized that is a more circuitous process. As teachers, when do we have a chance to honor our own space and to compliment the actually lived interactions that flow in and around us? Once the data established that empowerment did happen, especially with Jose, Terry, Sheree, and Thomas, I was able to see that empowerment was enabling them to grow as young people on a personal, social, and academic level. This still was not the end point. It was the beginning which empowered me as a teacher to begin again and move on to another more enlightened, engaged, and inspired space so that we all became more empowered to stretch and grow and share that growth with others.

An intriguing moment for me was when Terry and I were having that one-on-one conversation. He was able to identify that he liked feeling powerful but knew that the manner in which he activated his own personal power was negative and non-

productive. He expressed his desire to be right and live right. It was intriguing because it made me re-think how I taught and the importance of being open-minded when it comes to my perspective on empowerment. I started to reflect on all of my students the moment they appeared powerless or seemed powerful to their peer group in a negative way. It was Jose who got me to understand that to be empowered through engagement in the learning process should not be limited to a specific stereotype and that I as their teacher needed to remember that there are those who were already empowered and were ready to go onto the circuitous process and receive higher goals. Jose taught me that even though none of those categories blatantly fit him, he wasn't processing negative power in the school, nor already empowered. He was quiet in his disposition, but I was empowered when I learned to accept where he was and perhaps his characteristic of being shy and reflective was just as empowering in his own way, which is perhaps why once he did start to share and to pass his power on with others, it was drastic and he was able to execute his thoughts and vocalize his opinions in a very clear, direct and empowering way. I am so thankful that no matter what level my students fell on the empowering scale, at the end of my sessions they were starting to think how they could share their knowledge about oppression and they were starting to become ambassadors of social change. In closing, Wilson (1987) asserts:

In interaction with a rich environment, i.e., an environment which gives the child's imagination ample exercise, range and flexibility, an environment which is relatively psychologically and physically unrestricted and allows the child's imagination to become a principal problem-solving, creative tool, adds significantly to his future characteristic adult personal and cognitive style (e.g., the flexibility of thought approaches, initiative, creativeness, lack of fear of new ideas, willingness to experiment, etc.) (p. 99).

## **Chapter VIII: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

Chapter VIII discusses my approach to the research questions of this study, offering a recapitulation of methodology, perspective, and subsequent insights. The overarching research question for this project centers on my examining my own practice of creative drama with urban youth. Through the process of self-reflections, interviewing, and narrative recall, this Chapter presents reflections on past and present teaching strategies as well as my professional leadership in the field of creative dramatics in education. Particular emphasis was placed on verifying how the thoughtful deployment of individual stylized modalities can capture and inspire active participatory learners in the urban classroom by integrating these techniques into the curriculum.

This self-study led me to several major discoveries. In the review of the main research, the question was: “ What techniques associated with my implementation of creative dramatics has been proven effective with urban students? My findings were consistent with the fact that creative dramatic strategies were highly effective with urban students. Through this research, I concluded the following: 1. Self-study for me as a teacher led to self-reflection, self-improvement, and self-empowerment; 2. Creative drama acts as a catalyst for personal and academic growth, especially for urban learners; 3. Creative drama was highly effective in working with urban youth on three critical levels: engagement, enlightenment, and empowerment. One of the main implications of this study was that creative drama and cultural responsive teaching can act as a potential model for urban school settings.

## **Understanding the Self in Self-Study**

I immersed myself in the initial aspects of this study—embodying the open reflective posture of investigator yet concurrently subsumed in a perpetual search for the framework of my research phenomena. As I moved forward, I attempted to discern recurring patterns and evolving disparities inherent in the study design and implementation. My goal was to delineate the powerful nuances that are an inevitable aspect of qualitative research and to articulate those moments when I knowingly encountered the quandary of ‘inter-subjectivity’—or “the problem of how to reliably know both one’s own and another’s subjective experience.”

In terms of the methodology, I believe that on some level that the narrative added to the dimensions of the self-study design. In other words the self-reflective practice in self-study was enhanced by using the 3-dimensional space inquiry. Interpreting data was a constant balancing act between my personal thoughts and the young people’s perceptions on similar and contrasting thoughts and ideas. It was as if during my process of interpreting the data the narrative approach offered self-study design new way to explore the self. I also found that the self-study design benefited because narrative inquiry offered a vehicle to capture and report the story. Sherees’ episode in the classroom as described in chapter six emphasized how reporting of that class interaction through story really help illustrate how her journey of reclaiming her femininity was a significant find when implementing creative drama and the enlightenment that happens from moment to moment.

Throughout the course of this study my central mission was to document and

interpret my personal journey in finite time and space while positioned in the unique realm of creative drama applications applied to the urban classroom. My research commenced with the study questions, which, in turn, dictated the narrative inquiry and methodological approach. As a novice researcher, I had hoped to capture the viability and richness of the pedagogical experiences that I was fortunate to encounter along with some exceptionally bright, engaging, and insightful students. I sought to ensure that the field notes, interview responses, video assessments, and other data would be cataloged, synthesized, and subjected to rigorous scholarly analysis sufficient to build on and contribute to the body of discovery in the field. I made some key assertions which I endeavored to both codify and embrace via a juxtaposition of personal experiences with insights provided by my students.

My four sub-questions in this research study were approached using the three-dimensional inquiry space presented by Clandinin and Connelly (200). The inquiry space and the ambiguity implied remind us to be aware of where we and our participants are placed at any particular moment—temporally, spatially, and in terms of the personal and the social (Clandinin and Connelly, pg. 89). My field texts were predominantly from my personal self-interview and my self-reflective notes during and after classroom sessions, particularly while watching the collected video tapes. The majority of my self-reflective teacher notes manifested an outward focus and were at times markedly retrospective. The journal entries that I documented and interpreted were clearly inward-focused in perspective, and often I could identify those places where my writing style turned forward or futuristic. In reviewing the first question of the study—How does the teacher’s reflections influence and reshape the

use of creative drama? The process quickly highlighted internalized and processed information and provided me with a stronger rationale for why and how I made decisions from one moment to the next.

During this process, I made significant progress. Turning inward allowed me to discover how my childhood experiences in the theater correlate with my leadership style as I teach my students in the classroom. I was able to re-examine how my compendium of journal entries from past and present introspective dialogue facilitated my recall of specific incidents. This discovery enabled me to revisit—and underscore—the rationale for the creative drama modality; why I regard it as such an exciting tool to use with urban and special populations; and the benefits of the practice to both me and my students. For example, recalling and writing about my positioning—voice and physical placement—in relationship to the creative drama strategy and my students were of the greatest significance for me. I documented the research texts in several areas in Chapter V when I was able to observe how I managed to keep the students focused on the classroom protocols.

My second question in this study—What constitutes a moment of illumination in using creative drama techniques?—proved a relatively tough question. In exploring this question, my reflective analysis assumed a more outward approach when pulling my story together. I continue a more in depth explanation of this in the next chapter. Documenting and interpreting my third question—Which standards or body of theory does the teacher find most relevant in the design and use of creative drama in varying settings?—turned me more outward and forward. It was evident by examining Heathcote’s, Bolton’s and Boal’s work that I was able to identify the similarities and

differences in my own work. Secondly, I was able to make certain future projections about creative drama and the effectiveness it can have as a potential model for urban youth, particularly since it upholds some of the very standards that match the learning styles established and supported by Boykins (1976).

