From the Heart of the Ensemble:
Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in Education

Lisa Sophia Williams

Vancouver Island University

April 2017
Abstract

This phenomenological study explores the experience of members within Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in theatre education. Theatre educators, theatre professionals, and graduates of high school theatre programs responded to writing prompts and were invited to write personal monologues inspired by their ensemble experiences in an online focus-group. Qualitative research methodology inspired by A/r/tography was selected to explore the theatrical phenomenon of ensemble using the theatrical conventions of script writing and monologues. An analytical thematic framework using inductive analysis was applied to the data in order to listen to experiences within the interconnected elements of connection, commitment, communication, and creativity within ensembles. This thematic and A/r/tographical exploration lead to the writing of a final creative piece as part of the summary. I suggest that this final piece, inspired by the voices of experience emerging from within the ensemble, will allow us to listen with deeper understanding to the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in education.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those creating, working, teaching, learning, and playing in the world of theatre education. I thank you for doing this challenging and magical work; never underestimate the significance of this art form and how the connections you make shine light and meaning upon this crazy planet we call home.

I am inspired by you. I love you for that.

To my first drama teacher, Jonathan Rout, for unlocking the drama room door, igniting the spark within me, and showing me a whole universe of joyful opportunities. And for my lovely, Frances Theron, a beautiful person and passionate theatre artist…you will always live at the very heart of my ensemble.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Williams Ensemble: My family. Without your love, encouragement, and support these last two years would not have been possible. Nicholas Williams, Thank you. I love you. Ruby and Nella, I hope watching me on this journey empowers and inspires you to follow your own dreams of discovery.

Thank you Liz Moore for being the best kind of Momma. A powerful role model, a lifelong learner and do-er. I simply adore your fiery zest for life.

Thank you Aileen and Steve Williams and Liz and Patty Moore for providing loving childcare, encouragement, and food.

VIU Cohort 8, thank you for sharing yourselves with me and for allowing me to be my silly self. Rebecca Watkin and Karma Taiji… You are so rad. I will miss our educational commute.

VIU, for granting me permission to study theatre education in an emerging and creative way. You allowed me to make this educational journey personal and meaningful.

Teresa Farrell, my thesis supervisor, for pushing me to work on my thesis writing… in a fun and kindred spirit kind of way.

And finally, my theatre ensemble, particularly the drama teachers of Northern Vancouver Island; you inspire me to grow and learn. My career path is rich and juicy because of the time we spend together. We are family.
Table of Contents

Title Page ................................................................................................................................. 1
Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 2
Dedication ............................................................................................................................ 3
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................ 4
Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. 5
List of Figures ...................................................................................................................... 8
Chapter One: Introduction to Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in Education .................. 9
  Contextualizing Teacher Theatre Artists ........................................................................... 9
  Understanding Collaborative Theatre Ensemble in Education .......................................... 11
  Researching the Ensemble Experience ........................................................................... 15
Chapter Two: Theatre Ensembles and Research ................................................................... 17
  Observations: A Teacher Monologue by Christine Knight .................................................. 17
  Theatre Ensembles ........................................................................................................... 19
  Collaboration, Leadership, and Structure within Ensembles ............................................. 22
  A/r/tography and Listening to the Ensemble Experience .................................................. 26
  Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in Education ................................................................. 29
Chapter Three: Exploring the Ensemble Experience ............................................................ 31
  In This Ensemble ............................................................................................................. 33
  Learning about Ensemble: Instruments and Procedures .................................................... 34
  Analysis and Authenticity in the Ensemble Experience ....................................................... 40
FROM THE HEART OF THE ENSEMBLE

Chapter Four: Ensemble Scripted

Cast List: In This Ensemble

CHRISTINE
DAN
DAVE
JASON
LISA
LORI
MONICA

Ensemble Scripted

The Script
Scene One: Connection
Scene Two: Commitment
Scene Three: Communication
Scene Four: Creativity

Conclusion

Chapter Five: Voices from the Heart of Ensemble

Within the World of this Study: Discoveries
Within the World of this Study: Limitations
Beyond this Ensemble
What We Do: Messages about Monologues
Curtain Call

References
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter ................................................................. 90
Appendix B: Consent Form ................................................................. 91
Appendix C: Initial Interview Questions ........................................ 94
Appendix D: Facebook Focus-Group Writing Prompts .................. 95
Appendix E: Monologue Writing Prompts ....................................... 98
List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Russel, Berg. Facebook Post- February 20, 2016…………………………………10

Figure 2.1: Frantic Assembly. Facebook Post -November 15, 2016……………………………23
Chapter One: Introduction to Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in Education

Contextualizing Teacher Theatre Artists

Seventy-two hours, two hundred and sixty drama kids, twelve main stage plays, workshops, fringe theatre, and artistic and technical adjudications; Welcome to The North Island Regional Drama Festival. For three days, no one sleeps as we experience a rush of exciting and emotional theatrical experiences. It is loud, chaotic, creative, and extremely fulfilling. To say that the feeling of the NIRD Festival is overwhelming is an understatement. Yet, this is only one example of the many collaborative theatre projects high school theatre teacher artists scheme up for themselves and their students each and every year.

At the end of the festival weekend, after the students return home to their families, the rental vans returned, and the set pieces are secured in storage, I climb, exhausted, into my own bed. Although it is after midnight, I scroll through our North Island Regional Drama Festival (NIRD Festival) drama teachers’ Facebook page. I click “Like” like a crazy person, devouring the photos, videos, and anecdotes that have been posted about our festival. In this moment, I am nostalgic for the experience, even though it has only just come to a close. I am inspired, and already planning next year’s event in my mind. The weeks leading up to Festival dissolve in my memory. Gone are the agonizing twelve hour days, non-productive rehearsals, and missing permission forms. Time away from my family, friends, and my daily routine seem a small price to pay for the magic we created in the theatre.
I read Russell’s post:

Figure 1. Russel, Berg. Facebook. February 20, 2016. [Feb 20, 2016<facebook.com>]

Russell’s words resonate deep within me. They speak to everything I feel and all that I want to understand about collaborative theatre ensembles. I respond with love, click “Like” and fall fast asleep.
Understanding Collaborative Theatre Ensemble in Education

Year after year, in addition to teaching their theatre classes and lunch time and after school drama and improv clubs, the drama teachers of the North Vancouver Island Zone collaborate in a colossal, extra-curricular effort to produce the theatrical event, known as NIRD Festival. This project requires hundreds of volunteer hours to produce and yet it is just one of many such projects these teacher theatre artists commit to each year and every year. This commitment to authentic learning and the art of theatre making is priceless. I cherish and look forward to making personal connections, sharing stories, and creating memories together. I value the communication, organic professional development and collegial camaraderie that come with the shared experience of festival. I return home and to my own high school smiling, inspired, proud, and exhausted. I return happy and full of creativity; the fuel, fire, and desire required to teach theatre.

The purpose of this study, was to explore the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education. I wanted to know more about the experience of those creating and working within collaborative theatre ensembles. I wanted to climb deep within the interwoven web of ensemble and listen to it breathe. During the course of this study, I listened to the voices from within collaborative theatre ensemble in education. I asked: What is the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education?

I listened.

I listened to the ideas, values, attitudes, and beliefs within the elements of: connection commitment, communication, and creativity. I hoped to find insights and surprises that were previously unknown to me in the in-between spaces and subtext of the research. I hypothesized
that working in collaborative theatre ensembles is inspiring to teachers, graduates of theatre programs, and theatre professionals artists because of strong personal connections, commitment to each other, and a shared passion or goal.

*Theatre Ensemble*, is defined by Theatre Educators Burnett Bonczek and Storck (2012) in their book *Ensemble Theatre Making*, as a cast, group or troupe assembled in pursuit of, or sharing, a common artistic goal as a focus for *collaboration*. Ensemble members are connected on a deeper level than their commitment to the goal. They describe that, good ensembles, the ones with great collaboration leading to extraordinary results, are built on a strong foundation of trust. Trust is earned though the behaviours of commitment, sacrifice and support (p.19).

In this study, I use this definition of ensemble and include the four elements of: *connection, commitment, communication and creativity* to add texture and create meaning within the educational context. The following definitions were considered when designing my research:

**Connection** in this study, refers to the relationships we create within ensembles and the deep sense of understanding between ensemble members. According to Burnett Bonczek and Storck (2012), this allows members to share a bond that, “Enables them to think and act at the same time” (p. 7). Connection allows members of an ensemble to form a group-mind, to commit to each other and the task at hand in order to collaborate successfully.

**Commitment** within this study, and in ensemble theatre making, refers to the commitment ensemble members make to each other. Rather than simply committing to a project or goal, ensemble members also agree to commit to each other. This sense of one-ness and high stakes level of trust forges strong bonds and support within the group which, in-turn, allows for great and meaningful collaboration. There is no greater commitment within an ensemble than the
commitment to one another. It is authentic, meaningful and allows for long-term closeness, trust, and success. Burnett Bonczek and Storck (2012), teach that when trust is firmly in place, collaboration occurs allowing members to “truly risk, play, discover and create” (p.16). Amy Poehler extends their definition by stating, “If it [the ensemble and/or the work] doesn’t mean that much to you, then you shouldn’t be here” (p. 17). Commitment is an essential element in collaborative theatre ensembles.

**Communication** refers to the way ensemble members communicate with each other in their theatre making. Depending on the participants' context, this communication could include teaching, learning, directing, coaching, devising, improvisation as well as other forms of direct and indirect leadership. In her book, *Devising Theatre*, Oddey (1994) emphasizes that, “Every individual must invest something of his or her own person if the group is to communicate fully. Respect and trust in each other permits… the group to explore new directions” (p.25).

**Creativity** is the driver in my own theatre making and ensemble theatre work. I included this element in my study of ensemble to learn more about my research participants' creative inspiration, motivation and processes and how their creative processes relate to their ensemble experience in theatre education. Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett (2014) of the UK’s Frantic Assembly, name creativity as an essential element in collaborative theatre ensembles. Ensemble members need to be open, creative, beings who are “truly receptive to ideas and influences that occur in and around the [ensemble]” (p.22).

Ensemble, in French means *together*. In this study, the term **Collaborative Theatre Ensemble** will refer to a group or groups of individuals who are working *together* toward a specific theatrical goal in theatre. Particular focus will be on ensemble work within high school public education and the various ensembles created to people the projects and performances my
research participants are involved in the 2016-2017 school year. The definition of ensemble theatre outside the scope of this study is, loosely, a theatre company that works together with a commitment to a play or devised performance. The structure is often collaborative. While the term, *the ensemble* often refers to the chorus or non-lead cast members in a production, it can also be used to describe a cast where the parts are fairly evenly distributed with no lead roles.

Theatre artists have always relied on collaboration, commitment, connection and communication in the quest to create. A theatre ensemble must trust, be honest with, and learn from and support each other. They must commit to and live each moment as it unfolds. Kramer and Crespy (2011) quote from Knopf’s Director as collaborator (2006) resonates, “One of the advantages of collaboration is that synergy occurs. Positive synergy occurs when a collective group accomplishes more than the efforts of individual members” (p.1035).

In my teaching and my art, I am happiest and most inspired when I am collaborating with others on a piece of Theatre. I believe that the synergy of collaboration inspires my passion for theatre and for my profession. I desire to know more about the experience of others in collaborative theatre ensembles. In my research, I will look for the connective webs between these elements of: communication, connection, commitment and creativity within collaborative theatre ensembles. I will listen for ideas, values, attitudes and beliefs that are the voice of experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in education. I will listen for synergy.

**Researching the Ensemble Experience**

This study used qualitative research methods and was inspired by A/r/tography, a practice that allows to me maximize my role as a practicing artist, researcher, and teacher in a quest to learn, through living-inquiry, about the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in
theatre education. The study took place on Vancouver Island during the 2016-2017 school year. There were twelve participants; including seven Vancouver Island high school drama teachers, three professional theatre artists, and two School District 71 theatre arts program graduates.

In the first iteration of the study, after ethics permission was granted, I invited all twelve participants to complete an introductory interview. Included in the interview were questions about the participants’ theatrical, personal, and professional backgrounds so that a rich narrative could be created and so that their stories could be told from an authentic perspective. You will hear these in Chapter Four. Additional open-ended interview questions posted in an ongoing, online focus group sought to gain insight into the participants’ ideas, values, attitudes, and beliefs about working in collaborative theatre ensembles. Participants were encouraged to respond in any way they liked. These too, are presented in a series of scenes as scripted dialogue in Chapter Four.

All twelve participants were invited for the second iteration of the study. Participants were asked to write monologues or stories based on a pivotal or specific moment in their experience within a collaborative theatre ensemble project or based on their experience of taking part in this study. They were given the freedom to tell the story from any perspective. Special care was given to highlight the importance of the time and space in-between theatre making experiences. Three participants accepted this invitation and their monologues can be found in Chapter Two and Chapter Five of this study.

Examples of the types of collaborative projects that took place within the course of this study are: The North Island Regional Drama Festival, a collaborative three high school District Musical, The Canadian Improv Games regional and island competitions, as well as working with
various artists in residence through Art Starts, and our Drama Professional Learning Communities. The study took place from July, 2016 through February, 2017.

For the invitation to write monologues, I used methodology from Schonmann and Kempe (2010), keeping the writing stimulus open and nebulous so that participants would stay in the moment, exploring and expressing themselves honestly (p. 314). This would allow themes and voices to emerge organically and without influence. The final iteration of the project included my analysis of the focus group data represented as a personal creative writing piece. My intention was to analyze the participants’ monologues as data within this iteration. However, I decided instead to include the monologues in this study as part of contextualizing the theatre educators’ experience as only a few were submitted.

In this study, I listened for a collective voice emerging from the participants’ responses to the writing prompts. In which we explored the elements of **connection, commitment, communication, and creativity** from my definition of **ensemble**. Through data analysis, emerging themes, personal emotions, and shared experiences were gathered in order to write my conclusion: *Curtain Call* (Kempe, 2010, p. 316). This piece is included in Chapter Five. It was read by two participants for accuracy of voice and will be read aloud for theatre educators at the June meeting of our North Island Zone.

**Chapter Two: Theatre Ensembles and Research**

In preparation for this work, I read practical manuals, autobiographies, articles on ensemble, and practitioners’ guide books to working in ensemble theatre. I found academic empirical studies where theatrical methodologies where used in research of non -theatrical phenomenon. I read academic papers employing **A/r/toography** to explore theatre. I found enough information to provide a rich background in ensemble work in theatre. In all of this, there is a
place in the academic literature for the voice and experience within theatre ensembles in public education to exist. I hope my study can add to this emerging field of research. Additionally, there is room for more research using A/r/tography inspired methodology to complete a study of theatre as A/r/tography is considered to be a new and emerging research methodology.

