

# **The World of Theatre**

A Grounded Theory for the Teaching of Stagecraft

by

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## **Preface**

The purpose of this project is to propose Environmental Adult Education (EAE) as a theoretical framework that can be used as a basis for the methodology and practices of teaching Theatre, and in particular Stagecraft (technical theatre), in a high school setting. I first presented the core of the ideas explored within this project in a paper submitted for a course in my graduate studies program (Barss, 2010b). At the time I was disappointed that I did not have the opportunity to delve more deeply into the topic and examine more thoroughly the connections I proposed. In order to constrain the length to that suitable for a course paper it was necessary to give many aspects only a cursory treatment and completely omit others. In addition, as is so often the case, new connections emerged as I wrote – connections that were relegated to a passing mention or footnote. Since I had already formed the tentative idea that my final Masters project would be somehow related to the Stagecraft program, my desire to give the Stagecraft – EAE linkage a more complete treatment proved irresistible. This project is therefore an adaptation and expansion of the ideas proposed in that paper. It is divided into four main chapters: Context, Methodology, Findings, and Conclusion.

In the Context chapter I describe the Stagecraft program in relation to both my professional and academic contexts and discuss my desire to find a theoretical framework within which to situate my teaching practices in Stagecraft. In the Methodology chapter I position my research within the tradition of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) and discuss the metaphors that informed the organization and final written format of this project. In the Findings chapter I recount the journey of my gradual identification of pieces to the Stagecraft theory puzzle and ultimately propose Environmental Adult Education as a single framework that contains all of the separate pieces. In the Conclusion

chapter I reflect on the ways in which the ideas presented in this project have thus far influenced and transformed my every day practice. I do this in part by analyzing a list of obstacles encountered within Stagecraft (as put forward in a previous paper of mine) through the new lens of the EAE framework and theatre environment metaphor.

The research presented in this project represents the results of a journey of learning and reflection over the past two years of graduate studies. While I will discuss the metaphor of a ‘journey’ further in the Methodology chapter, including its role within the writing process in this work, it is useful for the reader to be aware in advance that I have chosen to make explicit the tracing of this journey by quoting sections of my own papers drawn from throughout my coursework. Some of these papers are specifically about Stagecraft, most are not. All, however, speak to my emerging understandings and highlight their connection to my work on the Stagecraft program.

Finally, to avoid confusion, I should be clear from the outset that I am not referring to teaching environmental ‘content’ through the medium of technical theatre (although that is certainly a potential offshoot of this work that interests me). Rather, I am proposing the teaching of technical theatre *by mapping the methodology of EAE into the theatre space*. Within the Findings chapter I therefore address potential concerns related to the adoption (or, some might say, appropriation) of the EAE framework in this way.

## **Chapter One: Context**

In June of 2008 a cherished and respected co-worker and mentor retired after a long career filled with touching the lives, minds and hearts of students. I had worked closely with this individual for the past ten years in my role as director of the school musical and his as theatre manager and teacher of the Stagecraft class, and I was now to embark upon the daunting task of attempting to step into his shoes in this latter capacity. (Barss, 2009c, p. 1)

Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu is credited with coining the now cliché (but true nonetheless) proverb that “a journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step” (as cited in Beck, 1981, p. 102). The opening passage above points to the initial steps of my personal journey of learning and transformation in two significant ways. First, since it is the introductory paragraph in the first of several papers I wrote that specifically dealt with various aspects of Stagecraft, it quite literally denotes the starting point of the academic component of my work on Stagecraft. Second, in describing the event that led to my new my role within the school where I teach, it represents the change to my professional practice that provided the impetus for this research in the first place. Transformation, as many authors and theorists have pointed out, is very often set in motion by an external change to an individual’s personal or professional situation (Clark, 1993; Scott, 2001; Capra, 2002; Johnston, 2009). It is both the opportunities and challenges of these new circumstances that provide the catalyst for reflection, reevaluation, and ultimate transformation. My sentiments in the excerpt quoted above are indeed suggestive of the sense of both opportunity and challenge I felt as Stagecraft became part of my teaching assignment. While I was certainly excited about the prospect of taking on the Stagecraft classes, I also held some apprehensions. These apprehensions were not related to my technical expertise or understanding of the curriculum, but rather about my ability to successfully adapt to the unique teaching methodology established within this program. I recognized in the way my colleague

operated Stagecraft an approach to teaching vastly different than the (more traditional) methods I employed, both within my official teaching areas (math and physics) as well as less structured additions to my teaching assignment picked up over the years (such as musical theatre). At that time I would have been hard pressed to describe this difference in any concrete manner. What I did know for certain was that Stagecraft was an extremely positive experience for all involved, teacher and students. The atmosphere was upbeat, the relationships between teacher and students were positive, and the students were motivated and engaged. While my colleague seemed to effortlessly create this atmosphere, I recognized that there was far more intentionality involved than met the eye.

The purpose of this chapter is to situate my work on Stagecraft in terms of both my professional and academic contexts. My goal is to first give the reader a brief sense of the ‘flavour’ of the Stagecraft program by describing the curriculum, the approach to learning, and the unique climate and growth that tend to develop. This, in turn, leads to a discussion of the role played by both Stagecraft and my graduate studies in an emerging reevaluation of my teaching and leading styles, a reevaluation that found an outlet in my desire to discover and describe theory to represent what goes on in the Stagecraft program.

### **What is Stagecraft?**

Early in my Masters program I had the idea that my final project might relate somehow to Stagecraft. My first thoughts were to do a course design, although even then I knew I did not want to merely manufacture a sterile list of learning outcomes and evaluation strategies. Rather, I had a strong desire to somehow capture the essence of what makes Stagecraft special. This meant identifying what exactly the elusive ‘je ne sais quoi’ of Stagecraft was. Thus, when tasked

in my first term of studies with writing a methods paper relating to my professional practice, I took the opportunity to create an arts based method for Stagecraft. In the process, I attempted for the first time to put into words what exactly makes this program so distinctive:

Ostensibly, 'Stagecraft' is simply a course that teaches students the rudiments of technical aspects of theatre such as sound, lights, set design, stage management, and protocol. However, under my colleague's direction the Stagecraft program has turned into something much more. It has become a kind of close knit family of student leaders who take ownership of the environment and reputation of the school theatre....This is true in particular when one considers the deeper, intangible elements of the program. Students are not merely taught how to set up a microphone, build a lighting cue or paint a set piece. Although practical skills such as these are certainly a critical component of the program, they have become merely incidental to the development of a culture of leadership, professionalism, ownership, etiquette, creativity, teamwork, integrity, community, and the magic of theatre. (Barss, 2009c, pp. 1-2)

As this quote indicates there are, in a sense, two curriculums at play in Stagecraft. The official curriculum is that of the skills required by technicians working in a theatre. The fundamentals of these skills are seldom taught in a structured, top-down manner. Rather, the course could be thought of as "problem-posing education" (Freire, 2003, p. 79) in that the real learning occurs as together (teacher and students) we face the daily challenges related to the operation, maintenance, and upgrade of a working theatre. For example, students do not learn in isolation or abstraction the technical and artistic aspects of refocusing a lighting instrument. Rather, they do so in the context of a specific instrument that needs to be refocused for a specific purpose for a specific booking that is coming into the theatre on a specific date. The individual helping them through this issue would just as likely be the teacher as another student who has dealt with that particular challenge before. In addition, the course hours are met through a combination of class time and a form of work experience in which the students actually tech school events in the theatre such as assemblies, musicals, special presentations, concerts, dance shows, and fundraising events.

The unofficial curriculum, on the other hand, is much more subtle and is related closely to the sense of community, purpose, autonomy, and commitment (to each other and the theatre) that develops within the Stagecraft students. While it is less something that is ‘taught’ overtly than something that arises organically, it is nonetheless a critical and central element to the program and requires intentionality from the instructor. It is these elements, and the ensuing culture that develops, that make Stagecraft such a joy to teach. This being the case, it became important for me to understand how and why they emerge in order to move forward in my new role as the Stagecraft teacher, and it is the discovery, naming, and exploration of these aspects of Stagecraft that composes the central focus of the Findings chapter in this project.

### **Reevaluations**

The new challenges associated with maintaining the unique culture of the Stagecraft program, in conjunction with my respect for my former colleague as both a teacher and leader, initiated a reevaluation of my own teaching and leadership styles.

[This] process of self-reflection...happens to coincide with my graduate coursework in Leadership Studies. The latter is proving useful in providing theory and language to understand and describe methods, approaches, philosophies, and challenges that I encounter in my daily practice. This linkage brings a greater degree of intentionality to my tentative steps to re-craft my leadership style, and I often find myself connecting ideas or strategies from course readings to aspects of Stagecraft and the leadership style of my former colleague (Barss, 2009d, p. 1)

As this quote suggests, I began to deliberately look for connections in my coursework to Stagecraft, theatre, and the approaches to teaching and leading that I hoped to emulate. At the same time, however, a deeper philosophical shift began to occur. I found myself questioning the traditional practices, purposes and driving forces behind the entire educational system in which I operate. If Stagecraft was the catalyst – to introduce a chemistry metaphor – to my shifting

perspective, “it is the writers and theorists I have encountered in my graduate work...that have supplied the steady source of fuel that continues to drive the reaction” (Barss, 2010c, p. 4).

While on the one hand I balked at the description of teachers as merely “agents of the state” (MacKay & Sutherland, 2006, p. 44), I could not deny critiques of our educational system (and consequently teachers) as a socially reproductive force (Bourdieu, 1974) that serves the interests of those with power by treating students as “empty receptacles to be filled by the teacher” (Freire, 2003, p. 72)<sup>1</sup>. I began to consider whether or not there was a way to rise above these tendencies while still continuing to operate as a teacher in the existing system, a goal which finds expression in the following passage from Beyer (2000):

The dominant structures and processes of schooling – whose knowledge gets taught there, what kinds of evaluative practices and social relations are promoted, the traditions on which we have relied in thinking about curriculum and pedagogy – have often served to promote perspectives and values that are socially and culturally reproductive. Here we will be concerned with ways in which the processes of resisting the tendencies toward passivity and submergence can be invigorated, as we formulate alternative visions and practices...ones that can alter the current realities of schools and the personal, social, and cultural contexts that shape them. (p. 46)

As the strands merged, I began to recognize the Stagecraft environment as one such “alternative vision...that can alter the current realities of schools” (Beyer, 2000, p. 46). I do not here imply that Stagecraft is the ideal or the only program that strives toward this goal. I believe, in fact, that there are teachers running programs everywhere that are quietly “resisting the tendencies toward passivity and submergence” (p. 46). Stagecraft is simply the program that I have had the good fortune to step into. My emerging philosophical outlook therefore provided further motivation to carry forward the Stagecraft program in a way that remained true to the unique spirit in which it had been built.

