Living the Part: Stanislavski's Acting Method

Bringing Life to Shakespeare's Plays through the Art of Reading

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Abstract

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This teacher research project explored the use of Stanislavski's Method Acting as an interpretive reading strategy, specifically for reading Shakespeare's plays. Drawing on both traditional and contemporary teaching artists, the study examined how the Method was applied to reading instruction with preservice educators in *The Teaching of Shakespeare 4551* course at Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York City. By considering the perspectives of both the Method actor and the preservice English educator, the research focused on reflections of activities adapted from Drama Education and Method Acting, applying them to the teaching of reading in English Education. Through dramatically reconstructed retellings of my teaching workshops and an analysis of practice, I sought to answer the following question: *What happens when the Method Acting approach is used as a reading strategy for studying dramatic texts?* My analysis of the collected data (observations, student writing, and interviews) revealed that through my adaption of the Method as an approach to Shakespearean drama study, my students connected with the text, both intellectually and emotionally, and intended to adopt a similar approach in their own teaching of Shakespeare and perhaps other literary works.

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With Gratitude and Love

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"I can no other answer make but
thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks."
(*Twelfth Night*, A3.s3)

Huzzah.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my son,

Samuel.

May you always look for magic,

and if a day ever comes when you cannot find it,

come find me, and we will go looking for it together,

in fields of wildflowers and under the stars.

And if ever there comes a time that you cannot find me,

remember to look inside your heart,

for the magic (and me) was inside you,

right there, all along.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts

William Shakespeare
From *As You Like It*,
spoken by Jaques, Act II, sc. 7

Preface

I still remember my first curtain call: I was 12 years old, draped in my Grandmother Ardis's embroidered brown shawl from "the dress-up box." My fellow 12-year-old cast members giggled alongside me as we prepared to bow, following our performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the way we had been carefully taught by our Director, Michael Langlois: the Shakespearean bow. Rumor had it that Paul Newman was in the audience again, as he often was, for the *Hole in the Wall Gang Camp Productions*. He had been an early hero of mine, and my Grandmother, Ardis Vandewater-Abbott, had made sure I had seen every one of his films, among many other classics. As we all synched our bodies and held our breaths, some of us snuck a peek in the audience. *Was he there?* While it has taken me a lifetime in the theatre and performing arts to begin to understand what the art form could be capable of in educational settings and beyond, it was these formative, experiential, and embodied learning experiences that shaped understandings of myself and how I saw myself in the world.

My Grandmother's "dress-up box" was a place where stories began and my imagination bloomed. Under a simply draped sunny window, bordered by romantic embroidered brown wallpaper where tiny figures from an English countryside floated above me, my creative ideas blossomed. Inside the creaking wooden long-box, there were aprons, old pocketbooks, shawls, and hats from another era. With each sash or costume jewelry piece, I became someone else (and so did my poor younger brothers). In a time before the internet or the cell phone, my day was filled only with my own dreams. Inspired by my favorite stories such as *Anne of Green Gables* or *Jane Eyre*, I embodied my early heroines in the long hours of summer. In each role, I took pieces from them and wove them within my own identity construction without really knowing what I

was doing. In many ways, these moments were like a seed planted for the future Method actor I would one day become professionally. Through ballet lessons and exposure to the Arts in all forms (provided by my Mother) and the curiosities of Science and Nature (thanks to my Father), I saw the world through questions, imagination, and play.

That dress-up box held the key to learning how to tell stories, embody them, create them, and perform them for family and friends. I remember in particular the red velvet hat for my city ladies, the ones who like my Grandmother left their homes to head to Washington, DC, to write. Or the woven flower basket for collecting wildflowers to later press when I needed to think under a great big sky and in wide open spaces. The shoes that were too big for me but made me feel like an old Hollywood movie star like Audrey Hepburn, my favorite. There was just something about being in costume that made me a little bolder, walk a little taller, and hold those shoulders more elegantly. In that box, I first learned how to see the world and learn from the world through others' eyes and embodied imaginative experiences.

I also remember my first monologue as Shakespeare's character Hermia, waking from a nightmare of a snake attack and finding herself alone in the forest without her beloved. As a child, I knew not what romantic love was, or even what a serpent's bite might render. So, I told my young self, *act what you know*. I would be afraid to be alone in the forest at night, even more so upon waking from a terrible nightmare, so I tapped into those feelings and allowed the rest of the story to be reflected in my body. I was becoming a storyteller. This was my first little green experience with Method Acting.

The following summer, I auditioned for the traveling New England Shakespeare Festival and landed a role as an intern in their production of *The Taming of the Shrew.* We traveled all over the East Coast and performed in traditional style, out of doors, the sky overhead, with our

Director, Demi Padpadinas, PhD, at the helm, educating us in the ways of performance art in Shakespeare's time. There was a striking realness to the shows in which actors evolved—and embodied their characters in the moment through improvisation.

As a cast member in this festival (or in Shakespeare's time), actors were trained to be ready for anything to unfold on stage, respond to it authentically, and build on the story through their body and a genuine display of emotion. Still, back then, even though, as the youngest cast member, I spent most of my nights washing the cast's costumes, that one show a week where I was allowed to set foot on stage with professional actors was thrilling. Through the rehearsal process, I learned of improvisational techniques and was trained in the art of preparing and using one's body to tell stories. I learned to find the truth of the play within the applications of physical action, improvisational yet authentic and concentrated. I began to formulate my own critiques of characters and their choices and found myself reflecting more about who I wanted to be and how I saw myself in the world through the exploration of my emotional memory. But I also learned to accept the world of the play, connect to others and to the choices my character made, whether or not I could have made them without judgment: This was my first taste of being an *expert reader*. A reader who can, to some extent, embody their understanding of the story, through transaction and connection with the story of a character.

I carried those experiential learning opportunities with me when I traversed my high school years and, thus, the Drama Club at E.O. Smith High School. Drama and the theatre had changed the way I encountered the people I met, literature, language, and even myself. It also taught me to sit with not understanding something right away or to embrace fear to face a challenge. It also, dare I say, healed me, as it allowed me to reflect on the way my pain was

similar to the pain other humans experienced. Through reading and performing, I was never alone.

During these formative years, I watched my favorite stories come to life on the stage. The auditioning and rehearsal process taught me humility, courage, and gratitude. Taking on roles instilled the ability to empathize with others and to be a truly good listener. I became comfortable with my body and what it could do, and thus I learned how far I could push myself in an effort to be a loyal ensemble member. Through dress rehearsals (where anything that can go wrong usually does), through tech week where minutes become days and cues become clockwork, through memorizing lines and opening night jitters—a thousand lessons of resiliency came to me. I understood what loyalty meant, and I found ways to play with words, language, and my own voice and breath, in hopes of entertaining, yes, but also impacting at least one audience member—or many, if I got so lucky. I also learned to tap further into my emotional memory and harness the depth of my feelings in efforts to portray a character as authentically as I could. This over time grew the depth of my own emotional intelligence.

The art form became a home and journey at the same time. For my senior year, in taking inspiration from my friend's dad, Samuel Pickering (who was the inspiration for Robin Williams's character in the film *Dead Poets Society*), I crafted a learning experience for my classmates in the exploration of Shakespeare through a performance-based study for my Senior Project. I fondly remember the smiles on their faces as they danced on their desks and shouted some of The Bard's greatest lines at each other. That was when I first learned that others became engaged when reading and learning were embodied—when emotions were shared.

These embodied experiences would remain the fundamental veins of my life, no matter where I was or what I seemed to be doing. In my undergrad years, as a Drama Major studying

the performing arts at Adelphi University, the experiences certainly came in handy as I navigated learning all aspects of the theatre, the power of language, embodied performance, and its capabilities. I watched my fellow classmates learn to navigate collaboration, practice discipline and empathy, and, most importantly, learn to be open to the perspectives of others while reflecting on a constant evolution of the self.

My mentor, Adelphi University's Dean of Performing Arts Nick Petron, said something to me in an interview that stuck with me many years later when I began this doctoral program at Teachers College: "*There is 15 seconds of silence before applause. Because you took the audience to a place and they forgot they were in a theatre. Theatre isn't magic. It isn't tricks. It's a mirror and a highly sophisticated art form*." This art form that I had come to know intimately from my early years taught me to be aware of all that is invisible and unspoken in the text through the eyes of an engaged reader—and then to use my body and physical action, such as gesture, voice, and emotion memory, to embody and perform a story as truthfully as I could as an actor. I moved to know what I was thinking or feeling.

Nick Petron's words and classes opened a door into understanding theatre as the sophisticated art form that it truly was through my courses in The Method: Directing, Staging, and Performance. But it also was an education of the self and the myriad ways literature can inspire and unite folks from all walks within the world of theatre. Through my reflections here, I hope to find some evidence regarding elements of The Method and approaching dramatic texts in the English classroom, through distilled techniques pulled from Stanislavski's System. These techniques may have the potential to create valuable learning experiences toward developing the engaged reader in the English Literature classroom and, perhaps, beyond it as well.

This embodied storytelling practice taught me most of what I needed to know about reading well and the art of language, but it also taught me about people and life in general. Whether working in The Long Island Shakespeare Festival or as a Sales Administrator for British Telecom on the 46th floor of *The New York Times* building, and as a solo traveler in remote areas of the world (all of which I did), the skills and the learning were adaptable. I understood, in its rawness, what it meant to be human, how to sit in nature and with all people. I understood what made us different, yes, but more importantly, what made us the same. If we apply Stanislavski's own perspective on his own system—which was less about a method and more about discovering and noticing what it means to be human—*an exploration of human nature*, perhaps the study of drama and the study of literature are one and the same. To quote James Baldwin from an interview with *LIFE* magazine in 1963: "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read."

I carried a set of skills like empathy, communication, adaptability, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, courage, and resilience through multiple careers that eventually led me to my current work in education. As I grew as an educator, it became my passion to study in what ways the actor's perspective and the artist's process might lend themselves to the exploration of dramatic texts that remain untapped in educational spaces. Perhaps, through my research, I could develop or adapt an embodiment practice that fostered or inspired an alliance between both Drama Education practitioners and those of the English Literature teaching field in new ways. That long road has led me here.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action;
with this special observance, that you o'verstep not the modesty of nature:
for the purpose of playing was and is, to hold,
as 'twere, the mirror up to nature.
Hamlet, Act III, sc. 2

1.1 Reflections on the Journey of a Method Actor and an English Teacher

The reading process of the actor can be reflective, sensory, imaginative, and transactional, as their interaction with the text of the play unfolds through the use of their mind and body. Often, once the story of the play is performed, the reflections on the complex nature of the human beings found at the heart of the dramatic text become engaging and memorable for both performer and audience member. Actors can be viewed as expert interpreters who study characters deeply through a sophisticated transactional process with the text, in hopes of performing within the vision of the director and playwright. In building on the lines of their characters, they utilize their own understanding of complex emotions, personal memories, body language, and life experiences to shape their creation of character.

One could take the view that they are experts at reading, that their comprehension is strong, perhaps even that they make their interpretation *visible* during the rehearsal process and final performance. In some cases, it could be observed that their response to the literature of the play is found in their performance. Some experts in the field of English Education have experimented with various forms of pedagogy from Drama as an effective way to teach reading in the teaching of English.

As an English teacher of 10 years, with a background in acting from university and professional training, I cannot help but observe the reading process from an actor's perspective as well. For me, reading literature can be sensory, reflective, imaginative, transactional, and sometimes embodied. However, in the classroom of English, I have come to know that this is not how my students see reading. Early on in my teaching journey, I noticed that my secondary classroom students would often struggle with reading dramatic texts from their desks and reflect that they were "confused" or "lost" in the structure of the play with its use of language, scenes, and dialogue.

With further inquiry, I learned of educators like myself who felt unsure of how to teach dramatic texts in any way other than those they utilized for other genres of literature. At that time, prior to starting the doctoral program at Teachers College 7 years ago, I wondered if it would be acceptable to teach the dramatic texts in the curriculum using my acting training. Over time, I became more confident and I began to experiment with doing so, to see if it would be more engaging for students but also to see if the genre, being taught in a practice true to its origin, or at the very least the artist's (actor's) process, might reveal a pathway for student's skills in developing interpretation.

At first, I began with simply having my secondary-level students read aloud from their desks, and then I shifted to Reader's Theatre practice, having students read on their feet and away from their desks with texts in hand, during my student teaching, but I was still disappointed. When I began my research courses in the doctoral program at Teachers College, I wanted to make further applications from the pedagogies of Drama in greater depth, to tackle the problems I observed in my own secondary classroom, with my students' reading engagement and their inability to develop interpretation independently. That is when I began to question and

experiment with the idea of using Stanislavski's Method. I pulled experience with the Method from my own undergraduate training as an actor at Adelphi University. I also pulled from my professional acting and directing as well as my research within the field of Drama. This teacher research project covered the exploration of this practice with graduate students of mine, who were preservice English teachers in the English Education M.A. program at Teachers College and who were currently, or would one day soon, work with secondary-level students.

The core elements of Stanislavski's Method are meant to function as an organic system where the elements play off of each other as an actor works through them. They are as follows: Physical Action, Emotion Memory, the Magic If, Units and Objectives, and Circles of Attention. For the actor, working through these elements while studying their role aids their creative process as they cycle through them to interpret their characters and the larger implications of the play. This system of interpretive strategies offers the actor a unique framework for engaging with dramatic texts through a deeply personal reading transaction: highlighting their use of emotions, memory, imagination, questioning, reading and re-reading, and physicality to explore and develop a character—for example, as the actor learns to track the events in the play while they direct their attention to the motivations of their character.

At first, in trying this approach to teaching, I was desperate to engage my own secondary students who were disengaged with reading Shakespeare in my other classroom. I wondered if better knowing the characters might shift that engagement for them, or if moving through texts physically might do the same with regard to their understanding the dialogue of the text. As I was also given the opportunity to teach at the graduate level in the M.A. program in English Education at Teachers College, I also felt a sense of responsibility when faced with preservice English Educators looking to me to guide them through the mastery of teaching Shakespeare in

ways they would potentially adapt, when placed in their own future (or current) secondary classrooms.

Thus, I had to determine which elements of the Method were the most useful to adapt. Perhaps, in shifting beyond traditional teacher-centered or text-centered reading interpretation methods, I might foster stronger engagement, encourage empathy, inspire creativity, and strengthen interpretive skills overall through student-centered methods. As Stanislavski's Method is centered around the actor's emotional and physical transaction with text, perhaps it would be well suited towards this shift. Further, as my students might possibly bring this experimentation into their future secondary classrooms, the Method itself provided *a method*—a scaffold in its very system to aid them in their development of pedagogy to those same goals, should they wish to do so.

In my Shakespeare course, *The Teaching of Shakespeare 4551*, I began to develop this Drama, theory-based practice of my own in many ways, before I really fully realized what I was experimenting with pedagogically. Created by Konstantin Stanislavski, this acting approach was designed for a specific audience and in a far different context than my own. However, in my own training, it was the practice that produced the most memorable learning for me personally, so I took a risk in selecting that approach. I hoped that perhaps, through the actor's Method or *interpretive* process for developing a character to perform, students of dramatic texts might experience a *reading* process that could foster valuable *memorable* transactions. I also hoped that through active engagement and a collaborative reading experience using the mind and body, it might aid in the independent development of interpretation, as it had once done for me as an actor many years ago.

This teacher-research project was born of those aspirations and led me to develop the following research questions to guide my study: *How might learning to develop a character through the use of the Method inform the development of interpretation for preservice teachers of English? How does the application of the Method as an interpretive reading system shape the preservice teachers' experience with Shakespeare's use of language? In what ways does the use of the Method impact or limit the classroom environment and student interactions? In what ways do preservice teachers enrich their response to Shakespeare's plays through the applications of the Method as a reading strategy?*

For a time, in my early years of research in the doctoral program, I was immersed in coursework that informed and inspired my thinking about applications of the Method to my graduate-level teaching. I wanted to be certain that the Method, although experimental, was grounded in theory and practice that experts in the field of English Education might value. I began to read of experts such as Louise Rosenblatt, among others to be explored in Chapter 3, in some of my first courses. These individuals valued student-centered practice in the context of teaching writing and reading. They wrote of ideas and theory, with which I was able to make connections across pedagogies from Drama.

Later, I learned of experts in Drama who worked alongside some of these same experts from English Education, such as Dorothy Heathcote. Slowly, and over time, I began to see the work of these individuals as the "glue" or a "bridge" between ideas and theory across the two fields. In many ways, what was happening in Drama, Theatre, and Aesthetic Education in terms of practice aligned with learning goals in English Education. Soon, I came to learn of others in the field, such as teaching artists and practitioners who were also making these connections and experimenting with them, such as Betty Jane Wagner, who researched and wrote about them as

well. Across these fields, I observed the value assigned to pedagogy that centered the students' transaction with the text. I noticed also the focus on the development of transferable skills which, for the teacher and student, highlighted the use of imagination, empathy, creativity, and collaboration.

1.2 Aesthetic Education

Every Why hath a wherefor.
The Comedy of Errors, Act II, sc. 2

My time at Lincoln Center Education (LCE) and Literacy Unbound further reinforced the value of applying performance techniques to reading interpretation as well as informing overall principles for teaching art. I explore these in brief reflection here first, as they are professional development programs that highlight opportunities for educators to work alongside students in the practices of Aesthetic Education. While I experimented with myriad practices under the umbrella of Aesthetic Education in my course at LCE, I first encountered the concept of Imaginative Learning, which emphasizes the learning capacities inherent in the artistic process. As the Method is the artistic process of the actor, these capacities informed and shaped the method of instruction in my classroom and situated my research in the field of Aesthetic Education (discussed at length in Chapter 3). These capacities are particularly relevant to teaching dramatic texts and may be utilized to help students develop key interpretive skills. Some of the most relevant capacities for my research in practice include the following from LCE, as I likened them to the steps that a Method actor takes as well:

1. **Notice Deeply:** To identify and articulate layers of detail in a work of art or other object of study through interaction with it over time.
2. **Pose Questions:** To use questions persistently to reposition thinking and generate curiosity beyond conclusions. To ask the question, "What if…?"

3. **Make Connections:** To relate what you notice to your knowledge, experience, and other people's perspectives. To make comparisons with details and ideas in other art works, texts, and subjects.
4. **Physical Work:** To explore ideas related to a work of art or other object of study physically.

These capacities informed my planning and methods as I began to develop a workshop structure for performative reading and training the student to read like a Method actor. These capacities guided my adaptation of the Method approach for my own students over many terms. For example, when actors practice organizing their Units and Objectives (events of the play and motivation for the character), they deeply notice the layers of the work of art under study as they interact with it over time. Similarly, when Method actors pose questions, such as utilizing the *Magic If,* they learn to reposition their thinking as they generate curiosity about the characters in the play using their imagination (asking: What If *I were* this character?). Additionally, when Method actors develop their interpretation of characters through Circles of Attention, they learn to make connections to the details of the text study by applying their own personal knowledge, their own life experiences, and any other connections they can make to other ideas across various forms of art, texts, and subjects. Finally, through the Method actor's physical work, they learn to tap into the emotions of their characters through transactions with the text and other actors in role during their physical enactments and scene work.

The artist's process is especially important to study when encountering dramatic texts. In shaping my workshop classroom, it was important to establish routines and rituals of the rehearsal space it would hopefully become. I had to create a model for which the teacher of English could design lessons in which students would learn to read the way an actor might, and

the capacities I selected from LCE served the purpose of targeting specific skills that a reluctant reader might otherwise need to practice. I also asked students to practice making connections to other works of art or texts in relation to their reading of the play to help shape ways of thinking and analyzing the play and its characters. Finally, each workshop began and ended with physical work and getting the play on its feet in efforts to work potentially through the reading experience physically—and actively.

These capacities are a natural part of the work of an actor and a drama student. Betty Jane Wagner of English Education, and an authority on the educational uses of drama, who wrote and researched with James Moffett, wrote extensively on her work with Dorothy Heathcote, world-renowned practitioner of Process Drama. In her work *Drama as a Learning Medium*, Wagner (1976) covered in rich detail Heathcote's practice in connection with theory supporting the use of drama in literary practice.

Heathcote believed that through performance activities and drama processes, students would find agency of choice in the use of their imaginations to connect with others and "drop to the universal," or, from the perspective of the ELA teacher, understand what is universal within the text of engagement and study. In other words, reading through Drama essentially is a conversation, a dialogue, or a transaction with the universal (emotions, events, perspectives, dreams, fears, etc. that we all share). Wagner noted that Heathcote believed the use of drama as a learning tool is innate within us: "a technique that most ordinary people regularly employ…. this dramatic act helps us explore the feel of the experience" (p. 16).

As students undergo the play, the teacher can *move* through the study of text alongside them through physical work, an actor's character study, and reflection and discussion. In the English classroom, the rehearsal space for acting could *become a rehearsal for thinking* about

the texts they are learning to read. In pulling from the structure and methods of the Drama teacher, students could be immersed in the actor's reading process, which may hold much value towards learning how to develop interpretation.

At its core, the Method teaches the reader to interpret character fully; often, behind the life of the character lies the in-depth or underlying layers of the dramatic texts. While exploring a work of art through any artist's process holds exponential value, it is particularly important when studying dramatic texts as the art is only fully realized when the actor brings the text to life. Method approaches, no matter their adaptation, seem to reveal what is alive in the text, and, further, in its core elements structure or scaffold a way into the use of language as an art form.

1.3 The Core Elements of Stanislavski's Method from Drama

In order to create a classroom routine and suitable environment to experiment with this performative reading work and core elements of the Method, I used a workshop model (explored further in Chapter 4 on practice). As an instructor, I was able to position myself to move with the movement of my class's reading process as a guide, and track or adapt pedagogy as necessary in a process that was purposefully student-centered. An immersive rehearsal experience allowed me to workshop parts of the Method as an interpretive reading process alongside my students as both director and actor within their ensemble. Towards these efforts, I used the rituals of the rehearsal space to develop *The Capacities of Imaginative Learning* from Lincoln Center Education and paralleled that with my adaptation of Stanislavski's Method (as reviewed in the following pages). Students performed scenes, monologues, and sometimes larger sections of the play, depending on their comfortability.

To apply Stanislavski's Method effectively in the study of Shakespeare, I focused on the five aforementioned key components: Physical Action, Emotion Memory, the Magic If, Units

and Objectives, and Circles of Attention. These elements, integral to the Method acting process, can offer students new ways of engaging with and interpreting dramatic texts. It was my hope that any culminating performance beyond improvisational work would serve as a way for students to see themselves in the text, a way to respond to the dramatic texts from a place of independent interpretation and understanding. Particularly for preservice English teachers who might one day be teaching dramatic texts, especially Shakespeare, this scaffolded a way into the text in two very special ways: one, to draw students' attention to the use of language as artistry; and, two, to create spaces for them to experience the art form through the eyes of an artist. In short, the Method makes an art out of reading and teaches participants how to create living art. In the next section, I briefly review these elements for context and, later, do so again in greater depth within the Literature Review of Chapter 2.

