



Waldorf High School Research Project

AWSNA

*Drama and the
Education of Youth*

by

Eric G. Müller

C O N T E N T S

Introduction	
Role of the Director	
Choice of Play	
Casting	
Language	
Gesture	
Drama as a Support to the Curriculum	
Drama Club	
9th Grade	
10th Grade	
11th Grade	
12th Grade	
Music	
Musicals	
Student Experiences	
Conclusion	
Bibliography	

ABSTRACT

A deepening and broadening of dramatic work with adolescents is essential in our time, because experience and investigation shows that the positive transformative effects on high school students through drama is tremendous, and that without the implementation of a well rounded drama program they will have missed out on an integral part of their education – an education that purports to lay down firm foundations for life. This study covers and examines the most essential aspects that will help facilitate such deepening.

The importance of the director's/pedagogue's role is thoroughly explored, focusing on how it translates into practice with the students. The nature of a production or dramatic project will be largely determined by the director's ability to envision and his capacity to enthuse, and whether or not he seeks to be guided by the formative forces of the spirit.

The choice of play, like casting, is of vital importance both to the individual student and to the class as a whole. A thorough and intuitive knowledge of the students, coupled with a natural sense for the needs of the adolescents as they pass through their different stages of development, will influence the outcome. It takes a listening ear on the part of the director to arrive at the right choices, for the students do express their needs, overtly and otherwise – and class participation has its rightful place.

This research also makes it abundantly clear that there are overwhelming needs in regard to speech, which demand to be addressed if the desired deepening is to be achieved. Moreover, the work on movement, posture, and gesture has to be dealt with as scrupulously, because many of the young people are in danger of losing their right, i.e. natural connection to their bodies – either incarnating too strongly, or not enough.

Recognizing that it is the dramatist who confronts us during adolescence we have to ensure that the students receive as much as possible in the way of drama during their high school years. It can and does serve as a tremendous support to the curriculum. But its potential has not yet been sufficiently tapped or explored. Apart from the drama club and the scheduled plays in 10th and 12th grade, certain main lessons and run through classes in each of the grades lend themselves to dramatic activity. For instance: improvisations based the study of the temperaments in 9th grade, debates in the 10th grade, Shakespearean monologues in the 11th grade, and the acting out of fairy tales in the 12th grade, are just some of the examples showing how drama can be implemented in order to satisfy the dramatic drive of the adolescent.

Furthermore, suggestions regarding the enlivening aspect of music are presented – there is nothing like music to enhance the dramatic work, be it as appropriate accompaniment in plays or in the form of full blown musicals. The musical life of the entire school is positively influenced, its refreshing effects felt in every classroom, and in the community as such.

Observing the cathartic effects drama has on students, and listening to their candid responses, more than justifies the enormous effort that goes into the production of a successful play. Drama can serve as a powerful medium for public outreach, and – if the needed depth is attained – can mirror all aspects of human life, affecting the students to their core, if one is bold and willing enough to illumine the contents from a spiritual point of view.

INTRODUCTION

In every dramatic activity I have ever been involved in as a teacher, it has been my fervent endeavor to bring out the very best in the students, and to ensure that the learning experience may take place on as many different levels as possible. This was true from my first humble experiences of directing plays as a class teacher, right through the grades to the culminating eighth grade production of Shakespeare

Introduction

In every dramatic activity I have ever been involved in as a teacher, it has been my fervent endeavor to bring out the very best in the students, and to ensure that the learning experience may take place on as many different levels as possible. This was true from my first humble experiences of directing plays as a class teacher, right through the grades to the culminating eighth grade production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Observing the gradual growth in the students through the medium of speech and drama – continuously mindful of their developmental stages – served as an invaluable foundation for my present task as the high school drama director at Hawthorne Valley School, responsible for the productions of plays and musicals with the sophomores and seniors. The fundamental goal throughout has been one of deepening the experience for the students, so that the effort may become a lesson well learned for life. It followed, almost naturally, that my point of departure regarding this research project was to explore the question: How can we deepen the dramatic work in the high school against the all pervasive backdrop of modern life? This all-encompassing question, which purports to underscore the significant role drama plays in Waldorf Schools around the world, forms the premise of my research.

I began by observing as closely and consciously as possible what I do in my own dramatic work with the students. This ground work came in the form of detailed journals on two senior plays I directed (one of them a musical). They chronicle the journey a play takes from its inception right through to the last day of the performance. As it turned out, the two classes were as different from one another as one could possibly imagine – polar opposites in nearly every conceivable way, which, in itself, through contrast and comparison, threw light on issues that otherwise might have receded into the easily forgotten realm of past experiences, as well as underlining the conclusions I subsequently arrived at or confirmed.

Furthermore, I took copious notes on two tenth-grade plays, focusing more on the effects drama has on individual students, their struggles, failures, successes, breakthroughs, and ultimately the tenor of their transformations. This intense exercise in focused observation caused me to reflect deeply on other high school plays I had directed over the years, gathering insights as I took stock of my work thus far.

It wasn't long before distinct areas of study began to crystallize themselves, essential to the necessary deepening and cultivation of dramatic work, especially in regard to today's youth. Locales of focus began to define themselves. Out of the 'sensitive chaos' (at times – utter chaos) of playtime, a lawfulness inherent in the creative pursuit began to shape the course of the proceedings, and the core elements of meaningful dramatic activity presented themselves in increasingly lucid ways. In short, I became acutely aware of the different realms under consideration, the most important of which being the role of the director! No matter which way one chooses to look at it, the director plays a pivotal role, and all the other elements, irrespective of their significance, are dependent on right leadership. Be it the choice of a play; the work with language and gesture; casting procedure; implementation of the different arts; how students experience a play; how a play supports the curriculum; and not least of all, the effects of a play on the social fabric of a class (and the school as such), they are all dependent on the ego presence, strength and talents of the director. In every

instance the position of the director is integral and must act as the major guiding force in any production. This, however, in no way diminishes the value of any of the aforementioned areas which need to be closely studied and understood, for they form the indispensable pillars of all dramatic undertakings.

Furthermore, recognizing the tremendous effects drama has on the students – both explicitly and implicitly – I pondered the question: How can we consciously implement more dramatic work in all four of the high school years, and how does the work differ depending on the grade? This question has been discussed in the past at our school, and is currently being examined with renewed vigor and interest. Tentative steps are being and have been taken. Exploration of all the above-mentioned areas will form the basis of this paper.

The students I have worked with over the many years have given me the fundamental insights into the state of today's adolescents. It is through the intense and rigorous work on plays that I have become privy – more so than in any other discipline – to the stunning strengths and shocking weaknesses of our current student body, as it represents today's generation (– a simultaneous sneak 'preview' of those to come). The students mirror, with unblemished clarity, the consequences of our materialistic, technocratic age; they carry the burden of an ailing environment, of soul/spiritual fragmentation. On the other hand, they are telling us the true needs of the upcoming generation of young people – if we are willing to listen, carefully. They are giving us glimpses of a future through the gifts they bring down to us so abundantly. We need to take heed, accept and recognize them thankfully. Not to do so is to exacerbate the hurt that afflicts our young students.

The immense pedagogical role drama can play in young people's lives cannot be overlooked or underestimated. It is my endeavor to explore the different areas that constitute a theatrical totality, so that we may be equal to the challenge before us, and to give pertinent pointers of how we can meaningfully deepen the drama work in the high school in order to do justice to this 'veritable child of care' – our student body.

THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR

But I am constant as the northern star
Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks,
They are all fire, and every one doth shine;
But there's but one in all doth hold his place.

— William Shakespeare (from *Julius Caesar*)

The success or failure of a play depends for the most part on the director. The role he plays is of paramount importance. He's the charioteer, the captain, the undisputable leader, and he needs to gain the utmost trust of those he is in charge. His most important tool is enthusiasm. Without enthusiasm the life blood will cease to flow. The students will fall into apathy, or alternatively, there will be a mutiny. Enthusiasm is the wind in the sails, the crack of the whip, the champagne at a wedding feast, fresh spring water gushing out from the depths of the earth, it is the fire behind the will – a force headed into the future, ready to meet and conquer any challenge, it is youthful vigor. Enthusiasm is the spirit of the vinified Dionysian spirit surging through our blood – Dionysus, god of drama, whose fire can be found deep within every one of us, whose help we cannot afford to dispense with.

This enthusiasm can be fueled by a knowledge and understanding of drama's place in the world. To bear drama's source in mind will help us to redirect our efforts, in order to fulfill its mission. Enthusiasm is easily sparked if the original task is heeded, if the need for its existence is recognized. To what extent is it acknowledged? How can it shift the approach and emphasis within a production? Can the needs of the adolescents be met – truly met – if the director's enthusiasm has not been kindled by the original spark?

The birth of drama, as we know it, is closely connected to that point in time when there occurred a shift or an inversion of human consciousness toward the self. When Thespis (first actor/director on record) rode into Athens on his chariot in 534 B.C., and acted out and sang, together with his goatskin-clad chorus of satyrs, odes to the public, it was an appeal toward greater self knowledge – true recognition of the seminal I am. Drama grew out of the Dionysian rituals, and the amphitheaters took the place of the temples in a time when the role of the gods began to recede. Seeds were planted for humankind to wake up to their own individuality. The essence of the Greek era is contained in the two key words – Know thyself! It runs throughout their mythology, their life and thought, their art – self awareness, consciousness of the self. And drama, from its very humble but lofty beginnings, speaks directly to the human being in the act of breaking away from blood ties and the close-knit community of the tribe, in order to find and strengthen his own individuality. The art of acting, therefore, is intimately connected to developing consciousness, quintessential to human evolution; and humankind will be left behind if it does not consciously keep up with evolution. This is imperative for the director to bear in mind, and ought to be present in all of the work with the students, for it can be catalytic in the students' road to self knowledge. Helping the students confront themselves and gain self awareness is part of a teacher's moral duty, and acting can support this vital process. And part of this 'awakening' is the recognition of one's spiritual source.

Every artistic activity has also its esoteric side. For the work that we carry on as artists has to receive its impulses from the spiritual world, and must therefore be rooted in the esoteric. If we forget this, if we forget that all genuine art springs from the spiritual world, then we must either resign ourselves to be guided by rules, or submit to an inartistic naturalism that is lacking in art, –

to one or the other we are condemned if we forget that what we create artistically has always, without exception, to receive its form from the formative activity of the spirit. (Rudolf Steiner, *Speech and Drama*, lecture 15, September 19, 1924)

As directors, devoted to meeting the contemporary needs of the students, it would behoove us to take these words by Steiner to heart.