My final sub-question—How would my teaching and understanding of creative drama technique and dramatic learners change because of this study?—definitely moved me into the dimensions of turning my self-reflections and understanding of my story toward a forward perspective.

### **Defining Moments of Illumination**

A “moment of illumination” is a term difficult to define exactly, but it is powerful, nonthreatening, and insightful all at the same time. It is that “moment of illumination” that I foresee as a major turn of events. Although the teacher has set forth certain goals and structure, it is during this time when the teacher’s role as the owner of the drama became managed, controlled, and extended by the students in the classroom. Many teachers would reject this attitude and say such a situation is a clear sign of the teacher’s losing power. But I have observed otherwise, and research demands that we go beyond the typical ways of measuring concepts and the mundane way of facilitating lesson plans in the classroom. Instead of teaching experiences being viewed as a monolithic concept/process, maybe we as educators might observe the process as a shared ownership experience. So an even greater question is How does that moment of illumination appear?” It is a question worth exploring. Saldana (1999) prompts us to view such dramatic moments as vignettes and to describe them

in non-temporal fashion as a journey not “from everyday moment to everyday moment, but from significant epiphany to significant epiphany” (p.61).

For me, the moment of illumination was the moment of both enlightenment and empowerment. Once the students were empowered, the mood changed and drama took on a life of its own. What was important for me as their teacher was processing the information after the drama experience and listening to how it applied to their everyday lives. Gallien and Peterson (2005) indicated that African-American students really connect to instruction when they feel that it is a cause worth believing in and they can make a change for the greater good for their people. I was able to see this clearly in my own reflections during the study and also in the responses I gathered directly from the students.

One of the most significant kind of moment of illumination (which offered these pivotal happenings in the classroom) was that of the police episode. The scenario set forth by the students created strong reflections from both students and me as their guide. The police scenario illustrated how our misconceptions can be dispelled once the students started to see the officers as human beings and as we see ourselves. The dialogue that grew from that session particularly in the question and answer period reinforced critical and reflective thinking. These two constructs were quite evident when the students like Thomas and Terry started a conversation about how the outward appearances can cause authority figures to make judgment but it doesn't mean that stereotyping by the police is correct. These type of moments that showed the young people critically combing through their own concerns and fears in such a constructive way really yielded perspective in that creative drama has the capacity to

get its participants to appropriately and critically rally for social change.

### **Self-study led me to a found space**

I was transformed during this study. I discovered that it was important for me to take the moments to pause, reflect and re-examine some of my instructional patterns on a personal and professional level. I became selfish at times but in a healthy way that caused me to seek more answers to ask better questions and to take more risks in the future. I was energized and found a space of self-improvement. At times, this was scary and dark for me. I found myself going in places where I did not want to go; I asked questions where I became the student to my own thoughts and actions. While scary, it was positive to go into the darkness and to come out inspired and ready to move ahead. Throughout this research project, I was able as a teacher and as a non-experienced researcher to go to a new space, a "found" space, that was amazing yet full of hope and understanding. In the midst of collecting the data, analyzing and re-examining, I came out with a deeper meaning in my practice and an increased awareness of my students' voices and interactions along the way. I found myself anew.

This study enabled me to come to a space in which I have never been before. I stated in Chapters I and II that as teachers we do not have time to reflect and pause while we are working because of high demands, the climate, and the typical daily inconsistencies that take place when working with young people. I was able to do the very thing that I now encourage other teachers to do—to become more self-reflective in practice. I discovered that through self-reflection, I had to go inward, sometimes a

scary, dark, and self-absorbing place. However, I learned that it was refreshing, needed activity that was overdue but critical to gaining insight into what I so easily do everyday—teaching. I believe this study allowed me to not make assumptions about my own practice and not to underestimate the moment, to be still and reflect on how these assumptions about my own practice got there and that they create growth.

This self-study gave me a place within myself that was immensely rewarding—a new space within myself, within the classroom, within my practice of creative drama, and with my students. This found space represented a new insight of past teaching strategies and the young people who were the recipients. It represented a renewing of the mind that energized me to move forward. It provided with a unique opportunity not to take for granted the small subtle moments in the classroom and to honor how my students receive and share new thoughts through an innovative format. Lastly but most importantly, I learned and discovered a new space within my teaching habits. I believe that through self-reflective teaching, I became more aware; and that awareness led me to self-improvement and self-empowerment. I do not believe that I could have found this space within myself if I had decided to observe someone else's journey of creative drama with urban students. This process of examining self appeared selfish and self-absorbed at first, but I quickly learned it was the best thing that could have happened for me and especially for my students.

I was able to understand the choices that I made only by capturing, cataloging, and integrating different parts of my experience. This type of self-study was challenging: it would have been simpler to have shadowed someone else in the classroom while she/he led creative drama exercises. However, I don't believe I

would have reached the depths of the inner-dimensional aspect of another person as I have with myself in my own journey.

My personal and professional approach to learning has always had its etiology in the dramatic arts—a path embarked upon in my early childhood and leading to this point in time. I have always felt that the arts held much promise for individuals who are socially disenfranchised—individually or collectively—and hard to reach. This research project has further elucidated this fact for me. I listened and found my own voice.

### **Creative Drama a catalyst for growth**

This self-study was interesting because I used components from the narrative perspective to capture my story. However, what became quite evident to me was the fact that it was not simply my story I was telling. The beauty of finding a new space and understanding that space was to allow others to become critical and reflective and to interact along the way with me. I soon discovered that I was able to become more informed about this creative drama space with urban students by delving into their stories, which helped bring out and reshape my story.

I discovered that creative drama acted as a strong vehicle for personal and academic growth for my students. At the beginning of the study, my class was filled with 34 students, but by the end of the study, they had left. The process of reflecting on my practice meant that I had to focus on the other characters in my story, such as Sheree, Terry, Thomas, and Jose. They were very different each in her/his own way, but we all had a shared experience of creative drama sessions.

In capturing my story without closely looking and understanding Sheree's story, I would have missed how creative drama could evoke hidden talents and create a platform for femininity to coexist in a space where it had been shut down and covered up for so long. In my research of Sheree's journey, especially in Chapter VI, I soon realized just how unpredictable the drama can be and, more importantly, just how vulnerable and rewarding the process can be for young females. Again, it is my belief that in Sheree's receiving the homework assignment, going home to do it, and presenting it in class, there was an enlightenment. This young lady, who came to class in baggy clothes, who walked around in a physical and behavioral outward appearance of being boyish with an attitude of liking other young ladies, came in well prepared for class, unburdening herself of all her baggage. Her connection to the drama was so strong that her dress code of stepping into a loosely flowing skirt over her jeans was allowing herself to change and to be changed. Now I cannot test this type of enlightenment and transformed experience, but clearly it provided a good script for understanding how creative drama acted as a catalyst for personal and academic growth.

On the other hand, there was Thomas, who stepped into my space as a resistant student and left as a participant who started to be my best advocate for creative drama.

