

# The Metaxic Journey of the Drama Facilitator/Inquirer

Warren Linds  
CANADA

Diving

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the beginning

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the technique,  
the process

that means

we are continuously  
exploring  
our own experiences

coming up  
for  
air

to apply these  
under/over/inter standings.....

The Air/the Water: the context we live (in) and we are  
part of in our own inter-action of spiral diving.

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A spiral revolves around a central axis. The theatrical method of *Theatre of the Oppressed* is the central axis around which everything r/evolves in my process of what Fels (1995) calls inter-standing through performative inquiry. This *guiding thread* (Arnold, 1985) keeps me on track and is a reference point throughout the spiral diving process of drama.

Grady (1996a) speaks of the need for a filtering paradigm and theoretical lens in undertaking research in drama. This ethical paradigm is a set of beliefs which enables research. I am looking at my own experience within a particular transformative drama form; I will examine that methodology in practice. The underlying paradigm comes out of the interplay and interaction between my own praxis, the methodology with whom I am community of drama teachers/practitioners with whom I am working. The more congruence there is between our educational practice, philosophy, ethics and research processes, the better.

Using the metaphor to dive into the process, what is my role as drama facilitator? Where do I fit into my own story? What are the implications for a drama process which is "spiral diving together"? Am I merely an instructor of the process—a guide, having done it myself? Or am I continuously going through a similar parallel process as facilitator?

I am diving but I am also enabling others to dive in parallel with me. I am in a state of metaxis. From the Greek *metaxi*: in the midst, betwixt, between, between-whiles, in the interval, neither good nor bad" (Liddell & Scott, 1996, p. 1115).

#### Theatre of the Oppressed

One of the hypotheses of the Theatre of the Oppressed is that knowledge acquired aesthetically is already, in itself, the beginning of a transformation (Boal, 1995, p. 109).

In *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995), Augusto Boal outlines three principles that are in every aspect of the process: osmosis, metaxis and analogic induction. In this paper, I will be looking at the implications of metaxis as I have been practising it over the past eleven years as facilitator, workshop participant and actor.

#### Metaxis

Metaxis is the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image. The participant shares and belongs to these two autonomous worlds: their reality and the image of their reality, which she herself has created (Boal, 1995, p. 43).

When participants, in the role of artists, create images of their own reality, they belong to both these worlds utterly and completely, not merely vicariously or imaginatively. This also happens with the audience and the facilitator.

The facilitator is a participant in a drama workshop with his/her peers, using all his/her senses and being present to journey with the other participants in the exploration. I am a learner too. I am not acting on the others, the participants; I am co-implicated in a process of exploration and co-evolving alongside the participants in it. I shift back and forth as facilitator-as-participant, and as participant-as-facilitator.

The task of the facilitator is to create balance, challenging without confronting. I do not know what will happen in the process. I can only create the conditions for something to happen. Within these conditions (the social, emotional, intellectual context of learning), I am sensitive to what it is like to be spiral diving.

Fels (1995) says performative inquiry enables an exploration of the "what is not known." Working in the image of reality helps us understand the reality of the image in order to see the possibilities. This everchanging process is a "suspended in-between," a place where learning occurs by what Michelle Fine (1994) calls "working the hyphens."

How would metaxis apply in an educational inquiry? Would it require looking at my own role as a "metaxic" facilitator—wherein I am simultaneously in two worlds/processes as researcher and research subject as well as facilitator and participant?

## The arts as research

If the arts in and of themselves are research, how do we explore and define what our own research methodology is?... What is the Drama Education Research paradigm (Wilkinson, 1996, pp. 31-32)?

Exploring drama as inquiry means having all the tools of drama to use in that exploration. Searching for examples of this type of research, I come across material that talks about new forms of paradigms, methodologies and methods. Little, though, is said about the arts or drama as research methodologies or designs with tools emerging from within the discipline.

The arts celebrate imagination and multiple perspectives; their form is part of their content. They teach that solving complex problems requires paying attention to wholes, not simply discrete parts; and they make not only expression but also discovery through adventure and experimentation possible. These are all qualities that will be useful in research.

Exploring the kinds of knowing that emerge through exploring drama will help to serve as a process of inquiry for other forms of educational praxis. We learn through our senses and we need to represent that learning. No! We need to feel that learning through all senses. How we think separates us from our experience (Reason, 1994), from each other and from the rhythms and patterns of the natural world; Reason asks us in our inquiry to reflect on this. Traditionally, research is approached as something separate from practice: you research practice and you apply research to practice. Any congruence with the process you are researching is accidental and/or incidental. What is the inter-play between the educative process and my research process? How do they inform one another?

## Walking together through inquiry

In 1984, I attended a training workshop on popular education methodology. One of the facilitators quoted something she had heard from an Australian aborigine social worker. Her words were, *if you have come here to free me, I don't want your help; but if in*

*some way your liberation is tied up in mine, let us walk together.* Years later, Australian educators and action researchers described to me the process of working in an aborigine teacher education program where they practised "Both Ways Learning." Here they saw learning as akin to two rivers meeting, respecting the other's rhythms and motions and intermingling as they moved together towards the sea.