Finally, there was little academic research to be found on collaborative theatre ensembles in education. I wanted to add the teacher theatre artists’ voice to the existing literature on theatre ensemble and add my research to the theatrical works living within A/r/tography. I offer my research study’s participant, Christine Knight’s, monologue called Observations as a Prologue to my literature review. A teaser of what the theatre teacher artists’ voice can add to the literature on collaborative theatre ensembles in education:

Observations: A Teacher Monologue by Christine Knight

Question of the Day –
Why did you take Drama? “To play games!”
What is your favourite musical? “I’ve never seen a play!”
What did you eat for breakfast? “Dog food!”
Who is your favourite actor? “I don’t know”

This odd mix of kids is challenging me, but they always do in the early days of the semester. I don’t know all of them. The ones who live here are showing the others their place in this room, gently pointing out that they were here first, but in a friendly way…a loud way… They are staking their claim, on the room, on me. The new kids have heard about this place, and some are just waiting to jump in. They are welcome. Others are uncertain, scared, acting cool. It will be ok. I think to myself. Just trust me.

Ok, circle up. Stop talking. I’m waiting...
I’m waiting...
I’m waiting...

The thing is, the energy they’re giving off is pretty great. They’re happy to be here. They like each other. They are enthusiastic and funny…just loud…and unfocussed. They’re focussed on each other, but not really on the work we are doing.

Let’s play a game. I need your attention. No, I don’t want you to perform right now, just be genuine. It’s not about you right now, it’s about us. Give us your real self.
This game isn’t about winning. It’s not really a game, but an activity, to work on awareness of each other and of the room. Help each other succeed.

And mostly they are doing that, but there’s that one kid who can’t help but do funny voices. He’s got some impulse control issues. He thinks people want to hear his Arnold Schwarzenegger and his Yoda, and the other kids are indulging him, but not necessarily cheering him on. Then there’s the kid who probably thinks she can teach the class better than I can. She questions everything I say. She tells me everything she knows. I’m tired of her already. Along with her, is the helpful, sweet girl who does everything to make my class easier, including berating her classmates and getting their attention with “Quiet Coyote.” I almost barked at her today…”I don’t need your help!” but she’s just so sweet…but it’s so annoying. I have my eyes on a few of the new kids…future theatre kids…the kind that will move into the theatre and people all my projects. Bright lights. I wonder if they will choose this over volleyball, or soccer.


Why are we doing this?
Because it’s fun.
Really?
Focus on being successful. Help each other.
Freeze Stop Jump Twizzle.
Can we play Wink Murder?

They actually seem to be enjoying themselves. I see certain kids smile with understanding. I see them side with me. I sense their shift over to my side, to each other’s’ sides. One or two remain resistant, but I see them weakening. The belligerence that comes from fear is fading. There’s no more need to act cool to save face, because no one cares that you look like an idiot, making faces and screaming nonsense noises.

It’s safe here, so you can let that little weird person out that you hide when you are out there in the hallways. You can put up your wall out there if you have to, but feel free to let it down in here. We don’t care. In fact the audience will notice you if you don’t play with us, and they’ll think to themselves “Why isn’t that kid playing?” so you might as well join in.

Come on kid. Stop trying to look good. Don’t be afraid to be ugly. We want you to join in. If you don’t, we’ll be a little sad that you can’t let go, and experience the freedom that we do.

If we do this right, by the end of the semester you will be sad it’s over, and will appreciate everyone in the room, and you will trust each other. That doesn’t happen in a math class. Trust me. It doesn’t happen in a Physics class.

No it does not. In my English class, there are sometimes kids who haven’t learned everyone’s names by the end of the semester. Some of them never exchange words. It’s different in the theatre. Do my colleagues ever get to experience what I experience? The building of a family, the trust, the fun? Probably not. Poor guys.

Question of the day:
What was a highlight from this semester? I got to meet all these people and it was awesome.
What was your favourite class? This one.
Will you come back?
I hope so.

**Theatre Ensembles**

In my research on theatre ensembles, much of the information I found comes from practical handbooks on devising and ensemble work as well as individual practitioners’ autobiographies and philosophies. I looked at Robert Cohen’s book *Working Together in Theatre*, Burnett Bonczek and Strock’s, *Ensemble Theatre Making*, *The Viewpoints Book* by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *Devising Theatre* By Alison Oddey, as well as the work of the UK’s contemporary theatre company, Frantic Assembly, and their book, *The Frantic Assembly book of Devising Theatre*. I also studied individual practitioner manuals to include their thoughts on working in collaborative theatre: I read Grotowski and Lecoq and the autobiographies of several contemporary women in theatre: Tina Fey, Amy Schumer and Mindy Kaling.

In his book, *Working together in Theatre*, Cohen states that:

Theatre is an art that people make not out of canvas and paint, or marble or musical instruments, but of themselves. Theatre is made *by* people, *for* people, and is *about* people. And it engages its people in two-way *interactions* - both across the foot lights with its audience and among those on and backstage themselves. Moreover, theatre is fundamentally *about* such interactions. Human interactions constitute both the *work* of the theatre and the *play* (the playing) of drama. For persons actively engaged in theatre, the process is both work and play (Cohen, 2011, 31).

Theatre Ensembles are complex organic systems, and in order to understand them it is important to look at the literature to figure out how and why they are formed as well as some of
the structures within ensembles themselves. A theatre ensemble is often formed from our need to create or accomplish a goal or objective such as a performance, project, competition, or festival. In our lives, we are surrounded by, and are members of, many different kinds of ensembles. At work, in our professional development, in our communities, and families, ensembles grow from a shared vision. Even within the parameters of this study, the participants and myself grew to become an ensemble of sorts as we committed to work on this research project together.

The Viewpoints rehearsal and training book includes the philosophy that, “We are what we are because of each other. I am open to you, for I trust you will help me become all I can, in my life, in my art, and onstage” (Bogart, 2005, p. 218). This quote on the Viewpoints and Steppenwolf Theatre’s commitment to ensemble is perhaps the loveliest way to describe what it is like to be immersed in an enriching and active theatre ensemble. A lot of work goes into creating a piece of theatre and so it is important to create and care for ensemble members. Life in an ensemble is not always lovely and poetic. There are challenges and certain, archetypes that exist in life, and in ensembles, that can hamper progress toward a goal. Forming a strong ensemble is key and can create the opportunity for growth and learning under even the most stressful of circumstances. In her book *Bossy Pants*, Tina Fey (2011) comments on the important process of forming such an ensemble. When discussing how she assembled her writing crew for the television show 30 Rock she writes, “I have met some erratic, dangerous, funny people over the years, people I admire, but people I don't want to work with everyday…I hire the most talented of the people who are the least likely to throw a punch in the workplace” (p. 175). In her autobiography, *Girl with the Lower Back Tattoo*, Amy Schumer (2016) writes, “Whatever I am working on I surround myself with smart, talented people, let them do their thing, listen to
their ideas, and figure out the strongest way to collaborate with them to make the best possible final product” (p.21).

Burnett Bonczek and Strock (2012) give many suggestions of qualities to look for when forming an ensemble. In fact, they devote a hefty portion of their book to creating and caring for the ensemble as though it were its own living thing. Besides having the skills or qualifications needed for a given project or task, promising ensemble members are hungry to learn, change and grow. They are positive people who see others and situations in a positive light. They are self-aware or have the potential to be self-aware. They listen. They are curious risk-takers with the energy and enthusiasm to do the work required of them. They bring a certain quality, talent, skill or contribution to the group. They are open to inspire or to be inspired by an ensemble member or leader. They value the idea of team work and are excited to collaborate (p. 66-76).

Theatre in education is an organic, magical, human centred, endeavor. People leading, learning, and participating in productions, performances and projects are require to commit, connect and communicate competently in order to run positive and effective programs, events or performances. In his study, Borrowing from Professional Theatre Training to Build Essential Skills in Organization Development Consultants, Stager Jaques (2012) argues that individuals collaborating in theatre and other organizations require these emotional competencies in order to achieve their goals (p. 250).

**Collaboration, Leadership, and Structure within Ensembles**

Leadership within collaborative theatre ensemble work in education is dynamic, mutable, organic, spontaneous, and improvisational. In their article, Communicating Collaborative Leadership, Kramer and Crespy (2011) describe theatres as complex systems with complex
situations where traditional vertical leadership isn't as realistic as the horizontal, where shared leadership and communication between leaders and participants allow co-creative cultures to thrive (p. 1025). Scott Graham (2014) opens his book on devising theatre by stating that in his book, “You will read how ‘we’ worked or what ‘we’ tried. Despite being sole artistic director of Frantic Assembly I don’t think I will quickly get out of the habit of using ‘we’…it is just that ‘we’ feels right for a company that has prided itself on its openness and accessibility… I look forward to new collaborators and the new discoveries ‘we’ will find. ..I do take pleasure, solace and pride in ‘we”’(p. 1).

Figure 2. Frantic Assembly. Facebook. November 15, 2016. [Nov 15, 2016<facebook.com>]
In a workshop with Frantic Assembly’s Associate Movement Director, Jessica Williams, (personal communication, October 11, 2016), I confirmed the connection between the horizontal ‘we’ / ‘I’ of the ensemble leadership structure in Frantic Assembly’s ensemble theatre company. According to Williams, although Frantic Assembly ensemble members “get a lot of freedom to be creative” they still create their performances under the careful, artistic leadership of the company’s Artistic Director, Scott Graham.

In his work on the ensemble model, Cohen (2011) defines the structure of an ensemble in two distinct and interwoven parts: Collaboration and Leadership. “Collaboration is the horizontal glue that holds an ensemble together and makes the work collective, mutually supportive, and the composite of many minds, bodies, and imaginations. Leadership is the vertical glue that gives the ensemble a direction, a focus, a goal, and a set of deadlines” (p.46).

The idea that the structure of an ensemble is multidimensional allows for multiple interactions and exchanges between members. An ensemble relies on the seamless integration of traditional hierarchical structures within more fluid and creative collaborative webs. The “pushing and pulling” between the horizontal and vertical are connected: Collaboration which allows for relationships, creativity and longevity (synergy) and Leadership which insures organization and the forward pursuit of both long and short term goals are interwoven and are never separated in an ensemble (p.23).

All members of an ensemble come with a story and a strong sense of self. Knowing that people come to our various ensembles with “feelings, agendas, fears, personal conflicts, bad days and so on,” and that they are, “human beings [who] may or may not be happy about being led” (Burnett Bonczek & Storck, 2012) are central in building a strong ensemble. An ensemble leader needs to know, and communicate with mindfulness, each member of the group in order to
provide the connection needed, to gain the trust, and supply the support that allows for powerful collaboration. Alison Oddey (1994) writes in her book, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, that a teacher, leader, or director is required to keep an ensemble in touch with the original focus of the group or organization and to preserve the integrity of a project or goal. An ensemble leader helps to define roles and responsibilities within the group and ensures that members are working to their own strengths. Without leadership, a democratic ensemble must be in constant communication. They need to remain critical of the work while preserving consensus and individual interests while also maintaining the focus on a goal or project; expending energy that would be better used on the task at hand (p. 43-44).

Kramer and Creepy (2011) describe theatres and the interactions of the people that work and play within them, as complex system with complex situations where traditional vertical leadership isn't as realistic as the horizontal, shared leadership between leaders and participants (p. 1025). They provide a framework for other leaders of complex systems hoping to work within this style of leadership. Central to the success of their theory, is creating a strong collaborative philosophy with a collaborative culture at its core. From this centre point, their system radiates outwards in a spiral including: recruiting for collaboration, creating a collaborative climate, communicating a collaborative philosophy, collaborative communication and, finally, achieving collaborative culture (p.1027).

Burnett, Bonczek and Storck (2012) define ensemble as a cast, group or troupe assembled in pursuit of, or sharing, a common artistic goal as a focus for collaboration. Their definition of ensemble includes the understanding that ensemble members share a connection and commitment to each other that, “Enables them to think and act at the same time” ( p.7). This sense of one-ness allows for successful collaboration. It is authentic, meaningful and allows for
long-term closeness and success in an organization. The closeness in this kind of work is synergetic and magical, “Leading to experiences of connectedness with…(b) other human and non-human souls in all of their similarities and differences;(c) the natural world and the cosmos beyond, its awe inspiring complexity, beauty and mystery and/or (d) the larger purpose, potentials and powers that transcend ego’s limited concerns (Vokey, p.171).

In many traditional theatre companies and in theatre education the director or educator has the final say in all decisions relating to the performance and production and is in a position of authority. Kramer and Creepy (2011) emphasize a strong collaborative philosophy at the core of creating a collaborative culture in theatre making their study outlines how collaboration can work within theatre education: “These findings contribute to an understanding of specific communication behaviours and practices that leaders in various contexts can use to develop a collaborative leadership style” (p.1034).

The North Island Drama teachers have created a positive collaborative culture. A citation within the paper from Knopf’s Director as collaborator (2006) resonated, “One of the advantages of collaboration is that synergy occurs. Positive synergy occurs when a collective group accomplishes more than the efforts of individual members” (p.1035). This statement really came alive as I progressed through my study. Through their synergetic contributions, my participants' voices were integral in guiding and shifting the course of my study. Their involvement allowed me to create something greater than I could have ever accomplished on my own.

A/r/tography and Listening to the Ensemble Experience

As I delved deeper and deeper into this study, I became as fascinated with learning about A/r/tography as I was with my own research question. I read articles in the book, Being A/r/tography, works by Rita Irwin, and spent hours perusing A/r/tography Phd Dissertations and
Masters Theses on the University of British Columbia’s A/r/tography webpage. A/r/tography is an organic and authentic way to explore the experience of the artist/researcher/teacher; a smooth and natural technique to delve beneath the surface to the sub-text to the emerging voice of experience within theatre ensembles in education. Theatre ensembles are where I teach, work, and create theatre. In Being A/r/tography, Irwin (2008) describes A/r/tography as aspiring to look at “the in-between where meaning resides in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time… A/r/tographical research is not subject to standardized criteria, rather it remains dynamic, fluid and in constant motion” (p.xix). A/r/tographers are to be “concerned with self-study, being in community, relational and ethical inquiry” (p.xix). To be immersed in the ensemble work required of a theatre educator while simultaneously and continuously listening to and reflecting on this work seemed like a perfect a/r/tograhical fit.

My high school musical did not offer a shirtless Zack Effron, but it did provide me with many lessons. I learned that I loved being in a theatre, attending rehearsals, and building sets. I loved listening to the director and groaning about rehearsing choreography. When I would leave the bright sunlight of outside and enter into the dark and empty theatre, I would feel like a real artist with a true sense of purpose. Time passed and the world spun, but all that mattered was that thing in the room you where making together (Poeller, 2014, 9).

