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The Voice of Ritual:  
An Exploration Teaching Body and Breath  
Using the Pedagogical Principles of  
Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy  
with an emphasis in Performance and Voice and Speech from  
Virginia Commonwealth University

by

JACQUELYNN RAE CAMDEN  
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

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Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
August 10, 2011

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## Acknowledgements

I would first like to give a big shout out to the Universe for meeting me more than halfway. It's only by the grace of the god/goddess that I am still standing today.

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And to the "Golden Triangle" -

Dr. Noreen Barnes, for inciting the scholar within me to come out and play and allowing me to finish this work on my own time. You make pedagogy look good.

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*"I can but no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks." - William Shakespeare*

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Parker Nicole Gay,  
whose presence in this world inspires me in ways I never thought possible.

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### **Glossary of Terms and Definitions**

ASHE' ASHE'	A West African saying which means essentially, "I agree with my whole heart"
RPDWAC	Ritual Poetic Drama Within the African Continuum
SPECTATOR	This term is used in RPDWAC in order to describe the passive indifference of a person when merely watching an event, rather than witnessing. Students are asked to refrain from being a spectator within the studio as a spectator has no emotional involvement in what they are seeing.
WITNESS	This term is used in RPDWAC in order to describe the active and emotional involvement of fellow participants within the studio as they observe one another's journey and process; oftentimes the analogy of someone "witnessing" an accident is used to explain this term, a witness has a responsibility

## Abstract

### THE VOICE OF RITUAL: AN EXPLORATION TEACHING BODY AND BREATH USING THE PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF RITUAL POETIC DRAMA WITHIN THE AFRICAN CONTINUUM

By Jacquelynn Rae Camden, MFA Candidate

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts Theatre Pedagogy: Voice and Speech & Ritual Poetic Drama Within the African Continuum at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2012

Major Director: Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, Theatre

The focus of my undergraduate training and the concentration of my graduate work have been specifically in two areas: Ritual Poetic Drama Within the African Continuum under the tutelage of Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, and Voice and Speech with Janet B. Rodgers. I spent my undergraduate years learning and absorbing the material and philosophy of both Rodgers and Pettiford-Wates, and in my first year of graduate work, I was able to study their teaching principles and methodologies within the classroom as a teaching assistant. I was also fortunate enough to study the teaching principles of fellow graduate students within both concentrations: Ritual Poetic Drama Within the African Continuum and Voice & Speech.

It is my intention with this thesis, to explain how and why I decided to integrate some of the teaching methodologies of RPDWTAC into the Second Year Voice & Speech course I taught in the fall of 2010, which focused on body and breath. It is my belief that these particular practices of Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum as applied to the Junior Acting Studio are also beneficial in the pedagogy of Voice and Speech in the classroom, because such practices create an environment that encourages the building of an artistic community, personal responsibility, and the freeing of the artist's body, mind, and spirit, resulting in the freeing of the voice as well.







## **How It Was She Came to Teach**

I was not the model student, and therefore an unlikely candidate for the Pedagogy program I now intend to complete. However, I believe there lies an important lesson in my personal struggle with the western institution of education, which has strengthened my desire to teach others. I now believe that my problems were not a rebellion against authority in general (an issue with which I was often diagnosed), but rather a revolt against the dichotomous paradigm with which most authority asserted their knowledge. The western system that we are accustomed to in the United States is one that stresses right vs. wrong, black vs. white, strong vs. weak and often leaves no room for the “creative gray area” in which most of our lives and experiences actually lie. I recall vividly being the one in the classroom/ church/theatre asking “but why?” when told an answer was undoubtedly the “right” one. “What about this... and this..?”. I was missing a piece of the puzzle when it came to education/spirituality/art (all of which were very separate spheres of course) and my own life. It seemed the “right” answer constantly eluded me and even when given to me by authorities on the subject, it never felt “right” at all. This disconnection with my own grasp of reality, which I had learned was definable by someone else’s terms, left me completely unwilling to “learn” at all.

I must also add that the core of my education was within the context of a fundamental Christian setting, in a small town in Virginia, by mostly white people. My preliminary years of schooling were within a cultural context that said although I desired to be a pastor, I was told I could not because I was a woman. Instead I was encouraged to be a missionary and “cheered up” by the prospect that maybe one day I could become a pastor’s wife. After one horrid year at the largest evangelical Christian university in America, I arrived in Richmond, VA and applied to Virginia Commonwealth University’s Theatre Department. During the course of these past six years, I encountered, resisted, failed at, attempted, accepted, embraced, practiced and taught the methodologies of Ritual Poetic Drama Within the African Continuum. It is an understatement to say that these methodologies assisted in my learning process. These methodologies were essential in my ability to learn at all. I received a re-education in how to learn. It is because of, and with this newfound ability, that I found a passion for teaching. It is my hope to convey to students the joy of learning in an environment which encourages questions and does not assume to know all the answers. It is my hope to pass on this educational/artistic/spiritual reawakening that I have experienced, in order to encourage and uplift other “unlikely candidates”.

## The Continuum

*It is my intention to explicate the use of Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum and to examine why it should be used in a collective movement toward social change in the theatre, the dramatic arts industry and the mass media network. In addition, I believe, it must be used as part of a holistic training system for the dramatic artist. Artists of the dramatic form adequately empowered by the collective energy of their artistic genius (by way of the use of Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum) would be a most powerful and effective remedy to the social decay of our community and our world. - Re-vision: Towards a Re-Connection of the Dramatic Artist with the African Origins of the Dramatic Form by Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates (1992)*

In her dissertation, Pettiford-Wates discusses in depth how she has successfully used RPDWAC in order to devise collaborative theatre with her students. These works are created with the intention to challenge the status quo and invoke transformation for all involved, the participants (the actors) and witnesses (the audience). While I have worked with her in many different capacities, the bulk of my work with Dr. Pettiford-Wates has been in the classroom setting, most specifically in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year Acting Studio at Virginia Commonwealth University. There are certain practices of RPDWAC, which she describes in her dissertation, that are specifically used in devising new works. Not all of these are necessarily employed within the Acting Studio. Therefore, there are some tenets/practices of RPDWAC discussed within her thesis, which I did not employ within my 2nd year Voice, and Speech class. It is **not** my intention in this thesis to explicate the use of RPDWAC as it pertains to creating new works, nor is it to explain the process by which it is used within

the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Acting Studio; rather it is to explain how some of the basic methodologies of this pedagogy have benefited my 2<sup>nd</sup> year voice and speech students within the classroom setting. I would also like to add that I have used these methodologies in all the classes I have taught, even those courses which have little to do with theatre or performance. Throughout this thesis, I will be referring often to the differences between the western model and the African model used within the classroom. The following is a list of said differences, which was put together by a class of Pettiford-Wates' students and appears in her dissertation:

From "A Re-Vision: Toward a Re-Connection of the Dramatic Artist with the African Origins of the Dramatic Form" by Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates (182)

#### Traditional or Western/Western European Dramatic Form

1. Search for "rightness"/the answer or "result"
2. Technical training is emphasized
3. A dichotomous orientation either/or
4. Dividing the actor into components Voice/Speech/ Movement
5. Competition based
6. Tension is expected and accepted
7. Lecture as a primary source of disseminating information

If we compare and contrast this to:

#### The Use of Ritual Poetic Drama in the African Continuum

1. Search for origins
2. Personal growth emphasized as intent of the process
3. Risks without judgment or evaluation
4. Acknowledgement of commonalities
5. Bonding with the rest of the community
6. Improvisation as a means of Transformation
7. Spirituality rather than a dogmatic didactic paradigm
8. Homecoming/familiar/family encouraged as an integral part of the artist creative self; if the artist is to be complete and fully functioning within the community

I would like to highlight what I believe to be two very important parts of the quote at the beginning of this chapter. These ideas, in my opinion, are what make this pedagogy successful in any classroom setting. The first is that Pettiford-Wates emphasizes the use of RPDWAC as a “holistic training system for the dramatic artist”. Within the westernized model, the artist is generally categorized as to their specialty within the performance arena: Actor/Dancer/Singer. Very few artists will claim that they are indeed all three, or the elusive “triple threat”. Understandably, this kind of marker is needed in order to process hundreds of performers through a cattle call, or to sort through thousands of resumes for exactly what a casting agent may need. Unfortunately, this kind of separation of expertise adds to the idea that the actor is comprised of distinctly different parts. It is this model that has led to the “talking heads”, actors whose speech is eloquent, yet their bodies completely disengaged. Or those performers who are trained heavily in dance, particularly in western forms, such as ballet, who have cut off their breath support by practicing “sucking in” and shallow breathing and are unable to speak heightened text to its fullest. Or those beloved musical theatre trained artists, such as myself, whose penchant for showing everything REALLY BIG for the back row, have lost their ability to portray the subtlety of human emotions onstage. This disconnect is addressed within RPDWTAC with the counter model- in this pedagogy, there is a shift from “separate” to “whole”. The artists who train holistically are no longer forced to categorize themselves; instead they are encouraged to explore themselves. Dr.Tawnya Pettiford-Wates posits, “If you can talk, you can sing.” “If you can walk, you can dance.” It is within this shift in thinking that I have witnessed self-defined “non-dancers” perform breathtaking movement pieces. It is within

this model that I have seen the birth of well-rounded and self-defining artists, who are no longer scared to make a seemingly “imperfect” sound or movement on the stage.

This brings us to the second point that I would like to expound upon, where Pettiford-Wates speaks of artists of the dramatic form adequately empowered by the collective energy of their “artistic genius”. What does this mean? This principle eluded me for years during my training, and I believe it only started to reveal itself once I was in the teacher/director/facilitator chair. As most artists will tell you, it is so much easier to understand creative principles while watching others. Unfortunately, artists are usually unable to see themselves with the kind of critical eye that others are able to see. Which is why I believe effective performance courses are taught in a group setting, training performers to develop their own critical eye for the art of performance. While this model has, and I believe will, continue to be the most effective, oftentimes it is this process of critique that will ultimately cause the artist to develop self-doubt and a constant need for immediate gratification. This instant approval may come in the form of the audience’s laughter or applause, or it may be a director’s shout of, “Well done!” or a teacher’s “A+!” on an assignment. Those artists who are naturally gifted, (or maybe just know how to use their limited tools well- such as crying on cue), begin to expect this type of instant praise. They begin to look to it as proof of their ability. An example would be if in rehearsal, Sally cries on cue after Tom slams the door at the end of their scene. The director then tells Sally, “OH! Perfect, Sally! I loved what you did there!” As they rehearse it again, Sally feels the same emotion, but tears don’t actually fall. This time there is more internal sadness. Afterwards, the director says nothing. At this point Sally notices the lack of praise. From this day on, Sally will force herself to cry as Tom slams the door whether she feels the emotion or not.