High school students need teachers who are experts. They have little patience for dilettante teaching. And, as we all know, they are adept at mercilessly tearing down a teacher if they perceive that they have someone in front of them who is not sure of his or her subject. For the drama director this holds especially true, for its effects are immediately noticeable. The relation between the student and director is, out of necessity, direct and intimate. There is no hiding from strengths and weaknesses, both in the students and the director. Outer qualifications play less of a role than what students observe in the actual doing. One cannot succeed by merely giving instructions or relating information (even if it is done in an imaginative manner); one has to be a person worthy of imitation, in the widest sense of the word, as well as in specifics, such as acting out parts, or speaking speeches. This does not mean that one needs to have utterly mastered a role, but the intention must come through. One must constantly be ready to step in and be a living example, showing them possible ways of advancing. Flexibility is called for. And the secret here is observation. Observation of the human being, down the smallest, seemingly insignificant detail. The spirit lives in the details, and the 'devil' is only there to be overcome. True observation objectifies the work, and can serve as one of the greatest tools to the actor, and certainly is an essential ingredient to the success of a director's task. If acting is indeed the art of being someone else, it stands to reason that, for the actor, all human beings should hold the greatest of interest. Students are naturally observant, though not always consciously so. During the warmups many of the exercises I offer address and stress greater observation of their surroundings, their fellow students, and of course – themselves. Every character trait is an expression of soul. We all have a treasure trove of observations buried within us. It now becomes a matter of digging for it. We begin to draw on memory as well as direct observations. The aim is to get the students to observe the people they come into contact with, urging them to study and become thoroughly aware of the movements, gestures, expressions, mannerisms, habits, tics, etc. – so readily available and constantly on display. Every human being is unique, and all people have something to teach us – if we take the trouble to direct our senses lovingly to wards them. It becomes the actors' capital on which they can bank and draw upon. How do people walk, run, sit, stand, bend, eat, drink, speak, smile, blow their noses, laugh, cry, read, write, listen . . . ? Imitation exercises hone the act of observation. A simple exercise is to go around the circle with someone making a gesture or taking a pose. Immediately the rest of the class mirrors the movement. With time subtleties begin to emerge, and the students become increasingly bold. They also realize how the slightest movement carries a distinct mood, like the barely noticeable rolling of the eyes, or a soft snicker, a sideways glance. Following that I ask them to build up their own characters by incorporating a whole variety of movements or gestures that seem fitting.

It must be said, however, that the director should in no way enforce his way of acting onto the student. He must bring the student to discover the character within him and herself. Acting out parts for students is meant as 'triggering effects.' Imitation is only a tool to help the student to the next step. The aim is for the director to find ways and means to propel the students forward, to help them in their ability to slip into the very heart, soul, and spirit of the respective characters. And for every student the road to finding the character is different, a maxim to which the director needs to be awake and aware. Sometimes it takes a good deal of pushing and shoving, molding and shaping – but always in a loving manner.

Envisioning! This is the paramount task of a director. It starts from the moment one begins to look for a play (see Choice of Play), continues through the process of selecting (see Casting), and finds its intensification during the rehearsals. Once the drama work has begun I am constantly thinking about the play, like a roosting turkey, hoping to hatch some wildly ‘phat’ ideas. It is a serendipitous occupation. Envisioning is a form of meditation. It is part and parcel of the artistic process and can be approached from the periphery or from the center, through perceptive doing or conceptual brooding, in an impressionistic or expressionistic manner. Inspiration is mysterious, and there are many roads that can lead to its source, though there’s never a guarantee that the wellspring will be found. Paths easily grow ever fainter, scattering in all directions, until the tracks are lost. There’s grace involved, and grace will not be ruled. But she can be courted, either by actively entering into the process, finding the gifts she leaves on the way, or by patiently waiting with pregnant calm, feeling gradual growth within. A combination of both is usually at work when I’m in the throes of creating a play. A play needs to be held within, so that we let it form itself consciously. This envisioning is imponderably infectious, and the rehearsals with the students can be turned into cauldrons of creativity, with ideas bubbling forth continuously through the mere doing – on the spot acting, in a playful way, thus tapping into imaginative realms.

During the six weeks at my disposal I usually try to find some time every day to devote to the activity of envisioning. Essentially, it already begins with the first reading of the play and can be viewed as a contemplative study of the contents. It is not merely a matter of knowing the play, but of consciously ‘seeing’ it. This imaginative approach to reading stands in strong contrast to the way we, as modern people, usually read: forming abstract concepts and gaining an intellectual, albeit pale, grasp of the contents. The act of picturing is not only more time consuming, but requires greater effort. While reading, the thought life ought to become as concrete as possible, so that our concepts might fill out and blossom forth into pictures. To read imaginatively takes practice, and can initially be tiring. It needs to be developed in order to sense as fully as possible the value, merit, and strength of the script one is perusing. This active reading makes us more awake and aware to the dormant possibilities within a play.

I usually begin by reading a few lines, then drop off into a kind of active/passive reverie. Each word, line, or section can trigger the process of mindful regurgitation and rumination. I go in and out between wakeful thinking and dreamlike imaginings. In between I make a few notes. Alternatively, I just sit and ponder the results of the day or the week, asking myself what worked or what didn’t. In a way it is like an algebraic equation, solved with the heart rather than with the head. Inevitably ideas come, resolutions are found, problems solved. I experience it as an artistic process. It is an essential part of a director’s preparation – and as they say: Luck is where opportunity meets preparation (I prefer to substitute the word luck with grace).

The process of envisioning helps me to deepen my understanding of the inner structure of a play, the author’s intent, and how best to translate what I am learning into a performance that will hold the interest of the audience. As the play progresses the emphasis of this envisioning process shifts. I am always fascinated how seemingly insurmountable problems find their solution during or after these ‘sittings.’ One is able to achieve a wonderful economy if one works in such a concrete manner, for on stage not a moment should be wasted, anything and everything should be suffused with purpose and meaning.

This ongoing preparation is essential in gaining the trust and thus control of a cast. It must be humbly admitted, however, that as a director one does not always know what one is doing, or if something is even right for the students or the play. But the hours of preparation gives one the confidence to proceed. Further, it allows one to appear sure-footed, even though one might feel terribly insecure at times. One gains the ability to think on one’s feet, which, more often than not, is

a direct result of the time spent envisioning. Students, no matter how talented, demand to be held and supported by a director in whom they can have the utmost of confidence. Moss Hart, the playwright, maintained that “the first necessity a director faces is the creation of a climate of security and peace, in which the actors can do their best work.” (Moss Hart, *Act One*, p 122) This holds especially true when working with students, some of whom are very fearful at the prospect of standing naked and exposed on stage. They need to have the utmost of faith in the person who is to lead and guide them through to the final performance. Love and natural authority, based on competence, know-how and talent are the inherent characteristics of an effective director. If such is not the case, the rehearsals will be beset with temper tantrums, panic, and generally impossible behavior.

The act of envisioning is a creative act like any other. And if we are ‘lucky,’ these moments with the Muses will prove inspirational.

It is important to emphasize that most of the director’s work should be invisible to the students. The role of the director on the students must live below the surface, so to speak, and should never be in the forefront. To lead the students in such a way that they experience the play as deeply as possible, in the widest sense of the word, and on all levels – that is the major task of the director. Nor must it be forgotten that in a school setting, the director is always also the teacher; pedagogical aspects must never be ignored, for we are, after all, aiming to educate, not merely entertain. And as teachers we are continuously endeavoring to draw forth the very best in them. Ideally, students should be guided to discover the secrets within a play themselves. If, in addition, they can be brought to greater self-awareness as well as a heartfelt appreciation of the other actors and the world around them – through the vehicle of the play – then it will all have been worth it. Moreover, if the students can be enthused to the point where they themselves take charge, where they take ownership of the play, where they become creative, then the learning experience will have been one that will last for life. And if the director can recede further and further into the background, looking on, holding and guiding from the periphery, then the students can shine like suns, rather than merely reflecting the wishes and ideas of the director in a moonlike fashion. Indeed, like the northern star, the director might appear insignificant in the vast firmament studded with magnificent stars and awe inspiring constellations . . . yet they all wander around him, and, as they move, he ‘holds his place’ – barely visible, but centered.

I would enkindle every man
From out of the spirit of the cosmos
That he become a flame,
And unfold in fire
His being’s very nature.

The others, they would take,
Out of the cosmos, water,
To quench with it the flames;
And dampening all being,
Lame it from within.

Oh joy, when the human flame
Is aglow, even there where it rests;
Oh bitterness, when the human thing
Is bound there, where it longs to be active.

— Rudolf Steiner

Choice of Play

I'm often asked how I choose a particular play for a class. There is no clear cut answer, for there is always an imponderable aspect to choosing a play. Needless to say, finding the right play for a class is of vital importance, for it becomes part of the students' biography, the impact of which can never be fully determined, though the life changing results can be observed in numerous cases quite plainly. Sometimes a play will verily fly into one's hands and the choice is easily made, and at other times one has to battle for months on end to find the appropriate material. One has to 'divine' it, like seeking for precious minerals or the source of fresh water in an underground, unseen and unknown location. The needs of the students, their soul-landscapes, become, in this case, the territory over which we hold our dowsing rod, sensing for the slightest vibrations. This somewhat semi-mystical process does, however, have its rules of thumb.

Class size

Most of the classes we have in our school are twenty and over, and the first thing I consider is the number of characters in a play. The number of characters usually given in the catalogues can be misleading because many of the roles tend to be small, and large classes demand plays that have a greater number of substantial parts.

Male/female ratio

Male roles dominate plays in the majority of cases, which can be troublesome and a deterrent to choosing a play. In the lower school many of the girls have had to act male characters numerous times, and by the time they are in high school they are eager to enter fully into female roles, wanting to explore their own femininity. Nonetheless, it often cannot be helped, and some inevitably have to slip into male roles. I do, however, make a conscious point of giving them a female character in at least one of the two high school productions.

At this point, I'd like to insert that I'm a firm believer in double casting. (There is a school of thought that prefers using only one cast.) That might seem like twice as much work, but in fact it is not. The students learn tremendously from each other. Healthy competition is in order. Students find that there are numerous ways of acting a character authentically. I have never regretted double casting. It enables more students to fill the main roles, and should illness come in the way, which it often does in the weeks leading up to the performances, the other student can always fill in; in addition double casting serves as a welcome safety net should a student be incapacitated during an actual performance. The students, during rehearsals, can be involved more actively – they egg each other on. Having two casts offers unique opportunities for social growth, which otherwise might be lost. I can think of numerous examples. For instance, I witnessed how the 'head honcho' of a particular class, who tended to be too full of himself, was gently humbled during a production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, when he witnessed his counterpart – a shy and introverted student – act rings around him. Not only were his feathers neatly trimmed, but he began to work on his part with greater diligence and conscientiousness – sans the usual big talk.