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<sup>1</sup> Recently as I arrived at work – several weeks after first writing this section – I noticed that our vice-principal had put the following quotation in the sign board on the road in front of the school: “Education turns empty minds into open minds.” While I certainly am all for fostering open minds, I could not help but imagine what Paulo Freire might have to say about the outlook that our students come to us with ‘empty minds’!

## **The Search for Stagecraft Theory**

Chalker (2002) states that “theory is often the most practical solution available to leaders faced with instant decision making” (p. 260). In order to operate on a daily basis in a way that embraced the many subtle aspects that had come to be part of Stagecraft, I needed a firm understanding not just of *what* I did in the course (which was essentially try to mirror my former colleague’s techniques), but of *why I did what I did* (Walter, 2009). In other words, I had the methods, I needed the methodology. I therefore began a search – at first more intuitive than intentional – for a theoretical framework within which to base my work on the Stagecraft program, a framework that might “approach close enough to practice so that it becomes a theory for practice, something the reflective practitioner can use in everyday encounters while walking about the school” (Starrat, 1991, p. 186). The search for this methodology was akin to assembling a puzzle and, as is often the case with puzzles, I found that some of the pieces were easy to identify and fit in, others were harder to recognize and required examination in light of the overall picture, and several seemed to be missing from the box altogether. The Findings chapter of this project recounts the discovery of these separate pieces to the puzzle and the emergence of the methodology of Environmental Adult Education (in concert with the metaphor of the ‘theatre environment’) as a framework that encompasses all of the pieces. Before embarking on that leg of the journey, however, it is important to pause and discuss the research methodologies within which this project is rooted.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

Bateson (1972) claims that all individuals engaging in research are “philosophers in that universal sense in which all human beings...are guided by highly abstract principles” (p. 320). Moreover, while these “philosophical ideas remain largely hidden in research...they still influence the practice of research and need to be identified” (Creswell, 2009, p. 5). The assumptions brought to any piece of work affect the questions that are asked at the outset of a project, the interpretations brought to the work at the end of it, and everything in between (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It is generally considered important, therefore, to take some time to discuss the theoretical paradigm of inquiry (Guba, 1990) within which a piece of work is situated and the methodological understandings employed. Guba & Lincoln (2005) refer to this as “locating self within the text” (p. 210) and it is both for the benefit of the researcher (“Because facts and values are linked, researchers attempt to become aware of their presuppositions and how these affect the research”, Ghezjeljeh & Enami, 2009, p. 18) and for the benefit of the reader (since “it provides the reader with a sense of the analytical lens through which the researcher gazes at the data”, pp. 21-22).

In this chapter I situate my work on Stagecraft within the tradition of grounded theory as outlined by theorists such as Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), and Charmaz (2000). I break the discussion into four sections. First, I describe my unexpected discovery of the close connection between my research and grounded theory. Second, I outline the history and basic tenets common to all branches of grounded theory and link them to the methods and methodology employed within this project. Third, I discuss the key differences between the three main branches of grounded theory that have developed and examine where my research fits within these ontological, epistemological, and methodological debates of modern

grounded theorists. Finally, I briefly examine the importance of metaphors to research in general, and to the grounded theory presented within this project in particular, and outline the primary metaphors at play in this writing.

### **Discovering Grounded Theory**

In the prologue to his book *Grounding Grounded Theory*, Ian Dey (1999) describes his experience as a presenter at a research conference in Colorado. As he spoke with members of the audience at the conclusion of his presentation, he was perplexed by the fact that most seemed to assume his research was based in the methodology of grounded theory. Dey had, in fact, never heard of grounded theory. However, as he subsequently looked into the details of this qualitative research method, he was pleasantly surprised at the application within his field and, moreover, the close fit with his specific research. I relate to Dey's story, for I too was unaware of grounded theory or how closely my work on Stagecraft fit into the grounded theory tradition. For instance, as I began last year to take note of various recurring themes related to Stagecraft, I had no idea that I was engaging in a variation of the detailed selective coding procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) in *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Neither did I realize that the resulting "pieces to the Stagecraft theory puzzle" (Barss, 2010b, p. 3) would actually be termed 'categories' by those in the grounded theory tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Gehrke & Parker, 1982; Dey, 1999), nor that such researchers would be entirely familiar with my feeling that these concepts seemed to somehow 'emerge', as if of their own accord, from the data (Barss, 2010b; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In fact, I was so unaware of grounded theory that I didn't even realize that my primary stated goal of finding a "theoretical framework that can be used as a

basis for the methodology and practices of teaching Theatre, and in particular Stagecraft (technical theatre), in a high school setting” (Barss, 2010b, p. 3) is exactly the type of situation and research question for which Glaser and Strauss (1967) first developed grounded theory!

I therefore came at the question of methodology from a rather backwards perspective, having essentially completed my research (identifying Environmental Adult Education as a theoretical framework for Stagecraft) before pondering the specific research tradition within which I might be engaged. My attention was first drawn to grounded theory by a cursory description in a list of research methodologies in Creswell (2009). I then hunted down a selection of books and articles on the topic and was amazed at the high degree of resonance with the work I was doing. This brought me to a crossroads of sorts. Was it now necessary to select from among the varying branches of grounded theory and restructure my work to adhere to the procedures, conventions, and assumptions within that tradition? This seemed to me somewhat insincere and disrespectful to the organic process by which I had initially approached the problem and come to my conclusions. I was therefore pleased to read Dey’s (1999) assertion that “there are probably as many versions of grounded theory as there are grounded theorists” (p. 2) and the fact that even Strauss and Corbin, who have developed a dauntingly comprehensive set of guidelines for grounded theorists, emphasize that “researchers should trust their instincts and not focus too closely on the analytical procedures” (Cooney, 2010, p. 22). These sentiments gave me confidence that I could situate this project within the grounded theory tradition while still remaining true to my own unique path and journey of discovery. With this approach in mind, it is useful to describe how my research relates both to the elements common among all branches of grounded theory as well as to the points of disagreement between the various models. These two discussions I undertake below.

## **What is Grounded Theory?**

Grounded theory was first introduced in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. At its core, grounded theory is a research methodology that focuses on the discovery or creation of theory to fit a certain situation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2000). It is generally considered most useful “when studying human action and interaction” (Cooney, 2010, p. 25). The impetus for grounded theory was the opinion of Glaser and Strauss (1967) that research in the social sciences had developed an inordinate focus on the testing and verification of existing hypotheses, and thus “their goal in developing grounded theory was to return attention to the generation of [new] theory” (Cooney, 2010, p. 19). Several variations of grounded theory have developed since Glaser and Strauss’s original work. Most significantly, Glaser and Strauss themselves had a parting of the ways over methodological issues such as the role of verification within grounded theory. This ultimately led to the approaches of Strauss and Corbin that are sometimes termed ‘evolved grounded theory’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A second significant variation emerged when Charmaz (2000) proposed ‘constructivist grounded theory’, a model that intentionally moved away from what Charmaz felt were positivist or post-positivist ontological assumptions inherent in earlier versions. However, despite these differences, all branches of grounded theory retain one central theme, that “the aim is to create theory” (Ghezeljeh & Enami, p.20), and consequently there remain numerous aspects common to grounded theorists of all traditions. The following quote from Ghezeljeh and Enami (2009) nicely encapsulates many of these areas of commonality:

Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to inductively distil issues of importance to specific groups of people...the researcher has no preconceived ideas to prove or disprove. Rather, issues of importance emerge from the [data]. (p. 15)

Layered within this passage are four elements that are present, in some form or other, within all branches of grounded theory. I have termed these elements specificity, inductivity, distillation, and emergence. I discuss each of these elements individually below.

### *Specificity.*

In considering the stated goal of grounded theory to “generate theory” (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 3) it is important to clarify what *type* of theory. To some, the word theory may carry connotations of overarching hypotheses about the nature of the universe such as Einstein’s theory of relativity or Darwin’s theory of evolution. Grounded theorists are, in general, not concerned with such all-encompassing theory, but rather reside within the emerging research tradition described by Denzin & Lincoln (1998) who state that:

The concept of the aloof researcher has been abandoned. More action-guided, action-oriented research is on the horizon, as are more social criticism and social critique. The search for grand narratives will be replaced by more local, small-scale theories *fitted to specific problems and specific situations*. (p. 22, emphasis added)

Grounded theory is, therefore, interested in generating theory that “is contextually situated in time, place, culture and situation” (Ghezeljehj & Enami, 2009, p. 18) and “is developed for a relatively specific area of inquiry in a given context” (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 2). This situation-specific research nicely parallels the focus of my work which focuses on the specific representation of the Stagecraft program that has developed at the school where I teach. The findings are, from my perspective, an accurate depiction of the “shared experiences and relationships” (Ghezeljehj & Enami, 2009, p. 17) of the students and teacher in the Stagecraft program, a depiction that I hope will “fit the situation and work when put into use” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). A consequence of this specificity is that while grounded theory in general,

and this project in particular, will provide “useful descriptions” (Cooney, 2010, p. 23) for a specific environment, it may or may not generalize to a wider context.

### ***Inductivity.***

The word ‘inductive’ is one that recurs often in the literature on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2000; Gehrke & Parker, 1982; Dey, 1999; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Inductive, in the context of grounded theory, refers to the fact that theory flows out of the data itself instead of data being artificially generated to test a certain theory. Gehrke & Parker (1982) illustrate this point when they explain that “unlike much past research, grounded theory research is not an attempt to verify *existing* theory through the testing of hypotheses. Rather, it is primarily an inductive system for generating [new] theory” (p. 1). This is a direct reflection of Glaser & Strauss’s original contention that the “procedures for generating theory [are different] from those required for testing it” (Dey, 1999, p. 3). Thus, in grounded theory the processes of data collection and analysis occur “before any hypotheses are defined” (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 1). A fundamental aspect to this inductive process is the idea of keeping an ‘open mind’ and avoiding ‘preconceptions’ (Dey, 1999; Ghezaljah & Enami, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Gehrke & Parker, 1982). These latter assertions bear examination as they contain more than a hint of positivist and post-positivist assumptions of the ‘objective’ researcher now out of favour in light of a growing understanding that “all research is interpretive” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 26). More recent grounded theorists, such as Dey (1999) and Charmaz (2000), have attempted to reconcile this incongruity by clarifying that the researcher can acknowledge their own personal biases and preconceptions while still following an inductive process that does not try to fit data to “prior speculations or borrowed hypotheses” (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 3). “The important point, presumably, is not

to be 'doctrinaire'; the researcher has to explore evidence in its own terms rather than immediately fitting it into some preconceived framework" (Dey, 1999, p. 4). In terms of this project, I think it more than safe to state that the ultimate theoretical connection between Stagecraft and Environmental Adult Education was obviously not the starting hypothesis of the research! Data was not sought to test a preexisting conjecture that EAE could be employed as a theoretical framework for teaching Stagecraft. I was, in fact, not even aware of EAE at the outset, and only toward the end of my graduate studies, in the culmination of a year of inductive analysis of aspects of Stagecraft, did EAE present itself as an applicable framework that fit all the data. This inductive process was greatly facilitated by the fact that I unknowingly adhered to several methodological suggestions made by grounded theorists, including the need to "start with unstructured methods of collecting data" (Dey, 1999, p. 6) and to be "guided by emerging gaps in [the] theory" (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 4). The data that informed the generation and discovery of theory were twofold. First was my (ongoing) experiences in Stagecraft, including both day-to-day observation and practice as well as conversations with students and my former colleague about what defined the distinctiveness of Stagecraft. Second was an unintentional 'review' of a wide range of literature (as discussed earlier in the context chapter) that had surprising connection to my Stagecraft experience despite the fact that almost none of it had overt ties to the theatre setting. The back and forth process of this practical experience with the discovery and naming of ideas illustrates how "the procedure for generating grounded theory alternates between data gathering and data analysis" (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 4).