She has lost connection to her process and is instead going to make sure she can manufacture the product, which will in turn get her what she needs: approval.

As a teacher/director/ adjudicator, it is rather rare to sit through an audition in which you don't encounter young artists who end a piece or song with a metaphorical "question mark". That moment at the end, when they should stay in the moment or finish with certainty, but instead drop out and giggle, or look to you and smile with raised eyebrows. That moment when they are asking you with their body, "Was that OK??" Did I do all right??!" or "Was that too over the top?" "Do you want to give me some direction??"

This was my initial struggle with RPDWAC- the lack of praise and the lack of implicit direction. During acting courses before, it had been fairly easy to slide through with my A's. I had a strong voice and a nice stage presence, but most of all I could follow directions! I was a musical theatre baby and my motto was, "What do you want to see? How high do you need me to jump?!" I was a fast learner and I gave directors exactly what they wanted, when they wanted. "Cry right there? GOT IT!" Like most young artists, I was overly eager to please when it came to performance and the aim was to get my instant gratification. So when I got to my junior year and encountered the paradigm shift, I was bewildered. There was no constant praise in this classroom and there was no "right" or "wrong" way. Instead, the students are asked to reflect on their own process and discuss with the community the choices they made and how they worked or didn't work. Pettiford-Wates always asks that the students not make statements during their critique such as, "That was really good." These kinds of statements are not constructive. She asks instead that the review be specific. Rather than saying, "That part where you got on the elevator was good", she would

encourage a student to say, “It really worked for me when you set up your environment by pushing the button for the elevator and then looking up at the display to see what floor it was on.” There was also a discussion within the trusted community about what choices could have worked better, such as suggestions for how to improve certain choices. Instead of saying, “You didn’t look like you were drunk”, a constructive remark could be, “It might work better if you are concentrating more on trying to stand straight and act sober, than to act too sloppy drunk.” This kind of critique builds the skills of all of the artists within the community in how to give and receive constructive criticism. Rather than placing the responsibility of all critical response on the facilitator, the students are entrusted with the task of offering insight to their peers, which also builds their confidence to make smart acting choices. Pettiford-Wates always places an emphasis on creating “smart actors”, those actors who can self-reflect and offer strong choices for a director to work with, rather than waiting around to be told what to do. This model also encourages artists to be honest with themselves and their community about their own work ethic. Oftentimes, a student will disclose that they didn’t work notes that were given to them or that they had just rehearsed right before class. This honesty is appreciated and also reinforces the notion that it takes constant work in order to progress. It is duly noted when an artist has put in a lot of work from week to week. Their hard work is made visible to the community through their progress at each Studio session. Without the praise I began to falter. I stopped working on my monologues because I didn’t have an end “result” to work towards. I was not used to being asked to interrogate my own choices, nor was I used to receiving critique from my peers, and I desperately wanted the teacher to tell me what to do! I had no personal process by which I worked; only the ability to regurgitate what people said was “good”.

Without someone to validate my work or direct my every move, I was at a standstill. I ended up failing Junior Acting Studio that year. At the time I would blame Dr. Pettiford-Wates, but today I can honestly say that it was the best thing that she could have done for me. She often says, “Unhealthy artists make unhealthy art.” It is my belief that those artists that search for constant assurance of their craft, (like I was used to doing), are in an unhealthy place. When she speaks of artists being “empowered by the collective energy of their own artistic genius”, I believe she is referring to self-validating performers. It is through performance courses that focus on the actor’s process instead of delivering a product, in which students begin to see the evidence of their fellow artists creative brilliance. Though it is difficult to see within the self, these student artists start to realize the genius that lies within their peer artists- and that is a collective energy. Finally, they realize that they too hold this artistic genius inside of them. At long last, there is an artist who knows when they have done well without anyone else’s praise or confirmation. This, in my opinion, is the most transformational principle of RPDWAC and one that gives students, especially those in the performing arena, a newfound purpose, joy, and confidence in their work.

## **The Course**

The particular course that I intend to discuss in this thesis is the first semester of the Second Year Stage Voice and Speech class, which I taught in the Fall Semester of 2010 at Virginia Commonwealth University. This course is labeled in the course catalog as THEA 201 and is the precursor to THEA 202, which is taught in the following Spring Semester. This continuous course is designed specifically for BFA Performance majors within the Theatre VCU department and the completion of this course with a grade of B or above is required for their entry into their Third Year as BFA Performance majors, unless otherwise authorized by the head of performance. The first semester of the Second Year Stage Voice & Speech course concentrates on the body and breath, while the second semester is a study in the International Phonetics Alphabet and character voices.

The description of this course as described in the syllabus is as follows:

- This is an introductory course in vocal artistry for the actor. Focus will be on body/breath/voice connection as well as on vocal production, vocal anatomy, optimal use of resonators, focusing of vocal tones, increasing vocal range, projection and articulation. Work will be applied to texts in studio sessions. Healthy voice and body care will be addressed during the lectures on Wednesday.

The objectives of this course as described in the syllabus are as follows:

- To free the body of habitual tensions
- To rediscover natural breath impulses

- To develop diaphragmatic release and support of breath
- To expand breath capacity along with core strength
- To understand the anatomical structure of the voice and how it functions
- To develop an ear and vocabulary for evaluating and discussing your own vocal practices
- To clear the path for Career Speech by learning to recognize and then develop ways to free yourself vocal "isms"
- To develop resonance, range and focus of vocal tones
- To begin to strengthen the muscles used for articulation of sounds
- To begin to strengthen articulation skills
- To heighten aural and kin-esthetic awareness of vowels, diphthongs and consonants
- To learn to practice healthy usage of body and voice on-stage and off
- To understand your own voice/breath/body connection and it's application to text and acting
- To devise a personal warm-up incorporating breath, body and voice
- To connect the work in this class with daily life, acting, rehearsal, auditions
- To learn the importance of daily practice

The required texts for this course as listed in the syllabus are as follows:

- *The Actor Speaks* by Patsy Rodenburg
- *The Second Circle* by Patsy Rodenburg

In the fall of 2010 there were three sections of the THEA 201 course offered, which was overseen by, Janet B. Rodgers, the director of the Voice and Speech Pedagogy Graduate Students and the Head of Undergraduate Performance within the VCU Theatre Department. While Rodgers was very much involved in preparing me for teaching this course, she was not present in the classroom. I was the instructor for this course; so all lesson plans,

evaluations and grading were my sole responsibility. I was fortunate enough to have a Teaching Assistant assigned to me, Louise Cassini Hollis. Louise attended all of the Tuesday and Thursday segments of the course and was involved in all of our group discussions before and after class. She was there to lead class if/when I was unable to do so and helpful correcting postures and form during exercises and evaluating the students' progress. I consider myself very lucky to have had Louise as my teaching assistant, as her energy and approach to the work was supportive of the process. It is important to note that Louise was very much involved in the classroom as a witness rather than a spectator. She did not just sit off to the side and observe. Instead, she was present within the circle at the beginning and ending of class and always available to the students for questions or additional feedback.

THEA 201 is a one semester, 15-week course worth 3 credits within a curriculum that requires 120 credits in order to graduate. These 3 credits are broken up into two 50-minute studio sessions and one 50-minute lecture/lab. The studio section of this course that I taught met on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:30am to 12:20pm. The lecture/lab included all three sections of the Second Year Stage Voice & Speech students and met on Wednesday from 10:00am to 10:50am. These labs focused on vocal health and anatomy education as well as serving to bring together the three sections for an hour each week. While I attended and assisted most all of the lecture/lab segments, Rodgers was the primary instructor, therefore, this thesis will concentrate particularly on the studio portion of this course.

There were 15 students in my section of THEA 201. My preliminary roster implied that I was to have a course of 12, a smaller and even number of students. However, on the first day of class three students were “sent over” to me from other sections for various reasons. I include this information because as a believer in the process from beginning to end, I do not believe that these additions were mere coincidences. In my opinion, these three students were meant to be a part of this course. Looking back, these three students were integral to my learning process and growth as a teacher because they provided more of a challenge to me than the other students in the studio class. I do not mean this in a negative way. These were challenges, which I needed as a teacher.

For the purpose of this thesis and my desire to protect the process of these students, I will not use their real names when recounting class-room experiences. An essential part of RPDWAC is a fundamental trust within the community. These students often exposed parts of themselves within the classroom, (opinions, stories, and actions), that they expected and believed would remain confidential. Therefore, as I would expect my students to keep the process of their community sacred, I too feel the need to protect the integrity of the process. For the remainder of this thesis, I will refer to the students with the letters of the Alphabet- (Student A – Student O). These are in not in any kind of alphabetical “order”; there is no “code” to break. These alphabetical assignments are completely random, as are any gender assignments. Any references to him or her are most likely attributed to my own personal whims rather than to the actual gender of the student being discussed.

The first day of the studio portion of this course began on Thursday, August 26, 2010 and ended on Thursday, December 9, 2010. The grading of the course was determined by a combination of these four areas: Attendance, Personal Improvement, Written Assignments and the Final Exam.

The attendance policy, described in the THEA 201 syllabus is not only the policy for this specific course, but for all BFA Theatre Performance courses at VCU. The policy states “the student is allowed no more than two absences from this class during the course of the 15 week semester. With a third absence, the final grade will automatically drop one full letter grade and will continue to drop one letter grade with each additional absence. Attendance at the lectures and assigned tutorials is considered as class attendance”. It is also important to note that two instances of arriving to class late or leaving class early without an excuse equals an absence. Nine out of the fifteen students had perfect attendance. During the duration of the course, there was only one student who exceeded the number of absences allowed. Student “G” missed two studios and one lecture/lab.