1.3.1 Physical Action

In the face of challenges regarding disengaged students of Shakespeare's plays that I so often encountered, I decided to focus first on Stanislavski's Method of Physical Action. This element of training placed itself as a starting point for students with no acting experience because it helped students explore holding a physical presence while reading text out loud with intention.

One of the most powerful elements of Stanislavski's Method is Physical Action, which involves reading and performing the text with intention, moving as the character through physical presence and action. When working with students who have no prior acting experience, I started by having students engage in simple improvisational exercises that focused on the physicality of the characters. For example, students would practice reading lines with a clear physical intention. Sometimes, having students select words in the text from Shakespeare's lines

and then improvise an isolated physical representation of that word bolstered their comfortability with the development of physical action.

1.3.2 Emotion Memory

The second core element of the Method is Emotion Memory. This element is used to guide actors in recalling personal memories. In my classroom, however, I had to find ways for my students to tap into the emotionality of the characters in other ways more appropriate in the secondary and postsecondary English classroom setting. Even for seasoned actors, recalling personal memories can be problematic. With this in mind, without proper training and years of experience, this aspect of the Method needed adapting for a different context and students' learning goals. Instead, I adapted Emotion Memory by asking students to reflect on the emotions of the character rather than their own personal experiences. This was a much more difficult approach but a necessary one. Sometimes when the events of the play or the emotional state of the characters ventured into places that may be difficult for my students to connect or relate to, I utilized carefully selected works of art for students to observe and discuss difficult emotions separately from their own emotional worlds, such as grief, despair, anger, and so on. This process is presented in Chapter 4 as well.

To illustrate, when students explore why a character feels sad based on their work in the text, students can engage with the characters more safely without needing to recall memories. Students practiced these motions and incorporated their expression of them into their scene work through improvisational activities. A goal here would be for students to experience the truth of the emotional landscape of the character to develop their interpretation. Again, as a precautionary safety measure with this element of the Method, I recommend using artwork to

craft healthy discussions in connection with the conflicts in the play, when necessary. This element by far was the most difficult to adapt.

1.3.3 The Magic If

I also explored the Magic If as a way for students to enmesh their creative and critical thinking practice through improvisational techniques, in which individuals can explore themselves and others through the use of their imagination. The Magic If is perhaps the most imaginative aspect of Stanislavski's Method. This technique asks actors to consider, "What if I were in the position of this character? How would I feel? What would I do?" In my classroom, I used the Magic If to encourage students to ask themselves questions about the character's situation: "If I were in this character's place, what would I do? How would I act? In what ways would these things manifest physically—or not?" Using this technique, students could study their character's objectives, physical work, motivations, and emotional responses as they moved more deeply into their character study.

1.3.4 Units and Objectives

Another fundamental aspect of the Method is Units and Objectives. In Stanislavski's system, a unit is a section of a scene or play that has its own distinct goal or purpose. The objective refers to the character's intention within that unit: what the character wants to achieve in that moment or event. In my classroom, I used the concept of Units and Objectives to guide students in analyzing the play scene by scene. I asked them to identify the unit of each scene—essentially, what the character wants to achieve in that moment—and then consider what the

character's objective is. This helped students read with purpose, as they focused on what each character was trying to accomplish. By breaking down the scenes into specific objectives, students could better understand the dynamic relationships and motivations of their characters within the play.

1.3.5 Circles of Attention

The final element to review is Circles of Attention, which is another technique used in Stanislavski's Method to help actors focus and remain present in their performance. It also helps actors learn to explore the details of the character's use of language and search for hidden meaning and nuances that might help shape interpretation. Stanislavski believed that an actor should cultivate a sense of focus by visualizing three circles of attention: the innermost circle represents the actor's immediate physical space, the second circle encompasses the group of people in the scene, and the outer circle represents the environment as a whole.

For example, in my classroom, I adapted the idea of Circles of Attention to help students maintain focus while reading and performing. By asking students to imagine themselves in the scene, I encouraged them to stay focused on their immediate surroundings (the scene they are performing), then expand their focus to the interactions with other characters, and, finally, to consider the larger context of the play as a whole. I also utilized this part of the Method's system to encourage students to read for subtext, mine for nuance, and highlight special details that might serve to shape their interpretation of character. This helped students not only remain immersed in the play but also understand how their character's actions are influenced by the context of the story, the use of language and dialogue, and their character's relationships with other characters.

1.4 Further Context and Scope for Adaptation of This Practice in Public Schools

> Sure, he that hath made us with such large discourse,
> looking before and after, gave us not that capability and
> god-like reason to fust in us unus'd.
> *Hamlet*, Act IV, sc. 4

Drama is a story performed on stage for an audience that often takes months to rehearse. The theatre and its practices of drama are an ancient art form. Dating back to the Ancient Greeks, drama and the theatres that hold this art form have evolved over time in different geographical locations and across various cultures. Its origin is oral storytelling, and its craft is found in a complex set of skills, theory, and pedagogy for the purpose of reflecting on the human experience, human nature, and the human spirit.

Stanislavski was known for his acting talent and eventually developed into a theorist in the world of drama education. In his work within *An Actor Prepares*, he worked with his own reflections on the development of the Method as a system for actors to bring characters to life, sometimes even with Shakespeare. He developed this system aimed at (re)crafting the productions of Chekhov, Gorky, and Buglakov in the Russian theatre circle which became world-famous. Once he became a director, Stanislavski became curious about the actors' process and developed methods towards their approach to acting and performing on stage. Moreover, it would be necessary for actors to go through a rehearsal process that targeted rigorous self-reflection by each actor and encouraged an inner dialogue between the actor and the play—a transaction.

Stanislavski became fascinated with psychological realism and elements of investigating subtext and symbolism in the work. In this early form of his practice, he explored the actors' ability to mobilize their subconscious thought and, thus, activate the subconscious physical movement or behavior on stage to "capture the human spirit." However, after much reflection on

the dangers of this physiological practice, such as the potential to remind an actor of an emotional experience from their past that was in some way traumatic, Stanislavski's studies and perspectives changed over time.

Eventually, Stanislavski's theory shifted more toward the importance of the actor's physical work, as seen in his Method of Physical Action. The Method puts the actor and their character study at the center of the process: the dramatic art (the play) works inward, first, and then outward. While it stands to reason that certainly Stanislavski's writing on his own research in practice is and has been in many ways open to interpretation, I find that the fundamental purpose or origin of the system as a framework for interpretation is worth looking at further within the context of teaching reading because the very nature of its system is "self-centered"—actor-centered or student centered.

1.5 Rosenblatt: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work

In designing my course with a student-centered practice in mind, I hoped that an immersive workshop environment might honor the individual responses of the students in guiding them to bring life to their characters, in a similar vein as Stanislavski originally intended for his actors. In bringing life to their characters, these potential transactions highlight the text of study while, at the same time, honoring the individual and their response to the text. The student is the center of the reading experience.

Rosenblatt (1994) viewed the reading process as transactional, in which the reader constructs meaning based on their own unique experience with or response to the text. This experience is shaped by the signs or text on the page along with their thoughts and feelings in association with those signs. In other words, the text and the reader are informing each other through an individual transactional process. As the student selects what details to pay attention to

and reflects on those details through their own personal life experiences and use of language, meaning, which varies across individuals, comes into being. The students may pay attention to different details or aspects of the use of language, depending on their own abilities linguistically or background knowledge from their own life experiences.

Through student-centered practice, the teacher highlights the value of the text of study and equally that of the students' personal interaction with the text to shape meaning and interpretation. Essentially, this practice makes spaces for the students to bring themselves to the work as well as spaces for the text to evolve through multiple interpretations born of this pedagogy. For example, when an actor works this way by developing character through their interactions with text, multiple interpretations of the same character, such as Hamlet, may be created and performed. Fundamentals of the text may remain the same—or could be focused on, but based on the students' individual transaction, new perspectives, understandings, thoughts, and ideas will emerge. One could say that the Method actor practices Rosenblatt's (1994) "aesthetic stance" reading process, which is a kind of reading lens that focuses on the ideas, feelings, and sensations generated through the experience of reading.

1.6 Reflection on Methods

In constantly observing and reflecting on the value of the practice, I altered and adjusted pedagogy, learning goals, and objectives constantly over time. These reflections on my research inspired changes over the years and new ways of adapting the Method through acting workshops and class sessions. This, in turn, inspired a desire of mine to create a learning community in which students moved in and out of the practice while reflecting on it simultaneously as teachers *and* on their work as an ensemble. As preservice teachers in English Education, it was important

that my students constantly reflected on the practice from the perspective of English teacher. Examples of these workshops are explored in-depth later in this dissertation through dramatized transcripts.

It should be noted that I adapted this practice mainly because of what I learned about Shakespeare's works from a lifetime as a Shakespearean actor—not as an English teacher, and that I fashioned my course, and my workshops, based on what I remembered from my training and experience as an actor. Shakespeare's use of action-packed storytelling and archetypal characters are rich for character study and further present ways for the English student to connect potentially the implications of the play to contemporary events and representations of human nature still relevant today.

Over time, I came to discover connections across theory, pedagogy, learning goals, and teaching discourses, across the fields of English Education and Drama. Through my participation in teacher professional development programs out of CPET, such as INSTEP at Lincoln Center Education, and Literacy Unbound at Teachers College (explored in-depth in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 on Aesthetic Education practice), I came to know of experts and teaching artists in the field of English Education who were also experimenting with practice from Drama and Theatre and who informed and inspired this teacher research project.

As this practice is still in its early experimentation, the preservice English teacher reflections and dramatic reconstructions of my practice found in this dissertation could serve as reasons or evidence to propose further research and practice with the Method within secondary classrooms—specifically, reflections on my research with the Method as a potential interpretive strategy to be used in the teaching of Shakespeare. Dorothy Heathcote once said, "The hardest

thing in the world is to help somebody else know something for themselves."[1] This statement inspired me from the early stages of this research journey as I felt that if students could work through the actor's process with reading a text, they might comprehend it with a focus on what is universal in the text *through* the eyes of their character. Students might engage with their reading from an *aesthetic stance* and have an experiential, personal, and memorable experience. I think that with careful attention to the characters, their motivations, circumstances, and the choices they make, which is at the heart of The Method, the gaze of the reader shifts from the text itself to that of *"What do I see in the text that is human, emotional, relatable, to the self?"* The gaze shifts to how students see themselves in the text and the valuable discussions that arise from that interpretive process as they reflect. It may be that this gaze-shifting increases the chances of a reader to transact with the text from an individual perspective. If this is true, the more a reader comes to empathize with a character, the more they might understand themselves and the way they feel about the issues raised in the text, perhaps even the universality of what the characters experience.

1.7 Chapter Overview

In this dissertation, through reading research, journal reflections, dramatized reconstructions of my teaching workshops, and student writing reflections as published in the public domain through *DRAMA, National Drama's Magazine of Professional Practice*, I sought to highlight findings regarding the Method as a potential reading strategy for the reading of plays, in particular Shakespeare, with preservice English teachers.

[1] "Becoming a Teacher—Employing Drama into the Classroom" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ou0ICgN6oKg

Chapter 2 next explores the Method as a reading strategy through further definition of terms, values, goals, and how the practice articulates these goals. In this chapter, the focus was on pulling the Method from its original practice and presenting it as a method to train a student to be a reader of plays. My research took an in-depth look at how the actor learns to read plays utilizing the Method, with the actors as specialized readers *who make it into something else*—because acting a part or creating a character is not the same as performing a play.

Chapter 3 addresses professionals in the field of teaching English to see how this use of the Method draws on theory in the field of English Education. Further, in what ways does it contrast or complement drama-based practice work already being done in the field while also offering ways to invite different aspects of that work to evolve within the current practice?

Chapter 4 focuses on workshop practice through student reflections published in *DRAMA: National Drama's Magazine of Professional Practice*, dramatic reconstructions of my teaching workshops, and my teaching journals. This chapter examines how preservice English teachers responded to the Method and how the workshop model helped them engage with Shakespeare's plays.

Finally, Chapter 5 covers a brief conclusion and reflection on the practice. In this chapter, I reflect on the effectiveness of the Method as an interpretive strategy for reading dramatic texts, especially in an English classroom setting. Additionally, further reflections on the following research questions are included: *How might learning to develop a character through the use of the Method inform the development of interpretation for preservice teachers of English? How does the application of the Method as an interpretive reading system shape the preservice teachers' experience with Shakespeare's use of language? In what ways does the use of the Method impact or limit the classroom environment and student interactions? In what ways do*

preservice teachers enlarge their response to Shakespeare's plays through the applications of the Method as a reading strategy?

Chapter 2: The Method—The Art of Reading

> I gather that to study our art [acting] we must assimilate a physiological technique of living a part, and that this will help us to accomplish our main object, which is to create the life of the human spirit.
>
> Stanislavski, 1957, p. 15

2.1 What Is the Method, and How Does It Teach You to Be a Reader of Plays?

English teachers typically teach plays like they would any other genre, often reading the text and discussing it in the same manner as a novel, and without a specialized approach tailored to the characteristics of dramatic texts. In overlooking the specialized skills required for reading and interpreting drama, teacher training programs seldom focus on drama-based methodologies for teaching plays. Some teachers attempt to adapt drama into their lessons by having students read scenes or monologues aloud in front of the class, and while this can be helpful, it often falls short of providing students with the tools they need to understand and interpret the text fully from an actor's perspective. I have spoken with students who, in these situations, expressed frustration such as "I don't know what I'm doing; I'm just trying to memorize this," or "This is so hard; I don't get why we have to do this." These comments reflect a fundamental disconnect—students are being asked to engage with a dramatic text, but without being equipped with an interpretive strategy specific to drama. When used to teaching dramatic texts, particularly for performance or engagement purposes, one often lacks a systematic approach for reading and interpreting dramatic texts. This is where Stanislavski's Method can offer valuable insights as a strategy for reading plays.

The practice, known as Stanislavski's Method, teaches actors to read in a very specific way, as a formula or strategy towards the creation of character. Actors must bring life to what is

on the page and practice to supply something that is not already present in the lines of the play. In other words, what is on the page is not the performance; it is the actor's job to create that by using the strategies from their *reading* training.

First, it is important to review what the original purpose of The Method is before unbinding it as an interpretive strategy for reading in the study of teaching dramatic texts. The Method is a very specific physiological acting reading strategy which trains actors to make a character out of a script using their mind and body. It is one of many strategies for doing so, but Stanislavski developed his Method out of a desire to move acting and performance towards capturing the essence of human life, emotions, and behaviors, as organically as possible.

For Stanislavski, actors must not only perform their character but also understand the character deeply enough to find motivation for the choices the character makes. In short, reading for the Method actor *is an art*.

2.2 An Actor Prepares: When Reading Is an Art

> […] call for natural emotions at the very moment in which they appear before you in the flesh. They call for the direct co-operation of nature itself.
>
> Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 22

For Stanislavski, the Method in its original design and approach brought craft and artistry to the work of the actor in his time. It was a system of tools, ways of being and thinking and feeling that would inspire the actor to craft the living spirit on stage in-role for plays that required the actor to fill in the *missing pieces*. These tools would artfully compose a character through the use of *conscious* reason and be reflected organically in *subconscious* emotion.

In its design, the actor would build the emotional and physical adaptation of character:

> It is only when an actor feels that his inner and outer life on stage is flowing naturally and normally, in the circumstances that surround him, that the deeper sources of his subconscious gently open, […] Our aim is not only to create the life of the human spirit,

> but also to express it in a beautiful, artistic form. An actor is under obligation to live his part inwardly, and then to give to his experience an external embodiment. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 15)

The way the Method teaches an actor to read a script is special and unique to the world of drama in its focus on the art of *making* a character out of their *reading*.

This *acting art* form prepares an actor to do something different from other approaches to acting, with the representation of their character study, in that a Method actor will follow a system strategically designed to breathe organic life, emotions, and physicality into a performance of character. In Stanislavski's words, "In our art you must live the part every moment that you are playing it" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 18). Acting from this approach, from Stanislavski's aims, keeps the art form of the play a craft versus a mechanical representation and highlights the actor's organic emotions to be at the heart of the practice: "…call for natural emotions at the very moment in which they appear before you in the flesh. They call for the direct co-operation of nature itself" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 22). In the next section, I begin to define and thread the elements of the Method together in revealing how an actor learns to read and interpret their role as part of the preparation for the performance of the play. I do this to highlight the Method as an actor's reading strategy to provide perspective on how I endeavored to adapt it in the teaching of reading in my course with preservice English teachers.

2.3 Action

> On the stage it is necessary to act, either outwardly or inwardly….
> Whatever happens on stage must be for a purpose.
>
> Stanislavski, 1957, p. 33

When I first assigned chapters of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*, I was hoping it might give good reason for the work we were about to experiment with in my Shakespeare course at Teachers College. But my students had expressed *they tired of theory*, which had been a huge part of their graduate degree work thus far, and they had hoped this class would provide more *action*. I surmised the best way to do this for them—while teaching them a practice they could use to teach Shakespeare in their future positions at the same time—would be to train them as actors.

The most memorable training I could remember from my own acting degree at Adelphi University was Stanislavski and his Method, so I dug out my 1936 copy of his *An Actor Prepares* which I had riddled with tabs, highlighting, and notes in the margins. Since most of my students had little to no acting experience, I thought that perhaps if they could see what an art acting could be, they might find it more engaging to experiment with or consider it a useful pedagogy; in turn, they would find Shakespeare more engaging as well. As John Gielgud suggested in the introduction to Stanislavski's work, the Method itself does not only have to apply to Russian theatre and drama because what the actor learns from the practice is universal and applicable to any reading and performance; it only enhances the experience and art form overall, bringing life to the page of the play: "One can apply the Moscow Art Theory, the art of living every moment of the part, to Shakespeare and the classics.… I do not see any reason why Stanislavski's system should apply only to Russia" (p. xiii).

In his chapter on Action, Stanislavski set a tone for the work in my classroom: The play text became a set of choices from which the reader could apply physical action. Each physical choice would have purpose, however, and each movement would be thoughtful and filled with intention. In this chapter, Stanislavski addressed his actors in an activity regarding the many

ways one could sit in a chair on stage with intention through improvisation. Some of the actors struggles with the outwardly passive or "external immobility" of the work, and this is where Stanislavksi found his teachable moment:

> …the external immobility of a person sitting on the stage does not imply passiveness. You may sit without a motion and at the same time be in full action.… Frequently physical immobility is the direct result of inner intensity. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 35)

Here, Stanislavski gives the first stage of his Method of Physical Action, the first rule of the system, which is to remember always the link between the mind and body and how they, as in real life, always work in tandem, whether subconsciously or consciously. One does not direct the other; only as individuals, we are at the mercy of their silent language, and the actor's job is to harness the spirit of that language whenever possible, for that brings life to the lines on the page. The human spirit is revealed through the juxtaposition of the two working as signals to the other in constant communication.

For the actor, a choice full of intention must be made, which creates both inward and outward representation of character—something for the audience to notice, hold on to, connect to, and engage them; in Stanislavski's words: "On the stage it is necessary to act, either outwardly or inwardly" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 35). What Stanislavski is really saying here as an instructor is that his students must develop organic physical action from connecting or arousing a feeling from what lies underneath, what is revealed on the page of the play. Actors must connect their motivation to move physically by tracking the patterns of what they know or have imagined about their character, by studying "what has come before," and thus applying that understanding through the use of imagination and body language.

The actor's unique reading habits are scaffolded by the Method, which helps the actor to track their own reading process and identify places in the text from which to develop their

choices in physical action. The most organic movement on stage will not be a mechanical choice but one that is derived from finding patterns in the character's story and harnessing what they know about human behavior as a layer to be built in creatively and with a natural response to the moment of the play as *real organic action*. This as an *actor's strategy of reading* comes from the task of identifying why the character is thinking, saying, and thus moving in the way they do on stage.

For them to achieve this identification, they must participate in an in-depth character study which links the text (character circumstances and language) with the actor's improvised thoughts, emotions, and physicality. In Stanislavski's words on developing action from this reading process: "On stage there cannot be, under any circumstances, action which is directed immediately at the arousing of a feeling for its own sake" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 38). For the actor as reader, the only way to do this is to track or imagine what came before, what is supplied in the text, or what has to be imagined. For the student, this is a powerful tool to track understanding and to transact as part of their reading experience. Not only would they arrive at an opportunity to understand the character on the page more deeply, but they would also be able to move physically to generate further understanding when necessary.

2.4 Functions of *If*

A subsection of the chapter on Action deals with the functionality of *If*, part of what is known as the *Magic If*, and a lens for understanding how the use of imagination becomes a tool for the actor during their reading and performing. Here, Stanislavski trains his actors to dissect the *If* in the intentions and objectives of his actor's work with character study. Through the use of improvisation activities, he ushers his actors through the study of crafting action from what is logical and real prior to moving into the use of imagination: "All action in the theatre must have

an inner justification, be logical, coherent, and real. *If* acts as a lever to lift us out of the world of actuality into the realm of imagination" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 43). The *If* is a reading tool in that it draws the actor's focus from themselves to that of the character; it shifts the gaze of the actor from using their body for the physical action of the self (their own) and instead requires they move as someone else. As they answer the *what if?* they learn to understand the given circumstances of the character, and because they can use only their own body as another tool, the art of acting exists in the actor's physical response to the imagined given circumstances of text. This physical trans-action with the text fosters an opportunity for the actor to arouse "inner and real activity," which activates imagination in the same moment as another tool for understanding as part of this strategy, in Stanislavski's words:

> With this special quality of *if*, nobody obliges you to believe or not believe anything.… You are given a question (what if?), and you are expected to answer it sincerely and definitely.… It arouses an *inner and real activity*, and does this by natural means. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 45)

As a teacher, Stanislavski challenged his student actors to *live in their parts* creatively, through the strategy of tracking *what has come before*, answering the *what if*, and *moving* in response with spontaneity of emotion and physical *action* to the given circumstances of the play. The Method actor encounters a text using inner and outer activity: their mind (emotion and reason), physical action (body), and imagination (creativity) as strategies for reading and performing.