### *Distillation.*

Given that grounded theory focuses on a specific situation and inductively flows from data to theory, the question then becomes how exactly does the researcher go about this process of

turning data into theory? In the quote from which I've drawn these four elements of grounded theory, Ghezeljeh & Enami (2009) use the phrase "distil issues of importance" (p. 15). This phrase nicely encapsulates the process employed by all grounded theorists, in some form or other, of taking large mounds of data and filtering out a manageable group of key traits. These traits are called categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Dey, 1999) and represent significant attributes that recur throughout the data. Glaser & Strauss (1967) state that categories should present "a meaningful picture [that] helps the reader to see and hear vividly the people in the area under study" (pp. 37-38).

In order to identify categories, grounded theorists engage in coding, which Bryant and Charmaz (2007) define as "the process of defining what the data is about" (p. 605). They further clarify that "a grounded theorist creates qualitative codes by defining what he or she sees in the data" (p. 605). There are multiple, often detailed and complex, descriptions of types of coding and how they should be employed by grounded theorists. Strauss and Corbin (1990) discuss open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Bryant & Charmaz (2007) talk of substantive and theoretical coding. Ghezeljeh & Enami (2009) prefer the terms line-by-line and focused coding. Essentially, coding boils down to a two step process by which the researcher first engages in "naming and categorizing...phenomena through close examination of the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62) and then "[puts]...data back together in new ways...by making connections between categories" (p. 96). The latter is done by identifying "initial codes that appear frequently" (Ghezeljeh & Enami, 2009, p. 19) and by reflection upon the "categories and relationships between categories" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 5).

As has already been mentioned, in my work on Stagecraft the categories are the "pieces to the Stagecraft theory puzzle" (Barss, 2010b, p. 3) which represent key features and traits of

the methods and culture of Stagecraft. I identified these categories by recognizing and naming (coding) aspects of the program from my experience with Stagecraft, forming linkage with literature from my graduate studies coursework, and identifying recurring trends. This resulted in about half a dozen puzzle pieces (categories) that I knew were important elements to somehow include in my final theoretical framework for Stagecraft.

### *Emergence.*

The final key feature of all branches of grounded theory is that of emergence. The idea of the discovery or creation of an “emergent theory” (Ghezjeljeh & Enami, 2009, p. 19) is based in the inductive nature of grounded theory as, through the distilling process, categories, relationships, and ultimately theory emerge from the data. The process of emergence is a phenomenon discussed in some detail by Fritjof Capra (2002).

After prolonged immersion in uncertainty, confusion, and doubt, the sudden emergence of novelty is easily experienced as a magical moment. Artists and scientists often described these moments of awe and wonder when a confused and chaotic situation crystallizes miraculously to reveal a novel idea or solution to a previously intractable problem. Since the process of emergence is thoroughly nonlinear, involving multiple feedback loops, it cannot be fully analyzed with our conventional, linear ways of reasoning, and hence we tend to experience it with a sense of mystery. (p. 119).

Capra is not (to my knowledge) a grounded theorist. However, much of his thought on emergence is highly resonant with grounded theory. For instance, his focus on the important role of what he terms “multiple feedback loops” (p. 119) is evocative of the recursive interplay between “data gathering and data analysis” (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 4) discussed earlier. Also, he is in agreement with grounded theorists that *key elements to emergence are trust and release of control*. For instance, Cooney’s (2010) statement that “the important thing is to trust oneself and the process” (p. 23) is echoed by the following quote from Capra (2002):

Emergent solutions occur in a wide range of intensities, from small sudden insights to painful and exhilarating transformations. What they have in common is a sense of uncertainty and loss of control that is, at the very least, uncomfortable. (p. 119)

In considering the role of emergence within this project, the process through which the various pieces to the puzzle (categories) were discovered and connected illustrates how “as [the] categories emerge, they are integrated; relationships among them are identified” (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 5). Furthermore, I believe the reader will note in the Findings chapter of this project that Capra’s description of the “sense of mystery” (2002, p. 119) associated with emergence is highly reminiscent of the “revelations” (Barss, 2010b, p. 9) by which EAE presented itself to me as a theoretical framework that incorporated all of the categories I had identified. Finally, in an example of “the researcher...[allowing] the evidence accumulated to dictate the emerging theoretical agenda” (Dey, 1999, p. 4), the making of the EAE-Stagecraft connection altered significantly the whole focus of my research to a view of Stagecraft through the lens of the ‘theatre environment’. In retrospect, I see that this reframing of my research represents the final stage of grounded theory which suggests that “in concluding research, identify a ‘core’ category or main ‘story line’ for the study [and] integrate the analysis around this framework” (p. 9).

### **Grounded Theory Debates**

While I have already suggested that, according to Dey (1999), “there are probably as many versions of grounded theory as there are grounded theorists” (p. 2), some differences represent a more significant departure than others and deserve a brief examination. In the years since Glaser and Strauss first introduced grounded theory in 1967, two noteworthy splits have surfaced among the proponents of grounded theory. These departures are represented in the adaptations made by

Strauss and Corbin (1990), whose approach is sometimes termed ‘evolved grounded theory’, and in Charmaz’s (2000) proposal of ‘constructivist grounded theory’. These variations offer an opportunity to engage in two discussions about issues of importance to any piece of research: validity and paradigm. I therefore provide a brief outline of both of these grounded theory debates and include thoughts on where this project is situated within each continuum.

***Strauss & Corbin: Incorporating Validity (Processes, Procedures, and Verification)***

The question of validity is central to all research. The work of Strauss and Corbin, in essence, was designed to introduce a more rigorous approach to validity within grounded theory through two additions: the creation of procedural guidelines for grounded theorists to follow and the incorporation of a verification step to the data collection and analysis cycle.

The first addition of Strauss and Corbin was to outline a set of highly detailed processes and procedures for the grounded theorist to follow for the collection and coding of data. Glaser criticized this as stifling and maintained that a more open approach be employed, one that allowed theory to emerge on its own terms (Glaser, 1992). On this issue I tend to side more with Glaser’s point of view, especially in light of Capra’s (previously discussed) thoughts on the need for a release of control in “the emergence of novelty” (2002, p. 119). However, it is also worth noting that Strauss and Corbin later clarified their position, explaining that their procedures were meant to be helpful suggestions and guidelines to the grounded theorist, not regimented or binding rules to be obeyed unquestioningly (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Thus, while it is true that I have not specifically followed Strauss and Corbin’s procedures in this project, I nonetheless note some significant parallels between the approaches I employed and their guidelines. Moreover, the clarity of their descriptions of the grounded theory methodology certainly helped crystallize my thinking during the writing process.

The second addition of Strauss and Corbin's version of grounded theory represents a more serious departure from the original work of Glaser and Strauss. As Cooney (2010) puts it, "the core of the conflict between Glaser and Strauss is whether verification should be an outcome of grounded theory analysis or not" (Cooney, 2010, p. 20). Glaser felt it essential that grounded theory remain true to its roots as a methodology designed to *generate* theory, not test theory. Strauss and Corbin, on the other hand, felt that verification could be inserted into the cycle of data analysis and collection so that it became a *component* of the continuing theory generation process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In a fiery critique, Glaser claimed that Strauss and Corbin's work no longer qualified as grounded theory at all and was, in fact, something entirely different (Glaser, 1992). On this topic I tend to agree with Strauss and Corbin that the testing of generated theory (by putting it into practice) can further guide and fine-tune the theoretical constructs of grounded theory research. This is illustrated in the development of this project in which the generation of theory occurred simultaneously (and interactively) with a testing and verification process within my daily professional practice as instructor of the Stagecraft program. Indeed, even had I tried I do not think it would have been possible to resist testing, scrutinizing, and modifying the theory I was contemplating in the real-world laboratory at my fingertips. Such interplay is central to Strauss and Corbin's conception of grounded theory and is illustrated by their definition of validity as "a process of comparing concepts and their relationships against data during the research act to determine how well they stand up to such scrutiny" (p. 21).

***Charmaz: Reframing the Theoretical Paradigm (Realism, Constructivism, or Pragmatism?).***

Through the latter years of the twentieth century, a growing criticism of grounded theory became the positivist or post-positivist tradition within which it seemed to be situated. Certainly the

original work by Glaser and Strauss (1967) carried implications of a realist ontology with the idea of emergence having the connotation of an objective ‘truth’ emerging from the data (Charmaz, 2000; Dey, 1999; Cooney, 2010; Ghezjeljeh & Enami, 2009). In Charmaz’s (2000) introduction of constructivist grounded theory, researchers were given an option with “a relativistic ontological position that leaves behind the traditional grounded theorists’ subscription to the discovery of truth that emerges from data representative of a ‘real’ reality” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 3). Instead, “a constructivist approach sees data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (Ghezjeljeh & Enami, 2009, p. 17). Further clouding the ontological debate is the fact that while “Glaser’s later work continued to reflect a realist ontology” (Cooney, 2010, p. 24), there is some disagreement over what paradigm Strauss and Corbin’s version of grounded theory falls under. While “some authors maintain that Strauss and Corbin’s position is also aligned with post-positivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Charmaz, 2000; Hallberg, 2006)” (Cooney, 2010, p. 24), in later publications Strauss and Corbin (1998) clarified their position as one that Mills et al. describe as “relativist pragmatists” (2006, p. 3). This implies a relativist ontology (“reality cannot be fully known and is linked to time and place”, Cooney, 2010, p. 24) but with a focus on using “the techniques of grounded theory to produce *useful descriptions*” (p. 23, emphasis added). The theory generated will therefore “be useful in application because it has arisen from examination of the situation in which it is most likely to be applied” (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 5).