### **Creative Drama is effective with urban learners**

This self-study caused me to make key findings in relation to my past, present, and future teaching practices. However, the results of the study unexpectedly took a

major turn when through my eyes I was able to see creative drama practices bringing out the very best in my students' learning process. This finding for me was of immense importance. The study of self-reflections of practicing creative drama enabled me to be transformed. I moved from the "What's in it for me and how I can be a better teacher?" to what was in it for my students.

The results were dramatic. The creative drama unlocked the common threads of human experience for most of us in that classroom for that semester. It was illuminating to capture some of the thoughts, feelings, and hopes of all who became participants of the lived experiences. It became clear to me that the creative drama strategies offered more than a way to lead me to improvements in practice: they promoted a majority of my students to be engaged, enlightened, and empowered.

As I discussed in Chapters IV and V, many of the students who initially came into the classroom with unenthusiastic attitudes about learning appeared to open up to creative expression and seemed far removed from the traditional content and concept of academia. My students came in seeming quite negative about exploring new ideas in a creative and nontraditional manner. All of those inhibitions, idiosyncrasies, and poor attitudes and behaviors toward their academic perceptions soon changed.

The transformation for my students took place at various times. There were some times when transformation was quite evident because they themselves were able to verbalize what was really going on with them at a given moment. I tried to capture my story of teaching but came out with a more enriched one when I was able to re-see my work and the effects it had on my young participants.

There were some amazing liberating experiences that took place with my

students through role-play, “mantle of the expert,” “role-on-the-wall” and other creative strategies that unlocked the door of boredom, hopelessness, and limited imagination to engagement, enlightenment, and empowerment. I observed through both the class work and video how nonthreatening and non-judgmental my students became.

Lastly, this study presented such accounts of several students such as Sheree, Terry, Thomas, and Jose. There were others, such as DJ who was not one of my pre-selected students at the beginning but became crucial to my data. Many of my students came into my class with disengaging behavior, tainted spirits, and projected disempowering images and thoughts about themselves and the whole academic experience. I believe that this study, through Jose’s and Terry’s experiences can really speak to the fact that they were affected by the dramatic modality. Their specific moments described in Chapters V, VI, and VII revealed that these two young men experienced a deep release of expression of emotions, gained new realization, and wanted to exercise new empowerment in and outside academic walls. The power in drama for those who allow themselves to experience it as projected by Sternberg (1989) is that it can offer the chance for participants to learn about themselves, the world, and their place in it (p. 15). I can safely say that my students gave themselves the happy opportunity to learn in an encouraging, enlightening, and empowering format.

One of the most salient moments of engaging was when Thomas was able to find his way into the drama by letting go of his disempowering behavior such as clinching his fist, hanging his head down, distracting others by “joning” on them and

not wanting to participate in the creative process to one of my most engaged and honest young man through the sessions. Once I guided him to see that creative drama was neither judgmental nor stringent, he was able to open up and find his way as an active participant in the learning process. Thomas was able to see some of his non-verbal actions being mirrored by his teacher and fellow classmates that he started to feel accepted and I saw his engagement built his self-worth and self-concept. He went from acting out in the classroom and doing pantomime like smoking marijuana to participating in preventive role-plays and vocalizing positive solutions to the state of oppression.

The results of this study also indicated that aspects of the dramatization of Harriet Tubman enlightened the students and encouraged critical reflecting. As I guided them from the beginning of making meaning out of the artifacts in the box that the students were using both cognitive and critical thinking skills. They were so engaged that more of the students were turning homework assignments in with more thought provoking and emotional statements as discussed in chapter seven.

Jose clearly exemplified how creative drama led to empowerment. Before entering my class Jose's voice had been silenced to the point he was being overlooked. He started off only being present non-verbal, found his own voice through the expressive activities, he was transformed. Jose too, was excited about the power in using his own voice, he was led by cause. He was so empowered that he began leading his peers to get more involved and enjoyed the creative drama process.

## **Creative Drama Holds Value for Future School Systems**

I highly recommend that novice as well as seasoned teachers take a look at this study and realize the importance of using more creative methodologies to recognize the viability of this technique with urban youth. For future studies, it would be good to do more work on individualized and stylized practices that are deployed with African-American youth so that we can collect larger amounts of information to help combat the well-known implications of what too often happens in urban environments. Specifically, more studies of creative drama techniques are needed to engender an enriching dialogue that inspires greater advocacy and more narrative in the literature. More voices are needed to create more dialogue and more research-based studies to add to a grassroots groundswell regarding this vital tool of creative dramatics. Finally, I wanted my classroom to be a safe place where students would be able to explore different characters and truly experience what it means to make believe.

Therefore, I recommend to others that they employ self-study in order to also become researchers into arts in education and offer new ways of examining and supporting best practices as well as understanding what is ineffective in leading creative drama, particularly as researchers become more accepting of reflective teaching as a viable method. I have observed for some time both as a student/researcher and practitioner the evolution of educational drama in academia, all the while developing competence, proficiency, and self-efficacy.

It is my hope that my empirically-based instructional modalities based upon principals of creative dramatics will be integrated into a broad based ecological

framework and that this project will inspire others and help shape the landscape of future practitioners and practice. This research provides a conceptual framework and theoretical insights that others can use, improve, or reject as they research these issues of self-concept and urban learning motivational factors in the classroom. An additional implication of this research is that it will help practitioners engage in promoting in-service teacher training; for example, looking at creative and culturally responsive strategies when designing professional development and redesigned schools to foster continuing teacher improvement.

An even greater implication of this research holds positive promise for urban learners, particularly for students who have experienced poor self-concept, labeled as aggressive, and those who have simply giving up in being motivated to reach academic advancement. This research offers hope for students failed by teachers employing lecture and didactic styles of teaching. My research calls for a schema of creativity to be placed at the forefront of classroom interactions in order that students who are already innately inclined to be innovative and imaginative are fostered and led to academic and personal advancement.

One of my crucial assertions was that applicants selected from my instructional repertoire and classroom vignettes actually represented viable best practices that can serve as a 'template' or guide for novices in the use of creative dramatics. Secondly, if we begin as educators to codify the mechanics of creative dramatics in a technical manual format that projects a feel, outlining step-by-step implementations, perhaps we can marshal a call to action to underscore the importance of the modality. Such advocacy would facilitate more moments of

enlightenment in our nation's classrooms. I also assert that implementation of the self-study design and videotapes used in capturing creative drama techniques can offer a protocol and/or script analysis which lends itself to translation into uniform terminology, or nomenclature, of the genre. This would allow more schools to consider this underutilized tool to be added to both pre-service and in-service training for teachers.

This research indicated that my assertions were based on personal and professional reflections while functioning in a range of roles that I have assumed in the school system. Along a continuum from substitute teacher to teacher's assistant to guest artist in the classroom to being the lead teacher in the classroom, I found a recurring theme that resonated with me regardless of my position. Often, I have heard from past administrators, teachers, and from my own observations that teachers seem not to make the connection from the curriculum to the student. It is constantly echoed that teachers need to meet the needs of their students but do not; and, conversely, what about teachers' needs and wants?