Amy Poeller’s book, Yes Please, is not research, monologue or script. I include the above quote because it reads from beginning to end with a strong sense of her voice. Her experience. The above quote transports the reader to the moment in time where Amy feels connected. She has found her home, her place in the theatre, and in the world. It is the sincere specificity of voice, place, time, and emotion that I hope to capture in using monologues and scripted dialogue.
in this study. I hope to create, for the reader, a sense of belonging or connection to a moment that is the essence of the experience within collaborative ensemble theatre in education.

Schonmann and Kempe (2010) used A/r/tography in their research with drama teachers in training. They write, “This paper is concerned with the process of formulating an identity as a teacher...by exploring how listening to the voices of those entering the profession” (p.312). They set out to “discover what concerns or expectations trainee drama teachers would express through a medium of self-reflection” (p.314). Through the process of writing monologues, listening to, and interpreting the voice of the participants through performance, researchers created an understanding of how personal experience connects to the creation of a professional identity. Their methodology required participants to write, revise, and perform monologues at various stages in the year. “We did not want to overtly suggest that they should write about problems or concerns. Rather, we were deliberately vague in our invitation to undertake the task; the idea is let the students express their feelings in an open, intimate and spontaneous way then listen to the spectrum of voices that emerge [the] here and now of their situation” (p.315). Risner and Anderson, studied participants’ opinions on fine arts teacher training and displayed their data as scripted dialogue. After all of the data was collected, it was analyzed and coded for emerging themes and patterns. The researchers chose, “in the spirit of interpretive inquiry” to show selected dialogical response data, script style, within their article to allow “their arguments, rationales, and apprehensions to be heard in conversation with one another” (p.31). Both the monologues and scripts in these studies presented data in a powerful and theatrical way for the reader.(p.30).

In her Article *The Teacher Monologues*, Mindy Roberta Carter (2010) uses A/r/tography as it allows her to speak to her audience while exploring aspects of herself as a teacher, artist and
researcher. She feels that, “Though A/r/tography embraces all of the arts, most publications tend to be focused on visual arts, poetry and music” (p.44). She describes her work with words in her research “akin to creating what has already been described as collage” (p.61).

Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in Education

In *Working Together in Theatre*, Cohen (2011) states that, “When people work together, they can, as a collective attain artistic heights that none could attain independently” (p. 3). He quotes Joe Dowling,“ If the theatre is not about the interaction of people, it’s about nothing…[Theatre] can never be solely about concepts, ideas and intellectual pursuits-It has to be about the way in which people relate to one another” (p. 3). He goes on to state that the most important question on everyone’s mind at the first meeting for any project is “Why are we here?” If the answer was simply in order to get paid to do the required work, theatre would simply not exist. So, “What propels process into product, and collaboration into result, it is not just work, work, work; it is work with purpose, work toward a goal. It’s an adventure, an exploration, a call to a greater challenge. It is a mission” (p.66). It is an experience that I wanted to learn more about.

Part way through this study, in March of 2017, I had the opportunity to present one of my research participant’s monologues at the Master's in Educational research conference at Vancouver Island University. One of the attendees asked me why I had chosen to do something so “hard” for my research? Why I had asked my participants to do so much work? In fact, I think she specifically asked, wasn’t I allowed to ask my participants yes/no questions? Do a questionnaire? A survey? I spent several days pondering her questions and I kept coming back to the notion that if I approached any theatre project thinking only about how hard it would be - I would never even begin.
The joy and wonder that comes with creating theatre *is* in the work. It is in the casting, the frustrating rehearsals, the long hours spent gossiping and painting the set, the excitement that comes with devising original choreography. How could I select anything but a *hard*, creative, and meaningful methodology in which to do my study? I wanted to honour the laborious entity that is working in theatre ensembles in education. The art of theatre is not just the end product the audience sees on the stage under the bright lights. The work it takes to get there and the people that make it so are also the art form; the magic that is created when *we*, as an ensemble, make art **together**.

This experience lives in the *in-between* spaces of exhausted rehearsal silliness and nervous opening night back stage whispers…Lets listen for it.
Chapter Three: Exploring the Ensemble Experience

This study explores the experience of members of collaborative theatre ensembles working within public high school theatre education. I asked: **What is the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education?** I used a qualitative research paradigm as my intention was to learn more about and describe my participants' experience in collaborative theatre ensembles in education rather than using a quantitative method that measures or tests a theory. A phenomenological methodology was used in order to develop a holistic understanding of the ensemble experience from the participants perspective, as described by Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), I wanted to “describe and interpret the experience of participants in order to understand the “Essence” of the [ensemble] experience as perceived by the research participants” (p.282). I used the interconnected elements of connection, commitment, communication and creativity to inform writing prompts given to participants in an online focus-group. I worked through the data generated by these prompts using inductive coding in order to generate themes. Inspiration for processing and representing the collected, analyzed, written data is drawn from A/r/tography. My study includes monologues and scripted dialogue.

These research methods were selected as I wished to explore a theatrical phenomenon using theatrical methodology. In *Being with A/r/tography*, David Beare and George Belliveau describe the process of scripting data. In script writing the researcher engages in the data in a way that they are “experiencing what art wants [them] to do- unifying people to discuss and exchange ideas-to question ourselves. And the questioning and the dialoguing is happening as we are creating the work itself …connecting hearts, connecting minds, connecting ideas …all coming together to create a [script]”(p.149).
In theatre, characters to speak their truths either internally, to the audience, or to one another. This is how we learn about them. We, the audience, the observers, hear what the characters say about themselves, each other, and the world around them. We watch what they do, how they move, and how they behave. This is how we come to understand more about their experience in this world. In this study, monologues and scripted dialogue were chosen as a way to provide context and rich narrative, as well as an additional outlet for me to explore the research question in a theatrical way. This was motivational to me in this study and hopefully will produce a creative narrative overlay in which the reader can learn more about the ensemble experience within the world of theatre education. I “listened” to my research participants’ responses to the initial interview, online focus group writing prompts, and monologues. I analyzed participants’ responses to the writing prompts using inductive analysis. Themes within the data were generated by coding and influenced the creation of thematic vignettes within a series of four scenes of scripted dialogue relating to the four elements of: connection, commitment, communication, and creativity. This script is in Chapter Four.

At the outset of the study, I had planned to write a final monologue based on the findings. I hoped to capture the voice of the ensemble. By listing to the voices of the ensemble within this research project, the in-between moments of artistic collaboration, I hoped to create a character, through monologue, who lived, felt, breathed and moved truthfully in those moments. By creating a fictional charter who speaks from within the ensemble itself, I hoped to explore, play, and understand more about the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education. In actuality, I did come to understand more, but not in the way I had anticipated. This is presented in my conclusion, Curtain Call, at the end of Chapter Five.
In This Ensemble

Approximately twenty-five invitations to participate in the study were sent out to various members involved in theatre education on Vancouver Island via hand delivered paper work and my own personal Facebook contacts. Examples of invited communities included: Vancouver Island high school drama teachers, professional theatre artists with experience working within schools, International Baccalaureate Theatre Arts graduates and university theatre department professors. Participants were selected to be invited if they had prior and current experience working in collaborative theatre ensembles as I’d defined them in this study. I was particularly focused on theatre artists and teachers currently involved in high school theatre education on Vancouver Island.

I was pleased to have eleven invitations accepted and eleven participants agree to participate in the study after learning more about it. All eleven participants signed and returned consent forms and were pleased to be identified by name in this study. Including myself, there were twelve participants in total. This number seemed right as I expected about ten participants in the study. The participants included seven Vancouver Island high school drama teachers, including myself, from School Districts 68, 70 and 71, three professional theatre artists working in Victoria and Vancouver, and two Theatre Arts program graduates.

The age range of the participants was from 19-50. All participants had some degree of theatre training or some level of post-secondary education in theatre and/or theatre in education. Five of the teacher participants were female and two were male. Both the theatre professionals and past student participants included male and female participants. Gender was not an important factor when designing this study. Participants were asked to respond honestly and authentically to all writing prompts included in the study in order to create a trustworthy and dependable
collection of data. It should be mentioned, that at the time of the study, that all participants came with, for the most part, positive attitudes in favour of artistic collaboration in theatre ensembles. This fact greatly influences the transferability of the information presented in this study. Five of the participants, including myself, are drama teachers in high schools on northern Vancouver Island and we are colleagues. Two of the drama teachers in the study are regular collaborators and friends of mine. Two of the theatre professionals have done work within my theatre program. Both of the recent graduates are over nineteen and I have enjoyed working on collaborative ensemble projects with both of these participants.

**Learning about Ensemble: Instruments and Procedures**

After ethics permission was granted on May 20, 2015, recruitment consisted of an invitation to participate in the study which was sent out on Facebook to approximately twenty-five prospective participants from my theatre contacts list. Eleven people accepted my invitation to be involved in my study and were told they could participate at a level that suited them and that they were welcome to leave the study at any time. All eleven participants were sent an introductory interview (See Appendix C) and returned consent forms via private message. Seven participants, including myself, completed the initial interview. Included in the introductory interview were four questions about the participants’ theatrical, personal and professional background so that a rich narrative could be created allowing for their data to be analyzed and presented from an authentic perspective.

The *first iteration* of the study consisted of joining and participating in a private closed, ongoing, focus group on Facebook. This online focus group was created so that open-ended writing prompts could be delivered in real time to individuals living and working in different
geographical locations. Participants could respond as they wished to individual prompts at a time and place that was convenient to them. All participants were informed that their personal comments and data were stored in the United States, subject to Facebook’s terms and conditions, and were subject to the Patriot Act. They were also made aware that although the group was private, and that as a participant and researcher, I would maintain confidentiality, others would be able to view their comments and images. Sharing of images and research content outside the closed group was strictly prohibited. Writing prompts were posted on this group on a somewhat weekly basis from September to December. Writing prompts included questions aimed at gaining insight into the participants’ ideas, values, attitudes and experiences about working in collaborative theatre ensembles. Participants, including myself as an artist/researcher/teacher (A/r/tographer), were encouraged to respond to prompts in any way they liked. Content for these prompts was generated using the connected elements of: connection, commitment, communication, and creativity as defined in this study in Chapter One. The following are examples of prompts posted on the group:

~Describe a connection you made from your collaborative efforts in theatre making. 

(\textit{connection})

~Tell me about a challenge you have faced in creating a recent work. Who or what helped you through? (\textit{commitment})

~How do you seek input in order to critique or celebrate your work? (\textit{communication})

~Describe a time you felt you created a magical piece of Theatre. (\textit{creativity})

The first iteration of the study took place on Vancouver Island during the 2016-2017 school year. Written data was collected over a period of four months, from September to December, 2016, using open-ended writing prompts, like the examples above, based on the
definition and concepts of ensemble included in my analytical framework. All written data was collected and stored on a closed, on-going, online, focus group. Prompts were generally posted at times when collaborative theatre projects were in production or performance. Examples of the types of collaborative projects that were running during the course of this study were: The Canadian Improv Games, The North Island Regional Drama Festival preparation, individual and collaborative district musicals, as well as working with artists in residence through Art Starts, and Drama Professional Learning Communities. All collected information was stored on Facebook and later copied and pasted, for analysis, into a Pages document on my password protected Mac computer. The computer was stored in a locked room in my home.

At the end of December, all participants were invited to participate in the second iteration of the study. Three participants, accepted and were asked to write a monologue inspired by their experience within a collaborative theatre ensemble or upon reflection of participating in this research project:

Take a moment or experience, real or imagined, inspired by a real life event or by your experience in participating in this study, and express it in writing using the form and theatrical conventions of a monologue.

Your monologue can be in the voice of any character you wish. It can be any length. Your monologue can speak directly about working together in collaborative theatre ensembles or can be an indirect exploration of themes, life, lessons, adventures, challenges, etc… from within a collaborative theatre ensemble.

Your monologue can be funny, sad, insightful, serious, ridiculous or clever. I want to hear the honest voices that come from within the heart of the ensemble. I want to hear the voice of the collaborative ensemble experience. Be your creative awesome self and have fun

For the monologue prompt, I borrowed methodology from Kempe (2010), in keeping the writing stimulus open and nebulous so that participants would stay in the moment, exploring and expressing themselves honestly (p. 314). This could allow themes and voices to emerge
organically and without influence. They were given the freedom to tell the story from the perspective of any character, real or fictional such as themselves, a student, an audience member. I hoped participants would create original characters living in a fictional world similar to the world we inhabit in collaborative ensemble theatre making in high school education. The monologue prompt highlighted writing about the in-between experiences and behind the scenes moments in the creation of theatre art. Completed monologues were collected mid-February 2017 from participants. In the end, two written monologues were completed and received via email and a third was received through private message in March. They were stored in Pages documents and on a specially dedicated, password protected USB stick.

For the final iteration of the study, I gathered the fifty-eight pages of responses generated from the writing prompts on the online Facebook group. The data was then analyzed for themes emerging from within the elements of: connection, commitment, communication, and creativity. In this study, I spent many months interacting with the data through: cyclical reading, posting, commenting, and chatting on the online focus group page. I found that long after a question had been asked and answered, research participants and I would return to the group to discuss, joke, or share stories. Even before analysis, I felt as if I had spent quite some time with my participants immersed in my data. “Once you are into the data it is not the three steps that lead you to understanding. It is your ability to think, imagine, create, intuit, and analyze that guides the data analysis” (Mills, 2014. p133). Official six step inductive data analysis included gathering, reading, memo-ing, generating themes, classifying, reducing categories, and describing my participants using their answers to my initial interview questions.

The first time through the data, I read the responses to the prompts looking for participant statements around my introduced elements of connection, commitment, communication and
creativity. I assigned each element a colour and highlighted them throughout the data not only in the section of writing prompts assigned to that element. The second time through the data, I circled and noted new and reoccurring themes, issues, or statements with an impact. I starred statements that resonated within me.

The third time through, I used a fresh set of data and created a Pages document categorizing the themes that emerged within the elements to ensure they existed. As I did so, it seemed to me that a sort of conversation was developing in my data. Sometimes the quotes were in sequence, sometimes out of order, most of the time they were being coded with quotes from multiple prompts...And yet, what I had in front of me was starting to look and sound like a script. In Chapter Four, I have included my interpretation of the analyzed data, including all eleven participants’ voices on the ensemble experience, in a series of scripted dialogues or “Scenes”. Each one of my four elements is in represented scene format. The coded themes, allowed the distinction of individual vignettes to exist within each element’s scene. Participants and their contexts can be found at the start of Chapter Four under the heading Cast List; In this Ensemble. Included in the cast list are seven participants who participated frequently in this study. They are included to add rich detail and context both of which are key to reading the scenes and central in creating authentic qualitative research.