The term “Personal Improvement” is used because this course is designed in order to foster the growth of the students without the pressures of competition. The grade assigned to students was not a comparative analysis, but rather an individual assessment of their improvement over the course of the semester. Fourteen out of fifteen students received an “A” for personal improvement. Student “G” received a “C”.

There were thirteen written assignments for this class. Ten of these were written responses to readings of the required texts. One of these assignments was simply a check of their personal journal, which they were required to keep and write in, preferably after class

on studio days, expressing their thoughts and what they learned/didn't learn that day. I must add that this journal was their own private writing and while I did a check to make sure that they were indeed writing, I did not invade their privacy by reading these journals. At the end of the semester, I asked the students who were comfortable with me reading their journals to allow me to use them in for this thesis. Only two students allowed me access to their journals- Student "C" and Student "K". The last two written assignments were a personal reflection paper examining their own progress over the course of the semester and a write up of their individual personal warm ups. Eleven out of fifteen students received an "A" for written assignments. Students "M", "J" & "E" received "B's" and Student "G" received an "F". Student "G" failed to turn in 7 out of 13 assignments.

The class culminated in an exam, which was comprised of two parts. The first part of the exam was evaluated in the studio and consisted of an individual warm up prepared by the student that included all the necessary steps to prepare the voice for use on stage. The students were expected to lead the class with their warm up and receive feedback from the other students on its effectiveness. The second part of the exam was a group performance of the poem *On the Pulse of Morning* by Maya Angelou. Each of the three sections of THEA 201 was given a segment of this poem and all came together in the last lecture/lab class to reveal their creation.

It is important that I express my utmost disdain for using a grading system in a class such as this one. While the institution within which I was teaching demanded such adjudication, I made it a point to reiterate to the students that their final grades in my opinion were inconsequential. In fact, although my policy in the syllabus for late papers and

my manner towards lateness were both intolerant, I did in fact accept late papers up until the last day of class if a student asked for the opportunity to do so. While some may find this practice too lenient, as a student myself, I understand that a late paper still reflects learning and this was my ultimate aim for this class. I also believe meeting deadlines is an important value, however for Second Year students it was more important to me that they did the readings and reflected upon them. At the conclusion of the course I was asked to submit letter grades for my THEA 201 class. All students excluding one earned an "A" in this course. Student "G" was the exception and received a "C". While I offered to let him turn them in late, this student dismissed my proposal and was missing over half of his written assignments on the last day of class. In addition, this student also missed more than the allowed amount of classes according to the attendance policy and never offered any kind of excuse. While these are reasons enough for his final grade, the ultimate decision in this grading had to do with this student's lack of personal growth over the course of the semester. It seemed that Student "G" was overly confident to a fault, believing himself to already possess the vocal prowess to gain a high grade in the course. While Student "G" was indeed naturally gifted vocally, his lack of interest in training stunted his personal growth in the long run.

## **The Circles**

One of the fundamental practices that differentiate the African model from the western model of the dramatic form is found in its cyclical rather than linear nature. Pettiford-Wates explains in her dissertation how this linear model is so deeply ingrained in the American psyche and can ultimately be one of the major hindrances to a student's trust in the RPDWAC model:

As I began to work with theatre/drama students in the use of Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum, the most difficult obstacle to making a steady progress toward actualizing the use of this form in their creative process was the inability (at times) to let go of the linear thought process. The influence of 'Greek tragedy' and the legacy of the 'well-made-play' hung around the theatre like some familiar ghosts. These elements, while being prominent in the western/western European dramatic form, are virtually absent from the African origins of drama. (Pettiford-Wates, 181)

While Pettiford-Wates is referring to a process of devising theatre, this principle remains true within the classroom as well. In the linear way of thinking, one expects to start at point A and arrive at point B. In this model students expect that the instructor of

the course will give them the exact location of both points and a direct path to follow in order to make the trip between the two. In other words, students working within a linear/western model expect a clear-cut syllabus that outlines the exact specifications of each assignment. They want to know what point needs to be hit and when, and usually expect precise instructions on how to do so.

Pettiford-Wates often describes coming into her Junior Acting Studio as a paradigm shift. The students are assured that their previous ways of working (within the western model) are absolutely valid and very useful, AND that they are being asked to put that way of working aside and focus on this new model (the African model). She often describes the actor as having a “toolbox” from which they can pull whatever tools they need for any acting challenges they face. Neither the western nor the African model is the “right” or “wrong” way; they are two very different tools. Just because you wouldn’t use a hammer to tighten a screw doesn’t mean that the hammer has no use! Some students find the paradigm shift to be easy, however many students cling steadfastly onto the western model because it is all they have known and is therefore considered safe.

The desire to know particulars whilst devising theatre has to do with the performers being eager to know what the final product will be or look like. For the student within the classroom, this final product is replaced by the attainment of the almighty grade. It was my goal to instill in this class the importance of learning rather than getting a certain grade and to focus on process rather than product. In her reflection analysis at the end of the year, Student “E” explains her gradual acceptance of the importance of process:

Like I said, my speaking habits have greatly improved in my opinion, but this was not easily done. I really struggled at the beginning of the semester. I was having trouble grasping the different levels of range and how to breathe properly; especially the latter. When it was explained to me how I should be breathing through to the bottom of my body it just didn't make sense for some reason. I heard the words but did not comprehend them almost like someone was speaking another language to me. Sadly, I cannot remember the exact moment that it all clicked for me, or the moment when I finally understood. As far as I know I just woke up one morning and was finally doing it correctly. This brings me to a major realization I had over the semester, which was to trust in the process of voice and speech work. I will never see immediate overnight results in my breath and body work but as I do my work consistently over time the secrets shall reveal themselves to me. I still have a lot of work to do on my voice and body in general. In all actuality I won't ever be done, but such is the way of things in the world of acting. There is no such thing as perfection, only growth. I have no idea what I am going to learn next in the second semester of Voice and Speech but at least I have the advantage of going into that class with an open mind for the subject and wisdom enough to know to be patient with the work and most of all with myself. (Student E)

Not by coincidence, many forms of the circle found their way into the classroom. A practice that is exercised within Pettiford-Wates Junior Acting Studio is to circle up the class at the beginning and at the conclusion of each class. I have nicknamed this particular ritual the "Alpha and Omega" Circles. As the students came in, they were expected to start

warming themselves up in whatever manner they wished. At 11:30am I would usually move to the center of the room and the class would come together in our Alpha circle. Oftentimes, this would be a time for everyone to make eye contact and acknowledge each other and the space. This was also a time to remind the class to drop into neutral, to unfold their arms, unlock their knees, relax their jaws and lengthen their spines. Many of my THEA 201 students were coming directly from another course and it became clear to me that they were bringing the energy of their previous class into our space. This circle was an opportunity to remind them to leave any scattered or negative energy. At times, when the negative energy was palpable, we would metaphorically “push” it out of our circle and allow for new and positive energy. Every class also began with asking the circle if anyone had any answers. This is also a ritual that I learned from Pettiford-Wates’ Junior Acting Studio. The first day that I introduced the Alpha circle, I explained that although I was the instructor for the course, I was not the only one who contained answers. I acknowledged that they all had answers as well and that the learning process was an inclusive one and I expected to learn from them, just as they expected to learn from me. This practice has become a favorite of mine because it is a great way to not only give a sense of responsibility and ownership to the class, but also allows them to share their learning process with one another which in turn builds a sense of community. From a voice and speech perspective, this practice also gives students a sense of vocal self-validation as they express their answers. The voices within this alpha/answer circle were usually strong and direct, without falter. When someone stated an answer, there was usually no hint of it being a question. Oftentimes, answers would incite questions as well. In the beginning of the semester, these questions were always directed to me, the instructor. While I would

attempt to answer some questions, I also made a practice of opening up the question to the whole group. As the semester went on, I found that these questions began being directed towards the circle as a whole rather than just to me. Those asking the questions were recognizing the wisdom of their peers and this led to productive discussions among the students, building their sense of community and confidence in their ability to share wisdom with one another. Accordingly, each class commenced with gathering into the “Omega” circle. This was a debriefing of sorts and allowed the students to discuss anything that they needed to before we ended our studio time. After particularly emotional classes, I would ask that everyone say at least a word or two about their experience. After anyone who felt the need to speak had their chance we used a ritual (also gleaned from Pettiford-Wates), which would end the Omega circle by all of us raising our hands. I would say, “Go and be satisfied”, to which the class would respond, “Ashe, Ashe.” Then we would all clap and studio would officially be over. Having these opening and closing rituals are imperative in the RPDWAC process. These rituals give the class a sense of community and togetherness that is necessary for collaborative learning. It was important that each student have the opportunity to speak his or her truths to the others in the course in an environment that was open and non-judgmental. Within a model that is oftentimes different from what they are used to, these opening and closing rituals give the students a constant.

## **Second Circle**

One of the required texts for this course is a book called The Second Circle: How to Use Positive Energy for Success in Every Situation by Patsy Rodenburg. This book was introduced to me by my mentor and Head of Graduate Voice and Speech, Janet B. Rodgers, who also uses this text when teaching the THEA 201 course. Although this book is not designed specifically for an introductory speech course like many other texts, (such as the other required reading for this course, The Actor Speaks, also by Patsy Rodenburg), I found this book and its practices to have an amazingly positive effect on the progression of my students. Although Rodenburg expands her use of second circle energy beyond the classroom, this book directly discusses how living within first, second and third circle energies affect the body and the breath. Within a course that focuses on those two aspects, this text lends great insight into the connection between the body and breath, and its impact on the vocal instrument. I also found that the environment created by the use of The Second Circle within the classroom did well to compliment the concurrently applied methodologies of RPDWAC.

In her book, Rodenburg explains that there are three basic Circles of Energy, which describe how human energy moves. She labels them as First Circle, Second Circle and Third Circle Energy. She poses that these different Circles of Energy affect a persons body, breath,

voice, which ultimately influence how they listen, think and feel. According to Rodenburg, being able to access all three Circles of Energy is important for everyday activities and most people shift through these different Circles with speed and ease during their daily routines. However, despite the ability to shift through these different Circles, she contends that most people have a habitual Circle in which they choose to live. In her book, she illustrates the aspects of all three Circles and how to attain a habit of Second Circle Energy, or a natural state of presence.