I have witnessed either the lesson plan being emphasized and students lost or the students overpowering the objective of the day with nothing accomplished. This lack of reciprocal exchange is yet another reason why I now believe a creative dramatic approach is worth looking at as a means to improve motivation for both teachers' professional development and students' improvement, particularly with regard to inner city schools.

As in all studies, I encountered limitations and gleaned insights that yielded recommendations for future work and practice. One observation is that I wish that I

had the benefit of more participant opinions and more data from a wider range of subjects—more students’ feedback could have been included. I am documenting this point as a limitation on the study after realizing the overwhelming responses from the students who were so willing to share their opinions about my teaching strategies. I wish there had been more students than the original selected number. Secondly, I regret not having more feedback from collaborative entities involved with the students, such as other teachers in their network as well as parents. Because I encountered students who work with other teachers in my district, I wish I had extended an invitation for feedback from other students and parents to discern the impact outside the classroom, the “domino effect,” as it were, of what happened in the classroom.

Though I am pleased with the results, I could have provided the participants with a better understanding of the assessment process. My results of the evaluation could have been overwhelming with their responses. Then, the participants themselves would have had a vested interest in the results. The evaluations of the young people who inspired the video are in the Appendix along with evaluation responses by outside participants. These outside participants did not go through the same training as the others: they were first time viewers. It was very rewarding to see them as engaged as the ones who were part of the project from the beginning. I believe that they were lured into the video because they saw authentic images and heard authentic voices to which they could personally relate.

This study acts as a potential model to examine how listening is valued and possibly improved upon when working with creative drama strategies especially with

urban populations. The study offers new suggestions in how one might view students. Often the data showed how the students entered the classroom with blocked filters due to outside noises and therefore were not ready to listen to what was going on in the class. This is where the creative exercises can relax students and center their minds and their physical beings. By releasing the noise, creative drama unblocks the distracted youth to become active and engaged listeners. This study encourages me to conduct future studies regarding listening and creative drama as a way to increase empathy, motivation, and information processing.

Lastly, this research study can offer teachers a way to think about inequality in the classroom and how their students can be empowered through the creative processes similar to Boal's work around seeing oppression as something non-liberating (1993). It shows how students and teachers can expand and heighten awareness around issues of oppression. The results in this study could be used to stress the emphasis in how drama goes beyond the text in the book. Particularly about slavery, it really gets participants to understand on a more social and emotional level. The drama strategies illustrated how the participants experience meaning of oppression, rather than just passively hearing about the story of slavery. This was elaborated in Chapter VII which detailed the immediate manner of expansion of the participants' sensory awareness. The significance of getting students to "act in" rather than "acting out" should compel more educators to bring creative drama into the classrooms and schools. Imagine how much better it will be when the conditions of social inequality and injustice are "acted in" the schools with professional guidance than it is when they are "acted out" in the streets leading to needless death, suffering,

and imprisonment.

## CONCLUSION

Reflecting on specific situations as a practitioner engaged in creative dramatics instruction, I can report that the field itself lacks documentation, accountability, and dissemination of the best practices for purposes of replication by others. This situation does not result from a lack of credibility, however, but rather from the fact that conventional research methodologies are ill equipped to measure, assess, and codify what may be termed by some an “abstract” science. But I can report that there is nothing abstract about the current application results and the future potential that creative dramatics holds for changing and enriching lives. And this lack of codification of theory and nomenclature has been a motivating force in my decision to embark on this doctoral study and embrace narrative design as a technique to facilitate research.

I suggest that curriculum should be a fluid, meaningful, yet improvised event. I know that the teacher is the leader; my students know the teacher is the leader. So why manipulate students and parents by playing a status based power game? I am convinced that while currently underutilized, drama in the classroom is one of the most ingenious ways of meeting students’ needs. I agree with experts Borko and Livingston (1989) who characterized the actual teaching of a lesson as an improvisational act during which teachers closely monitor students for evidence of understanding and make final decisions about timing, pacing, and which examples to use in response to students’ participation.

This kind of study is what is needed to help close the gap between theoretical understanding and actual implementation of creative drama into school curricula across the board. Such studies will help future teachers understand that they are not alone and, more importantly, that those who actually use the arts in class are exercising a fundamental concept of what teaching is—“learn by doing”—so that it really becomes a circular process. Drama itself is a catalyst in which education, engagement, enlightenment, and empowerment can all take place simultaneously.

Certain words and phrases called out to me from my notes and journal entries. After serious review of how others defined the phenomenon of creative drama, I have developed an operational definition of this multifaceted learning tool. This definition is predicated on the use of this unique genre with urban youth. As a practitioner of creative dramatics, I define this discipline as an imaginative technique that serves as a vehicle for students to interact with literature and other subject matter in an engaging, enlightening, educational, and empowering manner. The students’ experiences with creative drama bring them to an awareness and understanding that fosters learning on both a personal and community level.

The compelling poem below, composed by one of my nonresearch participant students, bears witness to the powerful effects of the arts on students. This young lady was almost devoid of affect, virtually nonverbal, and academically isolated. Subsequent to a creative drama session in which I portrayed Harriet Tubman to underscore how one can triumph over severe adversity, this student provided the work below in appreciation and to give voice to feelings long held silent and locked

inside—released only by the vicarious experience of creative dramatics.

### **Student's Poem**

#### *Because of You*

*I know that castles are made out of sand  
I know that glass can be shattered  
I know that I am an image of perfection, my body is a ship  
my soul is pushing the waves  
I have not forgotten you – not your sound, your light,  
your feeling, your touch.  
You caress me like a memory of uncomfortable love.  
Because of you there is a chance  
The night is so long – The day is so pressing*

My sleep is uneasy – my arms so tired – my eyes are teary – My throat is hoarse – my  
----- my veins are bulging- my mind is scattered – my heads is pounding- my  
back is aching- my lips are weak – The time is now and you are the hero beneath my  
wings.

*Because of you, Harriet Tubman,  
You keep me alive!*

I come away with several thoughts and opinions but with more validity and increased knowledge of why and how I use creative drama and especially with my students whom I call dramatic learners. This creative tool, although simple in structure, is critical once applied appropriately. This study does act as a potential model project that can be used and studied more with urban learners as well as with other classroom environments. Creative drama does not teach only for academic enrichment but also to bring out a student's innate need and ability to learn his/her own self and own mind. I am confident that none of the findings in this study could have existed and come to life if my students did not already have those innate talents, intelligences, and powers inside.

Finally, I close this self-study in hope that I captured the feel of just how

unique this underutilized modality once placed in the forefront of a classroom can promote better teaching strategies and transformative participants. This creative drama practice holds potential success for American schools and generations of students to be affected academically and personally in enlightening and empowering ways for both the teacher and the learner.

## **APPENDIX A**

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### **Suggested Interview Questions for Self**

1. What was my first experience with creative drama like?
  
  2. Where and when did I first start to teach and implement the work?
  
  3. What was my primary focus when working with creative drama?
  
  4. Does my ethnicity play any part in my teaching style?
  
  5. What was my training like in creative drama?
  
  6. Do I maintain the same standards and principles of creative drama as in the past?
  
  7. What are my future plans?
  
  8. If I had the chance to change anything, what would it be?
-

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Self- Reflective Questionnaire**

1. What was the objective of the day and how was it accomplished?
2. What strategies did the teacher-in-role use?
3. How were suggestions by the participants incorporated?
4. How were initiative and power passed to the participants?
5. Were the theatrical elements of surprise, tension, contrast, conflict, and ritual employed?
6. How do I get and hold attention?
7. How do I give information?
8. What role do I choose to play in relation to the roles of the students?