In the English Literature classroom, this system for reading dramatic texts as a Method actor could be used as a tool for developing an interpretation. From this viewpoint, the actor *makes* a performance, and the English student *makes* a reading. Stanislavski asked his actors to create life from what is hidden in the words, with the *If* as the starting point to track their building of character. The given circumstances are the basis of the *If*. The actor grounds their

physicality in the given circumstances, while their answers to the *If* are fostered by their use of imagination. One cannot exist without the other. They are tools with which the mind and body can develop a unique kind of understanding. From this comes the Method actor's reading strategy. It yields an understanding that is built on both what the page supplies but also bits and pieces of ourselves, our identities, memories, and emotions. This reading process becomes deeply personal as we bring the experience into the body. Stanislavski defined the given circumstances and the *Magic If* as follows:

> …the story of the play, its facts, events, epoch, time and place of action, conditions of life,… If is the starting point, the given circumstances, the development, one cannot exist without the other[;]… however, their functions differ somewhat: **if** gives the push to dormant imagination, whereas the given circumstances build the basis for **if** itself. And they both, together and separately, help to create an inner stimulus.… all of which is closely interwoven with the implications of the play. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 49; emphasis added)

The student could be challenged to do the same, as a way to track their own reading process and practice developing interpretation using the elements of the *Magic If.* But the interpretation develops in a special way, through personal transaction, self-reflection, and taking a story into the body to *move from within* the perspective of the characters in dramatic texts.

By adapting this practice to the reading process in the English classroom, I sought to challenge my students to do this kind of work in the hope they might engage with the characters of Shakespeare's plays differently using their imagination to come to know them through the use of emotion and reason, mind and body, subject and learner working in tandem. By bringing their own thoughts to the author's lines and establishing relationships with other students and their characters, emotions would be sincere. The implications of the play, as developed through this sophisticated work of art, would create a pathway for students to make interpretations by reflecting on these emotions. In their responses to the given circumstances of their characters,

these emotions guide their reflections on things from their own personal lives as juxtaposed with the play of study.

2.5 Imagination

> Art is the product of the imagination, as the work of the dramatist should be.
>
> Stanislavski, 1957, p. 51

The role of imagination in learning to craft a part for *that of the actor* of the Method is paramount. For Stanislavski, "The aim of the actor should be to use his technique to turn the play into a theatrical reality. In this process imagination plays by far the greatest part" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 51). For both the teacher and student of dramatic texts, the possibility of the Method reading process as a potential theatrical reality, or immersive reading experience, is one through which an actor uses imagination to develop interpretation. As art is a product of the imagination of the artist, it seems important that the observer or learner study the use of imagination to better understand the art before them. The use of imagination is a skill for interpretation.

Imagination has always been a tool of learning as far back as our childhoods, but it is especially relevant when observing or experiencing a work of art in that it often inspires our observation of *meaning* or purpose. In his chapter on Imagination, Stanislavski explored this with his actors, developing it as a tool for shaping character development through the way "imagination creates things that can be or can happen" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 53). For his actors, this was a necessary tool to shape emotional and physical responses to given circumstances, but for the student of dramatic texts in the English classroom, this becomes a tool for reading and developing interpretation.

For my students when encountering Shakespeare, this became an especially important skill for reading because it bridged gaps between the subject and learner that were inevitable while exploring a play and language roughly 459 years old. Rather, the development of the use of imagination for my students provided a window into what was real in their character's emotions, thoughts, and ways of being beyond the realities of their own personal lives—but also similar. Essentially, they transferred emotions, thoughts, and ways of being across the barriers of time and language.

Reading this way brought the students' attention immediately to what was universal in Shakespeare's works through emotional connections to the given circumstances of their characters—for example, the uncertainty of love, the tragedy of revenge, a hunger for power, or the depths of grief. Imagination, and the practice of developing it, helped students to understand the humanity in the play in that they were eager to shift from the observer into the subject, the implications of the play, and the circumstances of their characters; for them, this meant they only had to remember the emotions that come from love, betrayal, urgency of control, grief, and fear, and to recall these emotions at a moment's notice by shifting their gaze from their character to themselves and back again.

As a reading strategy, the use of active imagination allowed my preservice English teachers to feel deeply for the circumstances of their characters and the other characters in their study of the play. When time and language fell away during this process, what remained was only what physically, emotionally, and imaginatively surrounded them, to which they responded, inwardly and outwardly—by imagining themselves as the character even if for only a moment. When this happened, as happens for the actor, the students shifted their understanding of what was once only words on a page through the use of imagination, and they became a person they

could care about as they care for themselves. Moreover, they could only react *organically* in living the words for the moment. This reading strategy changed the way my class encountered the play.

In Stanislavski's words to his actors regarding the same:

> In the end you will tire of being an observer, and wish to act. Then as an active participant in this imaginary life you will no longer see yourself, but only what surrounds you, and to this you will respond inwardly, because you are a real part of it. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 60)

Later, in Chapter 4, and regarding the adaptations of this work in my own classroom, I cover a series of psychological questions that helped students imagine the circumstances of their characters as well as the feelings associated with them in activities to help them paint inner imaginary circumstances from which to work within their representation of character. Some of these questions are as follows: *What choices do I face? What choices do I make? What do I need? What do I fear? Will the pursuit of my needs lead to a moral choice?*

In working with trained actors, Stanislavski worked with different improvisational activities to help his actors achieve this depth of thinking and feeling, but to the same purpose: context for understanding the depth of a character to make them *real, relatable, raw*. In his words:

> Every invention of the actor's imagination must be thoroughly worked out and solidly built on a basis of facts. It must be able to answer all the questions (when, where, why, and how) that he asks himself when he is driving his inventive faculties on to make a more and more definite picture of a make-believe existence. Sometimes he will not need to make all this conscious, intellectual effort. His imagination may work intuitively. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 66)

Imagination as a tool in crafting performance is powerful because it supplants the real from the mechanical on stage. However, for the reader and the student of dramatic texts, it helps them to shape interpretation. In exercising their imagination, they learn to shift their gaze from the real to

the unreal and back again as a way to track patterns of behavior, the choices derived from those patterns, and the consequences of them reading their character deeply through an emotional transaction. When they notice their character deeply, they can inspire physical action and emotional response—from that, the play comes to life. In bringing this practice into the classroom of literature, students of dramatic texts learn the value of exercising their imagination as a tool for understanding, and thus interpretation, as they reflect on their *living* parts.

Imagination fuels the inner working of the mind and body in this art form. Stanislavski wrote:

> Our art demands that the actor's whole nature be actively involved…. he must feel the challenge to action physically as well as intellectually because the imagination, which has no substance or body, can reflexively affect our physical nature and make it act. This faculty is of the greatest importance in our emotion-technique. Therefore: Every movement you make on the stage, every word you speak, is the result of the right life of your imagination […] you will find your imagination developing and growing in power. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 67)

In the next section, I briefly cover Stanislavski's points on Concentration of Attention and Units and Objectives.

2.6 Concentration of Attention

> An actor must have a point of attention.
>
> Stanislavski, 1957, p. 71

For Stanislavski, the actor must always have a way of focusing attention during reading, character study, and the eventual performance of that character. As a reading strategy, this is an interesting part of the way an actor learns to read a play. Under the system of the Method, the actor must learn to forget about the stage, the auditorium, and elsewhere, only to be guided in the moment by what is in their *concentration of attention*. One way to do this is ranging from the Smallest circle of attention—for example, the Nearest Object to the actor (a prop, a pen on a

desk, a costume detail, etc.); to the Medium circle of attention, the other actors in the scene, furniture, etc.); to the Large circle of attention (full stage, full ensemble of actors on stage, etc.). Each circle of attention guides the actor to stay in focus within the performance.

In Chapter 5, Stanislavski trained his actors to concentrate their attention as a way of staying present *and in the moment* towards playing their part, as this is necessary for organic life on stage (one must forget about the audience). He used lights and lighting to guide his actors through this practice, starting first with a small light on stage and working towards main lights, signaling places for them to attach their gaze. With each improvisational activity, he drew their attention to craft focus and re-learn, so to speak, how to be *human* on stage and forget the onlooking audience. In his words: "It is essential to re-educate ourselves to look and see, on the stage, to listen and to hear" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 73). This practice of shaping attention draws the actor into the script and highlights signals such as moments, beats, pauses, awareness of surroundings, as well as other actors all as parts moving in sync.

When students learn to read for these details in a dramatic text, they begin to take note of these things in their own worlds as well. In activities with my own preservice teachers, I noticed that even though they were not studied actors, they began to notice elements and details of the script they might have missed without special attention to this craft. They began to read like actors, noticing the nuances within the text itself as well as their own surroundings in becoming more observant; thus, their engagement with the play began to increase. I was able to work with different concentration-of-attention activities in small group and whole-group instruction, as well as with the ensemble during performance tasks. Students would take note of the careful choices they each began to make in their performance tasks, their movement, what held their focus, and how they used their voices. In moving through this detailed awareness of classroom space and

the use of it, as well as the nearest objects and especially *each other*, both the reading experience *and* the practice performing became richer as participants became more observant and focused overall.

In this same chapter, another part of this practice is observed through circles of attention, in which Stanislavski conducted an activity to shape focus and memory. He gave students 30 seconds to notice as many details as possible about an object. Then, in turning off the light, he asked them to remember every detail they could and to practice this visual memory as applicable to other tasks. For my students, I took them out of the classroom and brought them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to practice noticing the fine detail of carefully selected sculptures and paintings. As a group, we would work from our own individual observations of smaller assigned sections or self-selected sections of pieces of artwork, and journal about them. Later, we would meet up to share our interpretations of the art as a whole piece, based on the details of our smaller circles of attention.

Sometimes I would assign certain sections to different students and different works of art, which we would travel to and discuss as part of this training. I had hoped this would function as Stanislavski's circles of light on stage and, thus, heighten attention and focus with both the text and performative choices. For me, in working with students with little acting experience (and no use of stage lighting techniques), this was the place in which I had to alter practice and training the most, other than the use of emotion memory that is discussed later.

Stanislavski set different circles of light on the stage to illustrate for his actors moving from the Small Circle of Attention, to Medium, and then to the Largest, in order to teach them how to hold focus within these spaces. He wrote in addressing his actors:

> When you have a spot of light surrounded by darkness, all the objects inside of it draw your attention because everything outside of it being invisible, there is no attraction there.

> The outlines of such a circle are so sharp and the encircling shadow so solid that you have no desire to go beyond it. When the lights are on you have an entirely different problem. As there is no obvious outline to your circle you are obliged to construct one mentally and not allow yourself to look beyond it. (p. 79)

As a reading strategy, this was very effective in that the skill of focusing students' attention on details—such as language, word choice, iambic pentameter, a pause, a prop, a physical choice, a tone of voice, a scene, or another actor—became more familiar and lent itself to the work of interpreting the implications of the play over time.

This skill was further developed through exercises where my students would select words to work with from their lines, before bringing movements to their acting and performance; this is shared in Chapter 4 to illustrate how I adapted concentration of attention for the purpose of reading Shakespeare. In his Method classroom, Stanislavski encouraged his students to practice this work both outside of their work in the theatre and in their everyday lives as well to hone the skill of observing details most people might miss; thus, attention and controlling attention and focus become other tools of the Method. As Stanislavski lectured his students on the importance of this skill, he noted:

> Average people have no conception of how to observe the facial expression, the look of the eye, the tone of the voice, in order to comprehend the state of mind of the persons with whom they talk. They can neither actively grasp the complex truths of life nor listen in a way to understand what they hear. (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 88)

As my students were encouraged to do the same, I noted their power of observation and attention change over the course of our reading process, both with the script and with *each other* in their reading and performances. I highlight this in detail in Chapter 4.

2.7 Units and Objectives

> So, an actor must proceed, not by a multitude of details, but by those important units which, like signals, mark his channel, and keep him in the right creative line.
>
> Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 107

Once the skill of observing details is honed, then comes the task of learning to further mine those details for Units and Objectives, which aid the actor in the building of their character performance. The actor must learn to concentrate attention only on the details that serve them in their creative purpose and in crafting objectives to guide them through their interactions with other performers. This careful attention to the play and script is another important tool of the Method that mirrors human nature. When we speak to other individuals, our desires and fears often manipulate our use of language and body language, both consciously and subconsciously. The actor learns how to craft this through the use of Units and Objectives.

An example of this was depicted in Stanislavski's teachings and in his own words:

> *Going home*—gives you the key to your main objective. Along the way, however, there were stops. You stood still at one point and did something else. Therefore, *looking in the shop window*—is an independent unit. Then, as you proceeded you returned to your first unit. Finally, you reach your room and undressed. This was another bit. When you *lay down* and *began to think* you began still another unit. We have cut your total of units from over two hundred down to four. These mark your *channel*. Together they create one large objective—*going home*. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 108)

Through the development and tracking of Units and Objectives, the actor learns to chart each step of their performance with thoughtful, realistic, and logical intention. This layer builds into their character study as part of the organic material of their performance in that actors *respond* to the Units and Objectives of *each other* in the design of the implications of the overall play.

As a reading strategy for the actor that ultimately propels the development of their performance, this tool allows for a tracking of understanding over the course of the reading. As a

tool for the student of dramatic texts, this provides them not only a window into the artistic craft of the actor but also an opportunity to track their own progress with interpretation within these different stages of the reading process. Each designation of Units and Objectives creates an opportunity towards adding a layer of understanding and interpretation, but one that the student personally creates, which in turn fosters a deeper reading of the text. For the actor, these Units and Objectives must eventually be removed, replaced by the living spirit of the play and its characters, each with its own personal Units and Objectives worked into the nuances of their characters' internal and external worlds. These Units and Objectives may guide the reader to understand structure and thus craft interpretation along the way, but for the actor, they cannot remain.

Stanislavski reminded his actors, "You have divided the play into its main organic episodes—its largest units. At the heart of every unit lies a *creative objective*" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 114). For the remainder of his lesson, he shaped the understanding of crafting a creative objective from raw Units and Objectives. The actors learn they should not try to express their objectives as titles or nouns but rather as *verbs* to inspire physical action organically. This "germ of action" is carried within objectives and helps supply the actor with what is not necessarily supplied in the dialogue or monologues, among others; rather, the subtextual elements are revealed through this kind of organized reading process. In these moments, the actor begins to work in their *Magic If* towards objectives such as actors in Stanislavski's workshop exclaiming, "I wish to remember my dead child! I wish to bring him back! I wish to be so close to him that we can never be separated!" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 118). The creative objective is the actor's interpretation of the implications of the play

from the perspective of their character. Next, I explore the most controversial yet fundamental tool in of the Method known as Emotion Memory.

2.8 Emotion Memory

> Time is a splendid filter for our remembered feelings—besides it is a great artist. It not only purifies, it also transmutes even painfully realistic memories into poetry.
>
> Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p.163

Stanislavski's Method is perhaps most well known as a method for using emotional memory; it still influences actors and directors to this day in both modern theatre and film. These are Stanislavski's words:

> That type of memory, which makes you relive the sensations you once felt…is what we call emotion memory. Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 163)

Aware of some potential dangers of this practice because it can be partly psychological, I did not use emotion memory in the sense that Stanislavski did with his actors during the time this book was written. Moreover, neither did Stanislavski use it many years later as he adapted this part of the system over time.

However, what is special about this part of the craft is that when carefully used, an emotion memory can bring a personal understanding to words on the page. A memory is a poetic story that we tell ourselves (not necessarily how the moment actually happened) but as we *felt* it in that moment. Stanislavski believed that time makes *poetry* of those memories. Stanislavski was aware of the challenges regarding emotion memory:

> The unfortunate part about them is that we cannot control them. They control us. Therefore, we have no choice but to leave it to nature and say: "If they come, let them come. We will only hope that they will work with the part and not cross purposes to it." (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 166)

With more exploration of this element of the Method, I believe it would be a valuable tool in the reading and interpretation process for the student of dramatic texts in the English content area, if there was a way to utilize it safely and equitably, as I have endeavored to do here.

I think this could be especially effective because this element requires the actor to *blend themselves*, so to speak, *with the character* they read for and eventually perform, which creates a special kind of transactional, experiential, and *personal* reading process. In the words of Stanislavski to this point:

> Never lose yourself on stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist.… You must play yourself. But it will be an infinite variety of combinations of objectives, and given circumstances which you have prepared for your part, and which have been smelted in the furnace of your own emotion memory. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 167)

The interesting part of this strategy for character development in the actor's reading process is that it does create an approach to reading that brings the reader's personal perspectives, memories, feelings, and emotions to the text and that of the character of study. This makes the reading further *transactional* in that it draws our own understanding of human nature, why we *feel* and *think* and *act* the way we do, how we personally feel about the way other people *feel* and *think* and *act* (as well as what we say and what we keep to ourselves in making these reflections). But through this emotional transaction with text, we may realize what it means to be human, to desire, to fear, to embody complex elements that shape our reflections of the self as well. Stanislavski's emotion memory is rooted in psychology study; in his words: "Through conscious means we reach the subconscious" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 166). Every effort that Stanislavski makes with his actors in this chapter is always towards the use of the mind and body to reveal how our emotion memories shape our understanding of who we are as people, what our identities are, and how we envision ourselves (both consciously and subconsciously).

The actor uses these memories and calls on them to help them sympathize with a character of study, to recall them in performance as they rehearse their role, in shaping the implications of the play with their fellow actors. Stanislavski felt these memories filled with emotion and *repeated feelings* were a drawing board with which to be creative, rather like a medium to paint a character from:

> The artist does not build his role out of the very first thing at hand. He chooses very carefully from among his memories and culls out of his living experiences the ones that are most enticing. He weaves the soul of the person he is about to portray out of emotions that are dearer to him than his everyday sensations. Can you imagine a more fertile field for inspiration? (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 166)

Here, the recall of emotion memory becomes a powerful tool of the actor who wishes to feel only emotions that are true to *himself* in the acceptance of the given circumstances of the character and play. In a moment, they call their experiences with the emotions (not the contexts) forth and filter them through themselves (to sympathize or empathize) with the character in their portrayal and performance. For Stanislavski, this ability to respond and recall (and perform) using real emotions is like weaving the inner being of the actor with the outer world of the character:

> The actor *is* not one or the other. He has, in his own person, either a vividly or indistinctly developed inner and outer individuality. He may not have in his nature either the villainy of one character or the nobility of another. But the seed of those qualities will be there, because we have in us the elements of all human characteristics, good and bad. An actor should use his art and his technique to discover, by natural means, those elements which it is necessary for him to develop for his part. In this way the soul of a person he portrays will be a combination of the living elements of his own being. (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 168)

For the actor, this skill is one that has the potential to craft the *human spirit* on stage, not as a repetition of the context for an emotion memory; nor is it the actor faking their way through the emotion in the context of the given circumstances. Rather, it is a blend, where the actor remembers a repeated emotion in removing it from context and applying it as empathy for the

character in the moment of what they are going through. It takes a certain amount of artistry, physical action, imagination, concentration of attention, and focus on units and objectives, all of which inform the other as a system mirroring nature—a constant cycle through creating organic emotional responses in the practice of walking in another's shoes.

This line the Method actor walks between a reflection of the self and their connection with the character they portray is a creative channel developed carefully over time and through a strategic reading process that I evaluate here for use in the English content area classroom when encountering dramatic texts. It is the *art of reading*, and the art of reading the play, which creates this unique transaction between the reader and the text as a living art form that captures the human spirit. In this training, the reader must focus always on *what has come before*, either in the text or in their own emotion memory, and interpretation, connection, empathy, and understanding develop over the course of the reading experience in this proposed way. The actor reads through the use of the mind and the body to create new lived memories. Actors shape these memories through creating inward and outward responses to text using reason (units and objectives), memory (emotion), and action (physical work): performative reading.

For the actor, sympathy is transformed into active reaction. This is activated by emotion memory but is further developed through sympathizing with the emotions of others. The actor's reading strategy, therefore, is, in part, the practice of empathy through the Method which teaches the actor to study people this way. For the student of dramatic texts, this reading strategy holds the potential to stimulate their transaction with the text in ways that provide a deeper understanding of the layers of the character as people, as individuals, separate from themselves yet *similar* to themselves—the good and the bad in every person—as well as the implications of the play overall. Stanislavski viewed this *transformation of human sympathy* as creative material.

In his words, “You can see from this that we use not only our own past emotions as creative material but we use feelings that we have had in sympathizing with the emotions of others” (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 179). This carefully articulated skill as adapted from the Method has potential to transform a student’s interactions with dramatic texts in the English content area classroom.

2.9 Reflections on Stanislavski’s System in Connection with Theory and Practice

Konstantin Stanislavski greatly respected the art form of Drama and Theatre far beyond the use of it as a system. He saw it instead as the most sophisticated way one could tell a story with agency and truth: “Our aim is not only to create the life of the human spirit, but also to ‘express it in a beautiful, artistic form.’ An actor is under the obligation to live his part inwardly, and then to give his experience an external embodiment” (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 15). This perspective of the art form was at the heart of his Method and drove Stanislavski’s continued passion in studying a psychological approach to acting and performing using the mind and body in tandem. For those who study drama, teach drama, or participate professionally in drama and theatre, there is an inherent understanding that within dramatic texts, human stories, and life as we reflect on it, are relevant and important to explore and convey in performance, but it is also “necessary to recognize the boundaries of the art” (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 30).

These boundaries became significant signposts to me as I developed my course because I made sure to guide my students through the steps of the system if that proved useful to them in their ongoing understanding of their role as English teachers. Therefore, it was important for me to teach them some drama theory and pull directly from drama pedagogy so that they could view the text as both actor *and* educator, and for that reason they read the first three chapters of *An*

Actor Prepares, reviewed earlier. I encouraged them to study the play with two lenses: one, to analyze the pedagogical practice and the reasoning behind its applications and process; and two, to look through the lens of the actor as Method or performative reader.

Actors work with lenses as well in their process; they are both actor *and* character in essence. Actors must be able to shift perspectives between that of the character and that of understanding their role in the overall composition of the text as performative art. In the study of the Method actor's work, this might happen through elements such as some reviewed above, Physical Action, Imagination, Concentration of Attention, Units and Objectives, and Emotion Memory in connection with scene-work and building dialogue and monologues, improvisation, pacing and cue-pick up, building the narrative arc of the play, and so on.

This use of lenses stems from my training at Lincoln Center Education, where participating educators, alongside myself as researcher, were encouraged to teach the artist's process with the work of art under study. For example, when studying paintings or sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, we were educated in the process of the artist, alongside the piece of art (painter/painting, sculptor/sculpture, etc.). This process often yielded a much more complex understanding and respect for the art itself. It was during this professional development I first began to consider how teaching plays through the process of the actor might shift the gaze for the student between subject and learner.