The final iteration of this study lives in Chapter Five. I listened for a collective voice emerging from the participants’ responses and individual monologues. I connected the emerging themes, emotions, and experiences so that I could prepared to write my monologue (Schonmann & Kempe, 2010, p. 316). I reminded myself that no two researchers would experience my data in the same way that I did. “There is no single “correct” way to organize and analyze data. Different researchers produce different categories from the same data for many reasons,
including researcher biases, personal interests, style and interpretive focus” (Mills, 2014. p134). My thoughts, feelings and own love of ensemble deeply affected what I heard and how I interpreted the data.

In the final chapter, I applied the A/r/tography philosophy that combines research, creative practice, and a performative pedagogy to my work. I stayed true to my personal philosophy of staying present in the moment, and in my research question, when writing this piece. This sense of presence aligns with Irwin’s (2013) focus on “rhizomatic practices of the liminal in-between” spaces in art and theatre making. (p. 199). I hoped my written work would “reveal the fractures, sutures, seams, of self-interacting with others in the context of researching lived experience” (Spry, 2006, p.190). I include myself in my written piece as a way to interpret my findings for the reader. From deep within my soul, I wrote in the voice of my own experience within collaborative theatre ensembles.

My final my piece, Curtain Call, was written on April 10, 2017 and represents the common themes that presented themselves to me in my research. My creative piece was then read by two participants for accuracy of voice. It will be read aloud at the year end meeting of North Island Zone educators in June, 2017.

**Analysis and Authenticity in the Ensemble Experience**

Since the outset of this study and throughout my research, in my preparation to write and read this work, it has always been clear that I would never be able to separate my own voice or experience from the collective voice of the collaborative experience in my data. My voice is deeply connected, committed, and invested in the process of artistic collaboration in education. This is my study’s greatest limitation and perhaps its strength.
Truth in this research was sought by: inviting a group of people with a range of theatrical, collaborative, and ensemble experiences, ongoing data collection through various phases of production and collaboration for participants, and collecting data ‘in the moment’ on the online focus group page. Also, by giving participants an opportunity for reflection through the invitation to write a monologue and through the process of writing my own piece and through member-checking. I’ve attempted to listen to and unearth the true voices of experience with the ensemble.

My written conclusion, Curtain Call, “Completely dissolves any idea of distance, doesn’t produce ‘findings’, isn't generalizable and only has credibility when self-reflective, and authority when richly vulnerable… When done well we can learn previously unspoken things about culture and communication from it” (Spry, 2006, p.192). The idea for this piece came to me on a Friday night after painting the stage black with several of my theatre students. Painting the stage is a ritual common to many theatre people and is often done to refresh the space at the close of a season or show. I felt that this was a great place to start. I then wrestled with ideas for possible characters for my monologue and the insightful stories they might share but I just couldn’t settle on one. I couldn’t think in the abstract. I played lived scenarios over in my mind all that night and into the next day. Then suddenly, the idea came to me in it’s nearly completed form on Monday morning. I typed as fast as I could trying to grasp the images, feelings, sounds, and emotions before they slipped back into my creative subconscious. I was in near tears and my heart raced: I created a living-text that made me feel both vulnerable and strong. It required me, as the researcher to put my own breath, voice, and body to work in order to bring value and life to this academic work. I felt magic and light.
Chapter four: Ensemble Scripted

Cast List: In this Ensemble

On July 16, 2016, I opened the online Facebook focus group, thanked everyone for joining, and posted my four initial interview questions (Appendix A). These four questions were posed as a way for us to get to know each other, contextualize our individual ensemble and theatre making worlds, and create a rich narrative for this qualitative study. The following participants introduced themselves and I have included their stories in this section as a cast-list. This may help the reader to hear each voice as we move into Chapter Four.

CHRISTINE

“Every new school year is another opportunity to do ensemble work. One of the goals in my theatre is to have students work together and to create an environment that is supportive and respectful of everyone, to allow for a comfortable, safe place to work. It mostly works, and when it doesn't, it's a chance to learn from it.”

Christine has been a teacher for 22 years, in Coquitlam, Port Hardy and Campbell River, mostly in Theatre and English. She says, “I love my job, I love summer holiday, and I love teaching theatre.” Christine may be one of the most efficient people I know. She runs the drama department at Carihi Secondary in Campbell River, which means teaching Drama classes, coaching improv, directing a drama festival play, and directing a yearly musical. She is always eager to share resources, plan adventures, and collaborate. When asked to describe her experience in collaborative theatre ensembles she says, “I LOVE ensemble work. It is so important to a high school theatre program. I try to find festival plays, especially, that allow for a large group of kids on stage to develop a performance together, and am particularly excited about
from the Heart of the Ensemble

this year's show...Aunt Leaf...which is so unique and fully about the ensemble. Working with teenagers is all about finding ways to get them to work together to create art, so it applies to everything we do.” Christine is also a member of the ABCDE executive, which supports drama teachers in British Columbia, and has enjoyed being part of that ensemble. She also names our North Island group of drama teachers as, “A successful and wonderful group of teachers that work together and supports each other. Our work with each other buoys all of us through challenges, and we gain inspiration and energy from the work we do together.” The ensemble projects Christine participated in during the time of this study included: The one act festival play, Aunt Leaf, improv with the Canadian Improv Games, class plays within her classes, and her musical, The Addams Family. In addition, her district hosted NIRD Festival, “Which is a favourite event of students and teachers alike, as it allows us to come together for three days with a shared love of theatre and celebrate each others' work. I am looking forward to all of it.”

DAN

Dan is a 2010 graduate of G.P. Vanier Secondary School and starts his interview response with the words “Hi Friends!”

Dan is ageless, talented, hardworking, and all kinds of friendly. He got involved in theatre in grade 7 and has been hooked ever since. Throughout high school he participated in improv, musicals, and community theatre. As an alumni, he volunteers to coach improv teams, choreograph, and teach workshops at NIRD Festival. Most recently he has taken on the roll of Director’s Assistant, “I volunteer at Vanier with the theatre department so I would slot myself as a “Director's Assistant”. If Lori needs a tech guy, that's me. If Lori needs a choreographer, that's me. If she needs costumes, you guessed it - that's me. With that being said, I also do spend a lot of time on stage as well.” Although he loves theatre and performing locally, singing is his one
true love, “I spend a lot of time recording and creating original music as well as covers.” During the time of this study Dan coached Vanier’s senior improv team, taught at the North Island Regional Drama Festival and choreographed the School District 71 musical, Seussical. He says, “My experiences in collaborative theatre ensemble have been mostly learning. For me, the process has been trying to find patterns or "right answers" but I'm learning that there isn't always a "right answer" all the time. It's all very situational.”

DAVE

“I'm a storyteller, poet, and improviser. I've been teaching and performing improvisation for 15 years. For the last 6 years I've been the director and producer of Paper Street Theatre in Victoria. We perform improvisation that feels like theatre, with the goal of changing the way improvisation is perceived.”

Dave has also worked directing the Victoria Spoken Word Festival building a collaborative poetry show in less than a week, and with Belfry 101 helping high school students create an original piece of theatre over spring break. Dave is also a past Regional Director for the Canadian Improv Games and has a wealth of knowledge to share with teachers and students on Vancouver Island and beyond. Dave is a kind, funny and charismatic and his workshops are a hit with Vancouver Island theatre students. His has created a Ted Talk called, “Yes And…” and a most excellent Canadian Improv Games training video. When asked about projects involving collaborative theatre this year, Dave replied, “Our Season is all collaborative. We're doing three shows this season, and I'll be doing the Belfry 101 program again as well as working with Pacific School of Innovation and Inquiry creating a piece of theatre with the high school students there.”

JASON
“When I was in the eighth grade I went to live with my dad. I had a very positive experience with wood work. Mr. Owen Leung taught the class and I loved it. When it came time to move in grade 9 and do course selections I knew one thing: wood work was for me. In the new school I didn't get along with the shop teacher. "What else have you got?" Drama...and there goes life. Education is all about relationships!"

Jason is a high school theatre teacher, improv coach, and coordinator at Gulf Island School of Performing Arts on Salt Spring Island. He focuses on “integrated arts and collective creation - ensemble building and group mind cultivating at every turn.” He has a Masters in Arts Education from SFU, plays guitar and mandolin, and, coaches the most amazingly creative improv teams you’ll every see. He describes work in collaborative theatre ensembles as, “My favourite! We work at the top of our intelligence together.” He also enjoys the plays of Mary Zimmerman, playbuilding, mixed arts collective creation, and team teaching. At the time of this study, Jason taught theatre classes, coached GISS improv, and was working on a production with “original music compositions and choreography and ensemble devising and student design with team teaching.” He points out that, “Viewpoints composition work and ensemble building methodology is at the roots of most of these projects.”

LISA

I graduated from high school in 1993 and was surprised and excited to learn that theatre was a real thing that I could do in an adult-y way. I lived in that space. If the drama room door was locked when I got to school I would often just leave.
FROM THE HEART OF THE ENSEMBLE

I completed a Diploma of Technical Theatre at Malaspina College. I worked a few festivals and a few contracts but didn't really have the skills needed to commit or communicate - I think I was 19. I've been living the dream as a Theatre teacher in various schools on the island since completing my Bachelor of Education in 2003. I am very inspired by my theatre colleagues. So inspired that... I started this Masters Degree in order to learn a bit more about their magic!

My experience working with ensembles has always been positive. I loved the shared leadership and the commitment to each other that supersedes the goal or project itself. I love the flexibility, flow, and movement of collaborative work. The synergy. I even love the chaos, stress and gong-show of it all. I love the hive mind, the spiritual, the friendships, laughs and memories of a shared transformational experience. I love the art and the creation of something new and unique and fleeting. I love belonging to something larger than myself.

This year, I may accidentally have too many projects on the go. I am excited about ALL of them. Obviously, this masters research and thesis, directing a three school musical, having local artists in residence and, magically, hosting a work shop with Frantic Assembly. A real dream come true: Never underestimate the power of a whimsical email!

LORI

Lori is the head of the drama department at G.P. Vanier Secondary school in Courtenay. She is a bit of a local celebrity and a very strong supporter theatre in our community. She is inclusive, collaborative, and incredibly hard working. She is knowledgeable and a whole lot of fun to work with. Lori has been a theatre enthusiast since she was a young girl. She remembers
seeing a production of Peter Pan at an elementary school and “falling instantly in love.” She was involved in theatre through elementary, middle school and high school. Lori holds a Masters of Educational Leadership but feels her “most important theatre training has been from doing and observing, “Doing: Shows onstage and behind the scenes – mostly directing and coaching improv, and teaching theatre. Workshops – so many tremendous workshops through CIG, Theatre BC, The Broadway Teachers’ workshop in New York, NIRD, The ABCDE Provincials and conferences, CLT, CYMC, and other random letters and opportunities! I also learn from my students – ALL THE TIME! I learn from observing – the work of my amazing colleagues particularly those in our North Island region – and from seeing a great deal of theatre – live around here and in Vancouver, Seattle and New York and recorded at such events as National Theatre Live and the Globe and online. I cannot begin to express how much I have learned from all this observing.” Each year since 1999, Lori has coached improv teams at Vanier. She isn’t one to boast but I know for a fact that teams, under her guidance and tremendous dedication, have made is all the way to win the National Competition in Ottawa. She directs musicals and plays for several local theatre companies and programs, including “CYMC, a summer musical theatre company that produces a full scale musical, Light Fantastic Musical Theatre, Rainbow Youth Theatre, and Courtenay Little Theatre.”

During the time of this study, in addition to improv, classes, and her Festival show, Lori Directed “Peter and the Starcatcher” for Courtenay Little Theatre. Lori also collaborated with me to bring Frantic Assembly to the Comox Valley. “I have been a long time admirer of Frantic Assembly and, in my opinion, this company is pretty much collaborative theatre at its best”. Loris says. “ I think a great deal of what we do regularly as high school teachers is collaborative theatre ensemble work!”
MONICA

“My name is Monica Ogden, and I'm an actor, improviser, Youtube content creator, and intersectional feminist activist from Victoria B.C. living on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen people. I started improvising through the Canadian Improv Games 9 years ago and now work as the Head Referee for the Canadian Improv Games Vancouver Island. I've been performing for the last 10 years and improvise with Paper Street Theatre Co. in Victoria B.C.”

Monica attends the University of Victoria, and is working on a degree in Women and Gender Studies. In addition, Monica created “an independent web series called Fistful of Feminism on Youtube, where I discuss the lives and representation of marginalized identities using an anti-racist decolonizing framework. This series is now collaborating with Feminist Apparel to receive minimal funding for this feminist project. My activist work bleeds into all aspects of my theatre work, and this past summer I was contracted into an ensemble to work with the Intercultural Association of Victoria in collaboration with the Victoria Police Department. This project was created to create dialogue between marginalized/immigrant communities and the police to encourage understanding, collaboration, and trust.”

Monica works with Paper Street Theatre Co. as a performer and improv instructor. She teaches, and referees for the Canadian Improv Games. She engages in contract work as an actor as she pursues her degree. “I have worked on various applied theatre projects, the most recent being with The Intercultural Association of Victoria. Paper Street Theatre Co. is also an ensemble of members in which we research and rehearse genres and perform as improvised pieces of theatre. I also work in scripted theatre, but most of my experience has been in devising and collaborative theatre spaces.”
At the time of this study Monica was working on her degree, working for Canadian Improv Games and looking forward to “working towards a collaborative theatre project incorporating intersectional feminist scripts and voices of marginalized communities.”

**Ensemble Scripted**

In this study, I wanted to know more about the experience of creating and working within collaborative theatre ensembles in education. I climbed deep within the interwoven web of ensemble to listen to it breath, to listen to the voices of the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in education. I expected to find ideas, values, attitudes, beliefs within the elements of connection, commitment, communication, and creativity. I hoped to find insights and surprises that were previously unknown to me in the in-between spaces and subtext of the research. I hypothesized that working in collaborative theatre ensembles is inspiring to teachers, graduates of theatre programs, and professionals theatre artists because of strong personal connections, commitment to each other and a shared passion or goal.

In this chapter, I will present the voices of ensemble as I heard them, in a series of four scenes of scripted dialogue. This script contains the themes that emerged displayed under titled vignettes within each scene. These vignettes hold the thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs and attitudes of the participants’ responses to my writing prompts…and the answers to my research question: **What is the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education?**

The dialogue is presented out of context in relation to the individual questions that were posed (See Appendix D). Although they read as linear, the responses are often pulled out of order to create little theme based vignettes within each element’s scene. In some cases,
individual participant responses have been connected or shortened to capture the theme. Not all participants’ responses are displayed. Any major changes or additions have been noted.