9. How do I ask questions and then listen to and validate the answers?

10. How did my students support/enhance the drama experience, if at all?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Questions for Focus Group Session (Simulated Recall of Teacher in the Classroom)**

#### **Breakpoint I.**

- 1. What did you see happening?**
- 2. What was the mood like during this part?**
- 3. Could you identify what skills were being exercised during the particular activity? State a reason why you thought that skill(s).**
- 4. How was the teacher able to get participation out of everyone?**

#### **Breakpoint II.**

- 1. What did you understand to be the objective/goal of this section?**
- 2. How were the students responding to the exercises?**
- 3. Did you notice anything that struck your interest in the actual teaching strategy? If yes, what and why?**
- 4. Where was the teacher positioned in relation to the students?**

**Breakpoint III.**

**1. What did you think or feel about the type of questions being asked?**

**2. How did the students respond to the processing moments?**

**3. If you were the teacher, what questions might you ask??**

**4. Did you notice the students who were not talking and/or responding to questions? What were they doing?**

**Breakpoint IV.**

**1. Were there any elements of surprise or suspense and or tension during the first couple of minutes? If yes *or* no, explain.**

**2. Was there a shift of power at any point during the segment? If so, tell where and how it happened.**

**3. Toward the last three minutes, could you tell who was leading who was following? How did the use of creative dramatic strategies play out in the classroom environment?**

**4. What choices do you think the teacher made?**

**5. Did you understand how props were used in this segment?**

**APPENDIX D**

**Table 1**

**Dissertation Data Collection Timeline**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>#Field observation + journaling w/video</b>	<b># of videotaped classroom observations</b>	<b># of focus groups sessions</b>	<b># of journal entries + field observation w/o video</b>
Jan-June 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designed lesson plan</li> <li>• locate sites+ gain access</li> <li>• designed consent forms</li> <li>• developed protocols for informal interviews</li> <li>• selecting past videos gained IRB approval</li> </ul>				2
<b>June-July 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• selected participants</li> <li>• organized video production and taping times</li> </ul>	3			2

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gain approval of proposal</li> <li>field notes on sites and urban students</li> </ul>				
<p><b>July 5<sup>th</sup>- August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>viewed video tapes by myself</li> <li>implemented CD (45 min x 4 days per 8 weeks)</li> <li>videotaped approx. 20 sessions</li> <li>scheduled + performed informal interviews</li> <li>data gathering of field observations</li> <li>observation of classroom practices of self + students</li> </ul>	4	20	6	25
<p><b>July 5<sup>th</sup>- August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>data gathering of students work</li> <li>review</li> </ul>				

	collected data, research questions and made changes if needed	DONE	DONE	DONE	4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• start of data analysis</li> <li>• organizing story from the inside out</li> </ul>					
<b>August 25<sup>th</sup> - September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• schedule focus group sessions</li> <li>• data review, organizational analysis</li> <li>• continued viewing of videotapes by myself</li> <li>• transcription of journals, field observations</li> </ul>	4	16	2		
<b>September 6<sup>th</sup> - October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006 (5 weeks)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus group sessions w/video</li> <li>• unscheduled unstructured interviews</li> <li>• more intense data gathering</li> </ul>	5	10	5	2	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>transcriptions were made</li> <li>analyzing the data</li> </ul>						
<b>October-December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>categorizing and organizing transcriptions</li> <li>data analysis, writing</li> <li>drawing to conclusions based on triangularization</li> </ul>	DONE	DONE	DONE	DONE	DONE	DONE
<b>November-December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retelling of story and integrating the student voices</li> </ul>	DONE	DONE	DONE	DONE	DONE	DONE
<b>November-December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More writing re-writes edits, informal checks as needed based on data analysis</li> <li>Submit first draft of dissertation</li> </ul>	DONE	DONE	DONE	DONE	2	1

## APPENDIX E

<b>Journal Entry</b>	<b>Guided Questions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
1	Past experiences	April 20 <sup>th</sup> - May 18 <sup>th</sup>
2	Focus when implementing the work	May 23 <sup>th</sup> - June 12 <sup>th</sup>
3	Getting & holding student's attention	June 25 <sup>th</sup> - July 25
4	My role during set-up exercises	July 6 <sup>th</sup>
5	My role during set-up of creative drama exercises	April 10 <sup>th</sup> - July 10 <sup>th</sup>
6	Validating and assessing my students	July 20 <sup>th</sup>
7	Listening & asking questions	July 14 <sup>th</sup>
8	Initiative & power passed to students	May 25 <sup>th</sup> - July 12 <sup>th</sup>
9	Ethnicity playing out in teaching style	June 30 <sup>th</sup> - July 18 <sup>th</sup>
10	Present work & past training	July 3 <sup>rd</sup>
11	Giving information in and out of role	July 27 <sup>th</sup>
12	Maintaining standards and principles	May 29 <sup>th</sup> - July 25 <sup>th</sup>
13	Using props & costumes	June 30 <sup>th</sup> - July 23 <sup>rd</sup>
14	Homework assignment & empowerment	July 31 <sup>st</sup>
15	Voice & body language	July 26 <sup>th</sup>
16	Passing power to students	August 2 <sup>nd</sup>
17	Elements of surprise	July 28 <sup>th</sup>
18	Students support the experience	August 7 <sup>th</sup>
19	Silence in Time & Space	July 9 <sup>th</sup> - September 23 <sup>rd</sup>
20	Future Projections	August 23 <sup>rd</sup>

**Appendix F Selected Video Segment  
#1**

<b>Warm-up Activities</b>	<b>Teaching Strategies</b>	<b>Time-frame</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Leader-ship</b>	<b>Decision-making</b>	<b>Imagination</b>
Break Point I	Name game	5 minutes	Teacher	High/Engaged	Clarity/Modeling	Clear/No change	Physical/non-verbal
Break Point II	All-around-the-city	4 minutes	Student	Upbeat/cool	Call & response	None	Expressive
			Teacher	Maximum	Physical positioning	Spontaneous	Child-like
Break Point III	All-around-the-city	5 minutes	Student	High/?	Togetherness	Diff. Choices	Freedom
			Teacher	100% Participation	Shared	Inclusive	Playful/Joker
Break Point IV	Cartoon Charades	6 Minutes	Student	100%/crazy	Positive	Wanting more	“Do you”
			Teacher	Active listening/Engaged	Encouraging	Pacing + Role	Open to Stories
			Student	Too short/fun	Competitive	Team	Individuality