There were many exercises that I led the Second Year Voice and Speech students through in order to share with them the affect of their energy upon their bodies and breath. The exercises described within this thesis are those that I have created by using the exercises and techniques I myself have experienced as a student under Janet Rodgers and exercises that I have witnessed as a Teaching Assistant in the THEA 201 classroom of Olisa Enrico-Johnson. It is through these experiences that I have come to the opinion that it is more effective to guide students through physical and mental changes primarily in order to allow them to discover the breaths and voices inherent in each Circle of Energy.

First, Second & Third Circle Energy Exercise:

After a sufficient warm up, the students are asked to start walking the room in no specific pattern at a pace of 5 out of 10. They are instructed to acknowledge one another, with a verbal "hello". In order to introduce First Circle, they are instructed to start focusing their attention inward. They are told to let their chests collapse and their shoulders round down; their eyes are also focused downward, not making contact with others. They are no longer sending any energy out, but instead are to imagine sucking all energy into themselves. They

are asked to notice how this affects their breath and their body movements. They are then once again instructed to acknowledge one another with some kind of verbal greeting. They are told that this is First Circle Energy. (This state of First Circle Energy usually manifests itself in the body with a slower pace of movement that is limited and takes up as little room as possible. The breath slows as well and also becomes shallow so that the vocal “hello” is usually inaudible, muffled, or mumbled.) From First Circle, I give them a few physical adjustments in order to shift into Third Circle. They are asked to shift their shoulders high and back, and let their chests puff out. They are to imagine that their chest is their armor between themselves and the world. They are told to lift their heads high and to send all their energy up and out, over the tops of their peers’ heads. After a few moments, they are again directed to acknowledge others with a verbal greeting. They are told that this is Third Circle Energy. (This state of Third Circle Energy manifests itself in the body by speeding up the pace of movement and taking up more room with the chest and arms. **Caution: This can cause physical confrontations, as the students may start to bump into each other as they plow through the room and the Third Circle Energy creates tension in the neck and a breathing pattern that can manifest as anger rather quickly.** As the breath speeds up it may remain shallow or become excessively deep. This Circle also creates excess tension in the jaw, which in turn creates vocal changes that usually result in verbal greetings that are clipped and/or overly loud, not directed anywhere specific. In order to move the students into Second Circle, the first thing I ask is that they begin to relax their jaw and tongue, and then to relax the shoulders and chest. They are to imagine that their energy is emanating from the chest area or the “heart chakra” and are to start making eye contact with their peers again. They are told to give and receive equal energy with their

classmates. They are told that this is Second Circle Energy. (In Second Circle, the body is in a neutral stance, not taking up too much or too little space. The breath is even and relaxed and the vocal greetings are clear and genuine. The students are honestly acknowledging one another.) After introducing the Three Circles, I then start to move back through them again in order to allow them to experience the shifts again. This time, I do not give many vocal cues- I simply call out which Circle they should be in. After this, I bring the students back into Second Circle and ask them to meet eyes with someone and partner up. They are to face their partner and actively engage that person in Second Circle Energy, in what Enrico-Johnson terms, “the care bear stare”. (This part of the exercise may result in some giggles as students, especially those who usually live in First and Third Circle, may be uncomfortable with the full disclosure they experience or are overwhelmed with the joy of giving and receiving open and honest energy with another person.) I then go around the room and label one of the partners A & one of them B. Partner A is then asked to go into First Circle as Partner B stays in Second Circle. Then Partner B is told to shift into Third Circle. Finally Partner A is asked to shift into Second Circle as Partner B simultaneously shifts into First Circle. Then Partner A shifts into Third Circle. Finally both A and B come back to Second Circle with one another. (This gives the students perspectives on how each Circle of Energy affects the others, since the core exercise only allows the students to see how a group of people interacts when operating within the same Circle of Energy. Many students spoke at the end of this exercise in the Omega Circle about how they realized that people in First Circle suck the energy out of someone in Second Circle.) As both partners come back into Second Circle, they are again asked to start moving through the room and interacting with the whole class. Finally, I ask them to stop and close their eyes and to see if

they could sense their partners and turn in the direction of where they thought they might be. I then instructed them to open their eyes. (This usually results in many giggles and gasps when partners find that they have opened their eyes and are staring at one another across the room!) At this point the exercise is over and we gather into the Omega Circle to discuss.

Following are a couple of the student's writings addressing their experience with the Circles of Energy:

Journal Entry, September 2, 2010- "Student "C"

Today's class was beyond amazing. I honestly don't think I will ever forget it. I was so excited to come to class because I was so interested in the book Second Circle. I could not put the book down because I was so interested in it. It was very easy to write the reading response. I have never had a class like that and completely love it. I tensed up when I was in First Circle and my breath was trapped in my throat. Third Circle definitely felt more comfortable than First Circle, but I did not like how aggressive I got. It felt much better to come back into Second Circle. In the beginning of the first transition I thought we were going back into Second Circle instead of moving into Third. Partnering up had to be my favorite part. I was paired with [Student H] and it felt so good to look at him in the eyes for that long of time. I couldn't help but smile and be giddy. It made me so happy. I hated when he went into First Circle because I could feel the good energy being drawn out of me. My favorite part was when we walked around the room giving each other our energy and then stopped with our eyes closed and turned to where our partners were. I

was exactly facing [Student H] and he was facing me from across the room. It was so cool to see how powerful our energy can be. (Student C)

#### Reading Response, Student "I"

This work with circles and being able to assign and specify what happens in each circle has made a difference in my evaluation of people especially my family and close friends. I tend to spend a lot of time in 1<sup>st</sup> circle and maybe its because I have moved a lot in my life and so I'm used to not knowing everyone and so I stay to myself naturally now. There are however times where I'm in third circle but I don't really go there too often, third circle people are almost always annoyingly abrasive to me. After the reading though I've realized that I have been working towards 2<sup>nd</sup> circle for the past couple of months without knowing it and now that I'm getting to the point that I can reach it I tend to enjoy it more. It's amazing how much the physical body and the energy/ spirit within correlate so heavily. When I'm in 2<sup>nd</sup> circle I just feel a lot better and I feel as though I'm stronger and ready to take on more. (Student I)

While most of the students seemed intrigued and excited about the use of Second Circle Energy in their Voice and Speech work and beyond, some students were more skeptical than others. Student "E" expressed in one of the written responses his frustration with the concept of energy and confessed that he wasn't really sure if he knew what sending or receiving energy felt like. This student did end up having an "Aha!" moment while working on a student production and told the class his story of discovery one day in

the Answer Circle. In the following writings, Student K and Student D describe their struggle and eventual acceptance of the theory of Second Circle Energy:

Journal Entry, September 2, 2010- Student "K"

I don't get it; I just don't get the big deal about this second circle business. I will say that Patsy Rodenburg was onto something when she wrote about this stuff, I can see how her thesis is true and that this idea is a great model to study human behavior from. But I am just not as moved by this text as other people are. People were straight up crying about this stuff, getting upset about things that they were realizing from the reading. I guess this book is just like all written work and all other kinds of art, it is subjective and moves different people in different ways.

(Student K)

Journal Entry October 9, 2010 – Student K

I am slowly becoming a convert of the second circle theory in behavior. I was riding my bike home today feeling energized and motivated, so I said to myself I am just going to stay in second circle all day long just to say at least I tried. As I was riding back from class my house goes past an elementary school and there was a class lining up after recess. As they walked back into school the teacher caught my smiling face. She smiled and said to her class of 15 plus kids, "Everyone say hi to the nice man on the bike." At that moment I got a resounding hello from a first grade class. I laughed and went about my day, completely stuck in second circle. (Student K)

Student D, Reflection Paper December 13, 2010

We began the semester with studying first, second, and third energies, and dissecting and analyzing them. At first I was honestly not into it and seemed to have no patience for it at all, but as time progressed I began to learn to gain an open mind about the topic. The thing that really helped me be more optimistic was the fact that learning is a process and opening up and doing things with a “sense of ease” is what helps you in the long run. I soon began to develop a second circle energy about the first topic within the class, and this continued all throughout the rest of the class.

(Student D)

As mentioned before, this use of Rodenberg’s theory of Second Circle Energy not only enlightened my students to the correlation between their body, breath and voice, but also corresponded with the values of RPDWAC. While the western model usually emphasizes competition, in the African model, community is accentuated instead. In RPDWAC, there is a search for origins and truthfulness and I believe that many of these students were able to find their original and truthful voices by setting aside their First and Third Circle habitual ways of interacting with others. In the following excerpt from her Reflection Paper, Student “M” explains how the concept of Second Circle Energy gives her a sense of community with other artists.