Actors practice applying what they know about human behavior, communication, and the use of language and body language, our use of breath or the great pause, gesture and tone of voice, subtle movement and deliberate posturing. This actor's (artist's) process is one of the practices of believing and doubting, questioning and answering, reading and performing, all part of the inner workings of a system which the Method highlights. The practice of these skills is

often trained through improvisation in which actors learn to accept given circumstances and interact with another actor or actors by taking on emotions and physical action associated with objectives and intentions for language. Often, it is through improvisational practice that the actor explores these behaviors, conscious or unconscious. It is a very vulnerable kind of work, one where the main rule is often that you must say "Yes" to whatever circumstance you are given and that you collaborate with your scene partner or partners during the practice. But in this practice, the actor essentially practices being a person, and they study people from all perspectives and walks of life. Stanislavski valued improvisation as part of the artist's process, believing that the art form was a living one that could only be built by dedication, collaboration, patience, and vulnerability.

2.10 Stanislavski's Primary Elements: Physical Action and Emotion Memory

The Method of Physical Action allows acting students to transact with the text and to explore texts reflectively through the lens of actor and performer. Jean Benedetti (1998), actor and playwright best known for his work and study of Stanislavski, wrote: "What Stanislavski wanted to provide was a method for actors to explore the play, the events as they unfold, in terms of what they would do in the various situations the author provided, using exercises and improvisations" (p. xv). In crafting this system in the classroom when my students, preservice English teachers, were studying the teaching of dramatic texts, I realized the approach to text had to follow suit in the design for my learning activities. Efforts had to be made to teach my students how to notice deeply, pose questions, make connections, and essentially move to know what they were thinking: reading as moving with the movement of the play and its characters in the way an actor is trained to read performatively.

Contrary to more traditional approaches and instead of lecturing students on direct translations of Shakespeare's texts, I sought to usher preservice educators through their own individualized experiences with text, as well as collectively as a group, *to move with their movement*. This is also why I believe an appropriate and necessary challenge for the group to culminate the end of the collective study of the play should be a performance of some kind. It is imperative to build community and collaborative skills and realize the value of the work itself as a living art form; thus, students were required to work toward a performance of their choosing.

There was great risk in doing this as, more often than not, my students were not keen on the requirement of performing, but I had to trust that over time, I would earn their trust as they would mine towards these efforts. Just as the ensemble of a cast is new to each other and to the process at the very beginning, a collaborative process would build over the course of rehearsals towards a common performative goal. Over the course of my teaching Shakespeare to preservice English teachers, this expectation evolved in that early on, students had to prepare monologues or scenes, and then later I challenged them to perform longer sections of the play, sometimes with me alongside them or even, as with my last group (following 6 years of experimentation of this kind of work), performing a modern retelling using our own writing.

This was achieved through building the expectation that there would be physical elements to class daily, and all participants would somehow slowly move—at their unique comfort level—from reader as physical participant in the reading of the play of study just as an actor would. It may be that moving toward the use of physical action in the teaching of dramatic texts as a tool for learning can aid the reader in the same way it aids an actor in that job. For Stanislavski, the Method of Physical Action was the most effective way for actors to get initially into the play; it provided the means to liberate their imagination and their creative forces. Physical Action is the

foundation on which the entire emotional, mental, and philosophical superstructure of the ultimate performance is built (Benedetti, 1998, p. xv). For me, this work was driven by wondering if this might be the case for the reader of plays in the English Literature classroom as well.

This Physical Action is a concrete way to tackle what is called the Actor's Dilemma as follows:

> The only feelings or thoughts or impulses I can have are my own.... I have no other resource from which to create a performance but my own life; how do I create and present a character whom an audience accepts as a fully rounded, comprehensible human being, but who is not me? I do it by using a natural process. (Benedetti, 1998, p. 1)

This "natural process," as derived from the Method, could be seen as developing emotional intelligence or social-emotional intelligence, but it is mainly the innate ability to understand other human beings. One of the actor's greatest tools is to harness their innate ability to sympathize, further to empathize, with other human beings.

Actors as readers are able to empathize. Empathy is the capacity to feel and experience imaginatively what another person feels and experiences. Empathy, sharing feelings of another, is a tool of the actor following The Method strategy. This may be where some pedagogy in the context of teaching reading fails in the typical English classroom because the process of reading actively is not simply to react with the emotions that make one feel entertained by a tale, but ideally to transact, to be moved in some way, to shift one's own perspective*, to shift around in it*, to share feelings, even if it is uncomfortable, and entertain them for a time. This is gathering wisdom through the process of reading deeply.

Stanislavski's studies regard a system which reflects so much curiosity about behavior of "a self" and involves ways to reflect on this "self" to mold a character out of lines, for the actor, the audience, and the story itself. Thus, before I began teaching Shakespeare's plays, I invited

my students to look first at themselves: their favorite photographs, rituals, social circles, goals, and dreams, so that they could be reminded of their own identities, their own "humanness," and the "humanness" of our classroom to build trust and a safe space for the kind of work we would inevitably do. I then had my students participate in an activity that was pulled from Narrative 4, and involves a speaking and listening activity in which partners take turns listening to a story from their partner's life, which they must then tell to the group with respect, attention to detail, and care. This is similar to some improvisational activities which involve telling a story in great detail in the voice of their character. Improvisational activities like these and others were explored in the very first week in my classroom.

Actors use memories from their own lives to shape their understanding of their characters of study. These activities and other practices, to be explored later, helped students to be more reflective using stories of memories from their lives to reveal ways of seeing themselves and various stages of becoming or ways of thinking and believing. Once students became more confident in reflection of their own "human-ness" (*e.g., motivated behaviors that are a necessity, feelings suggesting how what I say is shaped by who I am, automatic physical reflexes, organic physical actions*), they were in theory more able to identify these same things in their characters of study. Then, the work can begin on the created behaviors of the actor, which I hoped would provide pathways to understanding the development of the use of Emotion Memory and help my students connect to the text in ways that were new to them all.

2.11 An In-depth Look at Emotion Memory or Recall

> He conferred with scientists and specialists in various specialized fields, and was especially interested in the works of French psychologist Theodule-Armand Ribot (1839-1916), whose term "affective memory" he used. Later, in the 1930s, he rejected this name and replaced it with "emotional memory." (Moore, 1984, p. 42)

Imprints on our memory shape our context for understanding many things. Stanislavski explored the concept of emotional memory and how an actor could harness these memories in their performance:

> According to scientific data, emotional memory not only retains an imprint of an experience but also synthesizes feelings of a different nature…. The actor must be capable of bringing out the imprint of a past experience and making it respond to the conditioned stimulus on stage. (Moore, 1984, p. 43)

The process of utilizing memory to form an understanding of my character is one from my Method acting training at Adelphi University, which helped me to understand how the play is a special approach to the telling of characters' stories: Drama can be viewed as poetry of memories as well. Often, my teachers and directors would challenge me to recall my own memories in efforts to connect to my character. Sometimes this would be as simple as remembering the physicality of being a young child and how they walk differently to something as complex as how our inner emotions and prior experiences guide our physical responses in any given moment, or stimulus, and how that itself is a method of communication: body language. My interactions on stage during rehearsal shaped these understandings and my "preserved traces of what was experienced" from my own memories of living became a driving force in my mind and body work as a Method actor and performer.

2.12 The Interconnection of Mind and Body in Stanislavski's System

> Learn to carry out correctly and organically the simplest physical actions. The logic and consecutiveness of these actions will evoke in you the entire complicated, subtle scale of inner experiences. Carrying out the logic of a physical action will bring you to logic of emotions, and this is everything for an actor. (Moore, 1984, p. 45)

A Method actor learns how deeply the mind and body are interconnected. Much of an actor's training is the realization and the study of our ways of thinking and believing, carrying ourselves and interacting with others, or how patterns of gesture and tone of voice are derived

from our own private inner emotional perception of external experiences, and the events of our lives that have shaped the memory of them uniquely as part of our identity. An actor understands that a gesture, tone of voice, or the way we carry ourselves could be deeply rooted in our childhood upbringing or events from our past that shaped how we use our bodies and voices as patterns of behavior. They are trained to use their body and their mind to find the logic behind the emotions, and, further, if they cannot find it, *to build it in*, using their own sense memory. Therefore, the actor's creative process is tied to movement and emotional memories. For the actor, every gesture, breath, or pause becomes a part of the art because it works to supply what is not necessarily on the page of the script itself. Further, these can be elaborated upon to explore the text and the study of the people at the heart of dramatic texts, in understanding the people the art form reveals through the actor. The actor learns to read with the mind and body to express the inner experiences of the characters, as Moore stated:

> A gesture must reflect an inner experience. It will then become a purposeful, logical, and truthful movement. The actor's body and voice must be cultivated and trained to be able to express externally, instantly, and precisely, the delicate inner experiences of the creative process (Moore, 1984, p. 53)

By utilizing the Method to train students of reading to be more cognizant of the connection between gestures and inner experiences of the mind in that of the characters they read about, they may be able to understand this about themselves and others. This has the potential to drive more complex comprehension and interpretation as well as a transaction with the text that highlights the individual's perspectives, ideas, and feelings, and how they inform body language.

2.13 The Method of the Actor and the Nature of Dramatic Texts

> What I write does not refer to one epoch and its people, but to the organic nature of artists of all nationalities and of all epochs. (Moore, 1984, p. 9)

Understanding the self and others—humans—was always the motivation behind Stanislavski's system, but The Method of Physical Action, or The Method, often gets misunderstood as mainly a cerebral approach to performing. But this is not the case. Physical actions become signposts, signifiers, and craft elements blended with the study of, and the logic behind, emotional memory which brings meaning to a sentence.

The actor studies language of the body which often conveys universal meaning. An extended pause in a moment between two actors on stage holds the same power that a comma might to convey meaning in a sentence. One problem with the study of dramatic texts in traditional classrooms is that we use only the mind and not perhaps the greatest tool for understanding (which likely holds much experiential learning) that we have had since birth—the body. Yet the language of the body transcends the boundaries of spoken language. An actor studies this language and its grammar through The Method.

These physical behaviors, albeit influenced by mental ones, are harnessed by The Method on stage to form an organic approach to storytelling, with mind and body working simultaneously. Acting is a living art for which the audience member has many ways into the story. It could be that where students struggle with complex text, like that of Shakespeare, the act of moving through the text to know what they are thinking, and the characters' basic physical actions, might bring about a deeper transactional reading experience, stronger comprehension, or even the ability to practice empathy, all through a way that is natural to us as a child bringing meaning to language as they explore the world physically.

Sonia Moore (1948) spoke to this underlying purpose in her work, The Stanislavski System: "The System therefore cannot be called a Russian phenomenon, and does not have to be 'adapted' to American actors or to actors of any nationality. Through the system, actors learn

natural laws and how to use them consciously in re-creating human behavior on stage" (p. 9). The system is designed around these observations in that by careful organic process, an individual can practice innate behaviors such as seeing, listening, thinking, and feeling as they explore the art of language. Still, it is impossible to build an understanding of character and language within a text through physical means alone; as Moore wrote, a connection must be found between the inner experience and the external expression:

> There is no inner experience without external physical expression; our bodies transmit to others our inner experiences. Science has confirmed that neural pathways connect our physical actions with the inner mechanism of emotions, the innumerable nuances in human experience…. Sechenov said that our bodies express what we are thinking and experiencing before we are aware of it. (Moore, 1984, p. 18)

In my own training within The Method, I learned through improvisation to search for the most organic action over a series of trials in rehearsal and sought to design my own improvisational activities to aid my preservice teachers in this awareness across inner experience and external physical expression. In my course, a large part of our focus was the study of the nuances in human behavior, experience to be found in the lines of the text of study.

Actors already work with the understanding that plays are distilled human experiences, but students may not always make these connections during their reading experience. The Method could be a formula to foster the aforementioned transaction which may aid students in their reading comprehension. Thus, the Method becomes an interpretive reading strategy.

Shakespeare's plays are often studied in secondary schools; their relevance in preservice English content area classrooms provides unique opportunities for preservice English teachers to learn a set of skills applicable to Shakespeare study. The Method might not typically be utilized by the Shakespearean actor as it was developed for a different kind of theatre; still, its elements when adapted foster deep reading and unique interpretations. There is a different focus with the

body and a psychological element that separates it from other forms of character study, such as Meisner's Method and Demidov's Method, which did not seem appropriate for the application of the beginner student of acting and dramatic texts. Actors understand that plays are distilled human experiences, but students may not always make this connection during their reading process. The Method offers a framework that can foster the kind of transactional reading necessary for a deeper comprehension of complex texts.

2.14 The Method and Shakespeare

Actors in Shakespeare's time likely never saw the entire play, nor were the plays composed with attention to character background in great depth. Much of Shakespeare's characters are archetypes of major aspects of human nature, personality, and how that individual was likely shaped by their life experiences or choices. Shakespeare's actors would have known how to make his plays actable, *real*, and familiar. Stanislavski's Method was initially explored to help actors make their characters real—perhaps even familiar. Methodizing Shakespeare bridges a gap across time for students who may view the happenstance of his plays as separate from themselves, inaccessible, and irrelevant. The Method brings a character to life—makes them real and familiar—actable. Students may learn to make connections through this new reading transaction and interpretation process, essentially to practice bringing his characters and their nature to contemporary spaces for discussion—*bringing them to life*.

Shakespeare's players likely would have known exactly how to bring their character to life on stage and for the audience effectively: living the part. It is important to note the limitations of his plays to be "interpreted" 459-odd years later and, similarly, the limitations of applying an adaptation of a method designed for Russian theatre in a different time. I review

some of these reflections here to highlight what is problematic about this project and identify my own bias in the work.

Shakespeare's plays are often studied in secondary school classrooms, and their relevance to preservice English teachers provides a unique opportunity for teaching performative reading. While the Method was originally developed for a different kind of theatre, its principles can be adapted for the teaching of reading. For teachers and students alike, the Method offers a structured approach to character analysis and physical interpretation, which is crucial for beginners in both acting and literary study.

However, while the Method provides an invaluable tool for character exploration, its application in the classroom can present challenges. First, not all students may feel comfortable with the physicality required by the Method. For some, especially those unfamiliar with acting or movement-based learning, the approach might initially feel intimidating or, perhaps, even artificial. Shakespeare's text can be daunting, and pairing it with physical action may seem overwhelming to students who are not used to integrating their bodies into their interpretation of a play. Additionally, the focus on emotion memory and physical expression may detract from the analytical aspects of the text that are crucial for understanding the historical, linguistic, and social context of the plays.

Performance-based teaching of Shakespeare can be an effective pedagogical approach, but it also raises concerns regarding accessibility, interpretation, and the potential oversimplification of the text's complexities. I worried about this often during the course of this research project, and I frequently reflected on the challenges of incorporating this approach because it includes a bias toward a particular technique for studying dramatic texts. The concept

of developing a character, especially in the context of Shakespeare's plays, is one that is not without its complications. As Stephen Orgel (2002) wrote in *The Authentic Shakespeare*:

> the history of performance is largely a history of the subversion of the text. Actors are the original poststructuralists, assuming, throughout the history of the theatre, that the author does not control the play, the interpreter does; and, that indeed, there is, for the purposes of performance—which are, after all the purposes of drama—no author, only an infinitely mutable script. (Orgel, 2002, p. 10)

In moving towards using Stanislavski's Method to approach Shakespeare, I noticed that students and their interpretations became the driving force of the discussions in the learning process. While this approach was well-suited to understanding performance, it assumes authorial intent, which had to be critically addressed in our discussions throughout the study.

In *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Janette Dillon (1994), in her article "Is There a Performance in This Text?" addressed the issues concerning the nature of creating "authentic" performances from folio quartos that include different sections of text, influenced by varying contexts, historical time periods, and other factors shaping how actors interpret the play. She wrote:

> A production of *Hamlet* by The King's Men at Oxford University would have differed from one given by another group of players in the same place, or from one given by The King's Men in the city of London. Performances are specific to particular players in particular times and places, as are the texts they perform. (Dillon, 1994, p. 79)

From this perspective, developing a study of performance in the context of teaching Shakespeare becomes complicated by interpretations specific to the influence of the time and personal lives of the students. While this impacts the learning process by highlighting current perspectives, issues, and events, it also places the responsibility on the instructor to navigate this approach in equitable ways.

Moreover, the instructor must be mindful of crafting practices that also highlight critical attention to the theory and practice in which students are engaging. In my own work with the Method, teachers had to reflect on the pedagogical aspects of the adaptation, among other

pedagogical approaches, while also experiencing the approaches personally themselves. My course had to be shaped as an inquiry and experimentation, one that provided examples and options for students to experiment with but also maintained that the practice itself was a question regarding the nature of the work and how effective it may be. W. B. Worthen (2015), in his article "The Shakespeare Performance Campus" from *Shakespeare on the University Stage*, wrote:

> A critical engagement with the implications of theatre practice would require the teaching of theatre practice, not as a privileged vehicle to authentic Shakespearean meaning, but as a variable mode of inquiry, a trained, complex, embodied, and consequential means for making conventional behavior signify as a performance. (p. 286)

This brings us to the question: Is performance an embodiment of text? Worthen reflected on this in his dialogue with Barbara Hodgson, in *Renaissance and/or Early Modern Drama and/or Theater and/or Performance: A Dialogue*. Worthen (2012) wrote:

> Writing cannot determine performance; performance does not interpret writing; the text is not a record of performance, performance is not an embodiment of the text. Is it possible to imagine a more dynamic relation between print and performance in conceptualizing 'drama' at the decisive moment of its emergence in a set of relevant modern institutions: literature, theater, print publication, professional acting, and so on? (p. 24)

This critique encouraged me to reflect on the idea that while my students were indeed engaging with the text, using their imaginations, and thinking critically about issues they found in the play, and through this approach in contrast to others, their interpretations were still subjective and reflective of their personal experiences and perspectives.

Worthen (2007) further explored these ideas in *Prefixing the Author: Print, Plays, and Performance*, in which he discussed the complexities of early modern texts and the challenges they pose to modern editors. He wrote, "While modern plays are printed much more systematically, the disposition of the dialogue, the location of speech prefixes, the use of white space on the page are far from conventional; indeed, many playwrights appear to see these

accidentals as ways to make a substantial intervention in the shaping of performance" (p. 214). These elements of early modern plays in print, which complicate the task of editing and interpreting Shakespeare's works, further emphasize the tension between performance and textual analysis. They call attention to the fact that performance does not fully encapsulate the meaning of the text. As I reflected on my practice, I realized that while students were engaging actively with the Method and Shakespeare's characters, they were still, in a sense, creating their own interpretations and not necessarily an embodiment of the text.

In sum, while performance-based approaches, such as the Method, can be valuable tools in interpreting Shakespeare, they must be used thoughtfully. In the next chapter, I explore how theorists, teachers, and other professionals in education have organized their work in ways that align, support, connect, and inspire this method of reading. I highlight how some of this practice already exists in various pedagogical approaches and show how my work offers a distinct contribution to these efforts.

Chapter 3: "Drama, What Is Happening?"

> The hardest thing in the world is to help somebody else know something for themselves.
>
> Dorothy Heathcote

3.1 An Ecosystem for the Art of Reading: Bringing a Text to Life

Since the founding of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 1911, Drama as a genre of literature and as a pedagogical practice has been a developing part of the work within the field of English Education. From the study of dramatic texts, such as Shakespeare, to the theorists and practitioners of performance-based teaching, Drama can be found interwoven within the folds of curriculum development and pedagogical shifts in the teaching of both dramatic and non-dramatic texts. Performance-based teaching practice falls under what is titled as Aesthetic Education, and many individuals ranging from theorists to teaching artists promote the use of such teaching practice in various forms explored here.

While approaches differ and texts of study cross genres, these theories and pedagogy of Drama highlight teaching principles that value student-centered learning and collaboration, learning environments that encourage multiple interpretations or critical stances, practice that crafts reading as a personal exploration or an experience, and opportunities for students to clarify and enlarge their response to the artwork of study.

In the context of teaching dramatic literature, performance-based teaching practice pulled from Drama offers various approaches to the study of dramatic texts as an art form and deeply inspired my reasons for experimenting with the Method as an interpretive strategy and framework in my course. In reflecting on Stanislavski's system as an ecosystem of sorts, each

element informs the other as an actor participates in the creation of a character—of life and/or the essence of the human spirit. Each element is necessary to build the life of the character, and the actor becomes the living organism (creatures, microbes, plants) in contrast to the nonliving elements of the system, such as the script, stage, props (soil, sunlight, water). Yet, they all function symbiotically (within the environment they interact with each other to live) to create a *living* art form and an interpretive reading experience for both actor and perhaps the student of dramatic texts in the context of the English classroom as well. The Method is meant to function organically, tapping into the innate ability for individuals to use their ability to imagine, feel, perceive, and reflect. An actor learns to move through the system intellectually and physically as they develop character. Actors cycle through this system, and eventually a play is born.

The value of studying dramatic literature as a *living* form of art is a complex topic, but perhaps a main highlight, which shaped my efforts in bringing Drama practice into my English classroom, is in its value in inspiring multiple *personal* interpretations. In particular, these approaches focus on the use of imagination as a way of knowing something for oneself based on transactional and experiential learning. For the context of my writing here, when I use the word transaction or transactional, I am building on Louise Rosenblatt's use of the terms from her writing on Transactional Theory aforementioned in the introduction. Her writing on "aesthetic stance" applies in particular for the reader who, like the Method actor in Stanislavski's system, forms interpretation through ongoing interactions with the text through the use of ideas, sensations, feelings, thoughts, and emotions to bring meaning to a text of study: transaction. The meaning does not exist already made in the text but is derived or evoked from a reading experience or stance through conscious or unconscious means.

Rosenblatt wrote of the unique avenues for meaning developed through a transaction that involves both the given circumstances of the text and what the reader (through conscious reflection from their own lives or background knowledge or subconscious emotion or feeling) brings to the experience of reading:

> Essential to any reading is the reader's adoption, conscious or unconscious, of a stance. The reading-event must fall somewhere in a continuum, determined by whether the reader adopts what I term "the predominantly aesthetic" stance or "the predominantly efferent" stance. The difference in stance determines the proportion or mix of public and private elements of sense that fall within the scope of attention. (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 12)

The Method may target her aesthetic stance, in which the text and the reader, subject and learner, art and artist's process, are constantly informing the other in the process of making meaning.

The individuals I explore in this chapter and the theories or practice they are known for shaped my thinking about Stanislavski's system and informed my practice as it developed over six terms of teaching. Through Greene, I remembered the importance of using the imagination to learn in spaces of education. Through Dewey, I was reminded of the value of developing an appreciation for art and experiencing it in any way possible. From Rosenblatt, I discovered that the skills I learned to develop interpretation as a young Method actor may exhibit the same qualities of the transaction with texts of literature she proposed. In building on ideas from Moffett and Wagner, I shaped my practice to form opportunities for students to interact with each other, discuss, and reflect on their process with the raw materials of drama. Heathcote shaped my understanding of Process Drama as an engagement tool already innate within us as students learn to improvise. From Wilhelm and Edmiston, I realized that others like me were researching and experimenting with Drama pedagogies to teach both dramatic and nondramatic literature in English classrooms. Finally, through my participation in teacher professional education programs such as Lincoln Center Education and Literacy Unbound, I came to see

another version of this ecosystem as students and teachers worked together in creative responses to nondramatic literature study through dramatic play.