In theatre, the subtext of a script reveals the character’s motivation. Throughout the online focus group, writing prompts were arranged in the four interrelated elements of connection, commitment, communication and creativity. For each element, I asked several questions and allowed time for lingering discussion as well as participant responses after posting.

After analysis, I found many themes emerging, like sub-text, in the data set, which I have come to call The Script. I’ve placed the themes found in The Script into the seven categories of: Love, Spark, Growth, Vulnerability, Sacrifice, Magic and Joy. Not all categories are evident in each element. There are a web of interconnections throughout and in some cases my emergent themes are interwoven within all categories amongst all of the elements! As we progress though the scenes, I will introduce the themes that emerged within each of these categories.

THE SCRIPT

SCENE ONE: CONNECTION
September 2016

Late Summer. Teachers and students are returning to school and reconnecting with each other with fresh energy and enthusiasm. Rumours of this year’s projects: Drama festival, Canadian Improv Games, workshops, shows, and field trips have students and teachers in theatre programs, up and down Vancouver Island, buzzing with excitement.

To open the discussion and define connection within ensemble the participants were asked to provide the one word they would use to describe the feeling they get when a connection is made within the ensemble.

WILLIAM: Beginning.

DAN: Genuine.
FROM THE HEART OF THE ENSEMBLE

JANA: Fulfilling.

KELLY: Success!

MONICA: Elation.

KRISTY: Fluffy. Warm and Fluffy.

WILLIAM: Open-heartedness.


LISA: Shine.

JASON: Discovery.

JASON: Kaleidoscopic.

CHRISTINE: Magical.

DAVE: Joy.

Love

Within the category of Love, are the themes of friendship, encouragement, nurturing, and universal connections to people and community outside of our theatre ensembles.

JASON: I guess I want to highlight the way we come to know one another, deeply. This week has been alumni visit overload week. Three separate, specific, former students stopped by for a visit. One from the beginning of my career, one from the mid point (so far) and one recent grad. In all three instances we went for a walk and we talked and listened and checked in on where we've come from, where we're at and where we're going. We offered advice, we joked, we reminisced and we continued to make discoveries about things we find important and gave each other a vehicle to articulate these things. I blame (credit) collaborative theatre ensembles.

LISA: So many of the people that are now my in real life friends started out as my theatre people, my colleagues….

MONICA: I recently worked on an applied theatre project working with immigrant communities and the local police department to create a dialogue between the two groups. This project focuses around themes of cultural "differences" but also the ways in which we are the same. As a politicized subject, I fall into the created category of "mixed race" as I am a Filipina British settler born in Canada. After one of the workshop performances of this project, I was approached by a woman who worked for the Bayanihan Community Centre (Filipino community). She
wanted to meet me because I was a Filipino woman (we also identify as Pinay in some contexts) and we had a wonderful talk about my grandmother and about our culture. This was a really special moment for me because I often pass through the world marked as "white" and it was extremely validating to meet another Filipino WOC who appreciated my work within the piece and asked me to come and work for the centre in the future. A really neat connection that I wouldn't have had if I were in a "traditional" theatre space. This is one of the reasons that I believe intersectional feminism and theatre should always be in relation to one another.

LORI: A personal connection that I made was with Jamie Hubley's parents. The tragic news of their son broke right when I was working on Torn Rainbow - and his story became a huge influence/inspiration/ motivation for the play. In addition, the inclusion of his story was something about the play that resonated with many audience members. For our performance for School District 71, Jamie's parents were in attendance. It was an honour to meet them and have them there. Now that I write this - I also realize that there were staff members in the district I made a connection with over this show as well - including custodians and maintenance workers who sought me out to discuss the play. I realize these were not members of the ensemble - but the connections were powerful nonetheless.

**Spark**

The category of Spark contains the themes of job satisfaction, inspiration, motivation, energy, synergy, and passion.

KELLY: I was so proud of the work we did together and that energy kept me going through a very busy school year.

LISA: Collaboration in theatre is the complex carb that fuels me creatively for the long haul (that is working in education and being an adult) .... Keeping me inspired, satisfied, and full!

CHRISTINE: I feel energized and inspired when I am having success with ensemble work. It keeps me excited to do my job, which is a great thing.

**Growth**

The category of Growth includes the themes of teaching, learning, transformation, personal and professional development as well as personal, artistic, and professional satisfaction.

CHRISTINE: I experience personal connection every time I work with my actors. I experience it the most when we, as a group...the cast and crew and I, have to solve the problems of the play as we go along.... We have to figure out how to do things together.
DAVE: You learn that your idea isn't always the best idea. If you want the best idea to surface, you have to get your ego out of the way. I think removing one’s ego to achieve something great is a useful skill for everyone to learn.

JASON: I’m a better listener now, open to change.

LORI: I think Brad Smith, you and I, Lisa - working on the grade 8 boy play together ended up being a great experience for the 3 of us to come closer together.

CHRISTINE: And our current play...it's a bit of all that. We are solving problems and making choices and figuring things out on every page, but I love it because everybody is on board and part of the process.

LORI: It allows our different strengths to come through, you never know from whence a wonderful contribution will come. A practical lesson that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

**Magic**

The category of Magic contains themes of magic, the spiritual, ethereal or pure energy in its most nebulous sense.

CHRISTINE:[When a connection is made it’s]Magical…theatre is magical. Sort of cliche, but true.

LISA: I feel it. I couldn't think of a word that really matches what I feel in my big, sappy, heart.

KELLY It's such a perfect word!

JASON: Kaleidoscopic

LISA: Shine.

**Joy**

The category of Joy overlaps Growth and Spark in many cases but needed to be included on its own as it houses the themes and happy voices of fun and play.

CHRISTINE: With a really hard script like "The Ugly Duckling" or "Pullman Car" which really needs to be UNDERSTOOD, we had to mine the meaning out of the lines. That was fun and brought us together too.
LISA: Solving problems together really is creative, fun and bonding! Everyone loves those stories best.

MONICA: Elation.

DAVE: JOY.

SCENE TWO: COMMITMENT
October 2016

Fall. Many of this year's projects and productions are underway. Festival plays have been cast, Improv teams are rehearsing, workshops have been planned and field trip forms have been sent out. In school District 71, the district musical auditions are scheduled. Vancouver Island theatre programs are going into production mode. Many commitments have been made...

LISA: What is the highest form of commitment in a collaborative theatre ensemble? How do you know when it is present? What happens when it is not?

DAVE: I think the highest form of commitment is equal to the level of the least committed member. If one person is only "kinda into it", then the whole project will reflect their half-assedness. A committed ensemble member should give the same amount of energy and time to a project that a theatre director gives to a project in a non-collaborative setting.

In a collaborative theatre ensemble, it's not that we have no director, it's that we are all directors, and so we all need to love the project as a director would. If one person doesn't, they drag the ensemble to their level.

CHRISTINE: I totally agree with Dave! The highest form of commitment is individual to each actor, so that one person who doesn't buy in makes it so the rest of the people have to work so much harder to succeed. You know commitment is present when, even when the work you are doing is HARD, everyone is still loving the process (because everyone believes in the work and wants to succeed!) When commitment is not present, it's just hard work.

LISA: Yes. Today was hard work for me. I felt the weight of the work as non committed members dropped their share of the process, project and commitment.

LORI: Complete trust in the project, the other ensemble members, and oneself. Also - what they said.

WILLIAM: There are so many great words here: commitment, love... And sacrifice... This is an act of service to something greater than any one person.

Love
DAN: Being apart of a show really brings people together. Friendships are made, connections spark, a community is formed. Even if you don't become friends with everyone in the cast - you're bound to meet, at least, one person who stays in your life at some capacity.

LISA: Dan, I love the notion of community!

KELLY: Dan has it exactly right... it's the family we become.

**Spark**

LISA: I can only describe the [commitment to ensemble] as a physical feeling...My motivation sits on my chest above my heart and it is heavy, warm and comforting. It is fuelled by creativity, synergy and magic. When it is fired up, I feel electricity, joy, expression, and dancing in my being! I think it is something spiritual. Or maybe an addiction.

DAN: I'm motivated by the audience and the cast. Being apart of a show really brings people together. Friendships are made, connections spark, a community is formed. Even if you don't become friends with everyone in the cast - you're bound to meet, at least, one person who stays in your life at some capacity. You're taking risks in front of people who admire you for going there and trying. Finally, an audience comes to a show to escape the world and enjoy themselves for two hours after their long, hard day at work. We have the power and the opportunity to give them that sweet escape. We have the magic of theatre that could change a kids life forever. It can be overwhelming but the pay off is worth it.

JASON: I often team teach, in a trio, and it's a dynamic juggle to find the time to collaborate and plan. Alone, I can follow any digression I choose. Together, we need to learn to trust and let go and assert and listen and embrace ambiguity and conflict and gratitude, sparks fly...so I actively seek as much consultation time as we can get throughout the year.I try to see shows and hire workshops with ensemble based, devising companies (electric co, only animal, etc.)I read a lot (a lot) and then experiment in rehearsal, particularly with my improv team.

LISA: Sparks fly! Love that metaphor for professional development. I always say that I am looking for a way to get "fired up" to fuel my passion for this profession . Definitely a fire theme!

CHRISTINE: I also attend the Provincial Drama conference every year, which is always inspiring and rejuvenating. NIRD (North Island Regional Drama Festival) is, of course, one of my favourite ways to connect with colleagues and gain inspiration. I also LOVE seeing live theatre at all levels. Even bad theatre teaches me things. Collaborating with my Musical theatre team is also very rewarding! Wow...I have a lot of good theatre stuff in my life.

KELLY: NIRD!

LISA: ME TOO!

**Growth**
CHRISTINE: I just spent the last three years on the ABCDE executive, which turned out to be quite informative and interesting, and it expanded my knowledge of Drama at the Provincial level.

Doing theatre is hard. Doing it well is really hard. What helps me through is that it's hard! The challenge is fun, and when the cast buys in, then it's REALLY fun. Solving problems is easier when everyone in the cast wants to help solve them.

JANA: I just posted our cast list for the musical this year. The role of Tinman was really close and I knew the student who didn't get it was going to be crushed. Awful feeling posting a list knowing you are breaking hearts. He had a really rough morning, would hardly look at me all day, reluctantly listened when I explained the difficult choice we had to make. I was worried he might drop out of the show completely. But after our first read through tonight he sent me a message apologizing for his negative reaction and said it wouldn't happen again. Nice to see some maturity develop in this young man, I'm so proud of his ability to take a step back and to know that he isn't allowing this let down to damage our relationship or the ensemble experience.

KELLY: I also enjoy acting or directing for community theatre as a way to develop professionally. I always learn something and it's a nice break to deal with adults for a change.

DAN: Recently, I have been lucky to be surrounded by amazing people (including everyone in this group) who really believe that, regardless of age, or even experience for that matter, you can learn from everyone around you. Everyone has something to offer, if you're willing to listen.

LORI: I love love love workshops. Within but not limited to the communities of CIG and other improv, ABCDE, Theatre BC, New York Teacher's workshop, I go places to do them and work with incredibly artists (festivals, New York, Vancouver, conferences) but we have also been so unbelievably fortunate to have wonderful artists give workshops here - Dave, Aaron, being super highlights along with Scott Swan, Frantic Assembly, Kathryn Shaw and many others.

CHRISTINE: I also like to please the audience. I want to direct a strong show. I want the cast to be proud of their work and I want people in the audience to recognize their hard work. I never want an audience to suffer.

LORI: Often the knowledge you are all helping others to grow while usually growing yourself. And as others have said -creating the opportunity for people to feel an important part of something. And also often, it is the material itself I adore sharing with the audience. Making them laugh or think or wonder or just enjoy.

**Vulnerability**

The category I am calling Vulnerability speaks to themes of trust, risk, openness and openhearted-ness. In this Scene, Vulnerability and trust are very prominent themes. Trust is at the very core of commitment.
DAVE: I think the highest form of commitment is equal to the level of the least committed member. If one person is only "kinda into it", then the whole project will reflect their halfassedness. A committed ensemble member should give the same amount of energy and time to a project that a theatre director gives to a project in a non-collaborative setting.

In a collaborative theatre ensemble, it's not that we have no director, it's that we are all directors, and so we all need to love the project as a director would. If one person doesn't, they drag the ensemble to their level.

CHRISTINE: The highest form of commitment is individual to each actor, so that one person who doesn't buy in makes it so the rest of the people have to work so much harder to succeed. You know commitment is present when, even when the work you are doing is HARD, everyone is still loving the process (because everyone believes in the work and wants to succeed!) When commitment is not present, it's just hard work.

LISA: Yes. Today was hard work for me. I felt the weight of the work as non committed members dropped their share of the process, project, commitment, etc… When I a committing to work on something I always worry.... Do I have enough time? Do I have faith in my idea? My project? My People?

KELLY: For me the beginning is always the hardest. I'm feeling it now with NIRD. Trying to get everyone on the same page. Sorting out who is committed to the group and who just can't make it work. For me, trusting the process and keeping my enthusiasm up is the only way to survive it.

DAN: One of the biggest challenges I face is other people's faith in me, and it is a day to day challenge. I find that on any given day they seem excited to work and share and go the extra mile with me and then the very next day I can't get anyone to focus or stay seriously on topic.

LORI: Complete trust in the project, the other ensemble members, and oneself.

LISA: Trust. Totally.

Sacrifice

The theme of Sacrifice emerged throughout all of the elements. This theme includes the personal, professional and artistic sacrifices ensemble members make in order to preserve their commitment to the ensemble. The themes of self and ensemble care are also included in this category.

CHRISTINE: Any time we put so much energy into a project we love, another part of life suffers. Less time with family, certainly, but for me, as well, it's self care...exercise, eating right, stress management. It is my goal this year to not feel like I did last June, which was on the edge of burn out.
KELLY: My goal this year is putting myself first. I can't keep burning myself out.

MONICA: Health and self care time.

AARON: Less time with family.

LISA: Equilibrium. I miss sleep. And my family.


LISA: Yes! My abs!. I used to have a six pack. Kidding.

KELLY: Health.

DAN: Other passion projects that weren't as time sensitive. But also everything else mentioned above.

LORI: Fitness, sleep, health, family - also my other classes and the Four Continents figure skating competition. Sometimes other theatre and workshops that were beckoning.

JASON: Ideas….Family time!! My boys are growing up so fast.

LISA: I just joked with my friends about giving up hobbies...and sex!

DAVE: Some things you can't give up. I'm talking about hobbies.

WILLIAM: There are so many great words here: commitment, love... And sacrifice... This is an act of service to something greater than any one person.