December 12, 2010- Reflection Paper – Student “M”

The biggest thing that I'm taking away from this class is a second circle energy. Learning to bring this energy into a competitive setting is something that all actors should learn. Before this class, I saw everybody in the department as a competitor. Now, I'm not afraid to lock eyes and send my honest energy to everybody I see, and I feel a sense of community with everybody involved in theatre. It seems now that we are all in this together for a common cause—using our voices to affect people in meaningful ways. (Student M)

## **The Circle of Trust, The Ability to Fail, Both/And**

Whenever teaching a course within the model of RPDWAC, one of the principles that makes the classroom environment conducive to the process is the emphasis on community building and the implicit trust built by this sense of community. Usually trust is gained slowly as the students find they are able to disclose themselves to the group without suffering negative repercussions. When the students recognize that their peers are willing to share their secrets, fears and weaknesses as well, a bond is created between the peer learners. This Circle of Trust allows the students to reveal themselves in an open and honest way, without fear of judgments. It allows them to risk failure and still have support from their peers and it assures them that the space in which they are working in is a safe one. An exercise that I used in the beginning of the course is one, which does well to start to build this circle of trust. This exercise is one that Pettiford-Wates uses within her Junior Acting Studio. Since the first Studio class was a meet and greet and going over the syllabus, I employed this exercise in our second Studio class. We gathered in the Alpha Circle and sat down together. I asked the students to share, in no particular order, their greatest hope for the class, or what they were most excited about learning and their greatest fear or presuppositions about the course. This is a rather simple exercise, however it does well to not only stimulate the students to think about what they want to get out of the course, but also to hear the fears of their fellow classmates. Many of the fears were the same, and often

I have found this to be true regardless of the course itself. Many students mentioned specific vocal “isms” that they were concerned about and some indicated the necessity of a certain grade in the course, while others admitted their utter disdain for their own vocal instrument. All of them expressed their fear of failure of some form- failing their parents, failing me, failing the course, failure to understand, failure to get any better, failure to succeed, etc. In this exercise, I find that the greatest fear of most artists usually comes down to the fear of failure. After this exercise, I assured them, however, as expressed in the comparison of the western versus the African model, that in this classroom they were expected to and encouraged to fail. We discussed the perfectionist society in which we live and the demands it makes on the psyche, especially that of the artist. We discussed the tension this fear of failure creates and how one of the main purposes of this course was to relieve tension; therefore we came to the conclusion that we must relinquish the fear of failure. I suggested to the class that in order to relinquish this fear, we must give each other support in spite of failure and that we must communally give one another and ourselves permission to risk and fail. Each student wrote down his or her fear on a piece of paper and passed it to someone else, signifying “giving away or giving up” their fear of failure. Then each student ripped up the piece of paper they were holding, signifying their acceptance of failure as an option and their power over the fear of failure. As this studio ended there was a much lighter feel to the room, the students seemed more relaxed and very appreciative of their newfound permission to fail. These kinds of communal rituals build up the circle of trust within the classroom and negate a competitive environment. In RPDWAC, there is the spirit of inclusion. Dr. Pettiford-Wates speaks of this difference:

In western/western European traditions of drama and art we think things are supposed to have a solution. There is duality (that is the self and the society/dominant culture) but one does not compliment the other. Instead one tries to conquer, to suppress and kill the other. In order that it might be supreme it invalidates the other that it alone may become valid. Contrasting this with the African perspective we see the spiritual/material base as complimentary and the ideology that promotes, encourages and embraces the attitude of both/and rather than either/or. (Pettiford- Wates, 39)

It is in the same vein of the acceptance of “both/and” that we structured our critique of the work being done within the Studio. As the semester progressed and the community began to share their efforts with one another, oftentimes students would make comments about the work of their peers. In the African model there is a rejection of the dichotomous nature of “either/or”. There is no “good” versus “bad” work. It became common practice to steer clear of using adjectives about one another’s work, which signaled superiority of one over the other. Instead, students were never compared to each other, but rather given individual critiques on what worked or did not work within their piece. Oftentimes, two choices were both valid and effective! This acceptance, or the practice of inclusion “both/and” was a new and liberating practice for many of the students. This practice, in my opinion, not only quells competition and superiority, but also encourages constructive criticism without personal attack. In a field that so often correlates the artist with their work, it is important that the student never feels that they are “bad”, but rather a certain vocal choice did not work as well as another may have.

## The Role of the Instructor as Facilitator

According to the Webster Dictionary, the term Instructor is defined as “1. One who instructs; one who imparts knowledge to another; a teacher.” One of the many synonyms listed was the word Pedagogue. Considering the description of my current MFA degree candidacy at VCU, as Theatre Pedagogy, I found this to be apropos. However, upon further research I found the term to be quite humorous and representative of the kind of teacher I do not wish to be. As described by Webster, a Pedagogue is “1. A teacher, schoolmaster; *especially*: a dull, formal, or pedantic teacher.” The example sentence given perfectly summed up why I do not wish to be an Instructor in the classroom: “...a *pedagogue* whose classroom lessons consisted entirely of reading directly from the textbook in a monotone voice.” Although amusing, unfortunately this kind of “teaching” style has become one that is expected by American artists in many learning environments. In the U.S. arts education system, which is obviously heavily influenced by Western Europe, the learning model delineates a finite line between the teacher/director and the student/artist. Within this model, teachers/directors are considered to have all of the knowledge and usually impart said knowledge to the students/artists in lecture form. We need not go any further than the classroom/rehearsal design which places the instructor/director at the front of the room/rehearsal space, behind a podium or desk, (and oftentimes in artistic rehearsal, in a “director’s chair”), with the students/artists arranged in rows facing towards them. This

staging suggests that the teacher/instructor/Professor/director is somehow more important and more knowledgeable than the students. It also suggests, since the students are not able to make eye contact with one another, that the head of the classroom is the only one capable of disseminating knowledge, and that the students/artists should only interact with their fellow artists by going “through” the teacher or director. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, Facilitator is defined as “1: one that facilitates; *especially* : one that helps to bring about an outcome (as learning, productivity, or communication) by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance, guidance, or supervision.” It is my belief, and the belief of my pedagogical mentors, that educators must become more than merely transmitters of knowledge; they must become facilitators of the learning process.

The question is how do we break out of the mold created by the western traditions of the educational system? What can we as facilitators do in order to create an environment conducive to the process of learning? How can we institute practices, which turn the traditional model on its head and refrain from perpetuating the dichotomous structure currently in place? I believe in order to become facilitators rather than dictators/pedagogues; we must experience and introduce our student artists to a paradigm shift. There are a few simple ways, in which I encouraged this shift within my Second Year Voice and Speech Course. This was achieved by changing the relationship between Instructor and student, by eradicating the practice of hand-raising, and by gradually handing over ownership of the Studio to the students. I found this task to be quite challenging for myself as well as my students, but the outcome was well worth the efforts.

As I entered our first Studio together, I must admit that I was probably far more nervous than my students were. Although confident in the material and having a good amount of experience with the course itself, I was still overwhelmed at the prospect that I would be the main Instructor for this Studio. I can see how this fear could easily manifest itself as aggressiveness and I now understand why many young teachers are overly authoritative; it is a safety mechanism. In my opinion, professors who are much older than their students and who have a great deal more life experience exude a sense of confidence and authority without trying. As a fairly young female graduate student, standing just over five-foot-three, my presence doesn't exactly ignite fear in the hearts of students when I walk into a room so it was important that I made sure to foster the dynamic between my students and myself carefully. I did not wish to be seen as a tyrant, nor did I want them to consider me a "buddy". Because of this, I was careful to avoid extracurricular social activities with my THEA 201 students. In order to resist the role of tyrant, I practiced engaging in all discussions with neutrality and disclosed myself in the trust exercises as well. Most importantly, if I didn't have an answer to a question posed, I admitted this to my students and promised to research further to find out. In my opinion, teachers who feign omniscience are not doing themselves or their students any favors. I have seen performance teachers in the areas of voice and speech who sit in a chair and direct their students like puppeteers and have found this practice to be too militaristic. I made it a point to do all the exercises with my students. I remember specifically when working on core strength, the students vocalized their appreciation that I was engaging in the activity with them, so they didn't feel as if I was commanding them to do things that I myself was not willing to do. While it can be scary to let down the shield of authority within the

classroom, I believe it provides a much better learning environment. I believe that my actions, rather than overbearing words or stature, gained the respect of my students. I never felt that these students took advantage of my humanity and there were absolutely no disciplinary issues within my Second Year Voice and Speech classroom.

For most westernized Americans, their earliest memories involve some amount of time within the classroom whether it is pre-school or kindergarten. In these formative years we learned the art of hand-raising, and if we have remained within the educational system we have never forgotten it. Although it seems like a simple activity, the practice of hand-raising within the classroom setting creates an environment controlled and regulated by the Instructor. In order to move into the role of facilitator, I found it necessary to abolish the act of hand-raising within the studio. There are several reasons why I believe this practice to be an effective one. The first reason is because, as Pettiford-Wates has been known to say, "I don't want to be the picker!" In a course structured by the raising of the hand in order to speak, it requires the Instructor to choose who gets to speak. Not only do I find this to be a rather rudimentary practice for college-aged men and women, but also I believe it furthers the notion that the "picker" is in control and that questions, comments and answers should be directed towards him or her. The second reason is because hand-raising eliminates the natural ebb and flow of discussion between students. Within a course focused on the voice through body and breath techniques, I find it imperative that the students are able to feel the energy of their peers, the natural flow of dialogue and acquire the confidence to speak when they are impelled to do so. In the beginning this led to a lot of interruptions. Many students had a very hard time breaking out of the habit and would hold their hand up for a while waiting to speak, until they realized that they would have to

assert themselves in order to be heard. By the end of the semester, the students were adept at having smooth conversations with one another and this became an invaluable skill when it came time for their Final Exam presentation. The third reason is because it requires the students to listen to one another. On the stage (as in real life), listening is just as important as speaking. When a student has their hand raised, they are not listening to what the person speaking before is saying. Instead they are usually formulating some sort of reply or rebuttal. Their focus is on getting chosen next so they can speak, rather than on listening to what their fellow classmates have to say. I believe that by eliminating this practice, it fosters an environment of respect. This also helps in giving the student artist a sense of ownership over their learning process and their studio.

In my experience, when the student artists feel that they are in charge of their own journey of learning, their attitude about the studio changes from a passive to active role within the classroom. Throughout the semester I often reminded them that this course was their studio time and that our productivity would be dependent upon their motivation to work. In the first several weeks, I led our class warm-ups and introduced exercises as we discussed proper vocal technique. However, as the semester progressed, I turned the warm-ups process over to the group, first by asking them what should go next and encouraging them to lead specific exercises themselves. Finally, the students were comfortable teaching and leading warm-ups and exercises that they had found or created on their own. By the end of the semester, the studio warm-ups could essentially be done without an Instructor at all. This sense of ownership also created accountability among the studio participants. Since the students acknowledged that their classmates were equally as important in their learning journey as I was, they placed more value on attendance and

involvement. As I mentioned before, there was only one student who had a problem with attendance. Accountability to the community is an integral part of building up the circle of trust within the classroom and is a byproduct of the students' sense of responsibility in the learning process.