Needless to say, I did, on one occasion, overestimate my own capacities when I worked with three casts in a tenth grade production of *Romeo and Juliet*. It was a large class with many girls (most of them wishing to be Juliet). My desire to please as many students as possible drove me to decide on triple casting. Never again! Alone the scheduling for extra rehearsals got to be a nightmare, and for three weeks I was rehearsing afternoons, evenings and weekends without a single break.

Eighth Grade Play

I usually take into consideration what type of play a particular class has performed in the eighth grade. Generally speaking, if they did not perform Shakespeare I tend to choose a play by the bard, or at least one that stands in strong contrast to it.

Set and Properties

Though it's a minor consideration, I do try and avoid plays that demand formidable sets, especially since our current stage is small and our possibilities are limited. However, what appears daunting can still be done, for the charm of plays is to suggest as much as possible rather than merely to depict. The same is true for prop-happy plays. On three occasions we've had to build a makeshift tarpaulin 'storage room' right outside the stage door for props. Too much 'matter' can often slow a play down and get in the way of the dramatic action. Props that serve multiple functions have become my favorite. How can one reduce the use of props to a minimum without compromising the needs of a play? In what manner can sets be used most economically? How can optimal results be achieved without making any concessions as regards effectiveness and beauty? These are the kinds of questions I ponder during the process of choosing a play.

Class participation

Should the class be part of the decision making? Sometimes, but not necessarily. It is, however, important to listen to what comes from the students. Some of their suggestions are valuable and can serve to loosen the process. Whatever the choice, you have to be able to stand behind it and get enthused – fully. However, it is prudent to bear in mind that it is not only a matter of pleasing them superficially. Performing *Grease* or *Zombie Prom* might fulfill their momentary wish, but is it going to fulfill them at a deeper level? In times of doubt I have brought various suggestions to the class and their spontaneous reactions have helped me choose the appropriate play. At other times I have simply broken the news to them. If one has chosen a play in a meditative way, with the students in mind, then the class will have confidence in your choice, and be thankful.

Language

Another decisive and important element I look for is the quality of the language. Is the language well crafted and poetic, or is it insipid and pedestrian? In this respect I find myself wanting to return to Shakespeare again and again, mostly (but not only) because the speech is of unparalleled richness. (See Language and Gesture.)

Group work

The ideal is to have as many students as possible engaged as much of the time as possible; therefore, I search for plays that have a chorus, are rich in ensemble work, or have crowd scenes. This enables the students who have smaller roles to enjoy a fair amount of stage time, feel fully involved and be engaged – both inwardly and outwardly. Unfortunately many of the more modern plays lack the element of group work. Ensembles, chorus, or crowd scenes are, of course, the most difficult to rehearse. They are, above all, time consuming, and demand a great deal from both the students and the director. There will inevitably be students who will act out, not be present when you most need them, miss essential rehearsals. They don't listen to instructions attentively enough (because they don't feel personally addressed), are wont to avoid living into their roles until the actual performances, etc., but in the end, if one keeps at it, it pays off; for when it works, these very scenes usually prove to be the most powerful.

One specific senior class had lived through a death of a student, and there were many who were still trying to come to terms with the tragic loss. The sense of pent up emotion as one stepped into that class to teach was palpable. The tremendous change in that class from one day to the next was shockingly visible; its spirit was severely wounded, and as a faculty we did our best to bring healing to these young people in pain. Naturally, I wondered whether they should have a comedy to lighten them up, but I chose instead a tragedy, which I hoped would take them to the source of their pain: *State of Siege* by Albert Camus. It is the darkest and most intense play I have ever directed. The theme of death is unremittingly emphasized, as is the theme of ubiquitous evil. Consciously I chose to have them confront, within the context of the play, the pain and fear of death. The townspeople of Cadiz are on stage for very prolonged periods of time, and go through an emotional journey from being carefree, ignorant, naive citizens, to a fear ridden, terrified, and enslaved people, threatened incessantly by the personification of the plague – in the form of a Hitlerian kind of dictator. In the end, however, they are saved by the indomitable courage and nigh divine insight of a single individuality. Only slightly did I change the ending to enhance and highlight the theme of the triumphant individual in the face of death and evil. At graduation many students mentioned how thankful they were to the play which had allowed them, as a group, to go through a grieving process. Some of them admitted actually crying on stage during the performances, and experiencing it as a needed and welcome release of unresolved emotions. They had undergone a catharsis that was not only deeply personal, but had impact on the spirit of the entire class. As a director I knew that I had pushed it to the edge, but that it had lifted a heavy load, allowing them to breathe again, to be freed of the weight they had carried for over a year.

Needless to say, the possibility for erring is real. With another senior class I still wonder whether my choice of play was the correct one. It was a small senior class of only twelve students (having started out with thirty-two in 9th grade). All along this class had gone through great social difficulties (beginning, apparently, in kindergarten). Teaching them was like teaching twelve individuals, as against a class with a wholesome and unified spirit. Our concerted efforts did not seem to bear any fruit. We had endless meetings with these students, took them on extended field trips, bent and reshaped the curriculum in order to minister to their afflictions – to no avail. The last hope of bringing this class together was the senior play. We put all our stakes into it. After long consideration (the most arduous I've ever had to make) I chose *Silas Marner* by George Eliot, adapted by Geoffrey Beevers. The main criterion for choosing this play was its potential for extensive ensemble work. If anything could bring them together, this would be it, I conjectured. The theme itself fitted this class, who had a picture of themselves as an anomaly in the school. *Silas Marner* is about a self declared outsider, who, due to unfortunate circumstances, is able to reenter the bosom of a new community after a fortuitous meeting with a little girl who brings love back into his life. This journey from darkness to light was a true Odyssey, for the class as well as for me. The effort of having to work together was nearly beyond their capacities. Except for Silas, every actor represented the entire community in the doubling of parts (more than twenty), as well as having to work together almost like a Greek chorus. There is indeed something deeply primal and archetypal about working with a chorus. From a pedagogical point of view I was convinced that, for this class, the chorus needed to have a dominant position. Primarily I wanted the chorus to set the overall mood of the play, using it to heighten dramatic effects. I wanted to establish a psychological framework to mirror the events in the play, as well as portray the reactions of the audience right there on stage – the ideal spectator. For this class, the work on the chorus would be the greatest challenge they would have to face, because it meant having to face each other, having to work together, though there were some deep rifts in the class. How deep they were, I did not realize. The rehearsals were fraught with discord, including a conscious walkout by the director (something I had never done before). Be that as it

may, the performances were ultimately a success, especially the final one, but it was a hard journey, and I had to pull out all the stops for their support, i.e., in regard to the set, music, costumes, props, scenery, special effects, lighting, et cetera. And their self-confidence was boosted. There was a lightness about the class in the days after the play that we, as a faculty, had not seen in them before. But to this day, I still wonder whether a more straightforward play, without a ‘chorus,’ might have served them just as well, or even better? It certainly would have been easier.

Cultural diversity

Plays affect the entire school, imbuing the community with a diverse range of moods that seep deep down into people’s souls, nourishing their moral makeup, helping to shape, clarify, and strengthen world-views always in the making. Plays become cultural ambassadors of sorts, and their effects echo on for years. The senior play, for instance, is a high point of the entire year, and everybody in the community and beyond looks forward to it. All plays expose the school in a certain light; the school expresses its underlying spirit through such performances. The school is inevitably judged, and rightly so, by what it shows to the public. It’s an enormous responsibility not to be taken lightly. Born out of these considerations I consciously look for plays that mirror cultural diversity. People from all walks of life, from different races, backgrounds, religions, and positions in life need to find their place on stage, in order to spread the gifts of diversity amongst all. This holds true, now more than ever, taking into consideration the growing awareness around multiculturalism – true cosmopolitanism.

Our production of *Fiddler on the Roof* was a case in point. This musical offers more than just a picture of the hardships of Russian Jews. The spirit of the Jewish and (to a lesser extent) Russian culture can be experienced, enhanced through the music and the various traditional dances. The universality of a people and their beliefs is portrayed, expressed through the differences, down to the smallest details. It fosters openness of mind and unifies seemingly disparate elements. Appreciation and true understanding are nurtured. Our production took on ritual and ceremonial proportions that transcended mere entertainment. There was a great eagerness to be as true and authentic as possible. One parent, for instance, offered us the use of the canopy under which she and her husband had been married, back in Israel, wonderfully decorated with flowers . . . and so it went, each detail lovingly considered.

In *State of Siege* the Spanish element was fully explored, down to performing dramatic flamenco dances. In *Les Miserables* or *Madwoman of Chailot* we became citizens of France. In *The Matchmaker* we returned to America, slipping into the fashions of the late 1800’s. *The Alcestiad* took us back into Ancient Greece. *Silas Marner* let us enter into the English society of Victorian times, where the upper and lower classes were still distinctly separated. *Cheating Death* transported the students to Africa. With the seniors this year I will be performing *The Yellow Jacket* which will take us all the way to China. . . . The full immersion into another culture, through costumes, music, accents, dances, and content of the play, lets the students connect with the spirit of that culture, thus forming a love and understanding which results in the broadening of human insight.

Content

Lastly, I scrutinize plays for meaningful content. To confront the students with literary giants, masters of language – to have them be immersed in the great thoughts put down on paper by geniuses – that is true nourishment for the soul. If one puts so much work into a play, it stands to reason that one should choose a play that will contain important lessons for life.

Casting

Like choosing a play, the process of casting has a similarly enigmatic quality. The role a student is given becomes an indelible part of his or her biography. We have no way of truly gauging its significance, or how it might influence a person's destiny. But observing over and over again the profound effect the acting of specific characters has on students makes one treat the subject with utmost care and seriousness.

One can, of course, take the traditional route – have auditions, pick and choose the best actors, and have done with it. In a neighboring school, over a period of four years, one gifted student received the main part four years running (that particular school produced extra curricular plays which always included the entire high school).

The other extreme is to ignore all aspects of talent and ability, and assign parts solely according to what the teacher thinks the individual student needs – under the hallowed banner of pedagogy. Now, these 'pedagogical' considerations may all have their validity, but they may also result in abstract choices, fixed in the mind of the teacher/director, rather than a choice that has had time to ripen.

Talent cannot be ignored. A person who has a natural aptitude for acting and the stage needs to be given a juicy role. If not, his or her relative inactivity mixed in with disappointment can drag a class down, and with it the play. However, pedagogical considerations not be ignored. Casting is not unlike playing chess – contemplating moves before making an actual move on the board. The process already begins with the very first reading of the play. Whom do I see and hear playing which roles? Preliminary lists are made which inevitably reveal the difficulties.