Thus, there appear to be three dominant theoretical paradigms within the grounded theory tradition: positivist/post-positivist (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), constructivist (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), and relativistic-pragmatist (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). While Cooney (2010) provides a helpful overview of these contrasting positions, I am not sure that I agree with her opening claim

that “those who plan to use grounded theory inevitably come to a point where they must choose” (p. 18). I certainly have some affinity with Charmaz’s constructivist approach, and my attempt in this study to piece together and theorize the Stagecraft environment (of which I am also a part) illustrates the idea that “social realities are inseparable from the researcher, not least because researchers construct the worlds they research” (Ghezeljeh & Enami, 2009, p. 17). However, I must admit that am also not entirely opposed to the somewhat positivistic notion (despite its post-modern unpopularity) that through the organic and interactive process of emergence researchers can become aware of a deeper ‘truth’ or understanding of the world around them. Despite these affinities with Glaser and Charmaz, however, my work on Stagecraft probably has the closest fit with “the broad goal of [Strauss and Corbin’s] grounded theory...to produce a theory that fits the situation, aids understanding and guides action and practice” (Cooney, 2010, p. 26) and thereby “[helps] the researcher move from a description of what is happening to an understanding of the process by which it is happening” (p. 26).

### **Grounded Metaphor**

Before moving on to the Findings chapter, a brief discussion of the key role of metaphor within this project is in order. Anderson and Grinberg (1998) discuss the central function of metaphors in research and theory. In particular, they suggest that theories, or “conceptual frames” (p. 331), are essentially just metaphors describing some aspect (or aspects) of the situation that the researcher is examining. Therefore, “when we recognize that competing theories are competing metaphors, we can approach them in a new way” (p. 331). Linking grounded theory with this association of theory and metaphor creates an interesting repositioning of grounded theory as

‘grounded metaphor’ (Campbell, 2006)<sup>2</sup>, a construct which could be defined as the inductive generation of metaphors from data. At the end of the previous section I cited Cooney (2010) who states that “the broad goal of...grounded theory is to produce a theory that fits the situation, aids understanding and guides action and practice” (p. 26). Borrowing and adapting Cooney’s summary, we could surmise that the goals of ‘grounded metaphor’ would presumably be to produce *metaphors* that fit the situation, aid understanding and guide action and practice.

Such grounded metaphors play a number of significant roles (to use a theatre metaphor) in this project, chief among them the fact that the central aspect of the Stagecraft theory that ultimately emerges is, in fact, quite literally a ‘grounded metaphor’. This is the metaphor of the ‘theatre environment’ in which the theatre is considered to be the (ecological) environment and the framework of Environmental Adult Education is employed in the teaching of Stagecraft. In addition to this primary metaphor, however, several secondary metaphors developed instrumental importance during the writing process and thus deserve discussion in this Methodology chapter. These are the metaphor of a journey, a puzzle, and the voice of the literature.

### ***A Journey***

The metaphor of a ‘journey’ reflects the need for grounded theory to “be evocative of the experiences of the participants [including the researcher]” (Ghezeljeh & Enami, 2009, p. 20). To this end I have attempted to construct this project in a way that re-traverses the (sometimes

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<sup>2</sup> After conceiving of the term ‘grounded metaphor’ I did a cursory search of the literature to determine whether or not this was an expression already in use (in which case I would want to reference its origin appropriately). I was able to discover only one other author who used the phrase ‘grounded metaphor’, namely Todd Campbell (2006). However, to this point I have been unable to obtain the article in question and am therefore not clear on whether or not the meaning Campbell attaches to this term is indeed the same as the meaning I intend (although it seems likely that it is).

winding) road that I travelled in this research. The principal device utilized here is the use of excerpts from papers written throughout my graduate studies coursework. These excerpts show the ideas that were forming and interconnecting. Although the original context of these papers was not always theatre related, the linkage to Stagecraft always lurks just below the surface (both in terms of my daily professional practice and my academic goal of discovering a suitable theory).

### *A Puzzle.*

The metaphor of a ‘puzzle’ parallels both the inductive process of grounded theory (since one must start with the individual ‘pieces’ without necessarily knowing what the big picture will be) as well as the emergent aspect of grounded theory (since a puzzle implies that, once put together, an image or pattern which is greater than the sum of the separate pieces will become apparent). The puzzle metaphor is an extremely good descriptor of the feeling I had, as my work progressed, that I was dealing with a collection of seemingly unconnected Stagecraft theory pieces (or categories), and my ultimate realization that once assembled ‘properly’ the pieces did in fact join together in a meaningful way.

### *The Voice of the Literature.*

A metaphor that became clear to me only in retrospect is that of the ‘voice of the literature’ which, within the grounded theory tradition, situates the literature as an additional ‘participant’ in the research. Mills et al. (2006) describe this as “interweaving the literature throughout the process of evolved grounded theory as another voice contributing to the researcher’s theoretical reconstruction” (p. 5). The voice of the literature is strong in this project, but not in the

customary research conception of a preemptive review of the appropriate literature which then dictates the 'jump off point' for the researcher. Many grounded theorists in fact reject "the traditional requirement of an exhaustive review of literature prior to the development of the study" (Gehrke & Parker, 1982, p. 3) on the grounds that it "can have a stultifying effect in theory-building research" (p. 3). True to this tradition, the literature in this project represents not a starting point for my research but rather a 'participant' whose voice, at key moments, contributes a unique perspective to those of the other participants.

## **Chapter Three: Findings**

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the process of coding and categorization by which a grounded theory emerged which positions Environmental Adult Education as a theoretical framework for the teaching of Stagecraft. As discussed in chapter three, ‘coding’ within grounded theory refers to the recognition and naming of elements of the research subject while ‘categorization’ is the grouping of data into categories based on common, recurring themes. The layout of this chapter is an example of Gehrke and Parker’s (1982) suggestion that, in presenting grounded theory findings, “the theory is written in essay form with the major categories providing divisions of the work” (p. 5). Although I follow in this tradition, I have also chosen in this chapter to not expressly employ the terms ‘category’ and ‘coding’, but rather to maintain the language of the metaphors (discussed at the conclusion of the previous chapter) of a ‘puzzle’ (the pieces of which represent the categories) and a ‘journey’ (which depicts the coding process of recognizing and naming these pieces). Both of these metaphors have high utility in conveying a sense of the inductive emergence of theory from data within this particular project.

This chapter consists of four main sections. First, I outline three pieces to the Stagecraft theory puzzle that I discovered through the theorists and literature I encountered in my coursework. Second, I describe three pieces to the theory puzzle that were still missing – that is, aspects of Stagecraft that were not adequately accounted for in the specific frameworks I had thus far encountered. Third, I present Environmental Adult Education as a framework that contains all the pieces to the puzzle – those I had found, those still missing, and some that I didn’t even realize existed. Finally, I address areas of concern related to the appropriation of the EAE methodology, which has been developed to contend with the critically important issues of

environmental devastation, for the comparatively trivial use as a teaching methodology for high school technical theatre.

### Pieces to the Stagecraft Theory Puzzle

#### *Paulo Freire and Stagecraft? Really?*

On literally the very first day of my graduate studies I drew the name of Paulo Freire and the “banking concept of education” (Freire, 2003, p. 72) as my topic for a class presentation the following week. I quickly acquainted myself with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2003; original work published in 1968) and Freirean methodology. The following was included on a handout that accompanied my presentation:

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire both describes the Banking Concept and provides his alternative to it. Rooted in the concepts of Libertarian Education and his **problem-posing education** method, one of the key features of his solution is the redefining of the teacher-student relationship as being ‘student-teacher’ and ‘teacher-students’ in which not only the students learn from the teacher, but the teacher learns from the students and the students learn from each other. (Barss, 2009a, p. 1, emphasis in original)

This quote mentions two specific Freirean ideas: the “problem-posing method” (Freire, 2003, p. 79) and a reconceptualization of the “teacher-student relationship” (p. 71). I specifically recall being struck by the parallel between the methods applied within Stagecraft and these two concepts. Stagecraft is a course that is driven by ‘problem-posing’ situations as opposed to teacher dictated content. Part of the mandate of the course is to provide technical support for all other groups in the school that wish to make use of the theatre space. While this requires competence in a wide variety of technical and interpersonal skills, for the most part these skills are not taught in a traditional classroom method where the teacher tells the students what they are ‘supposed’ to know (banking concept). Rather, under the facilitation of the teacher, the students learn, practice, and master these skills in the context of the technical demands and challenges of

specific gigs or projects for which they bear responsibility. In addition, students bring with them many skills, experiences, and interests which impact their focus of study within the class. They may choose either to get a basic grounding in all aspects of technical theatre or to ‘specialize’ in areas of particular interest. In many situations the students possess skills and knowledge that the teacher does not have which are applicable to the problems at hand. Some examples of pertinent skills that students often bring with them to the classroom (skills that are not necessarily within the primary areas of expertise of the instructor) might include construction experience, artistic abilities, a flair for design, mechanical aptitude (or, as we call it in class, “fixing stuff”), sewing proficiency, and computer skills<sup>3</sup>. The students’ enthusiasm and pride is obvious as they are able to make unique and important contributions such as knowing how to tie a certain kind of knot, rectifying a computer malfunction, or mixing paint to produce just the right hue. For a moment they become the teachers and the rest of us the learners in their ‘classroom’. Thus, unlike curricular driven education, the students’ validation comes not from submissively demonstrating their mastery of a preset curriculum dictated by the system, but rather by contributing meaningfully to a dynamic learning community. Stagecraft, therefore, truly represents a setting in which the teacher-student and student-teachers learn together and from each other in a manner that reflects Freire’s problem-posing method.

### ***Tsawalk and Stagecraft? How does that work?***

In Richard E. Atleo’s (2004) book *Tsawalk: A Nuu-Chah-Nulth Worldview* he outlines the theoretical position of *Heshook-ish tsawalk* (*Tsawalk* for short) which is a *Nuu-Chah-Nulth*

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<sup>3</sup> The latter is becoming increasingly relevant as computer technologies play a larger and larger role in theatre production and management. Sound, lighting, and design equipment now often contain a computer interface and rental groups regularly have complex interactive or multimedia elements to their presentations. It is no secret that in this time of rapid technological progress students almost invariably have a higher level of computer literacy than their teachers, and in particular an understanding of and familiarity with the cutting edge technologies and software. I have learned a great deal indeed in this area from my students over the past two years.

phrase meaning “everything is one” (p. xi). I was intrigued by the theory of *Tsawalk*, and wrote the following passage as part of a paper not specifically related to Stagecraft:

The Theory of *Tsawalk*...assumes a worldview that emphasizes the connectedness of all facets of life. Atleo (2004) argues that in the western, science dominated way of thought “there is a prevailing tendency to compartmentalize experience and thus assume that some parts have no relationship to other parts” (p. xii) whereas “the critical assumption of *Tsawalk* is that there is a unity or meaningful interrelationship between all variables of existence.” (p. 125)...To me, the incorporation of *Tsawalk* into a leader’s praxis suggests a constant reminder that the many components of an organization are interconnected in subtle and often surprising ways (Barss, 2009b, pp. 4-5)

A big part of what makes the Stagecraft program so special and unique is a holistic approach that mirrors *Tsawalk* in recognizing the interconnectedness of all aspects of the students’ learning.