Selected Video Segment # 2

Main Activities	Teaching Strategy	Time	Subject	Participation	Leadership	Decision-Making	Imagination
<b>Break Point I</b>	Role-n-bag of artifacts	5 min	Teacher	Medium/Engaged	Open	Flexible	Built tension/ surprise
			Student	Curious/Attentive ?	Focused	Togetherness	Storytelling
<b>Break Point II</b>	Role-on-the-wall	5 min	Teacher	High Affect	Requestive/open-minded	Negotiated	Stimulated
			Student	Focused	Caring	None	New character
<b>Break Point III</b>	Monologue and song	5 min	Teacher	High/Strong	Owning the role	Vocal Changes	3-dimensional solo-group work
			Student	Surprisingly fun	Believing in us	Directions Clear	Making stories
<b>Break Point IV</b>	Hotseating w/ Harriet	6 min	Teacher	Strongly Intense/High	Aggressive /Devil's Advocate	Nurturing/Empowering	Negotiated/Props
			Student	100%/Feeling it	Truth	Honestly	Acting

**Selected Video Segment # 3**

<b>Main Activities</b>	<b>Teaching Strategy</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Decision-Making</b>	<b>Imagination</b>
<b>Break Point I</b>	Pictures to monologues	4 min	Teacher	95% participation	Boundaries	Suspend belief	5 senses
<b>Break Point II</b>	Pictures to monologues	5 min	Teacher	Peer support	Care	Answered questions	Sharing with peers
			Student	High/Intense	Respect	Empathetic	Collaborate
			Student	Everyone doing it	Felling us	Respect	
<b>Break Point III</b>	Role-playing	5 min	Teacher	100%	Share	Reflect	Verbally connect
			Student	All in it	Peer support	Competition	Acting
<b>Break Point IV</b>	Round Robbin Role-Play	6 min	Teacher	Care for others	Inclusive/?	Boundaries	Spontaneous
			Student	Too short	Everyone	No fighting	Making lines

**Selected Video Segment # 4**

<b>Warm-up Activities</b>	<b>Teaching Strategies</b>	<b>Time-frame</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Decision-making</b>	<b>Imagination</b>
<b>Break Point I</b>	Teacher-in-Role/Thought tracking	5 min	Teacher	100%/Engaged	Creative Management	Contracting	Raise Stakes
			Student	Whole class	Fair	None	Believing
<b>Break Point II</b>	All-around-the-city	4 min	Teacher	Connecting	Challenge	Devil's Advocate	Vocal tone
			Student	Feeling it	Repetition	Fair	None
<b>Break Point III</b>	All-around-the-city	5 min	Teacher	Listening	We control	Listening	Powerful/big
			Student	In charged	All answered	Team	Encouraged
<b>Break Point IV</b>	Cartoon Charades	6 min	Teacher	100%	Listened	Empower	Pacing
			Student	Call & response	Respect	By ourselves	Dreaming



## APPENDIX H

Activity	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE	PROCESSING	YOUTH RESPONSES
<p>The Name &amp; Hobby Game</p>	<p>My students formed a circle. The I first demonstrated by first stating my name and then pantomiming something that I enjoy doing; i.e., cooking, exercising, playing video games, napping, etc). I Never say what I like to do—I just pantomime it. My teaching goal here is for other students in the group to be able to figure out on their own what it is that you enjoy doing and then imitate it.</p> <p>e.g., My name is Ms. Carmen and I like to (<u>pantomime dancing</u>).</p> <p>Everyone in the group said it in unison, “Her name is Ms. Carmen and <i>she</i> likes to (<u>everyone imitates my pantomime</u>).</p> <p>I allowed each student to take a turn.</p>	<p>To break the ice. To get to know To increase senses To increase expressionism</p>	<p>Me: <i>Did anyone learn something new about someone else in group?</i></p> <p>Me: <i>Did you discover that you enjoy doing the same things as other people in the group?</i></p>	<p>Student: “Yes. I learned that I have some things in common with other people.”</p> <p>Student: “I learned that a lot of people like the same things that I do.”</p> <p>Sheree: “I learned that everyone is different.</p> <p>Student: “Yeah—there are a few people who enjoy doing the same sort of stuff that I do, especially some of my friends but they looked funny doing it”.</p>

<p>Fruit Salad</p>	<p>The students sat on chairs in a circle. I stood in the center of the circle. I assigned each student the name of one of three fruits. e.g. (going around the circle), “You’re an apple, you’re an orange, you’re a banana....” (until everyone in the circle were assigned a fruit). I explained the rules of the game first. Me: “...whichever fruit you call out, all students labeled as this fruit must switch seats. If you call out the names of two fruits, all persons labeled as those two fruits must get up and find another seat. However, if you say “fruit salad” everyone must get up and find another seat. Whoever is left standing in the circle becomes the leader of the calls.”</p>	<p>To break the ice To build teamwork  To stimulate the senses To build cognitive skills</p>	<p>Me: <i>What made this game hard? Easy?</i>  Me: <i>How did it feel to be in the middle?</i>    Me: <i>What skills did you need to play this game?</i></p>	<p>Terry: “Trying not to push anyone or fall was pretty hard.” Student: “Knowing everyone’s fruit made it easy.” Student: “Once I started playing, I realized that it was fun and that made it easier to want to keep playing.”  Student: “It made me feel in control.(empowerment too) Student: “It made me feel like I could make something happen. Jose: “It was fun because you got to figure out whose seat to take.” Student: “Focus” Student: “Being able to remember our fruits” Student: “Movement” Thomas: “We got along and did it together”</p>
<p>Add-On Story</p>	<p>I encouraged everyone to form a circle. I stood in the center of the circle. I asked each student to begin telling a story, explaining that when I clap my hands, the student to</p>	<p>To stimulate imagination and promote creative thinking. To encourage students to explore their</p>	<p>Me: <i>How did you feel about this activity?</i></p>	<p>Jose: “It was hard to make something up.” Sheree: I thought it was fun.” Student: It was cool creating a story and hearing what everyone else had to add to it.”</p>

	<p>the right of that person picks up where the other left off. After the second student continues the story for a while, I clap again, passing the story to the next person. Everyone contributes, creating a story as a class.</p>	<p>expressive language skills To encourage students to be alert and attentive and promote receptive language and listening skills</p>	<p>Me: <i>What skills did you have to use to follow along with the story effectively?</i>  Me: <i>What tools did we need to make this story interesting?</i></p>	<p>Student: <i>I needed to focus and concentrate.</i> Jose: <i>I really had to listen</i> Thomas: <i>I needed to be open minded</i>  Sheree: <i>-Our Imagination</i> Student: <i>Creativity</i> Terry: <i>Shoot a sense of humor</i></p>
<p>Zip, Zap, Zop</p>	<p>Me: <i>Ok. Everyone get into a circle.</i> Teacher introduces the activity to the class by giving them the pattern of the words used in this order—zip, zap, zop. I repeated the pattern several times and then asked the students to repeat it back: Me: When I say Zip you say....when I say Zap you say...when I say Zop you say ZIP/ZAP/ZOP(call &amp; response). I modeled the hand movement and eye contact that must be used to deliver the words. Each student took a word and throws it at someone else in the circle. The student then continues the sequence, building</p>	<p>- To stimulate the senses - To build cognitive skills - To promote focus and concentration</p>	<p>Me: <i>What tools did you have to use in playing this exercise?</i>  Me: <i>What did you all have to do in order to stay in the game?</i>  Me: <i>What caused you to lose focus?</i></p>	<p>Jose: <i>A lot of Focus</i> Student: <i>-Concentration</i> Student: <i>Eye Contact</i>  Jose <i>-I had to be quick and stay focused.</i> Sheree: <i>I had to listen.</i> Student: <i>-I had to take my time.</i>  Student: <i>When the game started going faster I lost focus.</i> Student: <i>Once people started getting eliminated I lost it too.</i> Thomas: <i>Allowing myself to get distracted by other people that had already gotten out</i></p>