The next step is to ask the students for their input, usually in the form of a piece of paper on which they write whether they wish to have a large, medium, or small part. Later, when they have read the play, I ask them to put down at least three characters in order of preference. Also, at times, I have asked them to cast the play themselves. I then take the results home, and see how they correlate with my own list – and often they do coincide quite closely. In the interim I observe the students in class and in the hallways, ask them questions – in short, feel them out. Sometimes I try to persuade people to take on larger roles, trying to determine whether they could see themselves doing it. After a while I get a fairly good idea of who could take on what. It has, however, happened that a student whom I have chosen for the lead all along is exchanged at the last moment, immediately before giving out the parts to the class. I do take seriously students who come to me and tell me personally the role they wish to play. Their connection to certain characters is very revealing, and more often than not rings true. I can sense whether their wish is just out of self-aggrandizement or whether it is genuine. However, I've had students who tried to elbow their way to a main role by writing persuasive letters, getting their advisors to talk to me, and/or pressuring their parents to phone me. It's the kind of pressure I don't appreciate, and I usually sit down with these students for a conversation.

Some choices only make sense in the light of a longer process. One student, who was notorious for muttering inaudibly, who was reserved and introverted as well as being rigidly locked into his intellect, did end up receiving the lead role of a play. I knew a major risk was involved. But because he was a devoted and incredibly hard working student who related to the character more than any other student in that particular class, I decided – partly intuitively – to go ahead with the choice. Though it was a major ordeal to get him to loosen up, speak clearly, and project, he persevered with an iron will, and he eventually performed in a most commendable and unforgettable manner. It was a pedagogical triumph.

How profound the matter of choosing a play and casting can be was clarified to me in a most shattering and tragic way (though it left me with more questions than answers). A few years back,

when I was still leading the drama club in our school I chose an African play *Cheating Death* (author and publisher unknown). Two girls, new to the school, and best of friends, also participated. To Kirsten, the younger of the two, I gave the part of Nyama, the sky God (in this case Goddess), and to Nina, her friend, I assigned the part of the Old Woman. This African play tells the traditional story of how Death was brought to humankind. In it Nyama, the sky Goddess sends Ananse on a dangerous mission:

The most dangerous there could be. I've sent him to get the golden sandals that belong to Death. Since the beginning of time, in my great mercy, I have kept Death away from mankind. Only the animals of the forest know Death. To man he is a stranger, and no man ever dies. But if Ananse goes to the house of Death to get his golden sandals, then Death will take him, and Ananse will be no more.

In the play, the *Old Woman*, who is the first human being to die, speaks the following lines:

Old Woman: So you've returned safely. Did you bring me a gift from Death as I asked?

Ananewa: Here's a ring which Death gave to his daughter, and she gave to me.

Old Woman: That will be enough. My long weary journey is over at last.

Help me lie down (Ananewa helps her lie down) Thank you, thank you for all you've done. Now at last I can rest. Put the ring on my finger. Goodbye. (Ananewa puts the ring on the Old Woman's finger. The old woman dies.)

Over that Thanksgiving weekend these two girls were tragically killed in a car crash, only a few miles from the school. It was a tremendous shock to all of us. I wondered at the choice of play. What was the significance of their roles, the lines they spoke so soon before their own passing? What had led me to choose *Cheating Death*? The play ends with the lines:

But from that time on, Death feasted on mankind.
Ananse had brought death to us all.
And one day, wherever he may hide, Death will
Find him, as one day he will find us all.

None of the students had the heart to go on with the play, nor did anybody feel comfortable taking on Kirsten's or Nina's part. There was little humor left in the cast to want to act out the comic parts. The devastation these young people experienced was too great. Nor was I spared the emotional effects of it; I asked someone else to take over the drama club for me and have not led it since. Never before have I left a drama project incomplete. I have a great urge to put *Cheating Death* back onto the stage, in honor of Kirsten and Nina. A need for closure . . . ? I am waiting for the right time.

Language

Speak the speech, I pray, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. And if you mouth the words as so many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines.

(Hamlet)

Most students have poor – one could say impoverished – speech! Harsh judgment? Yes! Consonants are slurred, swallowed, clipped, and stunted; the vowels have become deflated, flattened, and atrophied. Speech no longer penetrates the entire body, but instead has been reduced to an inarticulate dribble from the head. It mirrors our intellectual age that likes to skim the surface of things, simulating depth through the brilliance of cleverness (still demanding authority). Contemporary habits of speech have little sense for the surroundings; oratory is a lost art, and the microphone has become the crutch for crippled projection. Sentences are hastily spoken or are uttered in a disjointed manner lacking all fluidity. There is little feeling for the sense within the words, let alone the actual sound of the words. I hear myself constantly shouting out, “Project! Slow down! Sharpen your consonants! Round out your vowels!” One spends weeks working on the mere basics of speech formation – in the hope that the students at least will be heard and understood. It is a deficiency not to be taken lightly. What are the causes for this exhausted state? What needs to ‘be done’ about it?

So much depends on the quality of speech the children are exposed to from the moment they are born (conceived). In the first three years it is not only the speech they hear around them, but everything, including how the adults move, think, and feel. At this age the child is most impressionable, and in no other time does the human being have the natural capacity to learn and take in as much. Absolutely everything that happens in the child’s surroundings is absorbed immediately, directly, and with great intensity. One is entering holy territory when one is in the presence of a small child, and nothing, no deed whatsoever, is without consequence. We either strengthen or weaken (damage) the little person in front of us. The imitative forces are – out of sheer necessity – incredibly strong at this age. What they learn and absorb in the first three years of life, purely through the forces of imitation, forms the foundation of their lives.

How tragic, then, when one is witness to so many toddlers and young children sitting in front of the TV set for hours on end, or even worse, at rock concerts and movie theaters, where the volume alone is an abuse to their delicate systems. The larynx, which imitates every sound all of the time, hears the human voice emanating from the loudspeaker, but it is a crippled and stunted imitation, for it does not have the vibrancy of the natural voice, complete with all of its overtones. This is exacerbated by the unnatural cartoon voices and the ubiquitous “muzak” plagues our age.

Further weakening of the constitution is caused by our fast paced lives. A child needs wholesome surroundings. It needs rhythm in its life, good diet, beauty, ample and regulated sleep, etc. For too many children these qualities are missing. This is reflected in their weakened constitution, which in turn is mirrored in their speech. However, some children, when under the best of conditions, are also afflicted by speech impediments, the causes of which lie deep within the destiny of that child. In short, more and more children are entering school with severe speech defects. They cannot be ignored and need to be dealt with.

In the lower school the class teacher has immense possibilities to work with speech in an effective manner. The forces of imitation, although waning, are still strong, and the students will yield to the loving authority of the class teacher. From the very first day of school, speech must be rigorously pursued. It needs to be a top priority of teaching. Impediments should be recognized and addressed immediately. Speech exercises help to loosen the tongue, and prepare it for diverse recitations of the highest order. Nor can the teacher ever ignore his and her speech, which also needs to be sculpted – continuously. We need to expect the best from ourselves in order to expect the best from the students. Sloppiness is not an option. The pursuit of excellence in speech will bear many fruits. These expectations also hold true for the specialty teachers.

The work done in the elementary school pays off in the high school. The differences are obvious between those classes which received in-depth speech work, and those which did not. Speech ought to be practiced daily. This is often not the case, especially in the high school. No matter what the main lesson, it should be preceded by speech work. There is no reason why the mathematics or physics teacher should not recite a Shakespeare sonnet, and there are numerous poems that can be found to fit these subjects. High schools should guard themselves against the neglect of speech. Because the main thrust in the upper grades is geared toward content, abstract thinking, and the accumulation of information, experiential learning, in which the body, soul, and spirit are taken into account, is all too easily disregarded or omitted. One can and must begin to work ever more consciously with speech. Students are hungry for to experience the nuances and subtleties of speech. This comes to a high point in the drama work. The high school student needs to enter the language to its core; every vowel, every syllable, every consonant is imbued with a mood, a feeling, a gesture. It is a prime source of creativity to enter into the living language. To help the students find a connection to the living source of language, is to lead them to the source of creativity as such. Thus they may get an inkling of what the words at the beginning of *St. John's Gospel* might mean:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the
Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made
that was made.

The most profound deepening in the students, as they are confronted by the challenge of entering into a character, can come through intensive and rigorous speech work; and I find that the most profound experiences regarding the transformative forces of speech have occurred during work on the plays of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's language, imbued as it is with spirit, is invaluable in our education of today's young people.

We see how Shakespeare's work, which arose out of a kind of self-education given by its very nature, and which he lifted to the highest spirituality, can work in schools and penetrate the living education of our youth. When once we have thus experienced their full cosmic reality, Shakespeare's drama must needs be living and present with us when we consider the great educational questions of the day. But we must be active with all the means at our disposal, for only by the deepest spirituality shall we find in Shakespeare the answer to these questions. (Rudolf Steiner, *Shakespeare and the New Ideals*, Stratford on-Avon, April 23, 1922.)

And through the language we can glean the spirit. What students gain in the course of working with the Shakespearean language will benefit the quality of their speech for life, as well as their acting abilities – not to mention the quality of life as such. I recall a student coming to me two years after he had graduated, wanting to let me know that it had been the exacting and concentrated work on his part as Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* that had proved to be the turning point in his life. It was the greatest dramatic experience he had had, and it enabled him to master the role of Javert in *Les Miserables* with sovereignty and ease. A fellow student, who lacked self confidence, and who never considered himself an actor, discovered his love for the stage during the work on that play; since then he has worked with the Actor's Ensemble, and is currently part of Shakespeare Alive led by John McManus and David Anderson. In both of these cases, I am convinced it was, foremost, the work with the Shakespearean language that struck a chord within them.

However, it is impossible to do justice to the nearly overwhelming needs students have in the realm of speech. This holds particularly true when one is confronted by twenty to thirty students and expected to perform a play within six to seven weeks. Most students have a deficiency of some

sort in the realm of speech, and some have to overcome severe challenges. Professional help in the form of a speech formation artist is becoming more and more a requirement that should not be overlooked, if we wish to meet the remedial needs of many of the students in our care. In our school we have a small budget set aside for a speech formation person to come once a year. Though it is only a token amount, it represents a promise to expand it some day to a full time position. Having the students exposed to the art of speech formation by a professional while working on a play deepens their experience immensely.

Gesture

Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.

(Hamlet)

Gesture goes hand in hand with speech. Speech is spoken gesture. Gesture is inaudible speech expressed through the medium of the body. Gesture is all expressive, reflecting and exposing inner life. The moment an actor steps on stage his physical presence is expressive of something, for he or she fills the space with direct immediacy. The one influences the other. The work with gesture needs as much time and focus as the work with speech. How can one work most effectively, economically and fruitfully with gesture, especially during adolescence, a time when natural levity is challenged by the weight of the world?