In Stanislavski's Method, harnessing Greene's *imagination* through the *Magic If* is key to understanding a character deeply. Learning to appreciate the art of dramatic texts and performances through Dewey's definition of *experience*: Actors cycle through the elements of the Method to experience and *create an experience* through rehearsal and performance. Actors learn to empathize by *doing* the work physically, *undergoing* the development of character, and *moving* between the spaces of subject and learner, as they use their emotions to feel the depth of the story and what it reveals about human nature. Through the Method actor's use of Units and Objectives, they set intentions by determining who their characters are, what they face and why, and what they decide to do: Actors transact with their characters through their lines as they take them into their bodies and speak them as if they were their own; empathy and understanding develop in real time. Finally, through Circles of Attention, actors learn to transact with the subtle nuances of text and their environment, other actors, the stage and its many moving parts, in connection with the other elements just mentioned. As an ecosystem, the characters and the play come alive. Interpretation is born.

The use of Drama practice in the study of dramatic texts as pedagogy highlights the use of imagination, provides opportunities for students to experience and appreciate an art form through the eyes of artist, fosters a rigorous yet personal transaction with text, crafts student-centered collaborative models for learning, and inspires a reading process that empowers the students to track their own interpretation and reflect on their reading. I endeavor to explore and reorganize our thinking about their work in this chapter as these individuals directly inspired and influenced my decision to offer this practice as an option to my preservice English educators.

Some of my reflections found in this section review my time at Lincoln Center Education and my participation in the Literacy Unbound institute at Teachers College to guide understanding. These reflections regard what this practice can look like through dramatic reconstructions, but mainly highlight principles for this kind of teaching. In particular, what these principles foster in the spaces of studying nondramatic literature, which falls under the umbrella of Aesthetic Education, as does my own practice. As the use of Drama pedagogy in the teaching of English was established by Moffett, Wagner and her work with Heathcote, and others, this teacher research project sought to explore the value of using the Method approach, in particular toward the teaching of Shakespeare and dramatic texts.

While philosophies of education, theory, and practice have constantly evolved over time, what seems to remain is a large body of individuals who propose that literature is a form of art and should be studied as such. In the next section, I cover this discourse to situate and resituate some theories of the teaching of English, specifically from English Education, under Aesthetic Education. This pinpoints instructional approaches well suited to the context of teaching Drama and dramatic texts in the English Literature classroom, and perhaps beyond by their very nature, as an ecosystem of sorts which may bring life to the study of texts for students across genres of literature.

3.2 Maxine Greene on Releasing the Imagination

The study of dramatic texts through performance-based approaches falls under the broader umbrella of Aesthetic Education. In 1965, the inclusion of performing arts in schools increased, largely due to federally funded programs like Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As William Ayers observed, the arts became more central to educational experiences, with school districts experimenting with ways to integrate them into

curricula, especially through interdisciplinary and team-teaching approaches (Greene, 2001). During my time at the Lincoln Center Education Summer Institute in 2019, I was introduced to Aesthetic Education philosophies, particularly Maxine Greene's emphasis on perception, cognition, and imagination as essential modes of knowing (Greene, 2001). Greene's (2001) definition of Aesthetic Education—as "an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts" (p. 6)—greatly influenced how I approach teaching dramatic texts, including Shakespeare. This experience inspired me to bring my background as an actor into my teaching, linking the artistic process to the study of dramatic works.

Aesthetic Education connects students' understanding of art, particularly in language arts, with their imagination and personal engagement with the work. As Greene (2001) wrote, "Not only is an active and informed perceiving required; an attentiveness to the qualities of the medium is required" (p. 10). As Aesthetic Education focuses on an approach to learning that emphasizes the appreciation and understanding of art in a way that involves both intellectual and emotional engagement, Greene's philosophy highlighted the importance of exposing students to engagement with the emotional and creative potential that language offers across the genres of literature. The use of imagination plays a crucial role here, encouraging students to interpret, visualize, and emotionally connect with the art of language in their own unique ways. The work becomes more meaningful when students find a personal connection to it—as it is not enough to consume art passively; students must engage with it critically and thoughtfully to understand its layers fully, including those specific to the genre, such as dramatic texts, like monologue, dialogue, and soliloquy. This project sought to understand if students can do so by learning to make connections with the characters emotionally in the same way a Method actor brings a

character to life through the use of Stanislavski's Physical Action and Emotion Memory, among other aspects of the interpretive reading system.

As my understanding of teaching literature across genres deepened, I began to appreciate the power of imagination in both the students' and the teacher's processes. By participating in professional development workshops at LCE, designed to help teachers cultivate perception and imagination in students, my ideas about teaching dramatic texts through the actor's process began to develop. The Method, as an interpretive reading strategy for the actor, allows students to engage in this transaction by adopting the artist's perspective: By learning to create a character study or performance in extending the limits of their imagination and reflection on their own life experiences.

Greene emphasized the need to restore continuity between the heightened experience of engaging with the arts and the creation of meaning in the classroom (Greene & Dewey, 2001). The creation of meaning in the classroom, I found, can be developed through the use of *The Capacities for Imaginative Learning* from LCE (explored in depth in the last half of this chapter). These capacities mirrored what is central to the Method's role as an interpretive strategy for teaching Shakespeare in my classroom. It provided a framework in which students can use their imagination not just to understand the text, but also to reflect on their own experiences and perceptions. It also served as a link between learning goals across the two fields of English and Drama.

Through the Method, students can discover new perspectives on Shakespeare's plays, engaging with them in a way that highlights the art of language and its connection to the human experience through their own aesthetic stance. This process of using active imagination while reading gently shifts the way students connect with both the characters and the text itself.

Similar to the way an actor steps into a role, students who use their imaginations to engage with a character's circumstances find that the play transforms from a mere academic exercise to something more immediate and vivid.

For the Method actor, the use of the *Magic If* will inevitably be used for two reasons: one, to dissect character motivation and imagine how to convey that physically or emotionally; and, two, to supply what is not there (if the playwright leaves motivations or information regarding the character's choices blank or missing). Either way, and for each use, the imagination becomes a tool to make the character more familiar, relatable, or actable. In doing this, especially when actors come into contact with other actors in the spaces of rehearsal, events, scenes, dialogue, and so on, the activation of imagination to answer the unknowns may reveal overarching themes, symbolism, or larger implications in the play.

When students allow themselves this imaginative leap, when they begin to find commonality with their characters of study, to think and behave like them, or to imagine emotional connections to their circumstances, they respond to the text not merely as observers but also as active participants. Their reactions are organic and, in the moment, much like an actor on stage. As Stanislavski examined, "In the end you will tire of being an observer, and wish to act. Then as an active participant in this imaginary life you will no longer see yourself, but only what surrounds you, and to this you will respond inwardly, because you are a real part of it" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 60). The role of imagination in learning as a participant—both for students and actors—is paramount in this process. In this moment, you see yourself in the character or the character appears in your reflection of the self. For Stanislavski, "Our work on a play begins with the use of *if* as a lever to lift us out of everyday life onto the plane of imagination. The aim of the actor should be to use his technique to turn the play into a theatrical

reality. In this process imagination plays by far the greatest part" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 51). Students, too, can use this imaginative "*if*" to transport themselves from the realm of passive reading to active engagement. As they begin to fill in the unknowns of the text with their character's intentions or connect to the emotions of the character, they begin to imagine themselves as the character in some ways, which increases their engagement with the reading transaction. It is possible that the use of imagination opens the possibility of a transaction with the text, one that stirs ideas, feelings, and sensations which make the reading process palpable and perhaps more engaging or memorable for the student of dramatic texts in the English classroom. Students who track their reading process thoughtfully using their bodies and emotions through Stanislavski's system learn to enlarge their response to dramatic texts through a personal transaction with a text. When these same students ask "What If?" and the Method actor answers "I am," then imaginative learning occurs. The use of imagination that Greene called for is answered by Stanislavski's most imaginative tool, the *Magic If.*

3.3 John Dewey on Art as Experience

Building on the transformative power of imagination in engaging with a text, Dewey's philosophy provides a natural extension of this process in the context of performing arts. Just as Stanislavski emphasized imagination as a tool to turn the play into a theatrical reality, Dewey's ideas in *Art as Experience* suggested that our interaction with art must go beyond observation to fully understand and appreciate its layers of meaning as a reflection on the mystery of life. In his own words, Dewey (1934) wrote of Shakespeare's works and the uncertainties and mystery of life that show up in his plays: "[Shakespeare] accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities—to imagination and art. This is the philosophy of Shakespeare and Keats"

(p. 35). What Dewey meant here was that when encountering an imaginative work of art that highlights life's uncertainties and mysteries, it is important to turn the experience of that same art form *on itself* by engaging with it in the same way—through exploration. For example, in the exploration of a dramatic text such as Shakespeare, when actors in his time would have had to engage with the text through improvisation, imagination, and performance, it is important for students of dramatic texts to encounter the art in the same way. In other words, to experience the uncertainties or mysteries from the characters' (or artists') point of view is to experience the commentary on them from Shakespeare's observations of the human condition in his time.

Further, to experience the art form in this way is to reflect on these archetypes of human nature or the human condition in the implications of the play in connection with how they are similar or dissimilar today. To make or observe these elements of Shakespeare's plays from the perspective of audience member is powerful in many ways, but to experience them from the place of actor shapes an active reading from the inside out. When students have the opportunity to move beyond passive reading in their study of a text and to participate instead actively in reading that text, their imagination becomes a valuable tool to guide their developing interpretations of the play through personal experience with the art form. Passive reading can be seen in students who do not question, become curious, or reflect on the layers of the text before them. Active readers shift in and out of the perspectives of the characters in the text through the use of empathy, questioning, reflection, and a willingness to read and re-read when necessary out of curiosity. The Method can be viewed as an opportunity for students to turn their own reading process "upon itself" as they move away from their desks, explore the text on their feet through interaction with each other, and question, discuss, and reflect as an ensemble on the larger implications of the play. As the ensemble reads and performs together, they are "turning that

experience upon itself," which highlights the qualities of the text (the medium of art). However, it also highlights the students' literary or reading experience as they come to know their characters personally as reflections of the self and others.

In essence, the students *center the study of the play* around their own experience with the art form and through interpretations as they transact from the perspective of their character with other classmates *in character* as well. From this transactional reading, their interpretation is born of their own theatrical reality. By viewing the term *experience* in accordance with Dewey's definition of it, we can see the medium of art, known as plays, as an opportunity for students to center their interaction with the art from the perspective of actor (artist). This opportunity to experience the art form (dramatic texts) as the artist (actor) turns the experience with the art upon itself, recognizing that where the mystery of human nature reveals itself in the play can also be a place where students can explore that mystery within themselves in artmaking or meaning-making.

The use of imagination through Stanislavski's Method highlights Dewey's *Art as Experience* as a way to explore others and ourselves by using careful questioning and physical activities to imagine one's way into the mind and body of the character (as explored in Chapter 2 and to be covered once more in Chapter 4 on this practice). Through the use of careful discussion (pairs, small-group, and whole-class) and reflection activities (journaling, creative responses to literature, commentaries), students have a chance to observe the qualities of the dramatic texts as they inform the actor's work and vice versa. This special lens on the layers and qualities of work within Drama as an artistic experience might help students recognize that the plays, too, are not merely texts to be read but living, breathing experiences to be engaged with, through the artist's process and through performance. This can involve becoming emotionally moved or mentally

transported by the piece beyond where an audience member who passively observes the play might experience. Dewey's concept of experience goes beyond the passive observer of art and moves into the places of being somehow changed by the interaction with a work of art. In some way, these imaginative interactions with art could be integrated into our everyday lives and interacted with in a way that brings new meaning to our lives, either through self-reflection or in our stages of becoming, in particular for students or teachers of dramatic literature.

In other words, initially, I might see *Romeo and Juliet* as a tragic love story, which it certainly is; however, once I play, study, or interact with characters such as Tybalt, Nurse, Friar Lawrence, and Mercutio, I might be moved to notice how the play regards the tragedy of cycles of revenge that lead to the death of innocent people, or the influence of patriarchal structures in society that shape an individual's relationships with others, or, perhaps, the nature of violence and organized religion as impossible barriers to agency in one's life. I might then be moved to notice that these interpretations are applicable to my own life, that I can even see some of these elements of the play as relevant in contemporary times. Further, once I have studied the play in this way, by experiencing it as an imaginative and theatric reality, I can never again look at my own life or other people, circumstances, events, and the like, in quite the same way that I did before I encountered the work of art that opened my eyes to new ways of seeing. The art informs a change in my thinking.

Traditional literary analysis or study is often more text- or teacher-centered and falls under the umbrella of a more passive kind of observation and participation, whereas imaginative reading through the Method creates an artistic *interpretive experience*. In the spaces of many public schools, the English literature classrooms I have observed over the last decade of my teaching value efforts towards skill-based instruction and training students to be passive

consumers of information on which they can readily be tested. The preparation of students for mandated assessments has taken the center stage for the average English literature teacher. This is through no agency of their own choice but through the expectations of their superiors and district goals.

Test prep and standards-based learning goals remove valuable time from learning spaces where teachers and students might engage in more valuable learning experiences that inspire creativity, empathy, and imaginative thinking through aesthetic-based and student-centered learning opportunities. Further, pedagogies from Aesthetic Education bolster transferable life skills that are also important for the young mind to acquire. For example, in the study of dramatic arts, students acquire interpretive skills, self-confidence, public speaking skills, collaboration, creative or imaginative thinking, and practice in developing empathy. When students engage in activities that foster such skills through active, physical participation where they have the opportunity to form their own ideas instead of passively memorizing another's interpretation, a new kind of learning happens. This learning is not teacher-centered or text-centered, but centered on the students' interaction with the art form.

Just as we cannot truly understand dance by reading about it, we cannot fully grasp the expressive nature of a play by solely reading it at a desk. Dewey (1934) suggested: "art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing, and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience" (p. 50). Here, Dewey's use of experience highlighted the students' dynamic interaction with the actor's process, revealing the energies of the dramatic text in their true form in connection with classmates who also assume the role of actor. This dialogic experience with text—and ensemble—creates a theatrical reality which develops interpretations in real time as a literary experience that students can later discuss and

reflect on, examining the many ways it informed their thinking about the implications of the play. Teaching a dramatic text, therefore, requires a shift in the teacher's and learner's approach: They must *do* and *undergo* the play to truly experience the dramatic art form, rather than simply observe it from a distance. Engaging with the play through both "outgoing" and "incoming" energy deepens the students' understanding. If students could engage with reading by using their imaginations, by studying character development deeply, and working with the Method, their interpretive process and their understanding of plays, such as Shakespeare, could shift into a more personal reflection on the work as they experience the use of the medium. Observing a dance is different than *experiencing* dancing. Experiencing something makes it personal, transferable, and memorable. The experience becomes new knowledge. Students could learn not just by solely and passively observing, but by actively participating and perceiving—learning by doing and engaging through their imagination.

Dewey argued that experience itself is inherently active and reciprocal. Just as in art, experience involves interaction—*doing* (acting, creating, experiencing) and *undergoing* (feeling, interpreting, reflecting). This involves a dynamic relationship between the creator and the audience, or between the individual and their environment. In the context of teaching dramatic texts, this means that students should not simply observe the text from a distance (or at their desk) for that would only be knowing one layer of the art form; they might interact further with the art by "doing" (engaging with the text through performance, analysis, etc.) and "undergoing" (emotionally and intellectually reflecting on what the text means and how it resonates with them). Teaching a dramatic text, in building on Dewey's use of experience, is about facilitating this active, reciprocal engagement where students fully *experience* the text rather than passively consuming it. The Method actor learns to experience not only text but also the dialogic nature of

the art of language as well as the word, for not only are the lines of one's character worthy of note but also the way they are an active response to another's words. Teaching dramatic texts in this way informs observations about how thought is created through the use of language or influenced by it as well, in the give and take between the language of the characters.

All uses of language, whether internal or external, are two-sided acts, as Timothy Koschmann (1999) wrote in *Toward a Dialogic Theory of Learning*:

> All speech (even internal) has an intended audience,…Bakhtin wrote:… word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee (Voloshinov, 1973, p. 86) (p. 3)

The nature of the study of the dramatic text highlights this two-sided act explored in Koschmann's writing on Bahktin, in that the characters have intentions behind their words, and in the practice of the Method, students have an opportunity to experience this aspect of language selection and use towards their characters' objectives. Further, they come to reflect on the playwright's strategic selection of language and words and their expression and location in the play (soliloquy, monologue, dialogue), particularly in the study here of Shakespeare's language as special to the nature of the art form and how the art form is meant to impact an audience. Students have an opportunity to explore and experience the many dialogic layers of language in their active responses to language from their character's use of language as well as the playwright's use of words and language.

This philosophy of art as experience shaped my experimental practice and influenced my decision to use the Method as a strategy for reading. In line with Dewey, I saw that an experiential literary opportunity for students could mirror the way we naturally interact with the world: through noticing, questioning, perception, recognition, imagination, curiosity, and reflection. Dewey (1934) wrote,

> Experience is a matter of the interaction of organism with its environment, and environment that is human as well as physical…. there is no experience in which the human contribution is not a factor…. Because every experience is constituted between 'subject' and 'object,' between a self and its world, it is not itself either merely physical nor merely mental. (p. 256)

Here, he explored the concept of experiential learning and how it mirrors the natural, interactive way humans engage with the world. But it could also be seen as though experiencing the art form of Drama through the practice of a Method actor, which is a natural way to read for interpretation. As students bring their own perspectives, reflections, ideas, and physical presence to the work they read using the Method as a system for experiential reading, they move through the text both as a learner and the subject of learning.

In an aesthetic experience, new encounters with the world are always filtered through our prior experiences, knowledge, and perceptions. Therefore, teaching in an experiential way allows students to interact with content in a similar, active manner, merging their own understanding (old prior experiences) with new information (interactions with the dramatic text and characters) in a meaningful and personal way. Since students come to texts with diverse backgrounds, the teacher has an important role in crafting an experience that encourages the use of imagination as a learning tool, thus shaping the relationship between subject and learner personally. Each student brings to the text their own life experiences, their own uses and understandings of language, as well as their own thoughts, ideas, and perspectives on the issues or implications of the play of study. The English teacher has an opportunity here to highlight these diverse elements so that students can learn other ways of thinking and believing from each other instead of only one teacher- or text-centered interpretation. When diverse interpretations inform each other, greater opportunities for richer and more in-depth interpretations may arise. For example, later in Chapter 4 on practice, students reading the same play, *King Lear*, developed vastly different

interpretations regarding the issues found in the text ranging from the ways in which power corrupts an individual to the impact of a patriarchal structure on the illegitimate child. Moving even further would be the sexist undertones as displayed by the women themselves in the text as they take on patriarchal attitudes to achieve power.

In this process, as students dialogue with the dramatic text personally, they inform each other's thinking, challenging each other to find new implications of the play during ensemble reading through performance-based practices. This is crucial in the study of Shakespeare's plays because they were intended to be performed, where the artist (the actor) creates living art through both the mind and body. To understand the full capacity of a play, students must see how the actor transforms the written word into action or something else. As Dewey (19340 wrote, "Aesthetic experience is imaginative…. Imagination is the only gateway through which these meanings can find their way into a present interaction;…the conscious adjustment of the new and old is imagination" (p. 283). By activating both their imagination and bodies, students transform reading from a passive, intellectual task into an active, interactive engagement with the text. Instead of passively receiving information, students actively perceive while transacting with the characters lines and actions…and emotions. Students bring their understanding of emotions, language, and body language (old) to the present interaction with the text as their character (new) to practice developing interpretation. As each student is participating in this way through the use of the actor's Method, the ensemble or class development of the text through performance behaves as an ecosystem as well, one where every element or participant informs the other while creating life from lines on the page.

As I shaped my own understanding of the relationship between subject and learner in my classroom exploration of literature, particularly with dramatic texts, I was inspired by Dewey's

notion of experience. If I could craft a learning experience where students understood the artist's process; shared in an aesthetic experience; and activated their mind, body, and imagination, I wondered how that might impact their ability to develop interpretation. Dewey (1934) argued that "Imagination is the only gateway through which these meanings can find their way into a present interaction" (p. 283), which ties directly to the idea of the Method as a tool for interpretive reading. Here, I view Dewey's use of the word "meanings" as representative of what a Method actor creates out of their character study. In observation of my students with this practice, meaning was often derived from their own personal interaction with the play and their character of study. When one considers the study of a play that has been known to us for over 459 years, it seems important to explore the artwork through the minds of our students as they find meaning in their present interaction. Dewey saw experience as an ongoing interaction between the subject and the world—both physical and mental—where imagination is crucial for deepening understanding. Where Dewey's perspectives on how the observer or learner is impacted by the art as experience, Louise Rosenblatt built on the other side, which is how the art is informed by learners and what they bring to the experience.

3.4 Louise Rosenblatt on Transactional Theory

The ideas of Greene, Dewey, and Stanislavski align with Louise Rosenblatt's vision of literature study as a living, dynamic art form, one that must be experienced and explored personally by students. Just as Dewey advocated for active engagement with art to deepen understanding, and Stanislavski emphasized imagination in performance to transform the actor's relationship with a text, Rosenblatt called for a similar shift in how all genres of literature are approached in the classroom. In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt (1995) critiqued the tendency of educational systems to prioritize systematic teaching and testing over fostering a true

connection between students and literature. She wrote, “Few teachers of English today would deny that the individual’s ability to read and enjoy literature is the primary aim of literature study.... In practice, however, this tends to be overshadowed by the preoccupation with whatever can be systematically taught and tested” (p. 62). This echoed Dewey’s emphasis on *doing* and *undergoing* art—students must not be limited to the passive consumption of texts. They need space to engage with the literature actively, to respond emotionally, and to connect the work to their own lived experiences.

Like the actor using imagination to shape the performance, students need the freedom to explore literature with curiosity and personal interpretation. This philosophy is in contrast with the reality that teachers of English face, such as district-based initiatives that focus on testable skills. However, just as Dewey argued, true engagement with art and literature requires more than just intellectual or analytical skills; it demands an active, imaginative, personal engagement with the text. When learning becomes personal, it becomes memorable. Rosenblatt’s critique suggested that when literature study becomes too focused on what can be “taught and tested,” it risks reducing the aesthetic experience—the kind of holistic, active participation Dewey advocates for—into something merely mechanical and detached from the student’s personal interaction with the text.