	<p>momentum until someone gets confused and says the wrong word. Me: <i>Remember, it goes Zip, Zap, Zop</i>. After a few practice runs, I began eliminating students who said a word out of sequence. This exercise can go on until all but one student was eliminated &amp; we gave her a hand.</p>			<p><i>of the game made me lose my focus.</i></p>
<p>Who's the Linebacker?</p> <p>After everyone was in a circle I modeled a couple of movements: e.g., start of by clapping hands, then change after 10 seconds to do another movement such as waving arms, then after 10 seconds I did another movement such as waving one arm, etc. The students did exactly what I was doing.</p> <p>Now that the students have the idea, I chose one student to be the Linebacker. The student left the room. I picked another student to be the Quarterback. The Leader started a movement and the rest of the circle copied it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To encourage participation and positive group dynamic</li> <li>- To give students an opportunity to try on different hats as leader and detective</li> <li>- To build cognitive skills</li> </ul>	<p><i>How did it feel being the leader?</i></p> <p><i>How did it feel being the detective?</i></p> <p><i>How did it feel to be a member of the group?</i></p>	<p>Terry: <i>I loved it because I felt in control</i></p> <p>Student: <i>It was O.K but I would rather be in the middle</i></p> <p>Jose: <i>I felt nervous because I didn't want to mess up</i></p>	

	<p>exactly. The quarterback changes the movement every 10-30 seconds and the rest of the team followed suit. Then I brought the linebacker back into the room. The linebacker has two or three chances to figure out who the quarterback is.</p>			
<p>Feel the Number</p>	<p>I started this exercise by explaining the rules of the game by having everyone close eyes and get focused. I told the group that we are going to attempt to count to the number 10. Only one student can call a number out at a time. I began the exercise by saying the number 1. With everyone's eyes closed someone else should say Me: <i>If only one student says the number, it is okay to keep moving. However, if more than one person says the number at the same time, then the game must start over again from the number one.</i></p>	<p>To promote focus and concentration  To stimulate the "sixth sense"</p>	<p>Me: <i>How did that feel?</i>  Me: <i>How did it feel having your eyes closed and not see when someone was going to call a number?</i>  Me: <i>What strength did you have to rely on in order for us to finally get right up to number ten?</i></p>	<p>Sheree: <i>It felt weird having my eyes closed while trying to count</i>  Student: <i>I got frustrated a little because we couldn't get past number 3.</i>  Terry: <i>I had to listen to other people's voices and then wait and be patient, so people kept messing up.</i></p>

**Appendix I**  
**Sample of My Past Proposal for Creative Drama Sessions**

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Class Goals</b>	<b>Creative Drama Activities</b>
1	GROUP DYNAMICS	To develop cohesiveness and cooperation within group	Creative dramatics Theatre Games Voice/Movement
2	SELF IDENTITY	To increase identification and expression of feelings and emotions related to self	Art (Mask work) Creative Drama Sensorial Exercises
3	MY STORY	To increase self-awareness and self-acceptance	Art (Life Tapestry) Re-Enactment of Stories
4	MY ROLE	To identify family structure and role	Art (Geneogram) Creative dramatics
5	EXPLORING ISSUES	To identify problems and role train solutions	Sociodrama Newspaper Theatre
6	PEER PRESURE	To develop and demonstrate refusal skills pertaining to (substance use, crime and teen pregnancy)	Drama (Role-training) Music (Rap/Hip-Hop) Creative dramatics
7	LIFE CHOICES (TAKE ONE)	To develop insight and identify situations	Drama (Role-play) Art (Community Noise) Creative dramatics
8	DECISION-MAKING (TAKE TWO)	To practice critical thinking and refusal skills	Drama (Role-training) Creative dramatics
9	ACTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES (TAKE THREE)	To examine consequences to one's action	Drama (Role-training) Creative dramatics
10	CONFLICT-RESOLUTION	To develop conflict resolution skills	Drama (Role-training) Creative dramatics
11	LEADERSHIP	To develop leadership skills	Art Personal Mission Statements
12	RESPONSIBILITY	To learn how to take responsibility for one's action	Dramatization Creative Projects Presentations
13	HEALTH & WELLNESS	To explore hygiene and unhealthy life styles	Art Work Open Forum Discussion
14	IMAGE	To explore image and the role media plays	Poetry & Art (Slamming) Video Music Creative dramatics
15	ACTION PLAN	To develop short term and long term goals for self	Art Creative Projects Presentations

## APPENDIX I

### SAMPLE PROPOSAL

By doing creative drama such as, role-play activities around issues that are related to their lives and reflective of their needs, we meet the youth “where they are,” and directly address their concerns.

Within this context, youth can voice their opinions and feelings on a wide array of topics while simultaneously practicing their decision and critical thinking skills. When they see themselves with a little distance, in the characters that the teacher and their fellow youth create, youth immediately drop their resistance and become more open to discussing their own behaviors. Through guided reflection and discussion during and after the *dramatic situation*, youth become more aware of their needs and their feelings, and ultimately learn to take responsibility for their decisions and actions.

### COMPONENT 1 INTRODUCTION

**GOAL:**

To set the context of the program

**OBJECTIVES:**

To introduce the participants to programs concept

To build a sense of community for participants

To develop a rapport with participants

**ACTIVITY:**

Participants will develop a community contract

Participants will engage in creative dramatic exercises

Participants will learn management techniques

**OUTCOME**

Will build a sense of community and rapport with participants

### COMPONENT 2 SELF IDENTITY

**GOAL:**

To increase identification and expression of feelings and emotion related to self

**OBJECTIVES:**

To build self-awareness

To identify self-concept

To understand the difference between personal and public-self

**ACTIVITY:**

Participants will identify their character strengths

Participants will reflect on feelings of empathy

Participants will create map feelings in connection to personal situations

**OUTCOME**

Will be able to identify feelings and strengths

**COMPONENT 3 GROUP DYNAMICS****GOAL:**

To develop cohesiveness and cooperation with group

**OBJECTIVES:**

To promote a sense of cooperation

To build confidence in the participants

To create an atmosphere of trust, affirmation, and respect

**ACTIVITY:**

Participants will engage in creative drama activities

Participants will engage in open forum

Participants will learn the three principles of group protocol

**OUTCOME:**

Will develop their trust and cooperation skills

**COMPONENT 4 COMMUNICATIONS****GOAL:**

To increase communications skills, by becoming a good listener and learning how to form questions