Generally, my point of departure is to let the gestures evolve and grow out of speech, speech as the formative force behind gesture. In many cases, however, the speech is so locked and tied up within the student, so encrusted, wooden and weak, that conscious work with gesture has to be undertaken in order to release the speech, thus enabling it to flow more freely. It is not merely a matter of working from the inside out, but from the outside in.

Eurythmy, as well as spatial dynamics/Bothmer gym, is an immense help in the development of spatial awareness to nurture the natural use of gestures. Most pertinent are the five main gymnastic exercises, as practiced by the ancient Greeks: Running, Leaping, Wrestling, Discus-throwing, and Spear throwing.

. . . For there is, in fact, no justifiable gesture for the stage that is not a kind of shadow-picture of some one of the five exercises of Greek Gymnastics. (Rudolf Steiner, *Speech and Drama*, Lecture 2, 6th September 1924, page 53)

We are lucky that the students in our school receive a rich and consciously penetrated gym program that includes these exercises. However, specific exercises ought to be pursued in direct conjunction with drama in order to cultivate the work on gesture. These exercises can be practiced as warm ups. In this respect Michael Chekhov's pioneering work is of paramount importance in regard to gesture. In his book *To the Actor*, Chekhov leads us through a series of exercises, which, if adhered to and practiced, work wonders. These exercises are deceptively simple, for example, focusing on the act of walking, which we do all the time, albeit most often unconsciously. However, as a teenager one is often extremely self-conscious about the way one walks. It exposes one – as if one were continuously parading down a catwalk or standing on a pedestal, constantly under scrutiny, as exemplified by a recent paper written by an 11th grader entitled "Scared to be True":

As I walk through the halls on my way to Main Lesson I feel the constant stare of eyes at my back, like a large telescreen [we had just finished studying *1984* by George Orwell], watching my every move . . . as I walk around at snack I feel the judgment of eyes on me

. . . .

The natural tendency is to want to hide or, alternatively, to enjoy the exhibitionism. It is a subjective experience, and the aim is to help the students break out of this state, and enter as objectively as possible into the movements that are given as imaginations; for instance, walking like a stick, walking through mud, walking on the balls of one's feet or on the heels, walking fast and leaning forward, or walking as if one were a huge ball. These imaginations, translated into movement, evoke specific moods. Each movement, each gesture has a mood. Especially for students who have difficulties creating a mood within themselves, these exercises can be of immense help. All work with gesture helps the student be centered within him and herself, the point of departure being the periphery – from the periphery to the center. In this respect (as well as in all aspects of producing plays in high school), David Sloan's recently published work *Stages of Imagination* is a must for all drama teachers in the high school. Having worked intensively with the Chekhov methods, and having been involved with drama and adolescents for more than twenty-five years, David offers insights that are an invaluable contribution to anybody working in the field of drama – be it with students, amateurs, or professionals.

What one observes most often is that students are initially reluctant to expose themselves through gesture. They feel their own vulnerability, painfully so. And the gestures which are used are stock-type, like the outspread arms, with the palms pointing up (a rare gesture in normal life) – the “I don't know what I'm doing” gesture. This kind of non-gesturing must be nipped in the bud. Depending on the student, I suggest different methods of getting into gesture: giving them imaginations, asking them to exaggerate, localizing gestures, doing it for them, letting them “hear” what kind of gesture the speech demands, and so on. Some students take the longest time to enter into their bodies, to feel free and comfortable. Inhibitions come in the way all too easily, from within themselves and from without. It must be cautioned, that one does not want to break down inhibitions (a destructive tool implemented in too many acting schools around the world, often causing permanent psychological/moral damage), but help them to break through the restrictions, so that they discover different parts of themselves, and essentially arrive at greater self awareness and confidence.

Then there are the students who overdo everything, who are over confident, and who dominate the space, at the cost of the ensemble's harmony. They need to be harnessed. This must be done with utmost tact, for they are more often than not the life of a class, and are naturals on the stage. They are like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, eager to act any and every role. Apart from working with even more rigor on their speech, it is very effective to work on reducing the gestures to the most minuscule movements. For example, asking them to act out a part using only the face, with the rest of the body remaining arrested; then repeating the scene using only the left hand. They become aware how incredibly expressive one can be with only a few, seemingly slight, movements. The energy that might have been thrown away and lost due to superfluous gesture can then be gathered and focused into one area. It takes immense concentration and focus, but it gives them a sense of increased expressive power. It proves the theory that less is more.

In the end, the natural and innate sense of artistic balance takes over, and the students find the various sweet spots for themselves. All the exercises and rehearsals are geared toward finding the equilibrium between levity and gravity that each and every moment requires. It is a matter of being awake to the in-between spaces.

The intimate relation between speech and gesture is illuminated by the following words of Rudolf Steiner:

In gesture lives the human being; there, in the gesture, is man himself. The gesture disappears into the speaking. When the word is intoned, then in the word man appears again, gesture-making man. When man speaks, we find in his speaking the whole human being, – that is, if he knows how to form his speaking. Let us then receive, as a heritage from those times when speech was still part of the content of the Mysteries, this truth: Man who has disappeared in the gesture, rises again in the spoken word.

The art of the stage, that employs gesture, does not let man altogether disappear from the gesture. Neither does it let him wholly ‘rise again’ in the word. And this is what makes a dramatic performance so fascinating. (Rudolf Steiner, *Speech and Drama*, Lecture 2, 6th September, 1924, p 63.)

Drama as a support to the curriculum

Then, at a quite definite moment in each child – it comes approximately with the twelfth year, at the threshold of puberty – we can observe how the child becomes receptive for the dramatic. . . . While we were careful at the right age to begin to develop the intellectuality, the young human nature, of its own accord, called out for the element of drama. This is what happens if one is able to bring to the child the right thing at the right time, and in the right manner. . . . While many ideals are necessary to our present life, the most important of them all will, without doubt, be the ideals of education. (Rudolf Steiner, *Drama in Relation to Education*, Stratford-on-Avon, April 19, 1922, p 9)

It is the dramatist who confronts us during adolescence. A teenager is naturally an actor and demands to be dramatically involved. The dramatic impulse thrusts itself upon the young person relentlessly and with transformative force, as he or she is ushered through the gateway of puberty – the physical changes defining the threshold to a newly awakened inner world. There’s no turning back. All the world has suddenly become a stage; a wonderful moment, as it is terrifying and disconcerting. No more can one hide in the dressing room of imitation (1st seven-year cycle), or in the wings of authority (2nd seven-year cycle). They are setting out on their own, playing different roles, trying to find their identities, searching for meaning, hoping to fulfill lofty goals – judging the world as it judges them, reaching beyond the sense world to something more grand, something imponderably new, something that has its source in the inscrutable realm of ideals.

These young people have begun to take life into their own hands – in itself a dramatic act – and now they walk the boards, alongside other players, in search of self-knowledge. It can be viewed as a steady process of individualization within a social context. Yet the road to freedom is fraught with difficulties. Wrong paths are easily trodden, and there are many forces distracting young people from realizing their ideals. The inescapable self absorbing emotional upsurge is not easily overcome. The proverbial ‘identity crisis’ has to be weathered, for some more than others. Young people have to cope with increasingly precipitous predicaments, at risk of being plagued by any number of pathologies. And it takes more than friendly support and guidance to help them remain centered through this trying time. It is the right implementation of drama that can help and serve as a most powerful and effective antidote against the perils that afflict young people. If we fail to offer today’s youth a stage to enact great tragedies and comedies, as expressed by the world’s master playwrights, then there’s no guarantee against potentially devastating consequences. It lies in the nature of

adolescence to be dramatically radical, overcoming the clinging fetters of all that's old, in order to strive after new ideals. Not meeting these innate demands may nurture increasingly severe delinquent tendencies, leaving us with yet another generation of rebels without a cause (or with causes of the most diabolical kind). Chaos or drama! It's the one or the other!

One therefore cannot underestimate the extent to which drama offers a needed balance to the substantial amount of intellectual activity covered during the high school years. Drama, by its very nature, is its polar opposite, and through healthy involvement not only supports the academic requirements, but enhances them on every level. Drama helps to nurture living thinking and true knowing, for the contents of a literary work are imaginatively embodied with the help of all of the senses. Drama is an exercise of will, par excellence, sustained by the fire of enthusiasm. Given the educational significance of drama, its purpose as a balancing factor, we must ask ourselves: how can we further enhance and support the high school curriculum through dramatic activity?

In our school, as in many other high schools around the country, the 10th and 12th grades put on full-scale productions. In our case, each class begins to work on the play about six weeks before the performance dates, albeit for only one double period a day during the initial phase. In the last three weeks the main lesson time is devoted to the play. In the week before the performances all lessons are suspended, and the play becomes the locus of our lives. In addition, afternoon rehearsals as well as evening rehearsals are scheduled. During extra rehearsals, which are very much enjoyed by the students, we accomplish some of the best and most fruitful work – especially during the evening rehearsals, when the students are more incarnated, and are raring to work. It is advisory to schedule them on Friday nights, because, as experience has shown, they are 'dead weights' the following morning.

But the drama work in the high school cannot be restricted only to two plays, no matter how grand, especially given its importance to the students in the third seven-year cycle. What other possibilities exist, and what form should they take?

Drama Club

We try to offer a drama club every fall. This is an extra curricular activity open to the entire high school, culminating in a performance (unfortunately it has not been possible to offer this course every year due to lack of personnel). This meets, to some extent, the needs of the 9th and 11th graders who love to act. There are always a number of students who welcome this opportunity to get involved in a school activity open to all grades. The drama club has always been very popular, and we have been lucky enough to draw people from Ted Pugh's Actors' Ensemble, as well as John McManus (cofounder of Shakespeare Alive and Walking the Dog Theater). These professionals offer more intense exposure to the work of Michael Chekhov, and can immerse the students in improvisations, as well as working on a play, or scenes from plays.

9th Grade

As a precursory remark, let me reiterate that all speech work done at the beginning of every main lesson already serves as a healthy polarity to the needed intellectual work done in the high school. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to forego speech work altogether. Recognizing its importance helps to rekindle the enthusiasm for daily work on speech. Students are often half asleep in the morning, more so than in the lower school, and one cannot expect a Shakespeare sonnet to be scintillating with life at this 'midnight' hour. A few tongue twisters and other brief warmups will already help to wipe away the morning cobwebs. On the surface the students might appear to be reluctant participants at such an unearthly hour, but they soon enter into the speech with enthusiasm, and actually get and gain pleasure from it.