## **The Drum**

One of the similarities between the teaching styles of two of my mentors, Pettiford-Wates and Rodgers, is their use of the drum within the classroom. They both employ the beating of the drum to facilitate certain exercises and journeys. While Rodgers uses an Irish/Celtic hand drum called the bodhrán, Pettiford-Wates uses a bit deeper sounding Native American hand drum. In order to coach the Junior Acting Studio students in the fall of 2009, I contacted the woman responsible for making Pettiford-Wates' drum and received my own. While I was fully aware of the uses of the drum in the Junior Actor's Studio's journeys, and also knowledgeable of how Rodgers guided certain exercises with her hand drum; it was while observing the teaching of a fellow graduate student and dear friend, Olisa Enrico-Johnson, MFA 2010, teaching, that the idea to combine vocal exercises and exploration with journeying. In order to acquaint the class with the use of hand drum, I introduced it as a means for assisting in a specific type of movement and presence exercise, called simply, "drum work".

In the summer of 2010, I was fortunate enough to travel with Janet Rodgers on a Study Abroad trip to Belgrade, Serbia and the country of Greece. While in Serbia, we had the opportunity to work with the DAH Teatro. During our two weeks in Belgrade, we spent several hours per day training with the women of the DAH: Dijana Milosevic, Sonja Tasic

and Maja Mitic. Milosevic led the group of us in Eugenio Barba based drum work every day. I was fairly familiar with this work already as Rodgers had used these kinds of exercises within my own Voice and Archetypes studios. It was quite interesting to experience firsthand the teachings that had inspired how Rodgers had come to develop her own exercises. The drum work is used to teach two fundamental principles of Barba's work and in her book, Acting and Singing with Archetypes, Rodgers explains the concept of "edge of balance" and "double direction":

**Edge of Balance:** The concept of "edge of balance" arises from the reality that the actor needs to be always moving towards something while on stage (an objective). If the actor is authentically engaged, this will create a dynamic in the actor's body. During the following exercises, when the drumbeat stops, the actor should stop in mid motion and hold at the 'edge of balance' until the drumbeat resumes. At this time, the actor will be instructed to change direction. Eugenio Barba calls that moment between the movements "sats". It is "the basic posture found in sports- in tennis, badminton, boxing, fencing- when you need to be ready to react." There needs always to be a dynamic in stillness, however long that stillness lasts.

**Double Direction:** Besides being on the edge of balance during "sats" moments, the actor should also have in the body an inner sense of double direction. This is energy going in two opposite directions. It creates a strong dynamic within the body.

(Rodgers, 14-15)

The following is an example of the drum work exercise that I used within the THEA 201 studio:

### **Drum Work Exercises:**

After a sufficient warm up, the students are asked to find their own space in the room. They are then given a visual illustration of the classroom space as being a plane setting atop a point, like a “teeter totter”. They are told that throughout the exercise, they are to balance the space with their bodies so that the “teeter totter” does not tilt or topple over. They are asked to not get into a habit of movement such as making laps or circles, but let their bodies take them where they are needed within the space to balance it. They are to move to the rhythm of the beating drum. When the drum stops, they are to freeze at the “edge of balance” in “double direction”. When the drum resumes, they resume movement. It is important to note, as Rodgers explains, “When the drumbeat begins again, change direction while following the new rhythm. Keep your body alive and living in Second Circle energy.” At certain points within this exercise, it is important to point out to the participants any spaces that are not being covered in the room. While concentrating on following the drum and freezing at the correct moments, the students often start to lose sight of the “big picture”, which is making sure the “teeter-totter” stays balanced. As the students start to get comfortable with this, there are variations of the drum work that can be added in order to raise the level of difficulty.

First, I added the “drop”. Every other time the drumbeat stops, instead of freezing, the students are instructed to drop to the ground still maintaining “edge of balance” and “double direction.” Then the “jump” is added, when every third time the drum stops, they

are to jump in the air and land in their frozen position, of course still maintaining “edge of balance” and “double direction.”

This can start to become quite complicated as the students are focusing on what comes next, “stop”, “drop” or “jump”, while still being reminded to balance the space in the room.

To add even more difficulty, I began to add the concept of moving backwards. This element often seems to surprise the students more than anything else. They often scoff at the request, imagining that they will undoubtedly crash into one another. However, once the students have grasped the concept of Second Circle and awareness, this variation is usually very successful at showing them they can sense one another’s energy and where their own bodies are being pulled by the collective energy within the space.

The students took to this work immediately and would show excitement every time I entered the classroom carrying the hand drum. This drum work significantly helped those students who had trouble connecting with their own bodies and aided all students in achieving focus and awareness. Following is one of the student’s writings concerning the drum work:

Journal Entry, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010- Student “C”

I felt more relaxed when doing the pre-rock and roll, but I was still stressed. I was bothered and didn’t want to think about it anymore. It wasn’t until the drum that I felt free and did not think about it anymore. I absolutely loved the drum. I felt that it united the class in a new way. We were together in our movement, especially the skipping and going faster. It did get confusing when we had to walk, freeze, jump

and fall. I was also so surprised how I did not hit anyone when walking backwards. When we were told not to think about the next move was when I finally let go all the way. (Student C)

This last sentence is what I find most important about this work. It allows the student to stop over analyzing (a trait which is preferred in the Western model) and to follow their own intuition (an element of RPDWAC), and to trust their own bodies.

Since the drum had already been introduced and embraced by the class, it was no great shock to the students when I started using it to facilitate other exercises. The following is an exercise that I led in order to illustrate sending and receiving energy. It also served to establish the use of imagination and visualization as legitimate forms of employing body and breath work. The drum is used to underscore the entire sequence.

### **Energy Expanding Exercise:**

In this exercise, students are asked to find their own place in the space and to lie down on the floor. First, the student are led through a relaxation and breath release technique employed by Pettiford-Wates. She uses this sequence as a lead in to the Journeys in her Junior Acting Studio. The students are then asked to visualize centralizing all of their energy into a sphere and located in their core. This energy can be described as a ball of fire in their belly. The goal of the exercise is for the students to expand this sphere of energy until it encompasses the universe. This begins by expanding this energy throughout their body, part by part. Once their bodies are emanating this energy, they are to imagine allowing this energy to grow into the space until is pressing against the floor beneath them,

the ceiling above them and the surrounding walls. Then they are to imagine the energy busting through these surfaces and infiltrating the whole building. This energy continues to spread throughout the building, and then the campus, into the city of Richmond, then the state of Virginia. It spreads across the United States, and then makes its way across the oceans until it covers the world, continent by continent. Once the world, it finally bursts through the stratosphere and into the great, wide, universe until their energy is touching all of the celestial. From here, you start the process of bring the energy back into the sphere within their core. You work your way back the exact same way that you came, as they visualize their energy slowly decreasing. Once this is complete, you remind them that they hold a plethora of energy within them, enough to reach the entire universe. Finally, they are told they can start to roll into a fetal position and start to “awaken”.

After the use of this exercise in our studio session on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010, we revisited drum work. The return to the drum work was especially enlightening for me. It seemed that the energy expanding exercise informed their level of readiness or “sats”. When freezing at the “edge of balance” and with “double direction”, there was a heightened sense of the impending release to come. I believe that the knowledge of their ability to expand their energy greatly improved the level of intensity within the drum work and also in application of Second Circle energy.

## **Vocal Journeying**

It is important to note that a fundamental similarity in the teachings of both Pettiford- Wates and Rodgers is their frequent use of “journeys” within the classroom to encourage self and character exploration through breath, sound, movement and text. Since “journey” is not a commonly used term within the theatre community, I find it necessary to briefly define and describe its meaning and uses, especially as it pertains to Pettiford- Wates Junior Acting Studio. I will then describe my experience as a Teaching Assistant witnessing my close personal friend and fellow colleague, Olisa Enrico- Johnson, use journeying in her THEA 201 course in fall 2009 in order to explore the range and resonance, using colors as the primary stimulus. Finally, I will recall how I modified and led a similar “vocal color journey”, the response from the students and how I believe using journeys leads to the discovery and freeing of the voice.

The best way that I can describe a journey with words is by calling it a “guided imagery exercise” in which the facilitator leads participants through a sequence of shared (collective) events. I must stress that while the wording of such journeys are heard the same by all involved, the individuals experiences and reactions to such guided imagery are very much their own. While Rodgers will often allow participants to keep their eyes open during such exercises, Pettiford-Wates asks that all those going on the journey keep their eyes closed throughout. Both Rodgers and Pettiford-Wates employ the use of drums to

underscore the journeys. During my use of journeys within the THEA 201 course, I also asked that participants keep their eyes closed and the drum was used to underscore. There is, however, a marked difference between a “guided imagery” type of journey and a journey based in Ritual Poetic Drama Within the African Continuum.

In her book, Yoruba Ritual: Performer, Play, Agency, Margaret Thompson Drewal does an incredible job explaining how ritual is viewed within the Yoruba culture and its place in the realm of performance (theatre) and everyday life (play), and how it is very often hard to distinguish one from the other. I encourage anyone interested in the use of Ritual within the theatre to refer to this text, as I am unable to explain Ritual as eloquently and fully as Drewal. Regarding ritual journeys, she posits that:

As media of change and transformation, rituals are conceived as “journeys”, a metaphor that runs like a leitmotif throughout these pages. In Yoruba usage, the journey highlights crucial dimensions of ritual that most of the literature on the subject does not reflect, that is, the subjective experience of participants, their capacities for reflexive self-monitoring, and their transformations of consciousness through play and improvisation. (Drewal, 28)

In her thesis, Giving Voice to the Hero Within: The Combination of Two Methodologies for Training the Actor/Performer--The Use of Ritual Poetic Drama Within the African Continuum and Archetypes for the Actor/Singer, close friend and fellow Ritual specialist, Olisa Enrico-Johnson describes how Pettiford-Wates leads the “Emotional Mapping” ritual journey in the Junior Actor’s Studio.

This is the exercise that teaches the student Pettiford Wates' concept of "Emotional Mapping". I remember my first time doing the exercise. Though it is difficult to explain I will try to paint the picture. Pettiford-Wates mimes peeling a banana, eating it, then asks the class "What am I doing?". The students respond, "eating a banana". She then acts out the process of "being" the banana being peeled and eaten. Someone will inevitably say that she was, "the banana being eaten". This is how Pettiford-Wates explains the difference between "having an emotion" and "being an emotion". She tells us that in the following exercise we were expected to "be the emotion". She then explains the idea of the body as an emotional map. She says that we hold emotion in our muscle memory. She gives the image of a person who knows how to, "press your buttons". She asks us to recall how it felt. She then suggests that as actors we must learn to press our own emotional buttons and that one way to do that is by knowing the emotional map of your body. She tells us all of this as preparation.