On a practical level, *Tsawalk* is illustrated in the complexity of the interplay between technical media (lights, sound, set design, costuming, effects, etc.) in a theatrical performance. If a reductionist mindset is employed and these diverse production elements are designed in isolation, the result will be a stilted and disconnected product that falls short of the powerful potential of theatre. Instead, to create a truly effective production design, the many technical elements must be developed as one and their subtle and complex interaction taken into account in the design process.

Even more germane than this practical application of *Tsawalk*, however, are the implications within Stagecraft of an understanding that all is one on a human and interpersonal level. A capable technician is far more than someone who merely has technical abilities. Interpersonal skills, emotional responses, attitudes, leadership skills, the ability to function within a team, and relationships of students with each other and with members of the theatre user groups they work with are all critical characteristics of a competent technician. Therefore, unlike curricular driven education, Stagecraft deals much more with the ‘whole student’ and the interconnectedness of all these elements. For instance, after every gig the class debriefs together

to examine what went well and what didn't. Interpersonal frustrations and communication breakdowns arise far more often than (or, more to the point of *Tsawalk*, in conjunction with) specific technical glitches. The learning that goes on in these sessions is not superfluous to the course or irrelevant to the practice of technical theatre. Rather, it is an intricate part of what it means to operate a theatre and be a technician. The students do indeed learn very quickly that it is not possible to compartmentalize the different facets of their role. All is one.

### ***Gemeinschaft and Stagecraft? Are you kidding?***

I discovered the concept of *Gemeinschaft* in a course where I least expected to make Stagecraft connections: Rural Education. However, as I read about Tönnies (1957) concept of *Gemeinschaft* I found myself enthusiastically marking the margins with notes about the implications for my understanding of the Stagecraft community. Below is a passage discussing *Gemeinschaft* from a paper I wrote on the topic of rural education:

In a broad sense, Tönnies' work is "a critique of the impact of industrialization upon social relations as they are found in rural and urban environments" (Barter, 2008, p. 476). However, Barter explores the connections between the unique "sense of kinship, place, and mind" (p. 469) found in *Gemeinschaft* communities and the "rootedness in one's community and the desire to cherish and cultivate one's local community" (Bauch, 2001, p. 212)... Of particular poignancy to our current discussion is Sergiovanni's (1994) assertion that in *Gemeinschaft* communities "the connections of people to purpose and the connections among people are *not based on contracts but commitments*" (p. 6). (Barss, 2010, pp. 6-7, emphasis in original)

Once again, I had stumbled upon a theoretical concept which highlighted one of the key features of Stagecraft: it is a community in which the connections "are not based on contracts but on commitments" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 6). Students in the course (and the teacher for that matter) tend to put in long hours in the theatre, far more than the official (contractual) course requirements. They do this not because they are required to or because they will get a better

grade in 'exchange' for their extra work. Rather, they are *committed to each other and the theatre space*, a direct reflection of the "sense of kinship, place, and mind" (Barter, 2008, p. 469) of *Gemeinschaft* communities. This is in stark contrast to most facets of a modern school which seem to be moving steadily and purposefully toward the more contractual based *Gesellschaft* model in which "the basis of the new order...is exchange" (Barter, 2008, p. 477).

Last spring the Saanich News sent reporter Kyle Slavin to do a community interest piece on some aspect of the school. The vice-principal suggested he might focus on our fine arts department and, accordingly, sent him down to see me in the theatre. Slavin happened to arrive during a Stagecraft block, and it was no surprise to me that he immediately sensed that this was a special community of learners. He quickly connected with the students and chatted with them about their "dedication and passion" (Slavin, 2010, p. A6) for Stagecraft for almost two hours, jotting notes and snapping photos as he went. Although ostensibly about the entire fine arts department, his article ultimately focused almost exclusively on the Stagecraft community of students and their commitment to the theatre. Referring to the comments of one particular student, Slavin described how "the theatre at Spectrum is her second home" and is "where she wants to be" (p. A6). The subtitle of Slavin's article refers to "the tie that binds at this Saanich high school" (p. A6), and there is no doubt in my mind that his instinctive attraction to the Stagecraft students was directly related to the atmosphere of the commitment based *Gemeinschaft* community that exists in the class.

### **Pieces of the Puzzle Still Missing**

#### ***The Arts and Stagecraft? Techies aren't Artists, are they?***

"Strange, beautiful, and unexpected outcomes can take shape when people are given permission to be creative" (Etmanski, 2007, p. 76). In addition to the acquisition of practical skills, an

important aspect to the unique character of the Stagecraft program is the incorporation of creative development and artistic discovery and expression. The following quote was part of a paper for the course “Cultural Learning and Social Leadership through the Arts” in which I developed an arts based method I hoped to incorporate into the Stagecraft course design:

In relation to the students in the Stagecraft program, it is one of my goals to reinforce the fact that as technician-artists they are *part of the message being conveyed on stage*. They do not usually view their role through this lens when they first enter the program. The common view is that the lighting operator’s job is to make sure people are seen, the sound operator’s job is to make sure they are heard and the stage crew’s job is to make sure they have the right set piece behind them and the right prop in their hand. This narrow view denies the reality that the ‘technical’ attributes do not merely support the message but are in fact an *integral part of the communication* that occurs on stage. The lighting, sound, stage design and even the manner in which a set change is executed can magnify, diminish, emphasize or alter completely aspects of the message, and it is critical that technician-artists in any given situation understand both the message and their role in representing it. (Barss, 2009c, pp. 4-5, emphasis in original)

While there had been arts associations in much of my coursework, I did not yet feel that I had a specific framework that *explicitly* incorporated a focus on artistry and creativity to the degree that I wanted. It therefore became important to identify a methodological framework that would allow me to include the arts as an important component of the Stagecraft program.

### ***Community Leadership, Social Action, and Stagecraft? I don’t get it.***

While reading the article *Assets and Obstacles in Community Leadership* by Eneiza Hernandez (1998), which examines community leadership development in a farming community in Venezuela, I was astonished at the degree of connectivity between the type of leadership development that occurs in Stagecraft and Hernandez’s description of “the emergence, from within... communities, of a group of members whose leadership facilitated change within their community” (p. 269). Not only was the origin of the leadership development very similar in both cases, being fostered by individuals gaining a sense of ownership and involvement with

their local community, but Hernandez's depiction of *action oriented* leadership committed to *bettering the local community* is precisely what occurs in Stagecraft.

Hernandez goes on to describe how ownership and involvement progress to social action. This goes beyond merely doing 'what needs to be done' and moves to the realm of actively seeking out problems and solutions in order to effect positive change upon the community. This is demonstrated in Stagecraft as students naturally begin to identify potential issues or shortcomings and instigate processes to rectify problems or improve the functioning of the theatre. In fact, I often find out *after the fact* about an issue that has been dealt with or a novel solution that has been implemented to an old problem. (Barss, 2009d, p. 8, emphasis in original)

It may seem at first blush that this aspect of Stagecraft could fall under the Freirean umbrella.

However, while social action is certainly a central element of Freire's pedagogy, it is within "a subtext of emancipatory action by the oppressed, an aspect not explicitly present in Stagecraft" (Barss, 2009d, p. 6). More specifically, I now see that I was searching for a framework with a social action orientation based on *community* as opposed to Freire's *individual* based orientation (Bowers, 2005). Whereas the latter focuses on emancipation of the self, the former would account for Stagecraft students' propensity to value both each other and *the theatre space* to the point where they begin to critically reflect on problems, search for solutions, and take collective action to protect it (the theatre space) and improve upon its condition and operation.

### ***Mysticism and Stagecraft? Give me a break.***

Often, in the midst of the bedlam that surrounds the final days leading up to opening night of a production, my colleague or I (upon noticing that one of us is becoming overwhelmed with the stress) will reassuringly pronounce, "Don't worry. It's a mystery." This cryptic encouragement is simply our code for "everything will turn out – it always does," and is an allusion to the movie *Shakespeare in Love* (Weinstein & Madden, 1998). In a classic scene, theatre manager Hugh Fennyman is confronted by Philip Henslowe, the panic stricken financier of the production, who

is convinced he is going to lose his entire investment. The theatre is in chaos, there is dissent among the cast, a lead actor has lost his voice, there is talk of a public boycott of the play, the crown may shut the theatre down entirely, and the ending of the script has not even been written, never mind rehearsed! In the following passage, Henslowe attempts to reassure the dubious Fennyman that everything will be fine:

Philip Henslowe: Mr. Fennyman, allow me to explain about the theatre business. The natural condition is one of insurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster.

Hugh Fennyman: So what do we do?

Philip Henslowe: Nothing. Strangely enough, it all turns out well.

Hugh Fennyman: How?

Philip Henslowe: I don't know. It's a mystery.

(Weinstein & Madden, 1998)

I must admit that my personality contains more than a hint of 'type A' traits that, like Fennyman, want to understand and maintain control of any situation in which I find myself. More than anything else, the theatre has taught me that this is not always possible, and that's okay. Sometimes we must simply relinquish control and accept that "it's a mystery" (Weinstein & Madden, 1998).

This suggests one final piece to the Stagecraft theory puzzle, and as I perused my writing over the past year relating to the topics of Stagecraft and Theatre I noticed a theme emerging that does not fit neatly into any of the other pieces to the puzzle I had thus far identified.

Consistently I saw words and phrases such as "the magic of theatre" (Barss, 2009c, p. 3), the "intangible elements" (Barss, 2009c, p. 3), the theatre space as a "refuge" (Barss, 2009d, p. 4), the "magical interaction between cast and audience" (Barss, 2009e, p. 14), "[creating] common meaning" (Shakotko, D. & Walker, K., 1999, as cited in Barss, 2009e, p. 15), "[achieving] a

deepening awareness” (Bates, 1996, as cited in Barss, 2009f, p. 9), and the “sense of mystery...[when] a seeming state of confusion suddenly crystallizes miraculously” (Capra, 2002, as cited in Barss, 2010c, p. 11). These quotes point to an intangible, mystical, or ethereal aspect to the Stagecraft program – something that occurs in the theatre environment that cannot quite be explained adequately within traditional educational methodologies.