Apart from the drama club, the block on Tragedy and Comedy offers many opportunities for hands on work in drama. Alone the morning speech exercises can serve as a foundation for all subsequent main lessons (especially since Tragedy and Comedy is the first humanities block in our high school), and thus is pursued with especial care and rigor in order to set the tone. The core idea of this block is to bring the two fundamental and contrasting human emotions of laughing and crying to the awareness of the students, how they are embodied and treated by the master playwrights in the form of tragedies and comedies. (The Tragedy and Comedy block is referred to as the Humor Epoch in Germany.) This block can all too easily be perceived as belonging to the ‘History through’ series, which it is not meant to be, though obviously it includes elements thereof (such as the origins of drama in ancient Greece, its development and debasement during the Roman era, etc.). Further, it can take on a one-sided intellectually academic air, in which one takes a few pertinent plays and merely studies them.

To keep the lessons as experiential as possible, in order to enhance the academic content; this is my main aim. Improvisational warmups suitable to the 9th grade go hand in hand with the speech exercises. (See David Sloan’s *Stages of Imagination*). The typical 9th grader’s penchant for polarity will be observed immediately. There are those who enter into the improvisations with tremendous verve, often going right over the top, and then there are those who shrink from exposing themselves. However, they nevertheless crave to be able to let go and enjoy it, and this is where the choice of the exercises becomes crucial, for they need to feel safe in order to participate; once that happens, healthy laughter resounds, with everyone enthusiastically engaged. Acting out scenes from the plays we are studying keeps the lessons alive and the students involved. Whatever has been penetrated and understood intellectually strives to be fully embodied. Hence jokes are made up and told (the telling of a joke has great dramatic potential); parodies are written and performed; invocations to Melpomene, goddess of tragedy, are composed and declaimed; humorous (and I usually choose humorous) short stories are dramatically acted out in groups; short plays are written and performed; masks can be made, improvising with them, endeavoring to slip into the being the mask calls forth.

...

As long as the guidelines are very clear the outcome will be successful – or at least very revealing. Over the course of three or four weeks, confidence is built and one can observe growth in the students, even during this short time.

A more in-depth study of the four temperaments, which developed naturally out of the research on the various kinds of comedy, has proven to be most fulfilling and appropriate. Many guided improvisations can be based on this study, which was also the basis for Ben Johnson’s Elizabethan comedies. (Johnson writes about his theory in the ‘Induction’ to his play *Every Man and His Humor*, 1598.) It is founded on the ancient theories of the four humors, or fluids. The temperament, or mixture of the four primary fluids – blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile), and melancholy (black bile) – determined both the physical state as well as the characteristic traits of the human being. In Ben Johnson’s *Comedy of Humors*, the temperaments of the main characters are exaggerated. Instead of well-balanced individuals we meet people whose dispositions reflect one of the four humors: sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic. We are able to laugh at the resultant eccentricities because we recognize them both within ourselves and those around us. The 9th graders, in particular, appreciate learning about themselves through the temperaments. They are able to take an objective look at themselves, and come to a greater understanding of others. The polarities are clearly portrayed.

The 9th grader is very open to working with exercises on the temperaments, and one can proceed very systematically. I based my method on the groundbreaking work of the late Nogge, a German clown of great repute in and out of Anthroposophical circles. (His biography, ending in tragic suicide, is worth telling in a 9th grade, as it exemplifies the soul constitution of a clown.) Again, the

starting point was through the outer gesture in conjunction with an imagination, trying to get them to experience the gravity and the weight of the earth – melancholic; the formless watery element – phlegmatic; the dissipating element of the air – sanguine; and the flaming element of the fire – choleric. These soul qualities, highlighted through the contrasts, allow the students to know what it might feel like to have a different temperament. I have noticed that an inner loosening takes place in the students, coupled with a greater appreciation for one another. At the end of a recent study of the temperaments with the 9th grade, the class insisted that we go around the whole class determining each student’s temperament. Following that they wanted to determine the temperament of the teachers. They were astoundingly accurate with the teachers, less so with one another. Such a study of the temperaments hones the 9th grader’s faculty of observation – imperative for this age. It can be a rigorous exercise. To achieve optimum results the teacher should rehearse the gestures thoroughly beforehand, in order for the students to imitate and feel into each temperament’s objective mood and quality. This can be quite demanding for the teacher – but very entertaining for the class.

One can proceed by initially having the students walk the different temperaments. Through walking they can experience the overriding mood of a specific temperament. I start by demonstrating, so that they are called upon to observe. Next, they should imitate as precisely as possible what they have observed. Remember: it helps to proceed methodically. My endeavor is to ensure that they all imitate correctly – there will inevitably be students who tiptoe along like a sanguine, or shuffle along like a phlegmatic, even though you demonstrated the choleric. Make them aware, for example, how the heels seem to burn into the ground, or how the entire body is thrust forward in the case of a choleric. After the initial stages of observation and imitation I urge the students to re-create out of themselves their own imagined characters, based on the four temperaments, for only now are they ready to play (*Spieltrieb*) with the impulses they have observed and imitated. Now they are prepared to pour their new found talent into guided improvisations. The following topics have worked well (using several actors):

1. Cleaning up
2. Making a meal
3. Calling someone on the phone (for a date, job, complaint, etc)
4. Doing homework
5. Teacher trying to get a class to behave
6. Ending a relationship
7. Sitting on someone’s hat (exploring the reactions of the different^otemperaments)

The possibilities are endless It matters less what one does, but how one chooses to proceed. Warning: students easily get carried away by the story they are enacting and may fall out of the respective temperament, or they might exaggerate their parts, hindering the natural development of the improv. The 9th grader, on the whole, cannot yet fill out the temperaments, which does not lessen their experience of them. Their introduction to them is an awakening of sorts, tantamount to an “aha!” experience, which will leave its indelible mark. I try to lead them on a voyage of discovery, letting them explore the nature of the four temperaments, and how they relate to the four elements. The students begin to find out for themselves the lawfulness involved. One can advance in a healthy Socratic manner, asking questions to elicit insights: what moods do the elements as such conjure forth? How are the temperaments revealed in language and speech? How do the different temperaments orientate themselves in space? Are they expansive, or contractive . . . ?

Studying the temperaments has become a high point in the Tragedy and Comedy block. What impresses the students is the polarity between the strengths and weaknesses of each temperament –

how a weakness can be changed into a strength if one works at it, and how, conversely, a strength can easily degrade into a flaw – a little lesson on good and evil right there. Something dawns in the students, and it is as if a mirror has been placed in front of them, allowing them to see themselves and others in a new way; an interest in one's fellow human being has been awakened.

10th Grade

The enthusiasm for the scheduled play is great. Students organize their exchanges around it, and some, who had left the school, have been known to return solely because of the play. It is the first time that, as a high school class, they present something to the entire school. It is a graduation of sorts and is taken very seriously. Students who may still have been very reserved in ninth grade step onto the boards with more confidence and aplomb. The transformative effects of the sophomore play is more visible than in any other year. Again and again I experience it as a rite of passage. In a way they truly leave their 'freshman' status behind only after the play. There is also a definite before and after shift in the spirit of the class; they've crossed the bridge and are ready to embark on the second leg of their high school journey (potentially the more tumultuous phase).

The sophomore play has its place, like a fulcrum, between the 8th grade play and the senior play. How does it differ from these two? Does it have a unique position within the rainbow of plays in the Waldorf curriculum as such? If yes, what is its nature? How can it be characterized?

Passages through life cycles tend to be marked by "rituals" of one kind or another. Rituals in the old sense of the word barely exist anymore in our modern society; the young man is no longer required to head forth into the veld and kill his first lion as a mark of bravery, proving his ability to be a protector and provider – someone who is able to serve the community. Instead, we see the sophomores stepping into cars, proud carriers of permits, eagerly awaiting the day when the driver's license will allow them to test their new won independence. It is also the first year when the students can choose to go on an exchange, leaving their homes for a protracted period of time. It requires them to adjust to a whole new way of living and, more often than not, another language. For a while they are removed from their community, filled with hope as well as apprehension, and sometimes despair. Inevitably they go through periods of loneliness, while simultaneously making new connections and gaining tremendous insights. There is a change of status on the part of the individual when they return, at times overtly expressed in new hairstyles, clothing, or attitude. Incidentally, adolescent initiation in Africa is often characterized by a change of physical appearance, such as covering the face or body with ash or chalk, as well as the shaving, growing, or braiding of hair. It is generally accepted by our society that 10th graders have reached a level of maturity warranting them to drive by themselves, leave home for lengthy periods of time, and to manage their own lives more freely. We recognize that these students are now capable of seeing possibilities and limits more clearly; their new found faculties allowing them to take life into their own hands, able to make independent choices, rather than relying on outside authority (which is still the case in the 8th grade, though the rebellion is already well under way). As they gain independence they are confronted with moral options more than ever before. The pressure to succumb to the temptations of the world in the form of drugs, alcohol, sex, as well as crime, violence and the ongoing pursuit of thrills, are tremendous. In this regard 10th grade seems to be an especially volatile year, with students either beginning to experiment with the ubiquitous trappings of the times, or entering fully into illicit lifestyles. On the basis that moral order controls social order, initiation rites in the past have always endeavored to lead the young people to recognize their connection to the social and universal order more distinctly. Rituals were associated with the effort to ensure success of the young person in these trying times, in order to avoid conceivable disasters. The possibility of dire calamities awaiting the contemporary adolescent around every corner is just cause for alarm. Sometimes it takes a

timely arrest by the police, suspension from school, or a car crash, to jolt a young person back to his or her senses. Rites have often been associated with crisis, and the sophomore, standing at the threshold of independence and young adulthood, is particularly susceptible to it. And it is a crisis which often precipitates a reconciliation with the community, thereby avoiding further disaster. 10th graders consciously and unconsciously search to bridge the gap between themselves and the world around them. How unfortunate that students often have to meet up with their own weaknesses through close “shaves” and humiliating, even tragic events, rather than through a structure established by society allowing the individual to prosper. Traditionally, rituals also put the person in touch with God, or the gods, facilitating the right relationship to the “invisible” world. Today, however, this spiritual link no longer exists. We cannot help but recognize that the young person is not adequately met on many levels. It is precisely in this connection that the 10th grade play can be of immense importance – a socially sanctioned ritual designed to instill the ideal by setting up values and patterns of behavior for emulation or detestation. In this respect one can also view the play as a carefully planned and scheduled crisis. In short, a well- chosen and directed play can help to fulfill the needs of the sophomores at this critical junction in their lives.

Both the 8th grade and senior play bear qualities of a rite of passage, but not to the same degree. I experience the 8th grade play more as a festive ending to the lower school years, rather than a threshold to the high school. It is the relative innocence of the nascent astral body that is so captivating to behold – like a fledgling bird about to take flight. For the most part, however, the students are not yet able fill out the parts (there are always stunning exceptions). Their feeling life cannot yet match the emotional maturity required to act major roles. Not in the least does this lessen the immense effects a Shakespeare play can have on the 8th graders, nor the enjoyment one can derive by watching them perform; on the contrary, the freshness of these young actors, sprinkled with the dew of the divine, can be a more fulfilling and satisfying experience than watching professionals perform.