Concerning the exercise itself, first of all, you have to do the entire exercise with your eyes closed. This was a trust issue for me. We lie with our eyes closed while breathing and releasing tension. She drops the first emotion into our belly like a seed that is fed by our breath. The drum plays underneath her voice.

The seed of emotion grows with each breath until we are so full that we must "give it a movement". "Movement power" is the first power called upon in a RPDWAC journey. Only after the physical and physiological manifestation of emotion is expressed with the body, is sound power added. 'Give that movement a sound' is the direction we are given. Sound is the vocal expression of emotion and

need. It is through sound that emotion is carried to the audience. After movement and sound, comes word power, or the power of text. “Now give that sound a word or a phrase”. The actor’s energy and presence is engaged fully in movement and sound, teeming with emotion and need prior to the speaking of the text. According to Pettiford-Wates “Text comes last. It comes last because it is built on a foundation of sound and movement. (Enrico-Johnson, 27-29)

In the fall of 2009, Enrico-Johnson was teaching the same course that this thesis explores and I was her Teaching Assistant. During my time in this course, I witnessed many techniques and styles that I also employed within the course in fall of 2010. Enrico-Johnson is not only a dear friend, but a colleague and mentor of mine as well. Our mutual specialization in Voice & Speech and RPDWAC meant that I was able to learn a great deal from her work combining the two pedagogies. The exercise I have coined the “Vocal Color Journey” was originally created by Enrico-Johnson and later, slightly modified and used by myself. Since one of the primary tenets of Ritual is the building of trust within the community, the Junior Actor’s Studio’s use of ritual journeys is often shrouded in “mystery” and is therefore regarded as somewhat “scary” by the Second-Year Students. So in order to eliminate any presuppositions about their experience, I did not use the word journey. I simply said we were going to do an exercise. The following is the “Vocal Color Journey” as I led it for the THEA 201 course in fall 2010.

Before the journey began, I used the “banana metaphor” that Pettiford-Wates uses for her “Emotional Mapping” journey. I substituted the word color for the word emotion. In other words, the students were told to “be the color”. The students are asked to find their own space in the room and lie down on their backs with their eyes closed. They are led

through the same breath and relaxation technique as the “Energy Expanding Exercise” described in Chapter 6. Then, the participants are to imagine a particular color dropping into their bellies, (Just as Pettiford-Wates does with the emotions), and being fed by breath until they must give it a movement. After movement has been established, they are asked to give it a sound. They are encouraged to not plateau, to keep exploring all the sounds that the color wants to make. They are then told to go back to just movement and then just breath until all that remains is the seed. Then the next color is dropped in and the process is repeated. During this first round, they were told to make sound and movement only. When the last color was reduced to a seed, I then re-cycled the colors from the beginning at a faster pace. They were told to express the colors even more fully this time. Finally, I allow them to speak their piece of text that they had been working with all semester in the voice of that color. At the end of the journey, the seed is plucked out of the belly and they are allowed to take their time rolling into the fetal position, opening their eyes and “coming to”.

The colors that I used for this journey were dropped in respectively: Emerald Green, Neon Pink, Deep Blue, Fire Engine Red and Bright “Sunburst” Yellow.

In my opinion, it is not terribly important exactly which colors are used for this journey, however it is important that they be very descriptive. Rather than just dropping in the color red, for instance, it is more effective to drop in “a vibrant, fire truck red” or “deep, blood red”. The more detail (whether it be color, texture, etc.) that you give in a journey, the better, because it is likely to evoke a more visceral response from the journeyer. In addition, I will say that I would advise starting with a more neutral color such as green and ending with a bright color such as yellow, while putting deeper and darker colors in the hub of the journey. Whilst not always true, most emotional responses to brighter colors are

more positive in nature and therefore a better note on which to end the journey. In my experience, even a simple journey such as this one, which is focused on colors, will evoke emotional responses. There is no telling what buttons different colors may push on individuals. At the end of this journey, I asked the class if anyone did NOT feel anything. No one raised his or her hand. Everyone agreed that they had experienced rather visceral emotional responses to the colors, some which were surprising. For example, while I say that yellow is usually a positive note to end the journey on, Student "E" mentioned that the color yellow made him agitated and frustrated. If I had more time allotted than the 50 minutes that we were given for our class, I most likely would have explored more colors. I would have loved to have the chance to experiment with the colors purple, black and brown. With more time available, I also would have enjoyed taking the students back to the colors while on their feet and having them recite their text as the colors for the class from the same emotional location that they were in during the journey. Unfortunately, there was just not enough time for this. Though, in our ending circle the students had quite a bit to say about their discoveries.

Firstly, the students were amazed to know that they had "gone on a journey" at all. Secondly, when asked how long they thought the journey was, most said it was a maximum of 15 minutes. They were shocked to learn that they had been journeying for 30 minutes. This is always an element of ritual journeying that causes some surprise. The trance-like nature that one goes under when on a journey seems to make time obsolete. Additional comments were how freeing it had been to speak their texts from such a "different place". Since they worked with the same piece of text most of the semester, some had adopted a very recitative or rote way of presenting it. Many students said that the use of colors gave

them the licensure or permission to switch up their pitch, tone and rate of speaking. They also said that the different colors they embodied emphasized different words that they had never thought of placing importance on before. They all agreed that having the drum, as an underscore, seemed to continually drive them forward in the journey and helped in keeping them from reaching a plateau. They also mentioned that the sound of the drum kept them from specifically hearing the voices of their fellow journeyers and therefore made them less self-conscious about making sound themselves. Following is the journal entry of Student "C":

Journal Entry, Student "C", Thursday October 14<sup>th</sup>:

Today I was really looking forward to class because I had a very emotional day in Movement. I always feel better after leaving this class. We worked with colors today. This was my first journey and I did not even know it. We started on the floor, breathing. We then let out the exhale on a sigh. Jaci then started with the drum. She had told us to be the colors, not act them out, just be them. She said that a seed was planted in our stomach and the color grew until we needed to give each color a sound and a movement. The colors were green, neon pink, deep blue, fire engine red and bright yellow. I surprised myself with how into it I was. I felt like a vine on the color green, I began to laugh when I was pink. I felt relaxed with blue and angry with red. I was happy with yellow. I had an emotional response to each of the colors. When we went back and spoke the text, I realized that my pitch varied with each color. I always spoke the text with one voice, but it was nice to find the variety in the

colors. I really enjoyed this exercise. I absolutely loved hearing the drum. That made it so I was not scared to make noise, but also guided my movements. I cannot wait to do more of these journeys. (Student C)

In the closing of this chapter I would like to leave you with an insightful and important point about the use of Ritual and Ritual Journeys that Drewel makes in her book:

Acquiring techniques for producing ritual action is mostly a rote exercise demanding sustained effort and concentration...To acquire such techniques- in other words, to know how something is accomplished, particularly if it can be picked up easily- without simultaneously learning the values and ethics operating behind that knowledge can lead to misuse and even abuse. This is particularly critical in rituals performed to effect change, as in rites of passage, divination, and healing. Specialists learn their craft with sustained, formal exposure to a ritual process, perseverance, and the contemplation of ritual knowledge. If this were not the case, then anybody could become an instant specialist by reading a "how-to" book or by observing behind the scenes. What distinguishes ritual specialists from each other, and from charlatans, are their particularized ritual roles, which they have often inherited and for which they have been specifically selected and trained. It is the transformative power of this kind of sustained experience that is essential, which is why Ositola often voiced to me his concern that "you can't learn everything in a day" in response to my persistent questioning. (Drewel, 24)

I find this text particularly necessary to share since I am putting forth the text used

to lead such ritual journeys. The “Emotional Mapping” in particular is a “don’t try this at home” exercise, not intended for use by those not trained specifically in ritual. The trance-like state that Ritual Journeys can induce along with the wide range of reactions from individuals to different emotions is a wildly unpredictable combination and requires a certain amount of experience to deal with safely and effectively. While I do consider myself a specialist, I must admit that even after three years of exposure and immersion in the practices of Ritual and two years of intense Ritual training, (and regardless of my impending degree), I still do not consider myself a “Master” of such techniques. The learning process regarding using Ritual within the classroom has been long, arduous and enlightening and I still have much to learn.

## **Passing the Torch/ Handing Over Ownership**

One part of the Final Exam for this class is a group exercise, in which all three sections of the Theatre 201 course come together to present Maya Angelou's poem, "On the Pulse of Morning". I vividly recall my own sophomore year performing this piece, then seeing Enrico-Johnson's class present it the year before, and I eagerly looked forward to witnessing my students interpretation at the end of the semester. We broke the poem down into three parts and my class had the last third portion of "On the Pulse of Morning". The following is the entire text, separated into the three parts as given to the students:

"On The Pulse Of Morning" Famous Speech given by Maya Angelou  
on January 19, 1993 at the Inauguration of President Clinton

A Rock, A River, A Tree  
Hosts to species long since departed,  
Mark the mastodon.  
The dinosaur, who left dry tokens  
Of their sojourn here  
On our planet floor,  
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom  
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.  
But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,  
Come, you may stand upon my  
Back and face your distant destiny,  
But seek no haven in my shadow.  
I will give you no hiding place down here.  
You, created only a little lower than  
The angels, have crouched too long in  
The bruising darkness,

Have lain too long  
Face down in ignorance.  
Your mouths spelling words  
Armed for slaughter.  
The rock cries out today, you may stand on me,  
But do not hide your face.  
Across the wall of the world,  
A river sings a beautiful song,  
Come rest here by my side.  
Each of you a bordered country,  
Delicate and strangely made proud,  
Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.  
Your armed struggles for profit  
Have left collars of waste upon  
My shore, currents of debris upon my breast.