Metaxic research in drama will involve the process of "walking together," a walk that affects the path I create in inter-action with others. I affect the path; I affect those I walk with; the path affects me; those I walk with affect me and the path. And I can't separate myself from the path nor those with whom I walk.

Metaxic methods of drama/research... Reflective action research Sumara and Carson (1997) outline how action research is tied to the living experiences that form various communities. In this way, research is like aesthetic practices that lead to the production of works of art. Inquiry processes are part of the complexity of researchers' lives. Looking at the research process through the prism of our own life experience as an inquirer would be more useful, they say, than simply looking at methodology as some separate and discrete series of activities.

Morwena Griffiths (1994) underlines that action research is a narrative about one's own story in a particular situation at a particular time. It requires research into one's own attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and values. Bringing together aspects of the critical, the political and the personal, Griffiths proposes that the process should include critical autobiography through autobiographical writing around individual experience, and reflective practice around the relationship of theory and action.

The dramatic process is a medium for reflective action. Participants are engaged inside a metaxic process that explores the slash or gap in me/not-me, operating in one body in the two autonomous worlds of actor/character. Varela et al. (1991) call this process "groundlessness," which disrupts the taken-for-granted world. Drama could serve as a useful process to engage

Drama enables practitioners/researchers to share practical stories and develop holistic ways of relating to their work, to look for patterns and discuss new methods that practitioners/researchers can try out. Ultimately, the test of research is whether it helps improve practice by enabling reflection (Fay, 1988).

The literature indicates that there is a need for drama/theatre research by drama practitioners and that arts-based research should be used more in the research process (Somers, 1996; Taylor, 1996). This leaves me with many challenges:

- What is the nature of the drama methodology that is being used and researched?
- How would we re-present/write the drama as research process?
- What is the nature of drama-based research and be informed by drama inquiry?
- How can we ensure that our educational paradigm fits our research paradigm?
- What other questions arise out of this reformulation of theory It's hard to conceive of answers to these questions of the challenge of changing how I view new forms of thinking (about research) and practice (of doing research in new ways). My research is embedded in the drama process I am part of, and my metaxic drama praxis will change in that living process.

As we return to the (spiral) diving (platform)...

The production of various forms of image, text, gesture, and talk—as well as their ordered presentation and efforts to influence their mediation—have to be understood as integral to the possibility of either the reproduction or transformation of any social order. In other words, cultural practices matter, and the modes and conditions of their production deserve close attention (Simon, 1992, p. 37).

In the process, people not only reproduce their views of the

participants in autobiographical action research about their own roles in a drama workshop process. Reflective inquiry occurs through collective drama experiences that build from individual to collective knowledge, group analysis of commonalities and differences, and the development of strategies for action. I have seen many applications of this process which builds through description (what we experience), interpretation (sharing and analyzing), verification (the results of this knowledge "fitting" individuals) and evaluation (leading to action).

Sharon Grady (1996b) recently critiqued the inquiry process she undertook as part of her doctoral research. She proposes another way of conceiving interviews by integrating them as an intermediary step (through, for example, written journals) which involve collecting participants' ideas, comments and statements to be later "enacted" and interrogated through the workshop experience. The resulting deepened understanding links the surface and below the surface in a complex process that serves both drama and research.

Creery (1991) found that reflection through educational drama is the arrangement of multifaceted ways of coming into knowledge. Drama opens up a space for exploration among individuals, creating a middle ground between the image of the reality and the reality of the image. In this way drama is a process where, as Maturana and Varela (1992), state that every reflection brings forth a world.

#### Drama as narrative

Drama tells stories. In its creation, there is a process of storying: engaging in drama, we engage in an exploration and inquiry into people's storied lives. Narrative complexity is developed by creating distance from a story through a reading back. As Reason and Hawkins (1988) say,

One way of expressing meaning is to play around with who is the storyteller, and who is the audience; and also with the variety of voices, roles and dramatic style which the storyteller can adopt (p. 86).

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world, they are also engaged in producing a new view of the world. A new kind of knowledge emerges from this process of inter-action between the observing-I, the I-in-situ and the not-I, the other. We begin to see everything in new ways. Thinking of learning as a quest for knowledge means that spiral diving can not result in predetermined outcomes. Under water, things look differently. Pretty stones I have brought up to the surface look plain in the air. How light refracts underwater means that even if I see something from above, I find it difficult to grasp. The knowledge I gain from any process will change in its application.

Drama creates new versions of reality incorporating stories to be explored in the subjective at a distance away from our everyday experience.

Which returns me to the idea of the spiral dive.

At times I will see those I work with coming up for air, applying what they learn.

At other times I won't.

And, at other times,

the beauty of the dive will be all that remains.



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