It is remarkable to see the emotional growth that transpires between 8th and 10th grade. Astrality is now in full blossom, without having lost any of its “morning” luster. They stand on stage like men and women, drawing on resources that defy rational understanding – for so much of what they are acting has not been experienced. They often surprise themselves as they discover their capacities for entering characters from all walks of life. Their fully awakened sexuality adds new dimensions to their ability of acting not only love scenes, but scenes that cover a whole array of emotions. Simultaneously, however, a definite chaotic element accompanies the breaking forth of astrality, and the discipline of acting can deal formatively with the dramatic changes taking place within the adolescent’s soul.

During rehearsals the young people are removed from the normal rhythm of school life for a few weeks, embarking on a common task that calls for loyalty, trust, goodwill, responsibility and rigorous work; no production of quality can be achieved without the class working together as a team. They get taught how to use their bodies, control their emotions, create moods, and enter into and become someone other. For a while they can shed their daytime ‘persona,’ which, in itself, can be a freeing experience, dependent, as it so often is on current fashions.

Conflicts between class members are frequently resolved, and opportunities avail themselves for diverse reconciliations to take place. The performances at the end of the ‘preparatory’ period can be likened to a festive and symbolic ceremony, welcoming the young people back to the community; it is a ‘rebirth’ of sorts into a different phase of life. Some students verily glow with new-found dignity and self confidence after the performances.

There are, however, other areas that can be utilized for their dramatic potential. The study of Homer’s *The Odyssey* lends itself to dramatic interpretation; taking care to choose scenes that

contrast one another, so that, through the doing they can strengthen their powers of comparison, thereby finding a midpoint between the opposites within themselves. In the exploration of how things relate to one another, debates can be consciously introduced. The art of debating has got definite dramatic qualities: the opposing views promise conflict; the manner in which the respective students relate their arguments suggests character; and the outcome of the conflict offers a conclusion – the end of the ‘play.’ During their debate the students have to prove the validity of their contention. Aspects of language, speech, posture, gesture are all part of it, as they are part and parcel of any dramatic activity. The words have to be spoken clearly and with conviction. The block on ancient Greece, which covers the great philosophers and orators of the age of Pericles, is a fitting time to introduce the students to the art of debating.

In Germany many schools traditionally perform a foreign language play in the 10th grade. It is a statement of how important the foreign languages are to these European schools, and the level to which they are able to advance. Though we have not arrived there yet, the tenth grade often performs foreign language skits at the assemblies which are always well received. It is refreshing to see drama taken up by the foreign languages. There are some schools in North America that are working with this concept, such as the Waldorf high school in Montreal, which performs plays in English.

11th Grade

Without a doubt the potential for difficulties during the junior year is great. Juniors become privy to a depth within themselves of which they were hitherto unaware. It can cause friction and feelings of great dissatisfaction, and needs to be tenderly met by understanding adults. It is interesting to note that more and more schools in Europe are choosing to shift the senior play down to the 11th grade, where the need has been deemed greater. The lack of a play has often been sorely felt by students, parents, and teachers alike. To meet the dramatic hunger of 11th graders, we have offered drama electives over the year, including dramatic exercises, improvisations, short plays and/or staged readings. If scheduled in the early part of the year, an adaption of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens works very well. It can be performed as a whole, or – as we have also done – in sections at the Advent assemblies. If the time for drama falls later in the year, one-act plays, for example by Thornton Wilder, have proved successful as well as the first act of *Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose.

With one particularly troubled class we organized a trip to the Bread and Butter Theater in Vermont. The result was that Bread and Butter came down and performed at our school, on the lawn, together with the 11th grade. It was an entertaining, pedagogical, and successful event, with a bohemian whiff to it. That, of course, was a one-time affair.

The Parzival block lends itself to the dramatic portrayal of the powerful imaginations inherent in the epic. Through these profound pictures the students can participate in the journey that Parzival undertakes, through dullness and doubt to blessedness. It is a soul-drama par excellence, mirroring archetypal inner struggles that can strike a recondite chord within them. Acting out the key scenes drives home the point more poignantly that they are not alone in their sufferings and feelings of inadequacy; and that others before them have had to go through similar probations. The lawfulness of the ‘gradual’ progression is tremendously empowering. The scenes are clearly defined, and allow for the expression of immense depth of soul, with the potential of filling their inner emptiness with moral sustenance. In the enactment of stupidity, rash behavior, deep sorrow, regret, suffocating guilt, love in all its lofty purity, loneliness, intolerable feelings of failure, defiance, doubt, and ultimately the triumph of blessedness – a state of grace . . . questions are addressed – consciously as well as unconsciously – which will serve them for life. It is advisable to divide the class into groups and have them each act out one of the key twelve pictures. The story of Parzival meets the

adolescent who is feeling alienated from the world, who is often blinded by the trappings of the outer world, who desires to reach out and be independent, but who is still awkward, clumsy, and inexperienced in the ways of the world. These students find in Parzival more than just a mirror of themselves; they find nourishment and strength to overcome their lower selves.

The Shakespeare block, in turn, offers an ideal opportunity for the preparation of classical monologues. These can be viewed as excellent tools to help the student through various problems, pitfalls, and general difficulties that one stumbles across as an actor. They can serve as microcosms for acting and speech classes as such, for each monologue has the potential to involve the actor in an active manner with his external surroundings, as well as supplying an introspective focus. The work in tackling a monologue is essentially the same as preparing an entire role or scene. One begins with a detailed study of the text and the development of relationships implicit within the material. These are manifold: relationship to the other actors, imaginary persons, the audience, the environment, his own physical being (gestures), and the actual words spoken. The more aware one is of these relationships, the fuller and richer the actor's involvement will become. Emotional and spiritual truths are revealed by recognizing and discovering the manifold and often subtle relationships. And Shakespearean monologues are a treasure trove, unsurpassed in dramatic quality.

12th Grade

The senior year is a true culmination of the entire high school education, and in contrast to the 11th grade, is chock-a-block full of events: field trips, practicums, college applications and visits, senior projects, field trips, class trip, play, and graduation – not to mention the regular classes – which all add up to a thickly layered year. A dramatic year in its own right! Nevertheless, opportunities also avail themselves for working dramatically with the curriculum.

The block on the Transcendentalists offers opportunities to enact sections from *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, or to improvise debates between Thoreau and Emerson. In the same vein, staged readings from Goethe's *Faust* can be very effective.

Furthermore, the study of Fairy Tales, which we offer as an elective, lends itself to dramatization. Most students are familiar with these fragments of mythology from kindergarten and first grade, and a conscious study of these 'pearls of wisdom' brings them back to the point of departure in their educational journey through the grades. One senior class insisted on acting out a fairy tale, and after going through a process of selection chose *The Golden Goose*, which they performed for the entire school with great success – directed and produced by them (with only a few suggestions from me). Fairy tales can easily be improvised, especially since the students know some of these stories so well. It is very endearing to see the little child in them reappearing during such endeavors. Other possibilities include having the seniors perform a puppet show for the children in the kindergarten. One student chose to produce a film of a modernized version of *Hans in Luck* as part of her senior project. Members of the class acted in the film and it was shown to the school community during the presentation of senior projects.

The work on the senior play is usually the most fulfilling and fruitful. Discipline problems are almost reduced to zero (they usually discipline themselves), and the warmups are more often than not imbued with nostalgic fervor – it's the last time they can 'play' together in such a free manner – since they are about to go their separate ways. When will they ever be part of a group that has gone through so much together, in which everyone knows the other so well? Their bonds have grown unfathomably deep, and in some imponderable way they come to expression in the warmups and in the play . . . a cast melded together through innumerable experiences of the deepest nature.

I always like to start the rehearsal for the 12th grade play with the following Steiner verse. It sets the tone for the daily work ahead, and centers the students while retaining their sense for the periphery.

When, on occasion, I have forgotten to say the verse, for one reason or another, the students will remind me, making sure that it is said. The inherent quality of the verse is calming, reassuring, and life imbuing.

The rigid dead mass of matter,
To inject it with life and spirit,
That is the aim of the artist;

The fleeting, ephemeral spirit,
To give it form and solidity -,
That is the scientist's striving.

And when the work's culmination
Is attained,
Then in one
The other must meet.

Rudolf Steiner, *Wahrspruchworte*, p192, loose translation by the author.

The play is often experienced by the seniors as the true graduation. It marks the synthesis of their entire education. In coming together for the last time as a group they are able to create a world on stage before they take their next steps onto the larger stage – that of the world.

For the most part, the seniors are very willing to do whatever it takes to produce a stellar performance. All the disparate elements of their lives are pulled together and utilized to serve this culminating experience. Characters are consciously penetrated with the flowering and newly awakened capacities now at their disposal. The strength gained to face the audience helps them to face the future. It has been remarkable to observe, over and over again, how students, who even in tenth grade, were unwilling to play big roles, now suddenly feel secure enough to take on major roles with success.

Performing a play must undoubtedly belong to the most triumphant and socially enriching ways of concluding one's life at school!

FINAL CURTAIN

Music

Music enhances any play tremendously. Its refreshing quality is felt by the students during the rehearsals as well as by the audiences during the performances. Music is used to heighten dramatic or comic moments. We all know how effectively music is incorporated in films: simply fix the camera on an empty room, add some creepy sounds, and voila! – people sit on the edge of their chairs anticipating the worst. The trick is to do the right thing at the right time. Sometimes the playwright stipulates where the music or sound effects should be included, but mostly it is up to the director, whether or not to add music, and in what manner.

What does one want to achieve? The musical component should never take over at the expense of the play; rather, it should at all times retain its subservient quality, even when it is obviously showcased, as in musicals. It should boost the momentum of a play, inject it with more life, elevate

and intensify the atmosphere. The play should always move along seamlessly, and music can facilitate that flow.

While reading through a play I always try to determine the musical possibilities, coupled with the means at my disposal. If the play is without any songs, I look for appropriate places to include a few songs or tunes (which then have to be found or composed). Next, I decide which instruments or sound effects would be most fitting as mood builders. For every play I like to form a little band or ensemble. Initially I try to draw from the body of the class, but often I call upon other musicians in the high school. Once that is established, I try to envision how the music should be integrated – before, after, or in-between particular scenes? These are some of the considerations one has to bear in mind if one wants to achieve optimal results.

As mentioned earlier, music captures the essence of different cultures, and thus serves to deepen a connection to the people of the other nations. Plays take us all over the world, yet we are usually restricted to performing them in our native tongue (though it's fruitful to work with various accents). The folk spirit lives not only in the language, but also in the music. And more often than not desired results can be achieved with simple methods. Add an African drum, and already we are transported to Africa (remember, it's the mood we are after); a jig on a fiddle accompanied by a bodhran carries us to Ireland; a howling blues harmonica takes us to the deep south; gongs take us to Asia; a banjo to the Midwest; a didgeridoo to Australia, a balalaika to Russia, a sitar to India. . . .