Magic

JASON: I have this arrogant delusion that the alternative is banal, boring and panders to something much less than artistic ambition. There is a radiant electricity and connectivity in the process of collective ownership that transcends light entertainment and getting through memorized lines as the measure of success. I imagine some laminated lesson plan rotating between three or four shows and it tastes like a little bit of vomit in the back of my throat. I keep showing up because I am inspired by discovery and creative natality, realized and given life through ensemble based creation. Not to be too sanctimonious but this endeavour gives meaning to my life's work. I have defined my terms to say this is what creativity feels like. It gives me hope.

LORI: My soul grows each time we get to spend time with one another.
LISA: Usually, I don't have enough time but some magical time/space thing happens in order for theatrical collaboration to occur...maybe it is because of my faith in my people?

LORI: When the audience gasps. That is my favourite and I think it shows the highest form of commitment realized.

**SCENE THREE: COMMUNICATION**

**November 2016**

Late fall. Festival Month! For many of my research participants this is a time of high creativity, high theatrical involvement, and high stress. Five of us produced shows this month and two hosted the festival. Two of the non-teacher participants taught workshops. At this time, The Canadian Improv Games competitions are looming, many spring musical productions are already in the beginning stages of rehearsal and production. For educators, it is also term change and report card season.

LORI: [Communication in Ensembles] is sometimes messy, sometimes exhausting, sometimes exhilarating, sometimes frustrating, usually rewarding.

Spark

LISA: Communication in theatre has so many layers and is complicated and creative!

DAN: As a director/choreographer - I love coming in knowing what we're working on but being left open to changes and ideas and being inspired.

WILLIAM: [the best way to lead] is to be willing to follow...with commitment and energy.

Growth

CHRISTINE: The part about communicating badly is very true for my ensemble too... and then I have to communicate with them about how badly they are communicating with me.

JASON: I get it. I'm full of assumptions and worry deeply that we need more time in translation and practice.

KELLY: I had a great conversation with my theatre in education mentor this weekend and would love to share about it. However, I too am exhausted and overwhelmed by a new technology position I've taken on at work, so... I'll share later... (also sacrifice).

LISA: I am using a new devising technique with my festival ensemble. And, it's like we are learning a new language together so communication is tricky. It's fun but sometimes we just don't have the vocabulary we need. we are all on the same page collaborating together which is cool but can be confusing...

CHRISTINE [Teaching and Learning ] are the epitome of collaboration. Yes, I come in with the play, and a vision, and information and ideas, but once we start working on it I encourage my
actors to contribute their ideas and eventually it becomes OUR vision. If it works out well, everyone is excited about the process.

LISA: For me it's you guys. I learn best by "doing": collaborating with my colleagues and theatre professionals inspires and educates me (and my students). And is my favourite thing ever! Sometimes I feel greedy that I focus on what/who "I" want to learn from but ultimately my students benefit and share in this learning and excitement. Of course, in theatre, the students learn by doing too. I don't think of myself as a teacher so much in this process...more as someone who provides the space, time and resources for cool shit to happen. A student once referred to me as their Guide. I liked that.

Vulnerability

DAVE: The first thing that comes to mind [when talking about communication within ensembles] is "With challenges".

Depending on the ensemble of course. Groups with varying skill levels often have difficulty giving feedback. Especially when it's someone who is less experienced giving feedback to someone who is more experienced. It often comes across as an attack or a put down. When everyone has similar experience, especially if they all have lots of experience, giving each other feedback goes a little better. But even then, sometimes doesn't go well.

My second thought is "badly". In particular when it comes to arranging rehearsal times, or communicating via email, or Facebook, or a message board. It's hard to get a group of equals, who have no fear of being "fired" or "asked to leave" to respond in a timely manner. If you have a director, and the director asks a specific question to a specific person, it's answered immediately. But if you have a "collective" and one person asks a general question to everyone... crickets.

That's what comes to mind, I'm sure if I think more I will have a more nuanced answer.

JASON: Sometimes, in endeavouring to solve a creative problem we can not know the answer but sense that we're heading in the right direction. There's this fuzzy shape on the horizon that we keep moving towards until it reveals its form and shape. I can't make rational sense out of it. However, there is an artform sense we trust. I don't have a product in mind that I'm trying to trick the ensemble into to discovering. Eventually it moves from a democracy into a directorial relationship. My metaphor is a stir fry where we don't know what we're making but we experiment with the ingredients at hand, the available light.

DAVE: Empathy. Trust. Talent. To me, the way to lead a collaborative ensemble is by being the best you can at what you do. If you're a talented actor/dancer/improviser and the rest of the ensemble knows that and trusts you, they'll follow your direction.

CHRISTINE: I think confidence is important... faith and a vision in your project... patience.

DAVE: Vision. Totally.
**Magic**

JASON: Telekinetically. Then by letting chaos, uncertainty and confusion exist and by staying credible and accountable with a declarative commitment into the unknown (trusting that vague shape on the horizon will come into some kind of focus)...and what Dave said.

LISA: Yup!

LORI: I don’t think this is my strength. Part of me wishes it could be but then I just get tired thinking about it.

WILLIAM: Lori, your improv teams show your strength in this area every year. I think you live this strength.

LORI: That is a wonderful thing to say, Thank you tons.

LISA: Lori, I agree with William.

**Joy**

JANA: [I communicate by] throwing things.

LISA: That is hilarious. I have been know to get a little silly myself!

CHRISTINE: I wish there was a way for my cast to "read my mind." Sometimes I joke with my cast that they need to read my mind because they're not getting what I'm asking for. Communicating patiently is sometimes needed... and sometimes I also throw things.

KELLY: That reminds me of the ridiculous hand gestures and noises I sometimes use to try and express ideas... sometimes it works, sometimes the cast just looks at me like I'm crazy!

LISA: Love, Energy, Hard Work, Honesty, Passion, and Humour. We definitely need humour!

DAN: And play. I love to "play" as an actor because that means I'm trying and exploring and keeping my mind creative and sometimes coming up with super awesome ideas…Most times it doesn't feel like rehearsal - it just seems like we're goofing around and then all of a sudden we've created something.

**SCENE FOUR: CREATIVITY**

*December 2016*

Winter. Festival season has finished and Improv is in full swing. Theatre educators are looking forward to winter break before they leap into full spring musical chaos and Improv Finals in January. I posted my final batch of writing prompts.
Growth

CHRISTINE: I learn from my ensemble. I appreciate the creative give and take, and try to remember that everyone is a different learner/performer and many need different approaches. I love the awareness that is created between everyone when that creative give and take is working!

JASON: I think I'm a better listener and employ more strategies than I previously have used in terms of treating each singular student as an individual with unique strengths, needs, idiosyncrasies, etc…

The dogs of day to day bark me into a corner sometimes, it can be isolating and compartmentalized. Team teaching and devising with an ensemble makes me feel connected and a part of something rather than apart from something.

DAVE: Seeing the way other people work, how they formulate ideas, how they solve problems and work through situations is so inspiring! It informs my teaching in two major ways: 1) everyone approaches things differently, so I should teach everyone lesson in more than one way so everyone can access it. And 2) I steal exercises from people and use them in my workshops. No matter who they are or how old they are, watching someone create something always make me want to create things and inspires me to find other ways of doing things and other things to do.

Spark

CHRISTINE: I have had projects that I chose BECAUSE of the people I had in my ensemble!

JASON: we’ve created, sourced and built [projects] because of the interest and effort of specific groups. It is rare that we start with a source, we find it together with the premise that what each member has to offer is exactly what we need as a group.

WILLIAM: Yes. Every time!

DAVE: Always. The idea that emerges I always think came from someone else, and I'm sure they think it came from me. That's the beauty of it. Following the follower as we say in improv.

LISA: Sometimes I start my creative process in a little bubble in my mind. I dream up the type of ensemble experience I want to have and the piece I want to create. Am I looking to move or be moved? Laugh? Cry? Weird people out? Who are my people for this adventure? Who will accompany me on this journey? What skills, talents, personality, energy, etc... Does everyone bring to the mix to make this work happen? In my artistic process, Creating the Ensembles in preparation for ensemble work itself is inspirational for me!

JASON: Discovery is one of our main goals. This couldn't happen without the singularity of each unique ensemble.
Sacrifice

CHRISTINE: I have worked with some groups where the dynamic made it feel like hard work. That doesn't happen much though!

DAVE: Good point. Sometimes it doesn't feel like you're making art. If the people aren't right, it feels like just a gig.

KELLY: Up until this year, I haven't really cared for myself. It seems many of us are at the same crossroads - providing opportunities for our students but also finding time for ourselves so that we can keep providing those opportunities.

CHRISTINE: It’s true. Self care has been at the bottom of my list for years, and I have only recently moved it up in importance. I can't do everything, so I have started to move things off my plate. Of course, for drama teachers, that still means doing a fair bit. Caring for the ensemble is on going: reminders to sleep, to communicate about difficulties to me and to others, to drink water, to find balance. It's always on my radar because unhappy ensemble means unhappy director and then leads to stressful work.

WILLIAM: What is this concept, [called self-care] you speak of?

MONICA: Open and honest communication, as well as taking breaks from the process or ensemble. I used to have trouble talking openly about how I was affected by things, but have become better through my education and through lived experience. I think the intersections of mental health and systemic oppression can often be overlooked, so I do my best to make space for those conversations as a form of care. But then again, speaking about these things is exhausting and difficult, so sometimes taking a step away to practise self-care for yourself can do wonders for the ensemble.

LORI: Food.

WILLIAM: Love.

Vulnerability

JASON: I approach my own fear and vulnerability with a healthier embrace now, using it, leaning into it and exploring its edges. I get to say “next”.

Magic

LISA: Transcendent! I feel sappy for saying it- and I know that I am still overtired from Festival ....but I really suspect that it is the spiritual or synergetic rush I feel when I create and connect with something greater than myself (with theatrical/ensemble work )that keeps me coming back for more!

CHRISTINE: This is exactly how I feel about my current cast. Yes to all of it.
LISA: Of course I love to throw the word magical around too! It is magical right?

DAVE: There is a magical feeling when working with an ensemble.

JASON: Divine. A few weeks ago we told a story about a treasure trapped in a tree. When the scene ended the protagonist was stumped. It wasn't "intentional" but we provided a space for magic to exist. Kung fu panda style.

The group mind/ group brain is everything. This needs developing and is inevitable. Lowest common denominator risks are also real. Every group takes every opportunity it gets to tell its story. This takes nurturing to maximize. At its best it is exactly that, transcendent.

**Conclusion**

In this work, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the synergetic experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education. I expected to find ideas, values, attitudes, beliefs related to the elements of: connection, commitment, communication and creativity and hoped for insights into whether working in collaborative theatre ensembles is inspiring to teachers, graduates of theatre programs, and theatre professional artists because of strong personal connections, commitment to each other and a shared passion or goal.

I found so much more. I found a web of insights into self-confidence, personal wellbeing, teaching, learning and professional development. I could hear the driving force of inspiration, motivation and passion in my participants’ responses. I was in awe, and a little surprised to hear such strong connections to love, magic, joy and the near spiritual. I was excited to hear the similarities and differences in our experiences and drivers within our ensemble work.

Above all, I heard the deep significance of connection and commitment within ensemble work and how these elements create a synergy. Together those two elements hold the most Love, Spark and Growth. Together they create ensembles that are greater than any one individual. That is why I close out scene four and this chapter with Dave’s response to a prompt about creativity in ensemble theatre. A response that was coded under Love, Spark, and Magic.
DAVE: There is a magical feeling when working with an ensemble.
Something so special that afterwards you feel closer than family.
Family isn't intimate enough of a word.
Familial. Cut from the same cloth.
Part of the same tribe.
I don't know how to describe it,
but you know each other,
and love each other,
and hate each other,
and are each other.
Chapter 5: Voices from the Heart of Ensemble

Within the World of this Study: Discoveries

On September 14, 2016, I posted my first writing prompt on my online focus group Facebook page:

LISA: Here we go! Over the next few months I will be posting questions on this page. Feel free to comment on as many as you like (or riff of the comments of others). Your answers can be any length. From a word or two to...don't fret, censor or feel you have to craft something perfect or poetic. Unless that is your thing and it brings you joy:

Describe a personal connection you’ve made because of your work in a collaborative theatre ensemble.

For four months we exchanged thoughts, feelings, woes, and witty banter about collaborative theatre ensembles, theatre education, and theatre making. I set out on this research process with the question: What is the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education? I asked questions related to the elements of connection, commitment communication and creativity within the ensemble. I listened to the answers and to the voices of collaborative theatre educators and artists involved in theatre education. I hypothesized that working in collaborative theatre ensembles is inspiring to teachers, graduates of theatre programs, and theatre professional artists because of strong personal connections, commitment to each other and a shared passion or goal. I imagined that after data was gathered, with time, analysis, and a little bit of magic: I would hear, and write a monologue, in the one voice of the ensemble experience.

What emerges from the data analysis in this research, however, as shown in the four scenes in Chapter Four, is not one but many voices. In Chapter Four, I have reduced the emerging themes from the data into the categories Love, Spark, Growth, Vulnerability, Sacrifice
Magic and Joy. Within these categories, we hear the ideas, values, attitudes, beliefs, and voices that speak to the research question emerging from the in-between spaces and subtext of the writing prompts. We hear a strong link between creativity, inspiration, teaching and learning. For each participant, the experience and specific alchemy of motivation is different. Lori and Christine’s responses, for example, often spoke of what I categorized as Growth:

**CHRISTINE:** I learn from my ensemble. I appreciate the creative give and take, and try to remember that everyone is a different learner/performer and many need different approaches. I love the awareness that is created between everyone when that creative give and take is working! Christine (2016, November 21).

While William’s and Jason’s comments often referred to Spark:

**JASON:** Together, we need to learn to trust and let go and assert and listen and embrace ambiguity and conflict and gratitude, sparks fly…

Jason (2016, November 2).

For Dave and Dan and I, Spark, Magic and Play were reoccurring and interrelated:

**LISA:** I can only describe the [commitment to ensemble] as a physical feeling...My motivation sits on my chest above my heart and it is heavy, warm and comforting. It is fuelled by creativity, synergy and magic. When it is fired up, I feel electricity, joy, expression, and dancing in my being! I think it is something spiritual. Or maybe an addiction.

Lisa (2016, October 19).

**DAN:** And play. I love to "play" as an actor because that means I'm trying and exploring and keeping my mind creative and sometimes coming up with super awesome ideas…Most times it doesn't feel like rehearsal - it just seems like we're goofing around and then all of a sudden we've created something.

Dan (2016, November 15).