According to Rosenblatt, the reader’s background, interests, and personal context shape how they interpret the text, just as the text itself provides the structure and content for that interpretation. Stanislavski’s Method, when used as an interpretive strategy, highlights the development of interpretation through the use of the actor’s personal transaction, emotions, and knowledge as they physically engage with the words on the page through imagination and performance. The system of the Method crafts this same dynamic exchange between the text and

the actor. As discussed in my introduction, Rosenblatt shaped my understanding of literary study as a *transaction* through her Transactional Theory—one that shapes not only the student's understanding of language but also their sense of self and the world.

It was Rosenblatt who influenced me to view my role as a teacher as an opportunity to craft a personal experience for my students, using drama and the actor's work as a means to deepen their engagement with literature while also reflecting on their own personal worlds. She wrote of the potential for the student's reading practice to be informed by the emotions or thoughts called forth during the reading: "Literary works of art exist in unique personal experiences. The reader attends not only to the formal aspects of the work but also, perhaps primarily, to the situations, thoughts, and emotions called forth during the reading" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 286). These "situations, thoughts, and emotions," as the student undergoes the process of performing their character through the Method, craft an aesthetic and transactional reading experience, which ideally prompts the student to reflect on what the art reveals about the human experience.

To engage fully with the text, students can reflect on both their emotional response and the process of reading itself. The reader's situations, thoughts, and emotions—what they bring to the text—are just as important as the text itself. Later, I explain how Drama practice, particularly the Method, can craft this dynamic transactional experience by helping students reflect on how they feel about the issues raised in a play as the text comes to life in a transaction between the reader and the work, making each reading an individual and evolving process. Rosenblatt (1994) emphasized the personal aspects of this transaction, writing:

> The reading of a particular work at a particular moment by a particular reader will be a highly complex process. Personal factors will inevitably affect the equation represented by book plus reader. His past experience and present preoccupations may actively condition his primary spontaneous response. (p. 75)

For example, when a student in my course was reading *Twelfth Night*, she formed an emotional attachment to the character Viola. This allowed her to connect to the motivations and objectives of the character within the overarching implications of the play. The student reflected that in having to hide parts of themselves to "fit in," they felt they understood Viola's intentions in certain scenes, even when she felt she could not fully express her feelings of love towards another due to circumstances that prevented her from doing so, which informed her transaction and thus her interpretation as well.

Further, as other students who were also studying Viola connected to her different aspects, the diversity of their transactions brought new ways of seeing and thinking about the characters and the larger implications of the play overall. If one is emotionally invested in the characters as a Method actor is, one will be able to empathize better with the character, and this will inform one's analysis of the play. In the context of my own classroom and the use of Drama practice, particularly through the Method, my students (preservice English teachers) can engage with dramatic literature through spontaneous responses, using *emotion and reason* to deepen their interpretation. The Method fosters growth by helping students connect their personal experiences with the text, allowing them to explore the emotional and intellectual layers of the work. Through the use of Emotion Memory, the Magic If, Units and Objectives, and Circles of Attention (explored later in Chapter 4 on practice), students engage with these elements of the Method through physical action to foster the kind of transaction that Rosenblatt reflected on here, as each student read the text through their own individual perspectives which inevitably shaped their interpretations.

The reader's life experiences shape the Method actor's work, where understanding a character requires drawing on emotional memory to inform their performance, thus helping the

actor (or reader) transact and bring life (their own) to the process of reading and interpreting. As an actor transacts with a text, they learn how to function within the system of Stanislavski's Method. His system holds the potential to bring life to the reading in the transactional way Rosenblatt described. Rosenblatt wrote of the importance of memories that link to the reader's past experiences, ripe for connection with a text, which may further their engagement with the text through intrinsic design which also *brings the reading to life*: "The reader's fund of relevant memories makes possible any reading at all. Without linkage with the past experiences and present interests of the reader, the work will not come alive for him, or rather, he will not be prepared to bring it to life" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 77). Rosenblatt suggested that a reader's past experiences (memories, emotions, knowledge) are essential for reading and understanding a text. Just as actors engaged in the Method use personal memories and emotions to bring depth to their characters, students must bring their own experiences to the text in order to understand its full complexity.

Rosenblatt (1995) also argued that "Understanding implies the full impact of the sensuous, emotional, as well as the intellectual force of a word…. Moreover, we must relate it to our own experience so that it may become part of our working equipment" (p. 106). The Method, in particular, provides a framework for students to use their past experiences to engage with the text on an emotional level, deepening their understanding as they mine text for subtext and nuance. The sensations, feelings, emotions, and physical experience of studying a dramatic text through the Method brings to light both of these important parts of her observations: one, that to understand, to be intellectual, a student must feel and know why they feel the way they do about issues in the text or the use of a word (language); and two, that to solidify the intellectual

analysis or understanding, a student should likely have a memorable, emotional experience to shape and inform their thinking in ways that will last beyond the moment.

Finally, Rosenblatt (1995) noted that a reading experience renews the literature of study when students participate in their own personal transaction: “Every time a reader experiences a work of art, it is in a sense, created anew. Understanding requires an interpretation of this experience” (p. 107). For students, this highlights the importance of personal experience in interpreting the text. The Method can assist in this process by encouraging students to engage with the text emotionally and intellectually, crafting a dynamic transaction between the text and their own lived experience. In her work, Rosenblatt emphasized the “dynamic transaction” that occurs between a reader and the text. A transaction like this allows students to engage with dramatic texts by highlighting the value of imagination, emotion, and reason. All of these elements would inform each other in the same way that the parts of Stanislavski’s system works across elements.

Dewey viewed experience as a more fluid, continuous process in which meaning emerges from the interaction with the world, rather than being confined to a moment of personal reading or emotional response. While both theorists emphasized the importance of experience, Rosenblatt was more focused on the emotional and intellectual responses of the reader in the moment, while Dewey framed experience as a broader, evolving process that includes action and reflection in experiencing works of art more broadly.

The process of reading becomes not just an intellectual exercise, but a deeply personal one, where students connect their own lives to the characters they study. This emotional transaction allows them to reflect on human nature—how we think, feel, and act—and how those inner processes are mirrored in the characters they encounter as a part of the study of language.

Stanislavski believed that through conscious means, the unconscious could be stirred and the depth of our emotions would come to the surface through this practice—helping us to reflect not only on ourselves but also on each other: "Through conscious means we reach the subconscious" (Stanislavski & Hapgood, 1957, p. 166). Just as Stanislavski's actors use emotion to connect with their roles, students reading through this emotional lens can uncover what it means to be human, deepening their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

3.5 James Moffett and Betty Jane Wagner: Separate Justification for Using Dramatic Techniques in the ELA Classroom

James Moffett and Betty Jane Wagner (1983) believed that most reading of scripts should be done aloud, in groups or with partners: "Students can read plays aloud as a small group, improvise or act out scenes for the whole class, and work out with arrows or other graphic symbols a representation of the character interactions" (p. 260). Moffett and Wagner believed that students would see their learning come to fruition through the intricacies of voice and language, as they worked through performance-based approaches to literature and the dynamics therein towards improvisational and writing goals in the classroom of English. Through Stanislavski's Method, students might have the opportunity to track these dynamics as well with physical action in their study of dramatic texts. Working through lines, by tracking intentions, designing objectives, and empathizing with the perspectives of their characters, students could shape their interpretations through the use of Circles of Attention, Units and Objectives, and Emotion Memory.

Moffett and Wagner aimed to nurture independent thinkers and felt that the discourse of Drama was a place to craft that experience for students: "Dramatic experience ties words to speakers and situations, and thereby grounds style, thought, language, and ideas to the realities that produce them" (Wagner, 1968, p. 265). Through their work, students came to understand the

experience of Drama in highlighting words, thought, and language study with connections to the ideas and commentary of the human condition that produced them. I am inspired by their work and where connections can be made between speakers and developing interpretation in the discourse of Drama.

Betty Jane Wagner also collaborated extensively with Dorothy Heathcote, a world-renowned practitioner of Drama. In her 1976 work *Drama as a Learning Medium*, Wagner covered Heathcote's practice in relation to theory supporting the use of drama in literary education. She stated: "Drama is not something special, but rather a technique that most ordinary people regularly employ…and this dramatic act helps us explore the feel of the experience" (p. 16). Wagner noted that Heathcote, like Moffett and others, believed that the use of Drama as a learning tool is effective for young minds. The Method, which emphasizes personal engagement, emotion, and lived experience as central to understanding—bringing life to the page through genuine interactions with the text, language, and each other—serves not just as a teaching tool but as a lens through which students can deeply interpret and connect with the material—as well as with each other—in a way that may be innate or come naturally.

3.6 Betty Jane Wagner and Dorothy Heathcote on "Dropping to the Universal"

The collaborative, student-centered approach that Wagner described in Heathcote's Process Drama aligns closely with the actor's process and the principles of dialogue and interaction, highlighted through work by Moffett and Wagner. Just as the actor engages in an ongoing, dynamic exchange with the text, the teacher, much like a director, fosters an environment where students actively shape their own learning process through experimentation with the medium (writing, acting, etc.). Just as Stanislavski's Method encourages actors to move

from the intellectual to the emotional, like Stanislavski, Heathcote's approach uses improvisation to shift students' perspectives and prepare them for the more complex layers of textual analysis, creating a bridge between creativity, performance, understanding, and personal engagement with literature.

Wagner (1976) highlighted the unique role of the teacher in inquiry-based learning, emphasizing that students should make their own judgments and choices. She noted that this process allows for organic learning through improvisational physical work: "It is not how much information you can give students that matters. What matters is how little information you provide, and how much power and significance it gains when you focus on it long enough" (pp. 21-23). Instead, students receive carefully selected details that gradually shift their perspectives, allowing them to build their own analysis through reflection—similar to how a science lab experiment works. In terms of the Method, this strategy of improvisation and internalizing the experiences and perspectives of characters enhances a student's interpretive reading.

An important aspect of this approach is the use of imagination to harness creativity, as Wagner (1976) explained:

> From this, children can weave threads into a complex net of elaboration, a web of their own making, in which they can capture new experiences and relate them to the center…. The students could discover these extrapolations for themselves, making them their own, if given ample time to develop their ideas…. With the assumption of attitude and belief comes identification. (p. 65)

As explored in Chapter 4 next with my preservice English teachers, this process ultimately has the potential to create what Wagner discussed here, which is a series of new experiential learning moments where students reflect on their own interpretations of the art alongside each other to inform new thinking. This thinking or meaning-making might be connected to issues that arise in the text as further connected to universal issues relevant in contemporary times, or they might be

isolated to the student and their personal connections to the text. Either way, students make connections between the text, process, and their own development of ideas juxtaposed with the ideas of others.

This "net of elaboration" can be effectively integrated into other instructional goals in the English classroom, such as creative writing or literary analysis. The Method could also be interpreted as a "net of elaboration" which captures the new experiences of the actor while they constantly cycle through old experiences, knowledge, emotions, and memories to aid them in their interpretations. As Heathcote believed, "Dropping to the Universal" speaks to the importance at the heart of drama and literature: "The universal is the wellspring, the source of human understanding" (Wagner, 1976, p. 71). When students have an opportunity to reflect on what is universal in the text, a new layer of understanding enters the learning process: "Heathcote often pauses the drama for reflection" (p. 73). This reflective process connects to the notion that drama is not merely about performing or acting out a story, but about interpreting and reinterpreting the material through lived *empathetic* experience ripe for reflection. The very act of reflection allows students to bring a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the text back into the classroom and to their own lives.

In closing, Wagner connected her observations of Heathcote's work to James Moffett's writing on the discourse of Drama:

> This is exactly what drama achieves: it provides an evocative context for expressing feelings and ideas, demanding clarity and force in their articulation. When language is required in drama, students shift from passive to active vocabulary, using words they may never have had a reason to use before. (Wagner, 1976, p. 188)

By linking the reflective practices and the active engagement in drama to the Method as an interpretive strategy, I have emphasized the way drama encourages students to internalize the text and physically experience roles to better understand characters and their motivations. When

they use words they have never had reason to use before, they are also feeling and thinking, perhaps even understanding, things they may never have had reason to before. For Moffett, this might show up in their writing; in my classroom, this would show up in their performative reading and interpretations, as explored in Chapter 4.

This approach parallels the Method's emphasis on interpretation through personal engagement with the material. The Method actor's work regards the skill of tapping into a system which reveals what makes a character human and alive. As students interact with each other through this system, they practice being human and being alive. The pedagogy specific to the Method allows spaces for students to shift between subject and learner within the system to reflect on and observe the implications of the play. Perhaps what is special about this approach to reading is that as students learn to create characters, they can intrinsically react and reflect on the actions, lines, and perspectives of other characters simultaneously, which brings to light the humanity in the play as well as the issues at the heart of the work. Students as part of this ecosystem, so to speak, observe and participate in an environment in which living elements of the characters become a part of the student *living* the art as an experience with a unique opportunity for them to observe and reflect on how the elements inform each other in the space of exploration.

Still, despite the wide-ranging theory and practice of drama, whether in Moffett's cognitive development or writing tools or Heathcote's Process Drama techniques, there remains limited integration of Drama as a discipline in the overall English curriculum. It is often relegated to supplemental activities. However, a growing body of work is exploring the untapped potential of drama in English education. In connection with earlier theories by Greene, Dewey, Rosenblatt, and Moffett, I next explore some of these valuable contributions.

3.7 Contemporary Teaching Artists and Teacher Professional Development Programs That Inform the Use of Drama Practice in Classrooms of Literature

3.7.1 Edmiston: Ensemble-based Rehearsal Approach

In his work *Shakespeare, Rehearsal Approaches, and Dramatic Inquiry: Literacy Education for Life* (Edmiston & McKibben, 2011), Brian Edmiston contributed significantly to the development of drama pedagogy through his studies with dramatic inquiry and dramatic play. His work built on earlier theories from Greene, Dewey, Rosenblatt, Moffett, and others, who called for a learning experience guided by students and their imaginative interactions with literature. Edmiston highlighted the potential of dramatic dimensions in literacy teaching, rooted in both dramatic play and performance.

Edmiston advocated for an active, ensemble-based rehearsal approach to teaching Shakespeare. He wrote about his work with ensemble-based rehearsals that encourage engagement with texts of study and generate meaning-making: "An active, collaborative, ensemble-based rehearsal approach, rooted in both dramatic play and dramatic performance, promotes engagement and meaning-making about the fictional world of a text" (Edmiston & McKibben, 2011, p. 1). Edmiston's work is an exploration of instructional approaches that range from Drama Processes to traditional drama practices, such as rehearsals. Edmiston used these practices to promote engagement and bring students into the fictional work of the text through dramatic play. In reading his work, I saw connections between the engagement I hoped to craft in my own classroom and the professional development I experienced in the Literacy Unbound program at Teachers College. In that program, alongside teachers and students, I witnessed the value of dramatic play as scaffolded by techniques such as transacting with text, immersion into text, and performance (to be displayed later in dramatic reconstructions).

Edmiston's (2011) work *Shakespeare, Rehearsal Approaches, and Dramatic Inquiry* explored the power of dramatic play in English Education, emphasizing how acting as characters allows students to engage actively with texts, deepen their understanding, and explore complex themes through performance. Edmiston wrote of his focus on dramatic play—students acting in role within scenarios—to highlight how acting as characters provides students with a dynamic way to engage with literature:

> Acting as if we were other people is highly significant for literacy learning: this is what young people do in dramatic playing and what young people do when they act as characters…. When young people use drama in the classroom they stand up, move around, interact, and use language as if they are characters in the text. (Edmiston & McKibben, 2011, p. 90)

Edmiston emphasized the importance of dramatic play. When students are stepping into the roles of characters, they not only use language creatively but also use physicality creatively to interact with texts by adopting roles and acting as characters. Edmiston's work reinforced the importance of creating learning opportunities in the classroom for students to engage with text through Greene's imagination, Dewey's experience of art, and Rosenblatt's proposed transactions. Like Moffett, Wagner, and Heathcote, Edmiston put theory to practice in the exploration of drama pedagogy as a tool for learning.

3.7.2 Dickson: Aesthetic Approaches

Randi Dickson, in "Emerging Practice for New Teachers: Creating Possibilities for 'Aesthetic' Readings" (Dickson & Costigan, 2011), discussed the work done at Lincoln Center. This work greatly informed my research project, which emphasized "increased aesthetic awareness," a goal developed with the help of their philosopher-in-residence, Maxine Greene. Dickson highlighted the organic complexity of aesthetic approaches, noting their connection to authentic and normative cognitive developmental processes. The Lincoln Center Education

Institute (2002, cited in Dickson & Costigan, 2011) asserted that such approaches support cognitive development: "Students develop a deep appreciation for the arts, gain practical insights into specific artworks, and strengthen core skills—such as abstract thinking and problem solving—that apply across the curriculum and throughout life" (p. 151). In taking inspiration from my time at the Lincoln Center Education Institute in 2019, I pulled from their professional development called *The Capacities for Imaginative Thinking* (previously mentioned and further explored in Chapter 4 on practice). I was able to make connections across the elements of the Method with these capacities which reinforced my decisions to apply elements of the Method in my classroom. These connections are explored in more detail later, but one such example might be the use of "Posing Questions" about the text, as mirrored with Stanislavski's *Magic If*: Students inquire as to the intentions of their characters (e.g., Why do they make the decisions they make? Who are they? and What would I do if I was in the same situation?). My practice was essentially developed with steps from the capacities from Aesthetic Education, aligned with steps from the system of the Method.

Over time, I watched my students exhibit what Dickson described earlier: They were able to find their way into the layers of dramatic texts. They also developed an appreciation for Shakespeare's writing, gained insight into specific elements of his plays, and strengthened core skills as they formed abstract ideas in connection with their character study (using metaphor to describe their thinking), or solved problems regarding the performance of a scene with peers. It seemed possible that through the use of the Method, students have an opportunity like the ones Dickson reflected on here, in which students can develop an appreciation for the dramatic texts as an art form with many layers for exploration. These layers will likely inspire curiosity,

discussion, and reflection, which hopefully encourage deeper understandings about the texts and themselves.

3.7.3 Wilhelm: The Joy of a Lived-Through Experience and the Contexts of Inquiry as Cognitive Apprenticeship

In 2008, Jeffrey Wilhelm published *You Gotta BE the Book*, incorporating research on the use of Drama practices from a theory-to-practice perspective. At the core of his work, Wilhelm asserted that Drama is a discipline. As students engage with various dramatic modalities, his approach remained student-centered. His work with dramatic modalities also influenced my development of the Method as a strategy for teaching reading through performative participation because it shaped my understanding of the many ways Drama practice relies on emotion and reason. Wilhelm advocated for practice in the classroom that highlights student identity construction in his writing here, which inspired my desire to so the same in my own classroom: "Beyond the cognitive process…is also a deeply emotional, participatory, dramatic, visual, artistic, psychological, and potentially transformational pursuit" (Preface).

Wilhelm's work, particularly in *Using Drama to Extend the Reader*, also influenced my teacher research project due to his attention to this *transformational pursuit*, in which the student can move beyond cognitive process into an *emotional, artistic, and engagement through participation,* especially for reluctant readers. His work uniquely contributed to my hopes that drama practice might engage my reluctant readers. I felt it might do this because drama encourages students to bring their own personalities, curiosity, and ideas to the reading, which is typically more engaging with a text through someone else's perspectives. Similarly, the Method as an interpretive strategy—from Drama—is valuable in encouraging students to bring their own experiences into their readings—via the use of Emotion Memory—as they track their character development through the actor's reading strategies, thus enriching their understanding of the text.

Wilhelm (2016) also wrote of the value in drama practice to provide spaces for students to connect with the text personally through active participation:

> Active participation, such as that incorporated in the creation of drama and visual art, creates context for more sophisticated comprehension and the creation of elaborated meanings made with the text because background schemata are necessarily activated and created, a foundational aspect of proficient reading. (p. 148)

When students are able to activate their own background schemata, they engage with the work personally. This personal engagement leads to active reading and confidence in developing interpretation as students are informed by the way they connect to their characters through elaborate meanings.

Meanings are derived from student life experiences or issues they feel are relevant in their own lives. When events or context become too distant, basic human emotion often creates spaces for meaning that would otherwise be more difficult to reach in a passive reading environment. The Method actor's work echoes this creation of elaborated meanings that Wilhelm proposed. The Method is an interpretive strategy, where active participation in drama helps students engage more deeply with a text. Students who work through a dramatic text through an actor's system strengthen their transaction with the text by activating their prior knowledge and personal experiences to inform their ideas. As Wilhelm pointed out, when students participate in creating drama, they draw on their background schemata—those foundational mental frameworks that help them make sense of new information. By incorporating these creative activities, the Method encourages students to make connections between the text and their own lived experiences.

3.8 Lincoln Center Education Summer Institute

The work mentioned here would not have been developed in the same way as it was without the unique teacher professional development opportunities that I experienced at the

Lincoln Center Education Summer Institute (LCE). This work was pivotal in helping me make connections across theory and practice in the development of practice under the umbrella of Aesthetic Education. What was extremely special and important about these development programs for teachers was that each time I participated, I worked alongside students. In working alongside students and teachers, I was able to see how this practice might impact my students as well as the myriad ways I could develop the practice within my own preservice English teacher and high school classrooms.

It is important to note that many valuable pedagogy and instructional tools that I took away from these programs do not necessarily and specifically show up in this research project (in focusing on the Method approach first in this dissertation). However, they still greatly informed my decision to utilize practice overall. Pedagogy from those programs created student-centered learning opportunities through exposure to the arts and creative responses to reading and writing. The dramatic reconstructions that follow this section are here mainly provide a prelude to the in-depth analysis of practice more specific to my work and where I focused my attention for this project in Chapter 4. They should serve as a moment to envision what it looks like when participants engage with a text through careful attention to (noticing deeply) works of art; pose questions about the art or their reaction to the art (posing questions); make connections to the art and what they see within the work (text to self, text to text [or other art], text to world); and physically exploring the artist's process within the context of dramatic texts (performance activities) as specific to these programs.

This section is also included to highlight the value of teacher professional development programs like these and the expertise of the individuals involved, who provide learning opportunities or research to further the development of theory and practice in the field for anyone

who might wish to experience it themselves. It may inform their teaching in ways that are new and hold so much value for the students in our classrooms to see themselves and others in the process of reflecting on art and making art at the same time.