The various instruments can, of course, be implemented purely to complement and augment a mood, irrespective of cultural origin. Timpani, depending on how they are played, can conjure forth a threatening mood, represent tremendous power, or – especially in conjunction with a trumpet – can create a majestic and royal quality. Gongs and metal instruments as such (bearing in mind the metal's relation to the planets) invoke immediate and direct responses, which tend to elevate us beyond the mere earthly, worldly existence. Metal instruments are like an echo of the cosmos, and can be incorporated effectively when scenes deal with the supernatural, whether of diabolical, divine, or celestial nature. . . .

Apart from the tonal quality of the various instruments, one can work effectively with scales and/or intervals, as well as rhythms. In my upcoming Chinese play I will be working mainly with the pentatonic scale (in conjunction with gongs and bells, cymbals and chimes, moon guitar). For Wilder's *The Alcestiad*, I used the tetrachord (descending scale of four notes, including the interval of a 4th) as the basis for improvisations – in conjunction with the 7/8 rhythm – which helped to conjure up a mood of Ancient Greece. Improvising on the so-called Gypsy scale can, in turn, excite an exotic near-eastern mood.

I have made it a habit to introduce some of these musical tidbits only shortly before the actual performance, especially sound effects. I do this so that the students learn to create as much of the mood as possible out of themselves. They should not lean on the background music too much, nor should they rely on it to supply the mood that they ought to create themselves. I liken it to the application of make up, which is only used for the actual performances, sometimes partially at the dress rehearsal. Some of the music and sound effects serve the same purpose – audible makeup. Any weaknesses which might stubbornly persist right up to the last moment can then be sonically papered over; the actor's confidence will thus be boosted and bolstered, helping them to enter even more deeply into their roles.

Musicals

These productions always generate a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm. They certainly enhance the musical life of a school. During and after a production the songs can be heard ringing in the hallways, sometimes for months on end. They live on, the effects seeping into every classroom;

the chorus work is positively affected through renewed interest and enthusiasm in singing – to hear the basketball captain sing ‘If I were a Rich Man,’ makes singing a cool thing to do. At our school the students love to sing, partly because they are emulating the seniors who have successfully sung in musicals.

It is always wonderfully surprising to see how willing students are to sing, even those who are relatively shy. Initially they have to overcome their own fears – because one does feel much more exposed while singing. But the improvement in the students’ ability is astounding. What starts off as a weak and timid voice can, and often does, grow into a voice that can project and fill a hall . . . talk about ‘finding your own voice!’

The dancing and choreography that a musical usually demands also has great appeal for the students. The concept of the play is thus expanded to embody even more artistic elements. It becomes the epitome of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Musicals have a magnetic and attractive quality. People are drawn to helping with musicals. A versatile piano player, who is able to come to many rehearsals, is nigh essential; best of all if he or she can take on all the responsibilities regarding the music.

Although musicals can be fulfilling and successful, superficiality in the genre abounds. Indeed, there are hundreds to choose from, but very few can match the caliber of such classics as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Les Miserables*, or *Man of La Mancha*. Added to this shortage is the reality that the majority of musicals do not cater for an abundance of female roles. If one has to contend with big classes, this can be a problem. To produce *Oliver*, for instance, might be fine for an eighth grade, where the girls inevitably have to take on the roles of men, but for a senior class it is simply no longer viable, given the distinctive differences in male/female voices. One alternative is to write musicals, that have been successfully done by Arnold Logan, my predecessor, or to add so much music to a play that it becomes a quasi-musical.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Alone, learning a part, filing away at gestures, working on speech, entering into a different role or roles, acting in concert with fellow class members, helping with costumes, stage sets and props, can be profoundly cathartic. And there is hardly a student who does not significantly benefit from such an experience. It influences all aspects of life. The feeling of fulfillment is based on concrete experiences. Years later former students approach me, voicing their appreciation. Some students, inspired by school productions, choose to go on and study drama; others never again act in a play, but carry the treasure of their experiences with them for life and look back at the plays as culminating points in their entire schooling.

After a recent 10th grade production of Thornton Wilder’s *The Alcestiad* I asked the students to write down some of their thoughts regarding their own experiences of the dramatic process. It was optional and I was pleased that some of them did take the time to reflect. I was struck how they were able to verbalize the effects of the play on themselves as individuals, and on the class as a whole. In order to retain authenticity their contributions have been changed as little as possible.

There are so many things one could say about putting on a play. . . . There is nothing more rewarding than seeing words printed on paper leap to life on stage.

As far as my personal experience, like most plays I’ve been in, I did not fully appreciate the role I was given until I really got to know the character. Of course, you take what part

you are given, but when a director knows his players well enough to give them the perfect part, then magic happens.

Due to social oddities within the class, being with only these twenty people made me very unhappy. But performing this play was one of the best times I had this year. When on stage, all feelings of pride flew out the window like loose paper. I only saw the characters in the play. At least in my case, when on stage, I am the person I'm playing, and nothing else.

What I took away from this play was the realization that in life, as on stage, I am the person I play. Opinions of others do not matter as long as I play my role in an A 1 manner – as long as I am outstanding as myself . . .

I look forward to our 12th grade play.

— Melanie

It was a unique chance for the individual to express him or herself in a way other than in the usual paper work . . . It builds and enhances individual strength, as well as allowing and encouraging bonds to form in the group (making it in some ways a single entity). The feeling of satisfaction lasted for days after the intense climax of giving the performance. I began to question who I was, and what I would do in a certain situation, and whether I could be this person, this stranger – the character I was acting.

— Kage

In doing our play, *The Alcestiad*, I gained more confidence in acting than I used to have. Of course I have a lot to work on, but I do feel better . . . I felt that everyone put their all into it. I personally was able to slow my speaking down – not a lot, but to the understanding point. I also got to practice pronouncing my consonants, which is not something I do every day. I think it was easier for me to get into my character since I was working with a close friend; I felt more comfortable and more able to act. I think that Erin and I played men fairly well, or as well as we could have. I think we could have played girl parts better, but that's just because we are girls. Overall, I felt satisfied with the performances we put on, and I had a lot of fun doing them.

— Whitney

I think our play was a success. It was hard work and a lot of practice was needed. Acting made me put all my other feelings aside and become my character. It was a very nice experience to spend all that time with our class. Our class is now like a family. I was pleased with my performance and proud of my class. It was a valuable experience and I am thankful that I had it.

— Dov

I read in a book once, stating that anyone who has the tendency to absorb the pain of others must, by necessity, be an artist in some way, in order to release the emotions which they have perceived and taken on as their own. This was said specifically concerning

theater, and it seems to me that acting is one of the most direct art forms for this release. How better to express the unacceptable than as someone other than oneself? What better way is there to defy the universe than from a stage, with the stolid protection of a costume? Be it pain, anger, grief, or love; be they feelings from within, or the perceived injustices or favors done to others, all are welcomed, all are wanted, in the house of drama.

I truly loved working on the play. The excited stress of it was exhausting, but also exhilarating. The class was brought together by the desire to reach a common goal, but the individuality was strengthened as well. The sense of accomplishment that a performance such as this brings is enough to make a half-frightened, self-frustrated teenager pause to enjoy herself a little. To me that is a wonderful thing.

My only regret is that the time spent on the play was not longer. Not even for the sake of the final production, but to gain a better understanding of the script itself.

— Tara

* * *

And from a senior who was only allowed to return under specific conditions. Because he entered the senior year firmly resolved to doing his best I gave him the lead in the musical *Man of La Mancha*:

Thank you for allowing me to prove myself to everyone who doubted me, and giving me my time to shine . . . [I] have learned valuable lessons about myself, as well as great inspiration from all that you have taught . . . Thank you . . . [for] what I believe to be the best play in the school's history.

— Andy

Conclusion

Drama serves as one of the most powerful mediums of public outreach if it is thoroughly supported by the school. But for the necessary deepening to take place, for the students to be reached, touched, motivated, nourished and met, certain prerequisites need to be in place, in order to achieve optimal results: active speech work throughout the grades, especially during the plays; age appropriate movement (Eurythmy, Spacial Dynamics, Bothmer Gym, Dancing); a dynamic and enthusiastic director who is willing to give up life in order to serve life, and who relentlessly pursues excellence; and ample help from the faculty and parents to ensure that the many aspects of production are taken care of. So as to minimize the chaotic elements that hover around theatrical productions. A successful play is the culmination of many deeds of love.

Plays can be unique apertures through which we can peer into all realms of human life – if we dare to illumine the contents from a spiritual point of view. And only spiritual insights can bring to the work the kind of authenticity needed for a successful drama program that strengthens and nurtures to the highest degree. If drama is to have a truly cathartic effect on today's youth, it must again be lifted to the level of a religious festival – in the broadest sense of the word – as it was once conceived in Ancient Greece.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beevers, Geoffrey. *Silas Marner*, London: Samuel French, 1999.
- Bohannon, Paul. *Africa and Africans*, New York: The Natural History Press, 1964.
- Chekhov, Michael. *To the Actor*, New York: Harper and Row, 1953.
- Filichia, Peter. *Let's Put on a Musical*, New York: Avon Books, 1993.
- Hart, Moss. *Act One*, New York: Random House, Inc., 1959.
- Johnstone, Keith. *Impro*, New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts Book, 1979
- Leonard, Charles. *Michael Chekov's To the Director and Playwright*, New York: Limelight Editions, August 1984.
- Rockwood, Jerome. *The Craftsmen of Dionysus*, Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1966.
- Sloan, David. *Stages of Imagination*, Fair Oaks: AWSNA, 2001.
- Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater*, Northwestern University Press, 1996.
- Steiner, Rudolf. *Speech and Drama*, London: Anthroposophical Press, 1959.
- _____ *Waldorf Education for Adolescence*, Michael Hall, Forest Row, E. Sussex, U.K.: Kolisko Archive Publications for Steiner Schools Fellowship Publications, 1980.
- _____ *Erziehungs- und Unterrichtsmethoden auf anthroposophischer Grundlage*, GA 304, Dornach./Schweiz: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1979.
- _____ *Wahrspruchworte*, GA 40. Dornach/Schweiz: Rudolf Steiner Verlag 1991.
- Von Krolit, Jorg. *Sprachgestaltung und Dramatische Darstellungskunst*, Dornach/Schweiz: Verlag am Goethanum, 1984.
- Wasserman, Dale. *Man of La Mancha*, New York: Random House, 1966.
- Werbeck-Svardstrom, Valborg. *Uncovering the Voice*, London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1980.
- Wangh, Stephen, *An Acrobat of the Hear*, New York: Vintage Books, 2000.