Throughout this research participants’ responses to the writing prompts related to the four elements of connection, commitment, communication and creativity and danced between and with the found categories of: Love, Spark, Growth, Vulnerably, Sacrifice, Magic and Joy. Their significance and importance in seemingly constant flux suggesting a circumstantial, dynamic and evolving relationship with these themes within our individual contexts and collaborative theatre ensemble experiences.
All participants had something to say about **connection**. The responses to my very first writing prompt resulted in a mini-script within which, I have come to realize, many of my subsequent themes and categories (Love, Spark, Growth, Sacrifice, Vulnerability, Magic and Joy) emerged. What is the one word used to describe the feeling the moment when a connection is made with ensemble?

WILLIAM: Beginning.

DAN: Genuine.

JANA: Fulfilling.

KELLY: Success!

MONICA: Elation.

KRISTY: Fluffy. Warm and Fluffy.

WILLIAM: Open-heartedness.


LISA: Shine.

JASON: Discovery.

JASON: Kaleidoscopic.

CHRISTINE: Magical.

DAVE: Joy.

Research Participants (2016, September 19, 20, & October 1).

The element which generated the most discussion was the element of **commitment**. Without commitment collaborative theatre ensembles simply cannot live. Commitment is also a common element in the literature as this quote exemplifies:

Commitment, sacrifice and support are the qualities on which trust is built.
Honour this qualities and you built trust; violate them and you lose that trust.

In ensemble, trust is the coin of the realm; with it, members can truly risk, fail, play, discover and create (Burnett Bonczek and Storck, 2012, p.16).

Love, Sacrifice and Vulnerability appeared initially in the elements of connection and commitment. These categories contain themes that emphasize what we give as members of an ensemble to connect with and stay committed to each other and our work. Love, Sacrifice and Vulnerability reoccurred throughout the study and were often interrelated as can be seen in the quote below:

CHRISTINE: Any time we put so much energy into a project we love, another part of life suffers. Less time with family, certainly, but for me, as well, it’s self care...exercise, eating right, stress management. It is my goal this year to not feel like I did last June, which was on the edge of burn out.
Christine (2016, October 15).

After many, many, hours of analysis, the connective analytical threads I was finding became tangled. It became harder and harder to differentiate between Spark and Growth, Magic and Love or Joy and Spark. This tangling of threads created an interwoven web of themes, emotions and experiences in my mind. I wondered if the interconnectedness of this web could speak to the strength of this research or its’ limits: The fact is that the emerging themes are so interwoven within the elements of commitment, connection, communication and creativity that their interconnectedness is integral and vital to the ensemble experiences as I’ve heard them in this study. This quote from Dan is from the element of commitment and speaks to so much more than that. I hear the elements of connection and creativity and the categories of Love, Spark, Growth, Vulnerability, Magic and Joy:

DAN: [My motivation] comes from the audience and the cast. Being apart of a show really brings people together. Friendships are made, connections spark, a community is formed. Even if you don't become friends with everyone in the cast - you're bound to meet, at least, one person who stays in your life at some capacity. You're taking risks in front of people who admire you
for going there and trying. Finally, an audience comes to a show to escape the world and enjoy themselves for two hours after their long, hard day at work. We have the power and the opportunity to give them that sweet escape. We have the magic of theatre that could change a kids life forever. It can be overwhelming but the pay off is worth it.

Dan (2016, October 19).

The most exciting discovery of this entire Masters thesis came to me just today, this morning, April 10th, 2017, at around 9:23am to be precise. This discovery came so quickly and so fiercely that I needed to grab my childrens' felts and a large piece of blank paper to scroll it down frantically before I lost it. This discovery changed the course of my research. In this moment of discovery, I was present in my work and the true nature of ensemble was revealed. How foolish I was to think that one voice, one experience, could possibly emerge from within the heart of ensemble when I live, love, and know that it is the many voices and hearts beating to the same rhythm within the ensemble that make ensemble work so rewarding.

I set out to find the one voice of the ensemble experience and I thought I’d find one when I fact, I found many. That is the power of Ensemble: Many voices, minds, and hearts, committed, and connected to communicate and create together. Ensemble.

**Within the World of this Study: Limitations**

The limitations of this study are that it is was bound by time and space, the types of questions I had ethics approval to ask, as well the responses I received from my participants, which may have been censored or kindly crafted due to the their connection to public education or their loyalty and commitment to me. This study is also guided by my own biases and ensemble theatre context.

Although this study was designed to coincide with many of my participants’ ensemble theatre projects, this study had a start and end point while true ensemble experience is evolving,
organic, and on-going. Also, my online research focus group was convenient as my participants live all over Vancouver Island and Vancouver but the technology based platform was perhaps a too distant and different from more organic, human centred, theatre making environments.

Throughout the research project I would meet my participants in the world and have great, deep and candid discussions about ensemble and my research but those discussions didn’t always translate into juicy writing responses in the focus group. Within the online group, there was some degree of formality that I had not expected and some participants took a while to open up to share. I tried to account for this by responding to as many prompts as I could myself without leading and using a relaxed, conversational tone in both my prompts and responses. In three cases, individual participants sharing was very limited.

The participation and commitment of research participants, was also an interesting piece in the third iteration of my research. When I asked my participants to write a monologue for this iteration, they let me know right away that this was a lot of work to ask: probably too much work. I considered redesigning my study right then and there. However, there were a few, very few, participants for which this element of the study was an exciting and important factor in agreeing to participate. I wonder if it was the close connection and commitment they feel to me and my realizing the goal of completing my Degree that inspired them commit to such a large task. Even with the lack of enthusiasm for this iteration of the research, I decided to keep moving forward and allow whatever was to develop to develop. In the end, the monologues moved from being data and into creating rich description. This unexpected discovery allowed me to explore my writing prompts as data and present my findings as scripted dialogue; an experience I found immensely rewarding and fun!
An additional limitation, is the fact that several of my writing prompts asked questions that where definitely leading toward one theme or another in a particular element. I hadn’t suspected that to be the case, as my comprehension of how data analysis would actually occur was still formative at the time I crafted my prompts. It was comforting to find that those themes emerged elsewhere in the study so I felt their inclusion was still valid. Some examples are the two questions that ask specifically about sacrifice, motivation, and professional development within the element of commitment. There was a question specifically about inspiration in the element of creativity. Synergy was asked about indirectly in the creativity element, curiously most of the responses to that question were coded in theme/category of “magic”.

The category of vulnerability included a sub-layer that was difficult to classify in relation to elements. It was the undercurrent I spoke of above that had to do with the participants’ vulnerably in sharing individual thoughts and stories related to the elements rather than strictly the vulnerability within the ensemble experience. Exhaustion and hard work reoccurred throughout as a mini-themes within all categories and elements, not only sacrifice which was asked about within the element of commitment. Lori’s response in this discussion came at a time of high productivity within her creative theatre making context and has little to do with her actual, exemplary, skills and abilities:

LORI: I don’t think this is my strength. Part of me wishes it could be but then I just get tired thinking about it.

The research participants’ ensemble were quick to recognize this fact and remedied the situation with love and support:

WILLIAM: Lori, your improv teams show your strength in this area every year. I think you live this strength.

LORI: That is a wonderful thing to say, Thank you tons.
LISA: I agree with William.

Finally, since the outset of this study, throughout my research, and in my preparation to write this thesis and all of its creative bits, it has been abundantly clear that I would never be able to separate my own voice from the collective voice of the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in my data. My voice is deeply connected, committed and invested in the process of artistic collaboration. My voice is in the prompts, responses and in the generation of themes and categories. Another researcher, another artist, on another day may discover completely different voices within this or any ensemble. This is my study’s greatest limitation and perhaps its greatest strength. I hope to add to the literature of collaborative theatre ensembles in education; my voice and my interpretation of our experiences.

**Beyond This Ensemble**

Throughout this research process I had ideas of what I would have done differently, what I’d love to delve deeper into, stretch out, delete, highlight or redo. I thought of how any one iteration of my research could have easily populated the pages of this thesis with ideas and words and how I could continue to ask more questions and explore in an infinite number of methods from many angles the world that is ensemble theatre. Given time and the opportunity, I would also love learn more about A/r/tography. I would love to do more research, study, and learn in more depth, the theory and process of this methodology.

Within ensemble work, the nebulous, interwoven elements of connection, commitment, and communication have always interested me. I’ve always wondered if the collaborative leadership styles and related skills present within theatre ensembles could transfer to leaders and collaborative groups elsewhere within public education. I asked my participants:
LISA: One word (or more) to describe the competencies or skills you need to be a leader of a collaborative theatre ensemble?

DAVE: Empathy. Trust. Talent. To me, the way to lead a collaborative ensemble is by being the best you can at what you do. If you're a talented actor/dancer/improviser and the rest of the ensemble knows that and trusts you, they'll follow your direction.

WILLIAM: Be willing to follow...with commitment and energy.


CHRISTINE: All of the above. I think confidence is important... faith and a vision in your project... patience!

(Dave, Lisa, Williams & Christine, November 18, 2016)

I followed up with a writing prompt about defining leadership within the ensemble theatre context. However, the prompt landed with a thud. I believe that this question was misplaced, perhaps to specific, as leadership within ensemble theatre in education is fluid and transitional; hard to articulate within a single Facebook question.

LISA: I wonder what a snap shot definition of leadership would be in our various contexts? I have described it as Synergetic Improvisational….

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS: (Cricket sounds)

(Lisa, November 21, 2016)

In analysis, it was interesting to go through my data to look for direct references to leadership. Outside the above mentioned prompt, I could not find enough references to leadership within ensemble to create an individual theme within my own data. In my research, I found informal references to leadership through the themes of: Teaching, learning, and professional development. Burnett Bonczek and Storck (2012) quote The Havard Business Review to start their discussion on leading an ensemble, “You can be the most brilliant
innovator, problem solver or strategic thinker, but if you can’t inspire and motivate, build relationships or communicate powerfully those talents will get you nowhere” (p. 41). The essential leadership skills laid out in this powerful, honest and succinct quote speak to the strong interpersonal skills needed by the leader of an ensemble. To lead an ensemble one must “see leadership as a social process or set of interactions—a dynamic, multidirectional collective activity, and moreover, that leadership is viewed as learning, centred on outcomes related to growth for the community, rather than on control or individual results for the leader” (Gagnon et al., 2012, p. 301). The leader works with the ensemble to define shared goals and projects and the means for accomplishing those goals.

I think further exploration of leadership within ensemble theatre in education would be fascinating to study. Effective ensembles leaders, like effective leaders of any organization, know themselves and know their people. Willson (2014) developed Performing Medicine, a series of theatre and fine arts performances and workshops for medical students in response to a negative experience she had at a hospital. In her work, she attempts to balance the technical, clinical skills required in the field of medicine with the more human, interpersonal skills, that make up the way the public view and interact with everyday modern healthcare. Her lessons require “active engagement, flexibility, adaptability, self-awareness and self-care” and teach professionals:

A variety of skills, ideas and processes – physical awareness, resilience, calmness, teamwork, balance, concentration, voice skills, listening, observation, timing, appreciation of difference and diversity, silence, readiness for action, an awareness of how your physicality may impact on someone else’s and an understanding
of how your performance (the clinical consultation) may change depending on the context in which it takes place (p.31-32).

Further research for the inclusion of ensemble theatre’s structures, interpersonal skills, and leadership systems revealed that lessons from the theatre are being applied by a diverse selection of professionals, institutions and organizations. These included doctors, dental surgeons, medical students, orchestras, prisons and organization development consultants. All seem to borrow a combination of skill development techniques, leadership development and organizational structure:

Because of the OD practitioner’s need to develop human behavior skills, and professional theatre schools’ systematic training of these skills, this article considers the relationship between the interpersonal skills that actors need to be successful in the theatre and the interpersonal skills OD professionals need to be successful practitioners in the dialogic development of change management that Bushe and Marshak (2009) suggest. OD practitioners, like actors, need a fundamental base of interpersonal skills grounded in the basics of self-awareness, listening, and observing. This foundational base supports more complex interpersonal interactions increasingly demanded by today’s multifaceted economic climate (Stager Jaques, 2012, p.260).

In their research on the development of leadership through improvisational theatre, Gagnon, Vough, and Nickerson (2012) point out that now, more than ever before, “Contemporary organizations face high levels of complexity, a rapid rate of change and increased ambiguity has become, perhaps, a truism” (p.300). While the emphasis on collaboration, or ensemble style organizations, are not pressing the “developments in leadership
theory have begun to reflect the contextual changes; scholars increasingly emphasize the role of collaboration and relational factors for effective leadership” (p.300). Brett (2015) agrees stating that, “To prepare a differently educated citizenry and to play meaningful forms of community building [we] must model informed and collaborative ways of learning and working within [our] own educational institutional contexts as well as through [our] interactions with the broader society of which [we] are an integral part” (p41).

CHRISTINE [Teaching and Learning] are the epitome of collaboration. I come in with the play, and a vision, and information and ideas, but once we start working on it I encourage my actors to contribute their ideas and eventually it becomes OUR vision. If it works out well, everyone is excited about the process.
Christine (2016, November 21)

Of particular interest and importance to me when dealing with a collaborative ensemble of any kind are the somewhat nebulous elements of connection, commitment, and communication. A recommendation for further research would be to explore greater depth how theatre ensembles work and if these elements could translate and work for other leaders and collaborative groups within public education.

What We Do: Messages about Monologues

LORI: Hi Lisa, I am still in a funk trying to write something I really like for you…. Here is something:

What We Do
This crazy thing This stupid thing This inexplicable thing
It is rewarding
And frustrating
And exhilarating
And exhausting
And.. And…
And exasperating -
They can’t make it
They can’t face it.
They can’t take it – the hard work – the feedback – the commitment
Something better came along – a sport – a relationship- a party – their couch – a class with better people in it. A class with a better field trip. Something more instantly gratifying. Something more important for their future. Something their parents support or value. Something parents understand.
And it seems impossible – this thing
This thing we are for some ridiculous reason trying to do.
And then
Then it happens
I take in a breath as I look at these creatures
When they finally get to
“I can do this”
”I did this”
“You helped me”
“I belong”
“I believe”… “In me” “In us” “In this” This thing, This thing we did.
We help them do this. Get there. We do. We help them feel this. We made a space - a thing – a time that truly meant something to them. Once upon a time.

WILLIAM: Hello Lisa. I am still interested in writing a monologue... What should it be? How should it live?

LISA: Hi William! Yay! It is really up to you. I am interested in a monologue from a voice from within the ensemble. What character, mood, length, perspective, interpretation is up to you. I am open to anything!

WILLIAM: What question is most important to you now?