As mentioned in the introduction, my time at LCE had a significant impact on my teaching practice. The experience introduced me to some elements of Aesthetic Education instructional practice called *The Capacities for Imaginative Learning*, which aligns closely with many of the theoretical concepts of the Method discussed earlier in this study. These elements served as a guide for helping students engage with art and literature in a more personal and active way. Drawing from my professional development experience at LCE, I adapted elements of Stanislavski's Method to create lessons for non-actors, utilizing *The Capacities for Imaginative Learning* to scaffold my workshops from being text-centered to student-centered, shifting from the role of a student of preservice teacher of English Literature to that of a student of acting. These capacities are as follows:

1. **Notice Deeply**: Identifying and articulating layers of detail in a work of art or other object of study through repeated interaction over time.
2. **Pose Questions**: Using persistent questioning to shift thinking and generate curiosity beyond immediate conclusions. The guiding question is often "What if...?"
3. **Make Connections**: Relating what you notice to your personal knowledge, experiences, and others' perspectives, comparing details and ideas from other texts, art works, and subjects.
4. **Physical Work**: Exploring ideas physically by bringing the study of a work of art to life through movement and gesture.

These capacities not only guided my preservice teachers toward becoming more engaged readers of Shakespeare's plays, but also mirrored the artist's process, particularly that of a Method actor. For example, when students break down a script to understand their character's given circumstances and motivations, they practice noticing the layers of the text and articulating their observations over multiple interactions **(notice deeply)**. By reflecting on their reading process metacognitively, they track character motivations and build a deeper understanding of subtext. The technique of the "Magic If," which encourages students to explore their character's situation by asking, "What would I do if I were in this situation?" fosters curiosity and invites a deeper level of engagement **(pose questions)**. Through this process, students can make connections between the text and their own experiences, thus enriching their interpretations and developing empathy for the character they study.

Additionally, the use of emotion memory, borrowed from the Method, allows students to tap into personal memories and emotions similar to those of their character, further deepening their connection to the text **(make connections)**. Finally, physical action—whether in the form of vocal warm-ups, reading through the script on its feet, or improvisational activities—allows students to embody the character physically, fostering a deeper, more visceral engagement with the text **(physical work)**. In my own applications of the Method, as shared here, I was able to make connections with the work being done at LCE and Stanislavski's work, which further informed the development of my practice. When students engaged with the dramatic texts through these capacities and through the system of the Method, student interpretations were more personal, richer, and well-developed. Further, the interpretations born of this approach were varied and diverse across dramatic texts, students, and different terms, which highlighted a deep

engagement with the texts and the value of multiple interpretations that inform thinking and interactions with art.

While using the Method in the study of Shakespeare may be considered unorthodox, my professional development through another program through Teachers College, called *Literacy Unbound* (LU), further shaped my decision to experiment with this approach. This program was unique in approaching nondramatic texts through myriad performance and non-performance-based techniques. LU, led by Dr. Nathan Blom in 2018, emphasized imaginative thinking, collaboration, and personal engagement with texts—principles inspired by Maxine Greene and John Dewey.

This experience, along with the insights gained from LCE and the Method, highlighted for me the importance of creating opportunities for students to engage both mentally and physically with dramatic texts. Although LU primarily focuses on nondramatic texts and uses the improvisational pedagogy of mainly Process Drama instead, its principles resonate deeply with my work in Aesthetic Education and underscore the value of integrating mind and body in the study of dramatic art.

3.9 Literacy Unbound Summer Institute

This next section reflects on a significant professional development experience I had at the Center for Professional Education of Teachers (CPET), founded by Dr. Ruth Vinz at Teachers College, Columbia University. The program, called *Literacy Unbound*, is directed by in-house research lecturer Dr. Adele Bruni Ashley. The program aims to "unbind" traditional approaches to literacy instruction by integrating various modalities of Aesthetic, experiential learning through a combination of Process Drama, and other pedagogies of Drama. In Dr. Bruni Ashley's words:

> I think it can be very powerful for English teachers who don't have dramatic training to learn how actors, directors, and designers approach scripts because then they can teach their students to approach texts in the same way.... I want us to constantly be going back and forth between reading and writing, getting up on our feet, then coming back to read and write again. All of these processes are ways of making meaning, and I want teachers and students to see them as resources. You write to know what you're thinking, you move to know what you're thinking, and you keep mining the text; all of those things inform each other. (Personal Interview, 2018)

This program was my first introduction to the blending of pedagogy from Drama and English as well as a valuable embodied learning experience that I was able to bring back to my classroom and research. As Adele commented, an opportunity to make the learning environment and process dynamic, dialogic, and in constant evolution creates spaces for a more in-depth literary experience. As students dialogue between themselves and the text, and between their creative responses to reading and writing to make meaning with other participants, these layers of meaning inform the experience.

In the Summer of 2018, I was invited to participate in the *Literacy Unbound* Summer Institute at CPET. The institute was directed by Dr. Nathan Blom, who conducts research on multimodal literacies. *Literacy Unbound* encourages multiple ways into text by layering modes and mediums of literature analysis, incorporating both traditional and nontraditional pedagogical practices through some Drama modalities and embodied learning. These first learning experiences at Teachers College, just before my first term there, allowed me to see the elements of Aesthetic Education in action and to observe how instructional approaches to teaching English, from experts in both English Education and Drama Education, could be further integrated. These elements were the aforementioned practice of noticing deeply, posing questions, making connections, and exploring a work of art physically.

It was also the first time I began to separate my personal experiences within theatre—as actor, director, and educator—from those in the English content-area classroom. The teachers,

also participants in the program, had little to no experience with the modalities of Drama, although some were aware of outside specialized institutions such as The Folger Shakespeare Library, which sponsors seminars and workshops on teaching Shakespeare. The 2018 Literacy Unbound group consisted of teachers and students (known as "Players") from both domestic and international backgrounds at the secondary level. This was the first time these students and teachers had met each other, and this structure, combining students and teachers, was designed to challenge the traditional direct-instruction power dynamics in classrooms. It also helped build a community rehearsal space for text analysis. Because the program was unique in its approach to layering Drama Practice (among many others from Aesthetic Education) with both teachers and students, I became a participant observer to learn how the program addressed gaps in traditional literary analysis instruction and explored the potential of drama pedagogies. What was especially interesting to me during this time was the application of this work to nondramatic literature study.

This section reflects on the essentials of the program and the theory that grounds the practice developed by experts in the field. This experience shaped my understanding of the many ways to bring *The Capacities for Imaginative Learning* to the classroom from Lincoln Center Education as well. It is difficult to encapsulate the experience of a living art form come to life over weeks of study and production, so in an effort to, at the very least, share the community, collaboration, and creativity born of the program, I have included several dramatic reconstruction scenes that connect with the principles of the program to highlight the power of the work being done at the institute.

Over the course of 3 weeks, we developed a performance using the elements listed below and guided by the director, Dr. Nathan Blom, for our ensemble-based analysis of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.

TRANSACTION with Text

1. **Scene I:** Practicing the art of **noticing deeply and posing questions**.
   *Literacy Unbound Summer Institute 2018, Learning Center Theatre, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.

IMMERSION into Text

2. **Scene II:** Releasing the imagination. **Making connections** to other works of art and artist's process.
   Learning Center Theatre, CPET, Teachers College, Columbia University - Process Drama.

Performance as Literary Experience

3. **Scene III:** Performance shapes experience with literature. **Physical work.**
   Learning Center Theatre, CPET, Teachers College, Columbia University - Final Performance.

Each scene was meant to illustrate *The Capacities for Imaginative Learning* as a prelude to a more specific look at those elements in my own practice (Noticing Deeply, Posing Questions, Making Connections, Exploring a Work of Art Through Physicality).

3.9.1 Interview with Dr. Adele Bruni Ashley

To better understand why these principles, later explored in scene-work, were developed, I interviewed Dr. Adele Bruni Ashley about her vision for the program. The following sections of the interview offer insights from an educator seeking to explore how pedagogy from Aesthetic Education—in particular, physical work—can benefit English teachers. I discuss Adele's ideas about "composing through movement," which inspired my adaptation of Stanislavski's Method of Physical Action. The idea that what an actor creates through a play can be an experiential reading process shaped my thinking about adapting the Method to help students develop interpretations through crafting a literary experience.

Transcribed Interview:

Amanda: In what ways do you feel that the Literacy Unbound workshops—specifically, and I'm quoting from your own writing—"disrupt traditional approaches to teaching the process of reading"? Could you give an example that you feel is especially powerful?

Adele: I think the biggest way we interrupt traditional approaches is through experiential learning. Rather than having an idea about the text and then exploring it through our bodies or voices, we explore through our bodies and voices first and then see what comes out of the text. That's an inversion of what usually happens. **I think that's different from the way Drama is typically used in classrooms.** Drama is often used to present ideas that are already formed. What I'm interested in is how Drama helps form those ideas.

Amanda: And the whole program is built around this?

Adele: Yes, exactly. That's why it's all about discovery, but discovery with prompts. As actors move and speak, they embody language, and this embodiment triggers **a thinking process that leads to interpretation through movement and speech.**

Here, Adele commented on the inversion of the typical way that drama modalities are used in classrooms. In my first conversations with Adele, I began to wonder what would happen if Drama was used the same way in English classrooms as it is used in Drama Education spaces. For example, what might happen when students use the Method to explore character in role? How might the interaction with dramatic texts through the process of an actor shape their understanding of text through movement and speech? How might interpretation be developed differently? I knew from personal experience that the Method approach absolutely triggers a thinking process that leads to interpretation, and this is largely due not only to movement and speech but also to imagination and emotion.

Adele: I think one of my major goals with Literacy Unbound—and with my work in teacher training—is to blur the lines between reading, writing, and dramatic activities.

Amanda: Could you elaborate on that?
Adele: Sure. Play is often dismissed as lacking purpose, especially after early childhood education. But I think play is essential to creating space for experimentation. We don't often allow for failure in classrooms anymore, but failure is necessary for innovation. Play spaces are about experimentation. Sometimes things fail, but we can learn from that, and other times we generate something entirely new.

Amanda: So, it's structured play?

Adele: Yes, structured play for sure.

In my first thoughts about applying the Method, I imagined it as structured play—a way my students could use the modalities without my being there, perhaps by creating spaces for students to play with ideas about the text and themselves in encountering the text. The Method had its own system and its own scaffolding, which served as an actor's reading and performance strategy to make a character. From this realization, I sought to develop the system in hopes that my preservice English teachers might be able to fall back on it when encountering dramatic texts and to have myriad pedagogies to this purpose to pull from. Over time, I began to realize that the practice and pedagogy in which I was immersed in studying greatly informed my own principles for teaching. I imagined myself as a young person long ago and remembered that in my early formative years when I was able to move to know what I was thinking—whether in my internship in the New England Shakespeare Festival, my professional experience in the Long Island Shakespeare Festival, or later as an educator at LCE or Literacy Unbound—the *moving* and the *structured play* informed my understanding of what we were doing. That simple fact held value enough alone. As a young person, I was very disengaged at school. It was only the opportunities outside of school to move and imagine and be creative that shaped my knowledge and reflections of myself as a person in the world. Often, those opportunities were through exposure to the arts, and so I developed a great appreciation for them, which I hope to ignite in my own students in future classroom spaces through the approaches reviewed and highlighted here.

As Dr. Bruni Ashley described it, "You move in order to know what you are thinking." In the next sections, I display some of these instructional practices, particularly the elements of

LCE's Capacities (Noticing Deeply, Posing Questions, Making Connections, Physical Work), during my time at the Institute because they informed my conceptual framework and instructional planning.

TRANSACTION with Text
Scene I: Practicing the art of **noticing deeply and posing questions**.
*Literacy Unbound Summer Institute 2018, Learning Center Theatre, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.

Following warm-ups and one improvisational activity students gather around the director to discuss reading and their observations of several pieces of artwork.

Nathan: Talk to me about these pieces of artwork—what do you see? What do you notice?

Student Player I: I was just looking at the colors, it's so dark, brown, black and almost red.

Student Player II: Yeah, it's like blood, or something bad. But, it's really good, yeah, dope.

Student Player I: I'm thinking these people are so surrounded by death and tragedy, and I like this drawing because it makes me feel the same way I felt when reading. Like it shows it.

Nathan: Can you elaborate on that?

Student Player I: I never thought about it, but like, how safe we are compared to these kids. Like, death all around. This drawing makes me angry.

Student Player II: Yeh, like it shouldn't be happening to the little ones, that's just, it's just wrong.

Student Player III: They don't even stand a chance, like, we stand a chance, but they didn't. I never thought about it.

Student Player I: Can I talk too?

Nathan: Of course, here we have (projecting image) the second piece of artwork today and following we will look at a media piece. Would you like to share your vision now?

Student Player I: Yeah, so, it was the one about Ona and how her demeanor has changed. This is like her face, and I was feeling like a loss I think? Like she lost so much, they all did. Like, more than most people we know might lose.

Student Player III: Everything.

Student Player II: It's not fair. And you just know, you know it, that there are families going through this even today, it makes me so mad.

Student Player I: Yeah, she's lost but can't be mad because she has to keep going. It's like the silent anger of loss but you don't show it in your whole face. That's why she resting her hand like that. Because she doesn't have the…the…um

Student Player III: The strength anymore.

Nathan: Thank you for sharing such personal observations. Let's take a look at one other media piece. Begin thinking about what questions you may have and we will share those as well.

IMMERSION into Text
Scene II: Releasing the imagination. **Making connections** to other works of art and artist's process.
Learning Center Theatre, CPET, Teachers College, Columbia University - Process Drama.

Scene II: Embodying Text through Process Drama: The Learning Center Theatre, CPET, Teachers College, Columbia University

Teacher Players and Student players are being led by a master guest instructor in the understanding of using our bodies to denote meaning making. We witness an incredible performance first, where the dancer walks from one end of the theatre to the other painstakingly, in slow motion, as if through trenches of snow, sand or water—knee deep. Every movement is contained, postured, graceful, and silent. Her gaze barely leaves a fixed point and in the final moments after looking back poignantly at first, she gazes ahead at some unknown point in the air above her. We are all left gazing there too.

Once finished, we clap and discuss. Workshop instructors guide a conversation with the guest master dance instructor as we infer the meaning of the piece. Questions like: What is the story? How do you know? What do you wonder? What do you see? In the context of our reading what might her gaze fixed on? What about her movement tells a story? Players all eventually arrive at the inference that her story is that of an immigrant making a journey to Staten Island, seeing the statue for the first time, and symbolically saying farewell to the homeland.

We then read poetry and create our own found poems in groups. Next, we participate in a workshop and we learn the slow walk for ourselves. After much practice we are guided back into our groups. We are tasked with developing a story for each of our groups, we are a family, immigrating, and through the use of poetry and this lesson in movement, each group creates their own version of the slow walk. Once performed, one at a time,

we are then given props, items range from the following: photographs, keepsakes, hat boxes, large rolled pieces of paper, scarves and other fabrics, bags, tokens, and other random items symbolizing what the immigrant may carry with them.

As we fold these items into our performances we share once again, discuss. In one final challenge, all of the groups are lined up on one side of the theatre, just as our master instructor originally performed, we slow walk, one family at a time collectively across the room. The amazing thing that happens is that even though one family at a time moves across space it is a larger movement piece where our bodies are still connected and the overall meaning is amplified on a grander scale. Beautiful interpretations by Student Players and Teachers Players alike, involve leaving items behind, holding hands at times, affection, fear, frustration, worry and anger are all portrayed. In the culminating discussion, it is determined that this activity ties well into our development of the theme analysis—the loss of the American Dream, and thus it ends up becoming a part of our opening scene within the final performance.

Performance as Literary Experience
Scene III: Performance shapes experience with literature. **Physical work.**
Learning Center Theatre, CPET, Teachers College, Columbia University - Final Performance.

Scene III: The Learning Center Theatre, CPET, Teachers College, Columbia University

In the final scene of our show, teacher players and student players take the overall theme of the realities of immigration and The American Dream, from their analysis of the novel to the modern day. We did this through the staging of a protest in the final moments of the production. Actors echoed signage and phrasing from protests most recently in our country regarding civil rights and gently guided audience members that wished to participate in our final message. This is an example of Theatre Pedagogy in that it brought the context of the novel, the play, to a larger more current perspective for audience members. This was the most transformative moment for me in the process as we guided audience members to the final space, an auditorium for the "talk through" following the production. This moment follows all Literacy Unbound performances where audience members ask questions of the actors and find a deeper understanding of the process. The narrative scene below depicts this moment where students and teachers embody their learning while tapping into a sense of empathy and identity construction for not only themselves but the audience as well.
She grabbed my shoulders and leaned in: "May I share your sign?" I was covered in sweat and felt the heat of the room around me, amongst impassioned shouts: "Show me what Democracy looks like?" "Whose streets?" "Our streets." I gave her my sign, crafted only two days before, reading "No Justice—No Peace." She smiled at me and said: "Thank You for doing this." With that, she began yelling collectively with the rest of our cast. We marched on towards our final destination. Soon other audience members began following suit, asking to help with the signs and marching alongside us. The sound was deafening. We made our way to the auditorium, some of us arm in arm, making glances

> of surprise and pride at the willingness of our audience to join in, something that was completely unexpected, which made it all the more poignant and beautiful.
>
> The student players had never looked so powerful and brave, all the fears of performance and hesitation gone now, they bravely marched on. Once the audience was seated, we stood at our final post, for a poem created by all of us. As each line played out, I fondly looked about the room and did not even notice that our eyes had gotten a bit misty-eyed until I noticed the eyes of the audience themselves, some of them, with their hands covering their mouths and their eyes closed, some of them with tears trickling down.
>
> End Scene.

In reviewing my journal entries regarding the scope and sequence of the program, I want to pinpoint the specific use of the following capacities from Lincoln Center Education Institute—(1) Noticing Deeply, (2) Posing Questions, (3) Making Connections, and (4) Physical Movement—to explore text through artistic expression. Moments like those above happened in unique ways in my own classroom within my own project with preservice English teachers. These ways of fostering student responses to literature are fundamental to the program and shaped my methods to be reviewed in my own practice, described in the next chapter.

The principles of *Literacy Unbound* are also principles for valuable learning experiences across the field of English Education and are described on their website as follows: "Our approach integrates reading, writing, and discussion with artistic experimentation through drama, music, dance, film, and visual art." In moving away from this chapter and reflecting on my journey, the next chapter reviews my own practice through dramatic reconstructions, student writing, and reflections from my teaching journal towards the Method as an interpretive reading strategy in my own course.

What is especially unique about professional development institutes, such as *Literacy Unbound* or Lincoln Center Education, is the opportunity for teachers to put this work into practice alongside students who are also engaged in the work. My participation in programs

like these inspired my ideas about teaching my students to be artists when encountering Shakespeare's works and helped to provide examples of practice that I could further adapt in my own classroom. Further, it was during this time that my own experiential learning solidified in my memory and emotional landscape, to which I still return at this time to inform my thinking and practice. I made friends in the program who were a part of other artistic endeavors, and many students have stayed in touch. I think the program speaks to the principles of teaching covered in Chapter 3 and highlights the importance of creating art to *experience* the art.

Chapter 4: The Method Reading Workshop

Love the art in yourself and not yourself in the art.

Stanislavski, Moore, 1984, p. xvi

4.1 A Portrait of the Preservice English Teacher as Method Actor

Stanislavski's theory and practice of the Method, covered in earlier chapters, reveals connections between the actor's reading and performance process and the reading goals in the classroom of English. There is evidence to suggest (as I reflect on here) that we do learn through the use of our bodies when we use the Method as a performative reading strategy for developing interpretation. When students encounter language this way—that is, through an imaginative mind and body literary experience—the reading process becomes *visible*, reflective, sensory, and transactional through these drama-based practices. The Method approach through the lens of actor as artist fosters this interaction with text that many English teachers may wish to facilitate in their classroom spaces.

In this chapter, I review three former publications of mine and, within them, evidence of student learning in connection with theory to practice from Chapters 2 and 3. The narrative writing reflections from my students in this chapter on practice regarding their experience with the Method as a reading strategy are also found in the public domain, first published in *Drama Magazine*, the National Drama's magazine of professional practice (ISSN 0967-4454). Published twice a year, this hard-copy print publication contains a wealth of features and articles for and by drama teachers and theatre educators in many contexts within the United Kingdom and overseas. Content focuses on practical teaching experiences and projects drawn from across educational

contexts and includes classroom materials, schemes of work, interviews, and reviews of books and other resources.[1]

My students were mostly preservice English educators in the Master's program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Some of them were in various student teaching phases, and one of them, Aristos Orginos, was already practicing professionally. They were high-caliber academics, scholars, and educators in training, spanning the 20s-30s age bracket. For the purposes of this dissertation and my reflections in this chapter and Chapter 5, I pulled from my students' own reflections (written by them voluntarily) in articles we composed together about the work in my course and published in three separate articles in *Drama Magazine*. As I taught this course for six terms, students from each class shared their enthusiasm about the work with me over that time and sought the opportunity to write alongside me. I remember fondly the article we wrote during the pandemic from the front seat of my car and all of us on Zoom. During those days especially, drama brought us together in ways unimagined.

As I present the following student reflections on their workshop experiences during my course *The Teaching of Shakespeare*, I make connections across their commentary and the LCE *Capacities for Imaginative Learning* as well as Stanislavski's Method in practice. Through dramatized reconstructions of workshops, I endeavor to reveal how the Method approach fostered deeper reading transactions, scaffolded a rich interpretive process for readers, inspired students to practice empathy and collaborate with each other, and engaged disengaged readers when faced with complex text, such as that of Shakespeare.

Over the years, I have explored theory and practice in the fields of Drama, Theatre, and English Education alongside experts who utilize Drama-based pedagogy within their learning

[1] https://www.nationaldrama.org.uk/drama-magazine/

spaces and beyond towards the same goals. I suspect that more is happening than we already know in our minds and bodies when we study and tell stories using Drama methods.

4.2 Workshop 1: Action

Action, prepping the mind and body for movement
Exploring ideas related to a work of art or other object of study physically

In adapting part of the Method system for preservice teachers of English, I first had to teach my students how to get more comfortable moving away from their desks and into their bodies for classwork daily. Each day, I ushered my students through vocal, breathing, and physical warm-ups to help them adjust to this change of exploring texts on their feet, moving away from strictly cerebral work, and shifting into a physical exploration of the text. This took some pedagogical moves away from traditional direct instruction with Shakespearean texts, which typically places a heavy focus on direct translation and text-centered work. Thus, implementing a shift towards drama pedagogy and performance was the first step in crafting a student-centered workspace. Former student Giuseppe Mele reflected in his own words on the practice in a journal article that I wrote for *Drama Magazine* entitled "The Body as a Place of Knowing: Art as Experience":

> It seems so much of what we do in schools, particularly ELA classes, serves to distance us from stories, characters, and each other. When we engage with texts, we typically default to decoding, criticizing, and critiquing. There is certainly some value in these practices, but I fear we lose something important in overemphasizing them. Some of my powerful learning experiences arose from getting "inside" of a text—being immersed in the world of the text and engaging with the material in ways that transcend the cerebral.