### **Environmental Adult Education and Stagecraft?**

As my program neared completion and the prospect of my final project loomed, I pondered constructing methodological frameworks for Stagecraft utilizing the various pieces to the puzzle that I had identified. I was unsatisfied as each framework I formulated felt like an incomplete patchwork of cobbled together ideas instead of a comprehensive and connected theory. What was missing was a central strand into which the many varying components could be interwoven.

In the midst of this process of attempting to link the Stagecraft themes, I enrolled in a course on environmental leadership, “Ecological Leadership for Educators”. I confess that I expected this course to be a pleasant diversion from the theatre focus I had been incorporating into much of my earlier work. I have a great deal of interest in environmental issues, leadership, and education, and looked forward to the course, but didn’t imagine that there would be any connection to my work on Stagecraft. However, as is apt to happen when one engages with new ideas, unexpected connections began to form. Through random selection I was assigned ‘Environmental Adult Education’ as my area of focus for a major assignment. At this point two significant revelations – in the style of Capra’s (2002) “emergence of novelty” (p. 119) – spurred my ultimate linking of EAE and Stagecraft.

The first revelation came as I examined various writings on Adult Education in general (that is, not specifically Environmental) in order to find or create a definition from which I would

work. In this process I came across the following quote: “Certain theorists, such as Alan Rogers (1996), define adult education in terms of whether or not the students are *treated* as adults... capable, experienced, responsible, mature and balanced people” (Kelly & Perkett, 1998, para. 5, emphasis added). While this is not the definition of Adult Education I ultimately chose to work from, it did inspire a realization that although I had recognized the links between Adult Education and the Stagecraft methodology, I had been resisting its explicit inclusion (other than a few isolated Freirean ideas) because of a *subconscious assumption* that the word ‘adult’ meant that its application in a high school setting was inappropriate (or perhaps ‘not allowed’)<sup>4</sup>. This myth debunked, I made a mental note to come back to Adult Education and look at its potential role in my final project at the conclusion of the coursework I was engaged in at the time.

The second revelation came as I turned to the problem of selecting a topic for my final paper in the course. Certain that Stagecraft could not fit into a course on Ecological Leadership for Educators, I attempted to put aside for a few weeks the Stagecraft connections my mind was forming. I was decidedly unsuccessful in this effort, and finally in exasperation (and feeling a little silly) I dared to ask myself the question: might there be a link to explore between Stagecraft and *Environmental* Adult Education? The instant I allowed myself to consider this possibility the answer – beautiful in its simplicity as such insights so often are – burst upon me. *If the theatre space is taken as an ‘environment’ in and of itself then the framework of EAE is a perfect fit for the approaches and methodology that I had been struggling so hard to articulate for Stagecraft.*

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<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note here that this quote from Alan Rogers resonates strongly with a favourite observation made often by my former colleague (the builder of the Stagecraft program) who would reflect that “if you treat them like adults, they respond like adults. If you treat them like immature children, they respond like immature children” (Brian Whitmore, personal communication, date unknown). I have since concluded that perhaps, without realizing it, Brian was in fact an Adult Educator and the Stagecraft program had been built in the spirit (though not the name) of the foundations of Adult Education.

The recognition of the methodology of EAE (within the grounded metaphor of the ‘theatre environment’) as a theoretical framework for teaching Stagecraft brings us up to the present moment in the journey. In order to make the Stagecraft-EAE connection I now offer a brief sketch of my personal understanding of the philosophies of Adult Education and Environmental Adult Education. I then return to the pieces of the Stagecraft theory puzzle and examine how they are illustrated by the key principles, characteristics, and approaches of EAE as outlined by Clover, Follen, and Hall (2000) in *The Nature of Transformation: Environmental Adult Education*.

### ***What is Adult Education?***

Clover et al. (2000) confirm that “there is considerable confusion about the meaning of adult education – particularly regarding its role...The term is regularly used in speech and writing with different connotations” (2000, p. 10). However, they go on to clarify that when they speak of Adult Education they are referring to the area of academic study and practice that “includes all experiences with emphasis on critical analysis focused on social change through people’s active involvement” (pp. 10-11). Notice that within this description there are incorporated four key themes:

- ‘Experiences’. Learning is based on the learners’ real life circumstances, understandings and challenges
- ‘Active Involvement’. Learning is participatory and interactive
- ‘Critical Analysis’. Learning is accomplished through reflection and critique
- ‘Social Change’. Learning results in action by the learners geared toward challenging unjust power relations and transforming both the individual and the community.

Inherent to these four concepts are ideas such as learner centered education, life-long learning, innovative/creative problem solving, community building, teamwork, involvement,

transformation, and Freire's problem-posing method and reconceptualization of the teacher-student relationship. Like Clover et al., these images form the vision of 'Adult Education' I choose to work from.

### ***What is Environmental Adult Education?***

EAE is "a hybrid outgrowth of the environmental movement and adult education" (Sumner, 2003, p. 41) which is "oriented to commitment and action" (p. 43) and is "environmental in two respects: the content as well as the methods and means of communicating" (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23). It may not initially be clear what exactly this looks like, but Clover et al. go on to specify three main differences between EAE and other forms of environmental education. First, it shifts from merely 'awareness raising' to finding new ways to respect, understand, and live with nature. Second, it shifts from individual 'behaviour modification' to ideological, structural, and political change. Third, it shifts from learning 'about' nature to learning with, through, and in nature. They expand on this by listing six key principles to EAE:

1. We need to passionately re-connect with the rest of nature through all our senses and emotions
2. We need to critically examine the unjust power relations behind modern social and environmental trends
3. We learn best by beginning with our daily lived experience in our own locations, contexts and histories
4. We are responsible for taking personal and collective action to re-create a healthy planet for all species both now and in the future
5. We can transcend the bonds of traditional top-down education
6. We are all artists, poets, storytellers, songwriters, dreamers, and more

(Clover et al., 2000, p. 23)

As Clover et al. further clarify the methodology of EAE it becomes apparent that tied up within these principles are several ideas that are not expressly stated but are highly relevant to our current discussion. Included in principle #1 is the incorporation of a spiritual perspective within EAE. This is not meant to imply adherence to any particular religious philosophy, but rather to reflect an outlook which involves “recognizing the divine in nature” (Hill & Johnston, 2000, p. 21) and an “awareness of something greater than ourselves, a sense that we are connected to all human beings and to all of creation” (p. 23). In addition, EAE rejects the dichotomy of ‘humans versus nature’ and employs intentional use of the phraseology “the rest of nature” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23). This emphasizes “instilling connection with nature instead of control over nature” (Haugen, 2006, p. 100) and reflects an understanding that we do not ‘own’ nature but are instead *part of* nature. These two ideas lead to the inclusion of indigenous perspectives in EAE since they tend to incorporate “a deeper understanding of the inter-connectedness of all life” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 21), a mindset of complexity as opposed to reductionism (Saul, 2008), and a view of “the land as a spiritual place that must be respected, not captured and dominated” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 21).

### **Putting the Pieces Together**

Having described above both the facets of the Stagecraft program that I wish to represent and the key principles of Environmental Adult Education, I now briefly look individually at each piece to the Stagecraft theory puzzle identified earlier and verify that it is indeed represented within the EAE framework. I repeat here my earlier premise that this linkage is realized by mapping the methodology of EAE into the theatre space. In other words, consider the *theatre as the ‘environment’* and the teacher and students as the learning community participating in ‘EAE’.

### *Freirean Pedagogy.*

By virtue of the fact that EAE is a subsidiary of Adult Education the ideas of Paulo Freire can be assumed to figure prominently in its framework. However, in order to make this connection explicit, note that Freirean pedagogy is clearly reflected in key principles #3 and #5, “we learn best by beginning with our daily lived experience in our own locations, contexts and histories” and “we can transcend the bonds of traditional top-down education” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23). Both Stagecraft & EAE start from the learners’ lived experience and employ the approach of a community (student-teachers and teacher-student) learning collectively through the problem-posing method.

### *Tsawalk.*

Richard Atleo’s *Tsawalk* resonates both with principle #1, which refers to the use of “all our senses” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23), and, more pertinently, with the prominence of indigenous perspectives within EAE. I say this not merely because *Tsawalk* is itself an indigenous perspective, but rather because the interconnectedness that is the focus of *Tsawalk* matches the main feature of indigenous perspectives drawn on by EAE. In the same way that EAE strives to establish “a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all life, and where and how humans fit into this web of life” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 21), students in Stagecraft become immersed in the interconnectedness of all aspects of the theatre – including technical, artistic, and relational aspects – as they “find their place, their role, their identity and their voice” (Kirk & Shutte, 2004, as cited in Barss, 2009d, p. 4) in and through ‘the world of theatre’.

### ***Gemeinschaft.***

Like *Gemeinschaft*, EAE emphasizes communities that are bound together out of commitment and respect for each other and the environment in which they live. This actually leads to some extremely important critical examination of a word that has figured prominently in my writing about Stagecraft – ‘ownership’ (Barss, 2009c; Barss, 2009d). Here is a concept that would seem to be in direct conflict with the outlook of EAE which, as we have seen, views the environment not as something to be owned but to be respected (Clover et al., 2000; Haugen, 2006). This issue reared its head within my Stagecraft class earlier this year in an unfortunate confrontation between a few Stagecraft students and some other students making use of the theatre. As often happens with adverse situations, it turned into an incredible opportunity for learning when we had a poignant class discussion in which we analyzed the difference between ‘taking ownership’ and ‘owning’. This occurred several months before Environmental Adult Education entered my world, but I now recognize that EAE perfectly exemplifies this distinction. In EAE, through commitment and respect of “kinship, *place*, and mind” (Barter, 2008, p. 469, emphasis added) for each other and the rest of nature, learners are inspired to protect and nurture the environment, not own and exploit it. This *Gemeinschaft* among learners and communities leads to “instilling connection with nature instead of control over nature” (Haugen, 2006, p. 100) in the same way that *Gemeinschaft* in the Stagecraft community is intended to instill connection with the theatre, not control over the theatre.

### ***The Arts.***

“Adult Educators have long embraced the arts...as a means of investigating the human experience and stimulating learning” (Etmanski, 2007, p. 74). The prominence within Adult Education (and thus EAE) of the arts, and specifically the focus on the arts as a method of

learning, parallels the use of artistic expression as a learning medium in Stagecraft. Moreover, principle #6, which states emphatically that “we are all artists, poets, storytellers, songwriters, dreamers, and more” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23), is echoed by my desire “to foster the students’ identities as technician-artists” (Barss, 2009c, p. 7). Note also that the theme within Clover et al.’s list is not just of ‘doing art’ but of *creating meaning* through art. This parallels the recognition that in Stagecraft the students’ “work is a critical component of the *message* conveyed on stage” (Barss, 2009c, p. 3, emphasis in original) and that they must “understand both the message and their role in representing it” (p. 5).