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Yet, today I call you to my riverside,  
If you will study war no more.  
Come, clad in peace and I will sing the songs  
The Creator gave to me when I  
And the tree and stone were one.  
Before cynicism was a bloody sear across your brow  
And when you yet knew you still knew nothing.  
The river sings and sings on.  
There is a true yearning to respond to  
The singing river and the wise rock.  
So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew,  
The African and Native American, the Sioux,  
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek,  
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh,  
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,  
The privileged, the homeless, the teacher.  
They hear. They all hear  
The speaking of the tree.  
Today, the first and last of every tree  
Speaks to humankind. Come to me, here beside the river.  
Plant yourself beside me, here beside the river.  
Each of you, descendant of some passed on  
Traveler, has been paid for.  
You, who gave me my first name,  
You Pawnee, Apache and Seneca,  
You Cherokee Nation, who rested with me,  
Then forced on bloody feet,  
Left me to the employment of other seekers--  
Desperate for gain, starving for gold.

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You, the Turk, the Swede, the German, the Scot...  
You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru,  
Bought, sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare  
Praying for a dream.  
Here, root yourselves beside me.  
I am the tree planted by the river,  
Which will not be moved.  
I, the rock, I the river, I the tree  
I am yours--your passages have been paid.  
Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need  
For this bright morning dawning for you.  
History, despite its wrenching pain,  
Cannot be unlived, and if faced with courage,  
Need not be lived again.  
Lift up your eyes upon  
The day breaking for you.  
Give birth again  
To the dream.  
Women, children, men,  
Take it into the palms of your hands.  
Mold it into the shape of your most  
Private need. Sculpt it into  
The image of your most public self.  
Lift up your hearts.  
Each new hour holds new chances  
For new beginnings.  
Do not be wedded forever  
To fear, yoked eternally  
To brutishness.  
The horizon leans forward,  
Offering you space to place new steps of change.  
Here, on the pulse of this fine day  
You may have the courage  
To look up and out upon me,  
The rock, the river, the tree, your country.  
No less to Midas than the mendicant.  
No less to you now than the mastodon then.  
Here on the pulse of this new day  
You may have the grace to look up and out  
And into your sister's eyes,  
Into your brother's face, your country  
And say simply  
Very simply  
With hope  
Good morning.

The first order of business was to introduce the poem and an idea of how the final presentation would go to the class. Then we sat down together with the last portion of the text, and read it out loud a few times. It was during this time that I clarified some meanings and pronunciations in the poem about which the students were curious or confused. We read the text over several times, each time differently. There was no assigned reading; rather the students were encouraged to speak the text as they were impelled. This allowed them to hear different ways the text could be interpreted by others and also showed them the power of having several people speaking certain phrases or texts all together. Finally, I asked them to get on their feet and split into the four corners of the room. The exercise was simply to add movement to the text and end up in the center of the room. These simple suggestions resulted in a beautiful and creative sound and movement piece. Students were using levels, pretending to be elements such as “the rock, the river, and the tree”. When they ended the poem in the middle of the room, it created a beautiful picture and made them excited by all of the potential interpretations of the piece. Then I asked them to go home and keep reading the poem and discover which lines spoke to them specifically, which stanzas they wanted to facilitate.

Over the course of the semester, my goal was to create a class environment that would sustain itself with or without my presence. My hope for the course was to remove myself from the equation and still equal the same process (not product). This is the role of the facilitator; to encourage the process of learning beyond the realm of his or her teachings. This was done slowly throughout the semester, starting with the “Answer

Circle". The students had started running the "Answer Circle" themselves, had stopped pointing their answers and question at me only, and instead were engaging in discussions amongst one another. They were also leading the warm ups, and many students were bringing in vocal exercises that were all their own. They knew that if they had something they wanted to share with the course, that we would make time. I was continually impressed by their discoveries and enthusiasm for sharing their knowledge with the class. For the final, I intended to hand over all creative control to the students. I wanted the process to be exclusively their work. I also wanted them to experience the community building and trust that is inherently achieved by such a practice.

When our class met next, we went through the poem again together and the students selected the lines that they wanted to direct. Then, I told them they had the rest of the class period to work. I told them that I would be in the room if they needed my help, but that I was confident in their ability to create the piece without me. Before I let them start working, I went around the circle, looked them in the eyes and told them each, "I trust you." This is something that Pettiford-Wates does with her students before the unveiling of their final literary and narrative pieces in the Junior Actor's Studio. It is always a special and empowering moment for the student when the facilitator expresses utmost confidence in their ability. I wanted my students to have this affirmation before they embarked upon the Final process on their own. I repeated this affirmation to them again right before their final presentation of the poem for Rodgers.

The next two class periods were dedicated to the student's work on the poem. There were many "leaders" in this course and I noticed from the sidelines that many of the

students tended to butt heads over creative control, however, I refrained from stepping in. It was important that the students realize the need for cooperation, and the necessity of the “give and take” required to create together. The most I did during the first two days of the students working on the final was to announce how much time they had left out of their 50-minute class period. This alone would usually seem to move along the process. On the third day, they showed me what they had put together and I merely made some adjustments in order to make a better stage picture (something that only an outside eye can do), and gave some notes on pronunciations of the text. The piece they put together was absolutely breathtaking. They used sound and movement, visual stage pictures, different levels and ensemble speaking of the text in order to bring the piece to life. The greatest part was that they did it all on their own. This accomplishment gave the students a sense of pride and ownership over their work and an appreciation for their fellow artists. On the Final Presentation day, I couldn’t have been more proud of them. They didn’t push or try to overact their piece. They were an ensemble and their sense of camaraderie and trust showed through onstage.

## **Go and Be Satisfied/Closing/Personal Reflection**

On the last day of our THEA 201 course we did what any self-respecting artist does at the end of a good run. We celebrated! We brought in snacks, refreshments and music. We drank, we ate, we danced, and we sang. We also had our closing ritual. We gathered in our circle one last time and the students were asked to go around and say what they were taking with them along the next part of their journey and also what they would be leaving for the next artists to come into the space and embark upon the THEA 201 course. The students didn't talk about certain vocal exercises they had learned or quote books they had been required to read, instead they talked about taking with them a "sense of community", "a newfound artistic family". They spoke about taking along with them the importance of "having their own process" and they prided themselves in their newfound "ability for self-reflection". They left for the next participants things like "trust in the process" and "willingness to risk". When we finished our closing ritual and closed the circle one last time, many of us, myself included, had tears in our eyes. I consider myself so very lucky to have had this amazing group of students with which to go on this journey and I am thankful for everything that they taught me as an artist and an educator.

At the end of every class, as Pettiford-Wates does with her students, I would encourage the participants of the course to "go and be satisfied". It seems the only fitting phrase to name this chapter now that I am so close to completing my extensive educational

journey at VCU. Over the past seven years, I have received more than an art education; I have received an artistic rebirth. If you had told me at the beginning of this seven-year journey that I would later on decide to attain a Master's degree in order to teach Theater at the college level, I would have laughed in your face. Now I am eager for the next time I can step into the classroom again as a facilitator. Along the path of my journey, there was a gradual shift in my own personal paradigm. In my transformation from an extremely unhealthy artist into a healthy one, there was also naturally a shift in priorities. Once upon a time I was interested solely in performing in order to achieve some sort of "fame" status, which is what I considered to be success. Throughout my years working with RPDWAC, the reconnection I found with myself, and the personal reflection I was asked to endure, changed my goals completely. I am now interested more in giving than receiving and my definition of success now involves work that is meaningful, challenging and transformational regardless of what status I may or may not achieve. My own experiences using RPDWAC and the experiences of others I have witnessed within this work, have inspired me to teach because I long to give others the tools that I feel were essential to my growth as an artist.

My experience within the classroom, taking on the role of facilitator has empowered me greatly as an artist. Over the two years I spent teaching, my trust in myself and in the power of the process grew exponentially. The results of RPDWAC cannot be faked. There is a real power in this work, and that power only became clearer throughout my time teaching. There were plenty of times when I thought I might have been in over my head, when I started to doubt my abilities as an educator. Every time that I started to feel inadequate, something would happen in the classroom or a student would make a

comment, which would reaffirm that in spite of my youth and my short amount of time teaching, the process does in fact work if you trust in it. As Enrico-Johnson stresses in her thesis, this work is “bigger than me”.

Since I am now close to graduation, lately I have been asked often by my friends and family, “What are you going to do?” The real answer to this question, at this particular moment in my life is, I’m not sure! I am in love with the art of theatre and I do plan to be involved in it somehow, though exactly how, I can’t say. Ideally, I would like to find a job in my area teaching at the college level. I would prefer to teach mostly acting and vocal courses, though I do have a passion for African American Theatre History as well. I have also been inspired by both Rodgers and Pettiford-Wates to incorporate study abroad opportunities whenever possible for my students. In my trip to Serbia in the summer of 2010 with Rodgers, I gained invaluable knowledge and perspective on my role as an artist. Because of that trip, I now have connections with the women at the Dah Teatro that I would love to use in the future to take my own students back there for training. No matter what kind of institution I teach at or what courses I end up teaching, I do know for sure that I will be applying the pedagogical principles of RPDWAC. In my opinion, even in a standard classroom setting, these principles have the potential to inspire students to take charge of their learning process, create community and open up meaningful dialogue. Though I do enjoy teaching, I am also still a performer at heart and am looking forward to getting back on the stage in the future. As an artist, I am looking forward to applying the skills that I have learned over the past seven years and be one of those “smart actors” that Pettiford-Wates refers to. I believe that is important as an educator to keep on practicing my own craft as well, as this keeps me mindful of the performing artist’s perspective.

Regardless of whether I end up with a teaching job or a role on Broadway, the principles of RPDWAC are present in my everyday life. The paradigm shift that Pettiford-Wates asks the students to undertake has been a lifelong shift for me. This work has truly changed my perspective on life and I can only hope that along my journey I am able to pass on these lessons to others in whatever capacity I end up working; whether it be an artistic endeavor or not. Though I may not know exactly where, I will go and I will be satisfied. Ashe', Ashe'.

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## **Vita**

Jacquelynn Rae Camden was born on October 25, 1984, in Roxboro, North Carolina, and is an American citizen. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia in 2009 and has been involved professionally in the Richmond Theatre community since 2005. She was an Irene Ryan Nomination recipient in 2006 and was also nominated for Best Supporting Actress in the Richmond Critic's Circle Awards in 2010. She now resides in South Florida with her husband, Michael and her daughter, Parker.