LISA: Hi William! My research question is about studying the experience with theatre ensembles. I am looking for themes related to creativity, connection, communication and commitment. Essentially, I am just looking at who we are, what we do and what makes us tick...when I think about writing my own monologue it could be anything from a version of my teenage self as I entered the drama room each morning, Or perhaps an audience member’s inner thoughts as they watch their child shine, or even a fictitious student messing up a tech cue and surviving to see another day. Does this make sense? As my research evolves, I am becoming increasingly interested in the way that I am researching. The A/r/tograpohical potential fascinates me as much as my research itself. I was non specific on purpose but because you were so polite....

WILLIAM: Thanks!

On Sunday March 26th at 8:33 PM

WILLIAM: Oh man. Can I still write my monologue? I know what it should be now…
What if...we played with conventions to free ourselves from a dead past so that we could truly and ebulliently live in the present? This is how we create our future together, a future borne of love.
This is what theatre means to me. It is an opportunity to ensure we live as a human community, as a family. Change "this is how we create our future…” to "We create our future…” and that can be my monologue.

**Curtain Call**

In this study, there is no final monologue. I intended to write one. I started to write one, several times, and the problem was that a monologue is just one voice. As seen in Lori and William’s messages, each teacher, research participant, student, and ensemble member comes with their own voice and their own story. I had always imagined the ending to this research as one monologue with one voice and yet it is not how I will end this thesis. I remained open to the possibility of concluding my research correctly- the way *it* wanted to end. I ruminated and kept coming back to the fact that in an ensemble, there are many voices. Not one single voice. Voices.

Early in the focus group, I asked my participants about the archetypes they encountered in their ensemble work. Although it didn’t line up with my research question, I wanted to include these characters, my participants’ voices and my own voice in the conclusion of this study. A monologue could never do that. In fact, I felt a little silly for thinking a monologue would be the correct way to capture all of this awesome noise. My conclusion, my final creative contribution to this study, would need to be reflective of any student, any teacher, in any school. It needed to be reflective of all of our experiences, not our individual voices.

I found stillness and calm in this new wave of thinking by reflecting on my artistic process. When I am starting a new piece of theatre or project, I start with visions of the overall artistic and sensory design of the piece. What does it look like? Sound like? Feel like? I imagine the mood, lights, sounds, set, and textures of the physical space before I analyze the script or add the “noise”, the voices, the people.
I leave you with this, my final piece. It is the opening stage directions for a curtain call. A curtain call is the final bow of a performance: A public, reflective, and appreciative giving of thanks. It is an expression of the gratitude and magic created in a room between the audience and theatre makers for the art that was create and shared for those fleeting moments in time. As theatre is an art form that couldn’t live without the energy of all of those present to create and witness it. The curtain call, or final bow as it is often called, is also a time where typically the performers have been called back to the stage by the audience’s applause to receive more praise. These final bows allow performers to indicate and thank the various players, or members of that production: The orchestra, the technical crew and the back-stage crew. I hope this final piece, my final bow, captures this feeling. I tried to create the sensory details so that you, the reader, may hear the rhythm and feel the love that is the experience from the heart of the ensemble.

This final piece, Curtain Call is my contribution as artist/ teacher/ researcher to this thesis. It is meant to be read aloud over top of the music referenced. It is my exploration of the Love, Growth, Spark, Vulnerability, Sacrifice, Magic and Joy that is ensemble theatre making. It is my answer to the question: **What is the experience within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education?**

**Curtain Call**

The song _Happy Days_ by Dirk Masassen is playing from an on stage source perhaps a small portable stereo. It feels echo-y and small.

Setting: A bare black proscenium arch stage in any high school. All of the curtains have been drawn and tied back to expose the bareness of the space. We can see all the way to the back wall of the stage, the wings, and the back door. It is obvious that the stage has just been painted as there is an open can of black paint and used paint tray.

There is a dim wash of warm light on the entire stage and a harsh blast of stark fluorescent light making it on to the stage from the hallway of the school though the back stage door window.
A grade 12 STUDENT sits cross legged down-stage centre. The STUDENT is wearing ripped jeans, Converse sneakers, and black t-shirt. There are paint splotches on the clothing. Not just black paint. The STUDENT holds a paint roller.

The STUDENT sits for a long time. Alone. Just breathing. Just being. We get a sense that in the world being created on stage the auditorium is empty. It is a time of private reflection. In these moments the lights come up slightly, evenly, slowly. The sound of a beating heart is played over the house speakers. It is slow, calm, but very audible.

After a time, The STUDENT gets up, slowly crosses DSL and places the paint roller back in the tray. The student moves centre and is instantly lit with a bright spot. The STUDENT smiles, takes a deep breath and bows. The student basksin the audiences love and gestures to the imaginary cast, crew, and orchestra. The STUDENT blows a kiss to their imaginary audience. As this is happening TEACHER appears Up Stage Right. TEACHER smiles and watches as the STUDENT takes their final bow, walks down the stairs, off the stage, through the audience and out the front door of the theatre.

We hear the heavy thud of the door clicking shut.

Throughout this the volume and frequency of the heart beat increases ever so slightly. Noticeably.

The TEACHER occupies the spotlight for a moment. Although the TEACHER is in the spotlight we get a sense that something has changed. Something is missing.

This moment is interrupted by loud banging and rattling of the back stage door. The spot remains on the teacher and the sound of the heart plays on but our focus is now far Upstage as we see a hoard of YOUNG STUDENTS through the window of the back stage door.

The YOUNG STUDENTS may be a class, a cast, or an Improv Team. They are new to this world, this room, the stage. We hear hoots, hollers and some sounds of disappointment when they discover the door is locked.

We see the YOUNG STUDENTS turn to leave.

Lights cross fade from spot to an ever increasingly warm wash as the TEACHER walks Upstage to un-lock the stage door for the YOUNG STUDENTS. They pile in: Loudly. Nervously. Excitedly. Hopeful and Expectant. They are ready for this.

TEACHER switches on the work lights.

TEACHER: Welcome Everyone!

We see wonder and joy spread across faces of the crowd of YOUNG STUDENTS. We feel them relax. We can see them feeling they belong. That they truly are welcome. They are all welcome.
Black out.
Music out.

The Heartbeat continues in darkness.

The houselights come up slowly. The audience exits.

The Heartbeat continues.
The Heartbeat continues.
The Heartbeat continues.
References


FROM THE HEART OF THE ENSEMBLE


Ramaley, J. A. (2016, Fall/Winter). Navigating the rapids: On the frontiers of the knowledge

doi:10.1080/15411796.2014.966025


10.1080/00071001003636349


Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Your invitation to participate in my research on Exploring the Ensemble Theatre Experience. Please read this following letter. If you feel you may be interested in participating, please contact me and I will send you more information in the detailed consent form.

This research project is designed to explore the experience of creating and working within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education. In the first iteration of the study participants will engage in writing prompts on an on-line focus group situated on Facebook. The second iteration of the study with involve a smaller number of participants who wish to write a monologue. Finally, as Researcher participant (a/r/tographer), I will represent the results by writing and performing a monologue.

I am asking the question: What is the nature of the experience of participating in collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education?

You are invited to participate in a research study because you have prior and current experience working in collaborative theatre ensembles as I am defining them in this study. I am looking for volunteers with some degree of professional theatre training and/or some level of post-secondary education in theatre or education.

For more information and participate please email lisa.williams@71.bc.ca or send me a Facebook message.

Volunteers will be provided with a consent form after joining the Facebook page. Consent forms can be returned in any way that is convenient.

Thank you,

Lisa Williams
Appendix B: Consent Form

Principal Investigator
Lisa Sophia Williams, Masters of Educational Leadership Program, Vancouver Island University
Contact phone number:
Email: lisa.williams@sd71.bc.ca

Purpose
You are invited to participate in this research study because you have prior and current experience, education, and training working in collaborative theatre ensembles. This research project is designed to explore the experience of creating and working within collaborative theatre ensembles in theatre education.

The results will be used to deepen the researcher’s understating of ensembles, collaboration and leadership in theatre education. In addition the researcher is excited to study theatre by learning about and employing the theatrical research methods of A/r/tography and performed auto ethnography. Findings will be shared with the Faculty of Education as a thesis and a performed monologue at Vancouver Island University at a Masters of Education Conference.

Process
The Process for this study will be:
1. You will be asked to sign the consent form and return it by email, Facebook message, text, or anyway that suits you.
2. You will be asked to participate in a private, on-going focus group on Facebook with 15-20 other participants.
3. Writing prompts will be posted on-line on the focus group page and you can respond in any way, to as many or as few as you wish. They will be stimuli relating to your experience in collaborative theatre ensembles.
4. This focus group will take place throughout the fall and winter in 2016-2017 school year.
5. Quotes from the focus group writing prompts will be used as data to inform research and as information for the writing of a monologue.
6. You may be asked if you’d like to write a monologue inspired by an ensemble related personal story, or possibly focus group materials. You may decline, of course.
7. You will be asked not to share, repost, or distribute in any way identifying information about yourself or others or the writing of yourself or others that is shared in this private, closed, group during data collection.

Potential Risks
Anonymity is not possible within the group unless you create a fake Facebook persona for yourself. Since the sample size is small, there is a risk that if direct quotes are used in the monologue (results) you may be identified. All data is stored under Facebook and is subject to The Patriot Act and their privacy policies (https://www.facebook.com/about/basics). A ‘closed group’ on Facebook is only open to those members selected for the group. All posts and content on or in this group is to remain confidential within the group. If you select to
participate in the study, you agree to keep all information within the group. No sharing or reposing will be allowed to ensure the privacy of others.

**Potential Benefits**
You may benefit from reflecting on your theatrical practice and/or teaching and may enjoy sharing stories in a Facebook group setting. You may participate in the writing of monologues and may enjoy learning about performed autoethnography.

**Confidentiality**
You can chose to be identified by name or can remain anonymous in the presentation of the results. Your participation in this study is not completely anonymous as your identity is known by the researcher and other participants.

All data will be stored confidentially. Focus group data will be examined to explore individual and group experiences within ensembles. Word processed documents will be kept on a password protected computer and USB stick. Electronic data will be kept on the group Facebook page.

Confidentiality is limited to what other participants do or say about the topics posted and written about within the study. You will be able to review all research materials, data and monologues before presentation, publication or performance.

**Incentive:** Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw, or simply stop responding at anytime. All people who were invited to this study, regardless of if you join the Facebook group or not will be entered into a draw for Forbidden Brewery Growler and T-shirt.

**Questions**
Email:lisa.williams@sd71.bc.ca

**Concerns**
If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in his research, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer at reb@viu.ca or by telephone at (250) 753-3245 (ext. 2665).
Consent

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. Don’t worry, you are still eligible for the Growler incentive if you do.
If withdrawal occurs before data analysis is completed (approximately March 2017) then your comments will be removed from focus group data. After data analysis is complete and monologues have been written your data cannot be removed.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in the study. Please indicate your consent (or not) for the following specific aspects of the study.

Please circle yes or no to indicate your consent:

I consent to participating in the online focus group on Facebook.
Yes No

I consent to allow the use of direct quotations from the focus group in the presentation of written results.
Yes No

I consent to allow the use of direct quotations from the focus group in the presentation of performed results.
Yes No

I consent to allow the use of photo documentation (screenshots, added photos, memes, etc...) from the focus group in the presentation of written or performed results.
Yes No

I consent to allow the use of my name in the presentation of results.
Yes No

Your name (please print):____________________________________
Your signature:____________________________________________
Date:____________________________________________________
Appendix C: Initial Interview Questions

Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in Education

Initial Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself. (Education, theatre training, work, hobbies, personality, spirit animal, etc...)

2. Please describe the context in which you work and/or make theatre.

3. Please briefly describe your experience in collaborative theatre ensembles.

For the purpose of this study collaborative theatre ensemble means your collaborative efforts within a group in order to make a theatre related project or goal come to life. It could be a PLC group, a theatre company, an extra-curricular club, a cast, a drama teachers association, etc...

4. Do you have a collaborative theatre ensemble project or projects planned for this year? If so, please describe?
Appendix D: Potential Facebook Focus-Group Writing Prompts (Arranged thematically)

Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in Education

**Commitment**

1. Describe a challenge you have faced in creating a recent theatrical work. Who or what helped you through?

2. What are the gifts and challenges associated with being committed to a group? What do you enjoy and not enjoy about the collaborative theatre ensemble experience?

3. Describe a sacrifice you made in order to stay committed to an ensemble or ensemble project.

4. Describe the highest form of commitment in a collaborative theatre ensemble? How do you know when it is present? What happens when it is not? Discuss.

5. What motivates artistic ensemble work? How or why do we commit to do this work?

**Connection**

1. Describe a recent memory from your collaborative efforts in theatre making. Who is the star of this show?

2. Describe a non-theatrical benefit to working in a collaborative theatre ensemble? This can be anything from a one word answer to a long sappy
story.

3. What does it feel like when a connection is made within the ensemble? Would you use the word synergy? Hive-mind? What would your dream moment look, sound-like? Do you have a captivating story about this?

4. What/Who are the archetypes you’ve encountered in ensemble?

5. Describe a personal connection you’ve made because of your work in a collaborative theatre ensemble.

6. How do you care for your ensemble?

**Communication**

1. How do you seek input in order to critique or celebrate your work?

2. What kind of professional learning communities or professional development experiences do you seek out?

3. What does the teaching and learning process in a collaborative theatre ensemble look like in your world?

4. What is your definition of leadership within collaborative ensembles? Describe the different ways you communicate within your ensemble(s).

5. What are the key competencies or skills you need to be a leader of a collaborative theatre ensemble? This could be in any role. Examples: director, designer, teacher, stage manager, captain, CEO, etc...

**Creativity**

1. Describe a time you felt you created a magical piece of theatre.

2. How does working in a collaborative theatre ensemble inspire or motivate your artistic work? Inform your teaching? Or if not, tell me that too!

3. Have you ever been able to accomplish something greater than yourself due to ensemble work? Discuss.
4. Does ensemble work give you any kind of personal, creative, artistic or professional satisfaction or contentment? Discuss.

5. Describe a time that a piece of theatrical work or idea emerged because of the ensemble you were in versus you bringing a work or stimulus to the ensemble.
Appendix E: Potential Monologue Writing Prompts (Arranged thematically)

Collaborative Theatre Ensembles in Education

Take a moment or experience, real or imagined, inspired by a real life event or by your experience in participating in this study, and express it in writing using the form and theatrical conventions of a monologue.

Your monologue can be in the voice of any character you wish.

Your monologue can speak directly about working together in collaborative theatre ensembles or can be an indirect exploration of themes, life, lessons, adventures, challenges, etc... from within a collaborative theatre ensemble.

Your monologue can be funny, sad, insightful, serious, ridiculous or clever.

I want to hear the honest voices that come from within the heart of the ensemble.

I want to hear the voice of the collaborative ensemble experience.

Be your creative awesome self and have fun!