### ***Community Leadership through Social Action.***

Principle #4, “we are responsible for taking personal and collective action to re-create a healthy planet for all species both now and in the future” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23), speaks to the social action element of EAE. Awareness alone is not enough, and EAE purposefully institutes a style of learning intended to move environmentalism “from awareness to action” (Clover, 2006, p. 52). Furthermore, EAE proposes that it is action within our *local communities* that must be the starting point. As we have seen, it is exactly this idea of a community which “identifies its own needs and determines its own means of addressing the problems” (Tan, 2004, as cited in Barss, 2009d, p. 4) that is a natural development within Stagecraft. In EAE, learners take “collective action to create and maintain a healthy planet for all species both now and in the future” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23). In Stagecraft, students take collective action to create and maintain a healthy theatre for the whole school both now and in the future.

This sentiment of sustaining the (theatre) environment for future generations of students speaks to another compelling Stagecraft-EAE connection, that of ‘Traditional Ecological Knowledge’ (TEK). TEK refers to the body of environment specific knowledge present within

the culture of people groups who have resided sustainably in a location for millennia. A recurring theme within the Environmental Adult Education literature is the importance of the continued intergenerational transmission of this knowledge (Sumner, 2008; Clover, 2006; Duvall & Zint, 2007). A very similar body of knowledge exists within the Stagecraft community (skills, attitudes, processes, approaches, mindsets, group dynamics, etc). This knowledge is transmitted from ‘generation to generation’ of students quite independently from the role of the teacher but is, nonetheless, crucial to the continued success of the program. The role of this intergenerational transmission of Stagecraft ‘knowledge’ is an important component of Stagecraft that I did not even identify (that is, a piece to the Stagecraft theory puzzle that I didn’t even realize was missing) until after I started exploring the Stagecraft-EAE connection.

### ***Mysticism.***

Nature is magical. There is an intangible quality to being in and part of nature that can only be experienced, not described. Many can recall a mystical or spiritual reaction to an experience in nature. Many can recall a mystical or spiritual reaction to an experience in theatre. There is an intangible quality to being in and part of a theatre that can only be experienced, not described. Theatre is magical.

The mapping of Environmental Adult Education into the theatre space brings out this parallel of the mystical (magical, spiritual, indescribable, divine, ethereal, intangible) elements of both the natural and theatre environments.

### **The Question of Appropriation**

The reader may have noted that I have thus far drawn connection between the Stagecraft methodology and each of Clover et al.’s (2000) six key principles (as well as spiritual and

indigenous perspectives and TEK) with the exception of principle #2: “we need to critically examine the unjust power relations behind modern social and environmental trends” (p. 23). Are there ‘unjust power relations’ at play in the *theatre* environment? What would the problematic ‘social and environmental trends’ be? This, I confess, troubled me for a time, and it speaks to the question of whether or not it is acceptable to appropriate the framework of Environmental Adult Education, which is concerned with serious and critically important issues, to use in the ‘frivolous’ theatre environment. This is a legitimate and important question to ask.

While teaching Stagecraft is a joyful and rewarding experience, there are also obstacles and frustrations that my students and I routinely encounter. These obstacles fall into one of three broad categories. First is pressure from ‘outside’ forces (such as other staff, administration, school district, governmental regulations, etc.), either to restrict the autonomy of the Stagecraft students and conform to more traditional (top down banking concept) educational practices, or to utilize the resources of the theatre for monetary gain with inadequate compensation to properly sustain the theatre. Second, within the class itself a hierarchy can sometimes form, if we (the class and I) are not vigilant, in which certain individuals are marginalized while others draw disproportionately on the ‘benefits’ of the theatre (Barss, 2009d). Third, both those inside and outside our Stagecraft community are tempted to exercise the type of ownership (to own) that treats the theatre as a commodity to be possessed and exploited instead of the type of ownership (to be committed to) that treats it as something to be respected, protected, and nurtured. Does any of this sound familiar? Is there the potential for unjust power relations and problematic social and ‘environmental’ trends in the theatre environment? Yes, I believe there is.

While I have been privileged to step into a theatre which, thanks to the work of those that have gone before me, is a vibrant, thriving, protected, cherished, respected, and nurtured

environment, not all high school theatres are so lucky. Many are neglected, exploited, or allowed to fall into disrepair. Imagine for a moment that we lived in a world where the forces of “contemporary neo-conservatism and globalization practices and policies” (Clover, 2006, p. 51) had not (yet) been allowed to devastate our natural environment. Would EAE still have a place in such a world? I believe that it would. The fact that the ‘unjust power relations’ have thus far been largely held at bay in a given environment does not negate the need to be engaged in critical reflection and action to keep it that way.

Even so, I hesitate to compare the current overwhelming environmental crisis (and the critically important work of EAE) with a high school theatre program. I therefore emphasize that I have no intention of trivializing in any way the global ecological emergency in which we find ourselves. However, I cannot help but recognize the synergy between my work on Stagecraft and the EAE framework as applied within the grounded metaphor of theatre as environment. I therefore close this chapter with a comment made by a classmate during a group discussion related to this issue of appropriation. She reminded us of the adage that “imitation is the highest form of respect” (K. Hlady, personal communication, June 4, 2010). It is therefore with this same *respectful* attitude that I suggest adopting the theoretical framework of EAE into the theatre environment.

## **Chapter Four: Conclusion**

At the time of this writing I am one month into the current school year. Since the bulk of this project was completed over the summer months, including the emergence of the findings discussed in the previous chapter, this has been my first opportunity to test out in practice many of the ideas and approaches that have been taking shape in my mind. As noted earlier, the intent of grounded theory is to develop “useful descriptions” (Cooney, 2010, p. 23) that will “fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). In this conclusion, therefore, I offer some preliminary thoughts on how both the metaphor of the ‘theatre environment’ and the accompanying methodology of EAE have thus far influenced my professional practice on a day-to-day basis. This testing of the grounded theory in practice reflects Strauss & Corbin’s (1998) definition of validity as “a process of comparing concepts and their relationships against data during the research act to determine how well they stand up to such scrutiny” (p. 21). To this end, I first examine the ‘theatre environment’ metaphor in terms of how it has altered my thinking and decision making within Stagecraft. I then revisit a list of obstacles encountered within the Stagecraft program – a list that formed the basis of a course paper last fall – in order to reflect on the potential implications of the EAE methodology to my perspectives on and responses to these obstacles. Finally, I offer some closing thoughts on my hopes and goals moving forward in Stagecraft.

### **The ‘Theatre Environment’ Metaphor in Practice: Applications & Limitations**

In the Context chapter of this project I related that the initial impetus for this research was a desire to foster intentionality in my practices in Stagecraft in order to better understand not just what I do, but why I do it (Walter, 2009). In this regard, the metaphor of theatre as environment

provides a foundation for action and decision making which helps move beyond rationales such as ‘this is how it’s always been done’ or ‘this seems like the right thing to do’. I am finding this particularly helpful in situations where I find two goals of the program seemingly at odds with one another. In balancing the competing objectives in such situations, I have sometimes struggled in determining which takes precedence. This can be all the more challenging since I find myself questioning whether my ‘gut reactions’ are reliable or are merely a reflection of the more traditional teaching methodologies that are ingrained in me after dominating my praxis for most of my career thus far.

I believe an illustration will be instructive. One particular issue for which the ‘theatre environment’ metaphor has already been helpful is in balancing the release of (teacher) control – an important aspect of the program – with appropriate respect and treatment of the theatre space. Sometimes in my desire to maintain the student-centered educational philosophy by trying to move (demonstrably) away from the ‘teacher gives the orders’ mindset, I have not responded appropriately or promptly to a lack of respect within (and for) the theatre. I now see that I can respond to such situations not from the perspective of the controlling teacher, but rather from the perspective of the theatre as an *environment* that we all share and hold mutual responsibility for treating properly. Moreover, in taking this approach I am actually able to achieve both goals (respecting the theatre space and overcoming traditional top down education) since the students are not *commanded* to change their behaviour but are instead reminded of the responsibilities and commitments they have willingly taken on. Interestingly, even before having the metaphor of the theatre environment to guide me, this is essentially the same approach I eventually arrived at (after much reflection) to address this dilemma. However, the utility of viewing situations such as this through the lens of the theatre environment metaphor is that it crystallizes my thinking

and thus enables me to identify such solutions more quickly and respond with greater confidence and purpose. This illustrates Chalker's (2002) assertion that "theory is often the most practical solution available to leaders when faced with instant decision making" (p. 260).

Before moving on, whenever a useful metaphor is applied it is important to also recognize its limitations. All metaphors have limited utility and should not be extended beyond the bounds of their suitability. The metaphor of the theatre environment is no exception to this rule. For example, if all humanity were to depart this earth for destinations unknown in the universe, the planet would do just fine (nay, better) without us. An empty theatre, on the other hand, is a theatre without the life, community, creativity, and magic that make theatre so special. This illustrates one point of breakdown for the metaphor of theatre as environment, and through time and experience I'm sure I will discover others. Therefore, although the theatre environment metaphor is useful and instructive, it is also important to gauge on a situation by situation basis whether or not it stands up to each given set of circumstances with which I am faced.

### **The EAE Framework in Practice: Stagecraft Obstacles Revisited**

In the Findings chapter I recounted the close connection I had previously noted between Stagecraft and an article by Eneiza Hernandez (1998) entitled *Assets and Obstacles in Community Leadership*. In this article Hernandez discusses both positive aspects (assets) and challenges (obstacles) of community leadership development as related to her research within a farming community in Venezuela. In a paper last fall, *Stagecraft and Community Leadership*, I paralleled Hernandez's observations with my own experiences in Stagecraft. The assets – primarily the development of socially active leadership within the Stagecraft community – I have already discussed in the Findings chapter as one of the pieces to the Stagecraft theory puzzle.

The obstacles, however, I have not yet discussed in this project. Considering these obstacles here offers an excellent opportunity to put the EAE framework to the test, as it were, and therefore in this section I revisit the six obstacles discussed in that paper to see what the EAE framework offers in terms of both explanations and potential solutions. For each obstacle I begin with an excerpt from my own work that explains the nature of the challenge Hernandez describes and its parallel manifestation within Stagecraft. I then reexamine the obstacle through the lens of the EAE framework.