**OBJECTIVES:**

To build communication confidence in the participants

To explore verbal and nonverbal communication

To develop listening skills

**ACTIVITY:**

Participants will engage in creative drama activities

Participants will learn the fundamentals of effective communication

Participants will practice listening techniques

**OUTCOME**

Will develop their communication skills

**COMPONENT 5 CHOICE (TAKE ONE)****GOAL:**

To identify and develop an awareness of life choices

**OBJECTIVES:**

To develop insight and identify situations

To learn vicariously through D/C's scenes/vignettes

To become aware of life situations

**ACTIVITY:**

D/C's will present scene about peer issues

Participants will process scenes

Participants will identify personal connections to issues

**OUTCOME**

Will be able to identify bad situations

**COMPONENT 6 DECISION (TAKE TWO)**

**GOAL:**

To identify problems and develop decision-making skills

**OBJECTIVES:**

To identify bad behavior

To practice critical thinking and refusal skills

To enhance good judgment

**ACTIVITY:**

Participants will explore the characters decision

Participants will role play other alternatives

Participants will practice decision-making skills

**OUTCOME:**

Will develop decision-making skills

**COMPONENT 7 CONSEQUENCE (A) (TAKE THREE)**

**GOAL:**

To identify bad situations through examination of actions and their consequences

**OBJECTIVE:**

To examine consequences to one's actions

To identify acceptance for your actions

To examine the victims point of view

**ACTIVITY:**

Participants will process character decisions

Participants will explore negative and positive consequences

Participants will develop scenes on victim's perspective

**OUTCOME:**

Will acknowledge possible consequences

**COMPONENT 8 CONFLICT-RESOLUTION**

**GOAL:**

To develop conflict resolution skills

**OBJECTIVES:**

To demonstrate and develop problem-solving skills

To learn stress relieving exercises

To learn win-win situations

**ACTIVITY:**

- Participants will learn and practice win-win situations
- Participants will learn stress-relieving techniques
- Participants will practice “I” messages

**OUTCOME:**

- Will learn how to solve conflicts

**COMPONENT 9 DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVES**

**GOAL:**

- To identify conflicting situations and suggest/utilize alternatives

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To role train critical thinking skills
- To role train alternatives to problems
- To role train coping skills

**ACTIVITY:**

- Participants develop scenes on conflictual situations
- Participants will create tableaux/frozen pictures
- Participants will share and process activities

**OUTCOME:**

- Will practice refusal skills

**COMPONENT 10 MY ROLE**

**GOAL:**

- To demonstrate ability to identify his/her role as well as other roles in family

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To identify family structure and role
- To establish your purpose
- To explore inner and outer you

**ACTIVITY:**

- Participants will explore family dynamics
- Participants will do mask work
- Participants will process the task in detail with the group

**OUTCOME:**

- Will identify more about self and family relationships

**COMPONENT 11 SOCIALIZATION**

**GOAL:**

- To explore and express feelings in socially appropriate/non-injurious ways

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To identify healthy relationships

To learn about others and oneself  
To become more open to express feelings

**ACTIVITY:**

Participants will examine their relationships  
Participants will learn to work in group and share feelings  
Participants will learn to accept differences

**OUTCOME:**

Will identify healthy relationships

**COMPONENT 12 PEER PRESSURE**

**GOAL:**

To develop and demonstrate refusal skills

**OBJECTIVES:**

To practice resistance/refusal skills  
To learn leadership skills  
To identify bad situations

**ACTIVITY:**

Participants will work and respond to improvisations about peer-pressure  
Participants will engage in role plays  
Participants will learn leadership skills

**OUTCOME:**

Will be able to identify peer-pressure

**COMPONENT 13 POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES**

**GOAL:**

To develop alternative leisure time activities

**OBJECTIVES:**

To learn self- soothing and relaxation techniques  
To become more aware of individual stressors  
To learn how to work through the stress with others

**ACTIVITY:**

To share and discuss the power of leisure activities  
To practice specific exercises that can relieve stress  
To acquire a personal preference to positive alternatives

**OUTCOME:**

Will learn new leisure activities and positive alternatives

**COMPONENT 14 MY STORY**

**GOAL:**

To increase understanding of self and develop a future projection about future.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To increase self-awareness and self-acceptance
- To express preferences, needs, dislikes and likes
- To acknowledge personal and outside obstacles

**ACTIVITY:**

- Participants will share fears and concerns
- Participants will create a map about their lives
- Participants explore their personal journeys

**OUTCOME:**

- Will learn more about self and develop a vision for future

**COMPONENT 15 ACTION**

**GOAL:**

- To develop a short term and long term plan about their future.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To review and reinforce their past journeys
- To create plans for future goals
- To develop ability to complete a task in the allotted time period

**ACTIVITY:**

- To create future maps about their new journeys
- To select the working themes for positive affirmations
- To develop individual contract

**OUTCOME:**

- To develop a future action plan and commitment

**Goals and Objectives**

**GOAL 1:** Resolve conflicts thereby decreasing negative incidents on the classroom, hallways, or cafeteria;

Objectives:

- a. Provide creative drama curriculum conflict resolution workshops.
- b. Provide creative drama trust/teambuilding activities.
- b. 50% decrease in weekly incident reports regarding fighting/disputes between students.
- c. 66% of youth will correctly identify 3 methods of resolving conflicts peacefully.
- c. 66% or greater will participate and observe in role-training techniques

**GOAL 2:** Increase tolerance for staying on task

Objectives:

- a. 66% or greater will discuss and process drama enacted scenes.
- b. 66% or greater will be guided through reflection of activities through music, dance, art or drama

**GOAL 3:** Deal with substance abuse, anger, and depression

Objectives:

- a. 66% or greater will participate in creative dramatic activities.
- b. 66% or greater will role train different scenarios.

**GOAL 4:** Increase attention span

Objectives:

- c. 66% or greater will create fictional characters with familiar issues to their own through drama.
- d. 66% or greater will create from creative arts activities which will free them up to discuss issues.

**GOAL 5:** Develop teambuilding skills

Objectives:

**GOAL 6:** Enhanced resiliency and motivation skills

Objectives:

- a. 90% of students will participate in workshops.
- b. Achieve a 10% increase from pre-test data to post-test data in positive student responses about self-esteem.
- c. 66% or greater will participate in drama-in-education workshops.
- d. 66% or greater will participate in improvisational scenes and role-plays.

**GOAL 7:** Build self-esteem

Objectives:

- a. 66% of parents/guardians will participate in parent/family workshops.

**Evaluative Outcomes in 2006 prepared by Dr. Denise Daniels**

**Executive Summary/Highlights - Youth Response**

- 1 96.1% of youth agree (almost and most of the time) they are treated with respect.
- 2 85.9% of youth agree (always and most of the time) they made positive decisions during the group.
- 3 72.6% of youth agree (always and most of the time) they were able to talk about or express their feelings.
- 4 80.39% of youth wanted to see the program continue on their unit.
- 5 92% of youth participate in groups.
- 6 92% of youth felt that the group leader exhibited knowledge and confidence when conducting groups.

**Staff Responses**

- 1 93.3% of staff felt the program met or exceeded the expectation of starting the group on time.
- 2 100% of staff felt the program met or exceeded the expectation of consistently providing sessions for youth.
- 3 100% of staff felt the program met or exceeded the expectation of treating the youth with respect.
- 4 100% of staff felt the program met or exceeded the expectation of meeting the needs of the youth.
- 5 100% of staff felt program met or exceeded the expectation of having youth

participate in class

6 100% of staff felt that the program staff was able to help manage conflicts during the classroom.

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