### ***Obstacles in Relation to Leaders.***

Hernandez describes how her work was not entirely able to break free of the traditional cultural perception of paternalistic leadership. Specifically, “some people who develop leadership skills assume them in a self-centered way and do not...delegate functions and power” (1998, p. 275). Similarly, there can be a tendency in Stagecraft for older students to assume they are now the ‘bosses’ and the new, younger students are the ‘lackeys’. This perception self-perpetuates because as the younger students become the older students they feel it is now their ‘due’ to get to be the ‘boss’. (Barss, 2009d, p. 10)

Having the ‘veterans’ of the class mentor the younger students is a highly desirable situation which does indeed occur. However, there can be a fine line between this (positive) mentoring and the cycle of ‘bosses’ and ‘lackeys’ described above. I often feel that if I could break this vicious cycle just once it would be gone for good. I have thus far, however, been unsuccessful in doing this. The EAE framework speaks powerfully to this situation in its focus on the critiquing and challenging of unjust power relations. The theme of those who have attained power being unwilling to share it and using it in a self-serving, controlling manner recurs worldwide in almost every setting imaginable. The ultimate results of such abuses are never good and are among the primary causes of the ecological crisis in which our world finds itself today. The incorporation of the EAE framework into Stagecraft makes it crystal clear that such power relations need to be

exposed, confronted, and rectified. This, then, is an issue to be worked through as a group in a manner that brings these relations to light and moves the class toward finding solutions as a community of learners that share responsibility for and commitment to the theatre environment.

### *Permanence.*

Just as the leaders described by Hernandez often “become involved for a short time and then leave (1998, p. 276), in a high school setting there is a perpetual turnover of Stagecraft personnel as students graduate and move on. This is both good and bad. The positive side is that there is a constant changeover of new individuals moving into leadership roles. The negative side is that it can make it difficult to maintain the culture of the program, especially in a year where many grade 12 students have moved on and the class is largely newcomers unfamiliar with the culture of the program. (Barss, 2009d, p. 10)

As this quote indicates, there are certainly some advantages to having fresh and eager faces appear each fall. However, it can also be frustrating to feel that you are starting over ‘from scratch’ every year. Of course, in many respects this is simply a fact of life for educators – it goes with the territory. However, the inclusion of the EAE framework adds an interesting perspective to the issue of permanence. While the individuals come for a time and then move on, the theatre environment and Stagecraft community *are permanent fixtures*. Moreover, the idea – close to the heart of Environmental Adult Educators – of intergenerational transmission of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (or perhaps the Stagecraft version might be Traditional Theatre Knowledge, or TTK) represents a continuous strand through the many generations of Stagecraft students.

Yesterday in class I took half the group to work on a specific project and asked a senior student, who was working on light design for an upcoming event, to take the opportunity to demonstrate to the other half of the class the basic mechanics of hanging, focusing, and shuttering lighting instruments. I recalled how just a year ago that senior student had been brand

new to the class and was being taught the same skills by a different student who has now graduated. This, in turn, brought to mind memories of this latter student five years ago as a shy grade nine volunteering in the theatre and learning from other Stagecrafters (long since departed from the school). While I hesitate to sound melodramatic, in this manner I suddenly had the sensation that I could quite literally visualize a chain of faces of fifteen years of Stagecraft students<sup>5</sup> as these skills – critical to the theatre environment – were passed on from generation to generation of students. Perhaps there is more ‘permanence’ to the Stagecraft community than meets the eye!

***“I Already Know Everything There is to be Learned.”***

On occasion, students who have been in the program a few years form the mindset that they are now the Stagecraft ‘masters’. They no longer have anything left to learn from the teacher or their fellow students and “begin to excuse themselves from training sessions” (Hernandez, 1998, p. 276) or other similar activities. This behaviour is unfortunate not only because these students short change themselves but also...because it can set a poor example to newer students. (Barss, 2009d, p. 10)

I believe the solution, at least in part, that EAE offers to this obstacle is the inclusion of the spiritual or mystical perspective. Recall that this suggests an “awareness of something greater than ourselves”(Hill & Johnson, 2000, p. 23) – a sense of awe and wonder about the vibrancy and depth of the world (of theatre). By making a purposeful decision to continually and explicitly draw students’ attention to the magic of theatre and the infinite possibilities of the theatre environment, I hope to combat the mindset that sometimes develops in senior students that there is nothing left to learn. This could involve taking class trips to professional theatres or bringing in guest speakers who have forged a career locally in the technical theatre profession. It could also incorporate offering new challenges to these senior students or asking them to

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<sup>5</sup> Although I have only taken over Stagecraft in the past two years, I have had close contact with the class since I first came to Spectrum and became involved with the school musicals.

brainstorm projects of interest such as new additions or upgrades to the theatre facility or capability. For example, this fall I suggested to two such students that most professional theatres possess a scale miniature model to be used by directors, producers, and set designers preparing for upcoming productions. The idea of constructing such a model caught their imagination, and they now spend every spare moment of class not sitting around satisfied that they “already know everything there is to be learned” (Hernandez, 1998, p. 276), but instead hunting down blueprints, taking measurements, drawing sketches, researching the construction of scale model architecture, and actually building the miniature theatre – a resource that will be enjoyed and utilized by Stagecraft students for years to come to plan and design theatrical magic together!

### ***The Traditional Perspective.***

Just as leaders may assume traditional paternalistic patterns, Hernandez (1998) explains how it is also common for the community itself to hold to the traditional dependent patterns. This can be true in Stagecraft where there occasionally are students who “take for granted their lack of involvement” (p. 276) and resist the invitation to ownership, involvement, and action. In extreme cases, some simply view Stagecraft as a ‘slack course’ or ‘easy credit’. (Barss, 2009d, p. 11)

EAE offers at least two significant perspectives on this particular obstacle. First, as in the previous obstacle, part of the answer may lie in encouraging an awareness and appreciation of the wonder of theatre. For example, it is not uncommon for students who initially enrolled in Stagecraft out of necessity (perhaps they needed a credit and Stagecraft was the only thing that fit their timetable) to then discover a lifelong passion for all things theatre! Second is EAE’s focus on starting with the lived experience of the learners instead of the preconceived requirements of the teacher. Taking these two pieces in tandem, it would seem that a vital element to combating this obstacle is to discover the interests and skills of such students and then find ways to incorporate these interests and skills into our work in the theatre in a meaningful

way. As students become involved and feel that their contribution is valued, their sense of belonging to the commitment based *Gemeinschaft* community will naturally grow and develop.

### ***Immediacy.***

Hernandez describes how people “generally look for immediate solutions. This makes it very difficult to motivate them to participate in activities focused on general, rather than specific, problems” (1998, p. 277). It is in this area that I recognise a great strength in my former colleague (the ability to stop and help students look at the big picture) and a particular weakness in myself (the tendency to focus on getting the task at hand done). (Barss, 2009d, p. 11)

It is clear that much of the current environmental degradation is due to a near sighted mindset of immediacy that looks only to short term benefits instead of long term sustainability. Therefore, the admonishment of EAE that “we are responsible for taking personal and collective action to re-create a healthy planet for all species both now and in the future” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23) offers a mindset that, if intentionally incorporated into Stagecraft, will help overcome the temptation to focus on short term issues at the exclusion of long term consequences.

An alternative (and equally valid) perspective that EAE brings to this issue is the fact that EAE encourages and celebrates *action and accomplishment* in the local environment. Therefore, while it is certainly important to understand the consequences of our actions in relation to the big picture, it is equally important – in the right circumstances – to focus on “getting the task at hand done” (Barss, 2009d, p. 11). Indeed, one of the primary underlying messages of EAE is that the best way to begin to combat the global (big picture) ecological emergency is with local (small scale) action. This mindset is also highly relevant for the next (and final) obstacle.

### ***The Fatalistic Perspective of Life.***

“Fatalism [leads people] to accept that what affects them is determined by others” (Hernandez, 1998, p. 277). Hernandez relates how fatalistic excuses for failure such as “it happened because we are poor” (p. 277) can be a significant impediment to

participation and social action. This is comparable to a similar outlook students sometimes acquire in which they view themselves as ‘only students’ or ‘just kids’ who do not have the ability or resources to bring about any kind of significant change in their community. (Barss, 2009d, p. 11)

The idea that we are too insignificant to have an impact is one of the fundamental mindsets that EAE strives to challenge and transform. Part of the strategy employed to this end is to focus on starting with “our own...locations, contexts and histories” (Clover et al., 2000, p. 23). In other words, while EAE is concerned with the global environmental crisis, it advocates that people start by taking action within their local communities. On such a scale, results are attainable and individuals can indeed have a significant impact. The implications for Stagecraft are clear: by challenging students to action within their ‘local’ theatre environment they will hopefully learn to appreciate that they do have the capacity to make a difference not only in the school setting but also in the world beyond.

### **Closing Thoughts: What Now?**

In the paper referenced above paralleling Hernandez’s work with Stagecraft, I included a discussion of the validity of this comparison. I noted that while there were some obvious differences between the Stagecraft community and Hernandez’s South American farmers, there were also some striking similarities. Interestingly, one of the *differences* I sighted was that “Hernandez is looking very specifically at adult education (often in informal settings) whereas Stagecraft deals with teenagers in a formal public school setting” (Barss, 2009d, p. 6). Given my changing perspective on the application of Adult Education within a high school setting, perhaps this is not such a big difference after all! Even more poignant to the goals of this project, however, is the following passage regarding the *similarities* between Stagecraft and the farming communities studied by Hernandez:

However, there are also some significant similarities between the communities, most notably in relation to the challenge of overcoming historical paternalistic-dependant patterns. Hernandez states that “long established patterns of social control have accustomed the people...to a dependent relationship with government ” (1998, p. 270). The argument could certainly be made that taking this quote and replacing ‘people’ with ‘students’ and ‘government’ with ‘teachers’ creates an accurate depiction of the culture in many schools and classrooms where the paternalistic teachers guide and direct the dependent students who have little or no control or input. This ‘teacher knows best’ relationship, widely accepted by students and teachers alike, “nurtures dependency rather than self-help and participation” (p. 270) in a very similar fashion to the farmers described by Hernandez. (Barss, 2009d, pp. 6-7)

The sentiments of this passage resonate strongly with the words of Beyer (quoted in the Context chapter) regarding the importance of finding “ways in which the processes of resisting the tendencies toward passivity and submergence can be invigorated, as we formulate alternative visions and practices...ones that can alter the current realities of schools and the personal, social, and cultural contexts that shape them” (2000, p. 46). As I stated earlier, it has become my goal that Stagecraft (continue to) be one of these “alternative visions and practices” (p. 46). To this end, I hope to allow the grounded theory that guides my practice in Stagecraft to continue to evolve, grow, and change, for one of the tenets of grounded theory is that it is never complete. As Gehrke & Parker (1982) explain, “it is considered a theory-in-process” (p. 5), and while the researcher “feels confident that the theory generated will be useful in application because it has arisen from examination of the situation in which it is most likely to be applied” (p. 5), it is also true that by “looking at the situation from other perspectives, [one] might well be able to modify or extend the work” (p. 5). This project, therefore, represents not a definitive solution or perfected model for the teaching of Stagecraft, but rather a work in progress as I continue to learn from day to day, month to month, and year to year the implications and applications of the theatre environment metaphor and EAE framework for the theatre space and Stagecraft community.

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