As a stepping-stone for physical ways *into* the text, an example of warm-ups is dramatized below to highlight the kinds of activities I had to construct daily to help my students prepare for physical work with the script. For the Method actor, action (physical work) is always linked to emotionality (creative objectives). Following warm-ups, there was an improvisational

activity in which students moved through initial steps in linking the mind and the body through the use of their imagination. In closing of this workshop, students applied some of their improvisational work to the script in an effort to build physical action into their character study and work with the script. For the Method actor, getting inside the text begins often with physical action and exploration of how they might move as their character. However, the actor comes to rehearsal with an understanding of how to use their body for performance, and sometimes they are already warmed up. For my classes, I had to teach my students how to warm up and how to use their body to explore the inner and outer life of their characters.

To this purpose, *Action* was the second chapter assigned in my class reading of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*. The student writing reflections from National Drama and dramatized reconstructions that follow in the next section deal with their application of action and physical work. Following daily physical, vocal, and meditation warm-ups, more focused physical activities helped my students explore their own body language and physical action in connection with their thinking—for example, the silent language of the body and the many ways to sit with intention in a chair, as illustrated below.

Simple improvisational activities like these help students explore the links between inner thinking and body language, what we reveal or choose not to reveal to others, and further, how an actor can manipulate that thinking through careful choices. What is interesting to observe is that when students engage in the challenge of articulating their characters physically, they engage with the reading process more thoroughly. When students improvise and reflect on their imaginative creative choices in performance, they intrinsically engage with their interpretations of characters more thoughtfully as well, as demonstrated next. Note also that when my students share reflections of their independent thinking through the use of their imaginative work, these

skills guide them to clarify and enlarge their response to the play. This Method reading strategy allows the teacher to target where learning occurs through carefully crafting a transaction with the text through the use of the mind and body. As per Rosenblatt's (1994) theory of *dynamic transaction* discussed in Chapter 3, in which she wrote that for students to experience the art of literature, there should be a well-crafted "dynamic transaction between the work of art and the personality of the reader" (p. 259).

Action Workshop Part I:

Active Learning and Informed Perceiving
Physical Improvisation

AA: Greetings everyone, please find your spot in the classroom for warm-ups. Remember to find a space that you can stretch your arms out wide without touching the walls, furniture or… fellow classmates.

(Students run through various stretches for neck, shoulders, arms, core, and legs. These are similar to those one might do for a sports practice or game. Often, it is possible to let a student run these, especially if the classroom has athletes or dancers present. Sometimes, basic yoga poses are beneficial as are active jumping jacks and shaking of arms, hands, legs and feet, which help to mitigate nerves. Students will laugh at first without a doubt but if built in daily as a classroom expectation they will come to expect them and may even take creative agency in running them themselves.)

AA: Any volunteers to run physical warm-ups today?

S1: I got this. Ok, everyone you know what to do, arms up—and around—and again! (Warm-ups continue for roughly 5 minutes.)

AA: Thank you for your leadership. All, right class, today we are going to focus on building inner and outward representations of how we are feeling. Every movement is an opportunity to express inner worlds of your characters or to reveal something about your character's personality. Last class, you chose an archetype for your character and walked about the room in the way you imagined your character might do so. You will notice a single chair in the center of the classroom. Today, we will explore sitting in the chair with intention. I want you to watch me sit in the chair first and guess what I am thinking inwardly. (Instructor slowly walks to the chair, looks from right to left, and then sits down with her head in her hands, elbows on knees.)

AA: What do you notice? What do you see?

S1: You're stressed!

S2: You're having a breakdown!

S3: You're just taking a minute to breathe.

S4: You just got some really bad news!

AA: (The instructor looks up and smiles) I am just really tired! (Students laugh)

S3: I knew it.

AA: In truth, the point here is not what I was thinking, but that **I knew** what I was thinking—that I made a choice and stuck with it as it aligned naturally with my intention. Your choice may or may not reflect something we can perceive outwardly, and we may all choose different movements for different moments and that's okay. The Method teaches us to choose and fill that movement with intention using your focused inner thoughts. Let me show you another way to tackle this specifically with your character from our reading in mind. (Teacher walks to the chair once more, looks both ways and sits down relaxing her body completely, legs stretched far out front, and with hands clasped across her stomach. She closes her eyes. Suddenly, she jumps, looks around and sits in a prim and proper display—and then sits completely differently with legs opened wide and shoulders slumped.)

AA: What did you notice? What did you see?

S2: You're worried.

S1: You almost fell asleep! You sat in two different ways—back to back too.

S3: You're worried about someone catching you relaxing.

S2: Yes, and I think you move that way because you have to pretend that you actually sit in a completely different way than you want to when others are watching.

S1: I've totally done that as well.

AA: That's very observant. Nice work. I like that you are thinking about why we move the way we do. It was a bit, much right? As Viola, I am a female pretending to be a male, and in the context of this play, that means I sit very differently, depending on who is watching. My disguise is my body language as well. My choice is specific to my character and what I fear. Okay, watch me one more time. (Instructor walks away and then turns slowly and returns to the chair sitting very slowly, and with great care. She looks at the floor and then raises her chin slowly to stare out, fixing her gaze before her, seemingly staring at nothing.)

AA: What did you notice? What did you see?

S3: You just heard something terrifying.

S4: You're thinking about your life and how you got here.

S1: You're listening for something.

S2: No, you're hearing something!

AA: I am thinking about my feelings for Orsino. Remember, the choice only has to make sense to me as long as it is in line with my given circumstances and units and objectives. Sometimes less is more, and often a minimalist, simple choice, speaks volumes. Do not be afraid to work your own personality into the activity wherever that feels appropriate to do so.

Now you will pair up and try this activity with a partner. Try it three times; first as yourself and then twice in character. For example, I liked my third choice better than my second one, use this time to explore. Following this activity, volunteers may come up and share their choice, if they like, in front of the whole group. Remember, what's important is that you are thinking about both your inner and outer representation of self. Just like in real life, sometimes those thoughts and physicality may align, although just as many times they will not. Later we will practice this with specific lines from our scenes but for now what matters, is that you know and improvise on the choice that you are making and that you focus on that intention the entire time, no matter what it is—it creates something for the audience to engage in, which is just your organic physical behavior, based on the way your character feels inwardly. There should be nothing mechanical about it—only do what feels natural.

(Students practice for 10-15 minutes on their own as teacher walks about and checks in for questions. Eventually, students have made it through each round.)

AA: Are there any brave souls to share?

S3: Let's go.

(Student 3 walks in front of the chair, back and forth, pacing. Slowly, she sits down, and then looks to the right and freezes.)

S1: You're waiting for someone you haven't seen in a while.

S2: You're in the doctor's office and he has just come in with your test results.

S3: That's really good actually! No, I was just seeing the love of my life before me.

(Students clap and cheer her on)

AA: Nice work, your choice was simple, poised, and well-crafted in movement and meaning. I could see you thinking. Care to try once more, as your character from our scene today?

S3: Thanks! Yeah sure, why not.

(Student 3 walks towards the chair, paces once more and sits the exact same way, as the class looks on confused.)

AA: Please kindly share your process when you're ready.

S3: Well, I was going to invent one but that felt forced and then I remembered Viola is in love with Orsino and I just thought that's probably how she would stare off-stage if he was coming. She must be pretty torn, having to hide how she feels all the time.

AA: Well done. Round of applause, everyone please. Your attention to organic movement as linked with that of the inward feelings of your character is an effective choice here today. Now let's all practice once more.

Following this, students practiced the same improvisational activity by simply walking about the room with intention, first as themselves and then in character. Then, they moved into scene work with partners to build in selected choices specific to their lines and what was happening in the scene. What was important here was that students learned that action and physicality are not separate mechanical acts; they are logical and real and connected to the text through interpretation—and they may choose to work their own persona into these as well. Also at play was not only the use of imagination but also reason and emotion, which created a personal transaction with the text in the choices they make.

Students reflected on the way they move, the character, and their thinking and moving, and they used their imagination to choose what they revealed. In this way, the students experienced the art form of acting and the dramatic text, but they did so with creative means and coherent thought. Sometimes, I would further break this type of improvisation down by asking students to record what they felt were their most important lines from a scene we were working on. Next, I would ask them to circle three words and pull them out of the lines. I would then have

them create a physical representation of those words only. They could choose from movement, dance, or posing as a statue of that word (they could do this in pairs or groups as well in tableaux). Once they moved through this process, they could decide if they wanted to keep some of their choices to incorporate them back into the movement from the scene. Through this practice of creating physical action with the use of their imagination, students engaged with Shakespeare's characters, observed each other's choices, and began to see the art of thinking about their reading and *what has come before* in the text when developing their choices in their performances—namely, that movement and action could be a story in and of itself as well as a powerful medium or *raw material* for the actor.

In this next section on Action, my students explored the *Magic If*, and its use to further transact with the text in real yet imagined artful ways in the representation of their characters' inner and outer worlds. Stanislavski's use of the *If* with his actors, as reviewed in Chapter 2, highlighted the efforts on the part of the actor to move within the given circumstances of the play, using their imagination to connect to their characters through emotion and reason. With my final term class (out of six total), I had a unique group who accepted the challenge of crafting group movement pieces, or dances, as reflections of characters, scenes, and themes from the play. It is important to note that over six terms, each class of preservice teachers brought their own unique talents, passions, and personalities to the work.

Also, from *Drama Magazine*, in a journal article that I wrote entitled "The Body as a Place of Knowing: Art as Experience," former student Molly Weitzman reflected on the practice—note her description of the improvisational activity aforementioned:

> I expressed my interactions with the text in a way that I never have before. While I often bring the study of visual art into my teaching, I never previously considered what movement meant. I now see it as a natural flow of body, nature, and society—one that peaks, and falls, and cycles over and over. Movement comes from your body *and* your

> mind—and dance, specifically, is a meaning-making type of movement, where storytelling is front and center…. Movement driven by both the character's mind *and* our own, expressed by the vessel of our body…pulling inspiration from the text and writing three words that describe our character, we created a repetitive movement reflecting those words,… Bringing this type of creation to my students will give them a taste of harmony. I hope it grounds them within their bodies and minds, and gives a deeper understanding of what we are reading and performing.

As my students tracked their reading process for units and objectives, learned to focus through circles of attention, and imagined the answers to the questions regarding the *What Ifs* in the text of study (explored more specifically in the next workshop reconstructions), they began to familiarize themselves with moving to know what they were thinking as their character. This process was composed of many moving parts which develop interpretation through imagination in the application of real action and physical activity. As Greene (2001) lectured (see Chapter 3), this attention to the artist's process creates "active and informed perceiving" as well as "an attentiveness to the qualities of the medium" (p. 10). Molly explored her character's movement through careful attention to those three words and allowed herself to reason with her character's position in the play and then to highlight this interpretation physically as part of the exercise, which students decided to work into a group presentation of their progress.

What Molly described as "harmony" and "creation" was the application of reason and emotion to a transaction with the text, to which she then responded through the use of creativity and imagination in a physical representation of interpretation. Molly, alongside classmates Maura and Maria, all shared different interpretations of Olivia in their separate character study. What was interesting to observe was how varied, personal, and individual the interpretations were, which became especially effective when shared with the whole class.

Shakespeare's plays shifted to become complex in different ways, as students began to see multiple interpretations of the same lines from diverse personal perspectives. I thought that

perhaps utilizing a space outside of our classroom might aid students in this layer of the work. I remembered that my directors would often do this with the ensemble. They would have us work on our characters and the script in different locations to inspire new ways of seeing, relating, and connecting to the characters.

So, I decided to take my class to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (although even another classroom or heading out of doors would suffice). This particular class was keen on the physical work, so within the halls of the MET, my students explored their characters once more. I believed also that a little space to perform without being seen (and if seen, no one would know any better as we were surrounded by strangers in the museum) might be an interesting opportunity for students to practice the art of acting while also being completely themselves. Maybe in doing this, they would allow themselves to be freer and more vulnerable or even allow themselves to feel the emotions of their character the way an actor might do.

I was reminded again of Dewey, Rosenblatt, and Greene in their theories on experiencing and transacting with art through the use of imagination *when old and familiar things are made anew*. The importance of *crafting unique and personal experiences* for my students would *draw their focus and attention* to view the art, using emotions and memory to have a completely organic literary experience. My decision to take them to the MET to work with the process of the *Magic If* was based on these reflections. In the next section, the workshop is dramatically reconstructed to illustrate active learning. At this point in my practice and in the utilization elements I selected from The Method, I discovered that students were often ready to take the reading interpretation process a step further with opportunities such as these.

Action Workshop Part II:

Exploring the "Magic If" through physical action

AA: Greetings, class. Today we will explore answering questions about our characters from a psychological perspective. We will use the questions from the Psychological Qualities/Moral Qualities document to craft our experience here in the museum today—in character. For the next 25 minutes, you will walk this space alone, in the Temple of Dendur exhibit only, and ponder the answers to these questions. If you feel ready you can begin exploring physicality in connection with these questions but later in the second half of workshop, we will explore that further. For now, use your observation skills to see this exhibit through the eyes of your character. The questions are as follows:

1. What choices do I face?
2. What choices do I make?
3. What do I need?
4. What do I fear?
5. What do I want? What do others think I want?
6. Are any of these traits manifested physically? Vocally?
7. Will the pursuit of my needs lead to a moral choice?

Do you have any questions about expectations for the improvisation activity?

S1: What if we run into another member from the ensemble?

AA: Respond to them in character, or you may choose to avoid them—whatever is your comfortability level. There is reward in the courage of trying something new, and this will be like that. Use your imagination to actively feel deeply for the circumstances of your character as best you can: Work inwardly and outwardly and practice focusing your attention from small, medium, to large circles of attention.

S4: Can we work alongside another character?

AA: For this first round, no, but for others, yes.

S2: Will we have to share?

AA: Yes, later there will be an opportunity to share your experience with a partner and then whole class only if you feel comfortable with that. Let's meet here in 25 minutes.

(Students wandered the gallery for a time, as I did, and within roughly 30 minutes, everyone was back at the meeting point. My journey around the gallery had brought back emotional memories and had certainly challenged me to harness my active imagination. In the shadows of the exhibit, I saw my younger self as an acting undergraduate years before and in journaling observed the space anew. The activity revealed to me another layer of reimagining the old and new through creative agency.)

S1: That was kind of surreal.

S4: (Smiling) I saw Orsino!

AA: (Smiling as well) May I suggest that you reflect in your reading journals first? Try not to speak with anyone and get as many observations, thoughts, feelings, et cetera, down on the page. Afterwards we will share with a partner. Challenge yourself to reflect both as student and teacher in reflections of the practice.

(Students journal and meet up with their partners).

AA: All right, at this time, I am seeking brave folk to share what happened in here. I will start so that I can feel what this might be like for you and to serve as a model for practice. I am hoping some of you will be comfortable sharing.

AA: So, I wandered the gallery and found myself shifting in and out of my younger self, and that of my character Viola. At times, I remembered playing Viola years ago too. When I was able to stay in character, I was able to tackle the question of what I fear first, and then the others followed. I noticed the graffiti on the temple walls and the pennies in the water and thought about the way people always try to take control in ways great and small: The graffiti and the pennies alike in some way as evidence and detail of this human need. Whether it was an "I was here" from the 1800s or the simple act of making a wish, I lived in their minds for a time too. Also, I threw a penny in there as an undergrad student—one night while doing homework here! (Smiling) In the shoes of Viola, I found myself walking ancient, stone-covered roads of Illyria, with arches and shadows along the stone, and thinking of Orsino and Sebastian. I was faced with the decision to reveal myself or face the consequences of Olivia's attentions, and I resolved not to give myself away somehow. I missed Sebastian and wondered if he had somehow survived like me. I find Olivia's aggressive nature off-putting and yet admirable—which seems impossible. And although most might find Orsino's poetry rather hyperbolic—I find it lovely. I need love and to be myself. I fear love and being myself. Others think I want to serve Orsino indefinitely, and for some odd reason, Olivia has set her sights on me—which I swear was not of my making. I walk with patience and as much lack of grace as I possibly can when in front of Olivia, but in front of Orsino I respond with haste and as much grace as I can muster. In sitting in one corner of the space tonight, I felt frozen in my grief. Morals drive me to reveal what I cannot. Indeed, "I sat like patience on a monument, smiling at grief."

AA: Would anyone like to share their experience?

S1: I'd like to. As Olivia tonight, I seemed to travel back and forth between sad and happy. On the one hand, I was sad because I am still grieving. Truly. But also, because selfishly, I like having the power that I do now without marrying. It suits me to be in control in this way, and I like having the power to choose for myself, which is certainly not something everyone can do. I wish to hold on to it as long as possible and yet,

> Cesario stirs my very being! I want him, I do, and even though he is a peasant, I expect where there is a will there is a way! I shall have him. Orsino can rot for all I care. This space made me realize that I too can preserve my story for history…but I must be strong as the columns themselves and not afraid of wear and tear. I must stand tall, with courage, and command what I desire. Rules cannot apply to me, so I touch the stone I am not supposed to. If Orsino can do it—why cannot I? As Olivia, I walk as a man walks. I will use the shadows of my grief just as the shadows of these ancient stones. There is no moral choice as I am driven by true love alone. However, unlike the sad history of this temple, I will not be removed from where I belong, set on display in another place as property.
>
> (The class shouts bravo as they clap for S1, and others are inspired to share.)
>
> AA: Bravo, indeed. I am proud of you all for accepting this series of challenges. Following one more reflection on the practice from the teacher's perspective in your journals, we will reflect on the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of our given circumstances, to create some movement for our current scene of study—just as we did last week. You will find that some of the physicality and various emotions will lend themselves to your practice performing. If you have any questions let me know. Thank you for your contributions tonight.

It was interesting to observe how my students handled the work of incorporating aspects of the *Magic If* during this workshop and others. In particular, it seemed that the opportunity to move learning out of the classroom was successful in revealing the Method as an interpretive strategy, but especially in noting how they creatively began to think from the characters' perspectives. The students showed agency in the choices they made, which led to interpretations as varied as their experiences in the museum, although another classroom or hallway would likely produce the same results.

In another excerpt from *Drama Magazine* and the same article aforementioned in the first workshop, "The Body as a Place of Knowing: Art as Experience," former student Maria Tramontozzi reflected on the practice:

> Not only did this class challenge my understanding of Shakespeare, I developed new skills to interpret his work. It was fascinating to be at the MET, a place that I know extremely well, and attempt to look at the art for the first time as Olivia. Olivia notices different things than Maria. I found the character was texture-oriented. She felt the stone and looked deeply at the engravings. She found the stone's history overwhelmingly sad.

> Maybe Olivia was in this state because of all the sudden death in her family. What gets in her way, besides classism and sexism, in Illyria? I rediscovered and created art…a deeper understanding of the world, the characters, and the obstacles, in the text.

It seemed the experience became somewhat personal. By creating action and then applying physical action to the sensations and emotions of being in character, the text was brought to life in ways that shaped students' understandings of their characters on an emotional level. Somehow, their transaction with Shakespeare's plays through the use of their imagination as an artist highlighted reason and emotion from the character's perspective and moving about a space as both themselves and the character. It seemed to inspire multiple perspectives of the same character; thus, themes and motifs were diverse as well during our whole-group share and discussion. Interestingly, another shift was in their overall discussions of interpretation. With several students working with one of the main characters, each personal literary experience fostered different ways of seeing Shakespeare's characters, but certainly in ways that students felt they could connect to in some way. In connection with Lincoln Center Education and the *Capacities of Imaginative Learning*, the skill students worked with on this workshop was as follows:

1. **Pose Questions:** To use questions persistently to reposition thinking and generate curiosity beyond conclusions. To ask the question, "What if…?"

The natural structure of engaging with the text the way an actor does by posing and answering questions guided students towards interpretation. From the answers to their questions, either revealed in the text or created through the use of their imaginations, students practiced feeling the emotions of their characters. In accepting the given circumstances and responding with understanding and emotion, as well as moving physically through moments in the text (real

or imagined), students engaged with the text over time through multiple reads and formed interpretations.

This Method reading process can be developed through simple physical practice, in which students speak to each other through the lines and characters of the text. Partner or ensemble discussions should cover topics such as: *What would I do if I were in this situation? What are the morals of my characters and life experiences which drive those same morals? What themes are developed from this situation, or conflict, and what choices do the characters make?* Students should be encouraged to let their inner understanding of character inform their outer physical action.

In the next section, in reflection and developed from my teaching journals, two dramatic reconstructed workshops cover the use of Concentration of Attention and Units and Objectives, as pulled from the Method.

4.3 Workshop 2: Concentration of Attention

Net of Elaboration
Noticing Deeply

As reviewed in Chapter 2, another vital tool of Stanislavski's system is that of Concentration of Attention. As part of the actor's work, this specialized exercise of focusing attention in small, medium, and large circles in practice (on the nearest object, furniture on stage in the scene, or fellow actors, etc.) later leads to the actor's ability to focus and perform organically during performance. Part of this process is about training the actor to be present in the moment and to forget all else, but also to notice deeply details all around them that others might miss. Furthermore, they can observe these details in other layers which inspire interpretations or their artistic choices in performance. In planning for these workshops, I was inspired by Betty Jane Wagner, who worked with both James Moffett and Dorothy Heathcote. In

revisiting earlier theory pulled from their work (see Chapter 3), reflections came to mind regarding the Method reading strategy as an opportunity for students to compose a "net of elaboration" as they constantly cycle through the process of experiencing art and reflecting on it in the same spaces in which they create it; in Wagner's words:

> Heathcote uses drama to help children understand human experience from the inside out. Out of this the children can spin threads into an intricate net of elaboration, a web of their constant making in which they can catch a new experience and relate it to the center… The students could discover these extrapolations for themselves, making them their own, if they were allowed ample time to spin out their elaborations…. With the assumption of attitude and belief comes identification. (Wagner, 1976, p. 65)

With all of the elements of the Method informing each other in an *intricate net of elaboration* from which to develop interpretation, my students had the time to spin out their own elaborations. When working with my students, I noticed that they became far more observant in general following exercises in attention not only about the text and language, but also about movement choices in their performative work. Because my students were mostly from non-performing backgrounds and because I did not have a stage (and control over lighting in a way that Stanislavski did with his actors), I decided to bring my students through a series of exercises in noticing the layers of pieces of artwork both online and in person at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

These exercises can be done in a classroom—or anywhere for that matter—as long as students are journaling or sketching their observations in detail and time is provided for reflection. These reflections can be 5- or 10-minute quick-writes or more elaborate activities in which each student gets a photo of a different section of an object or piece of artwork to view and observe in detail. Then, in pairs or a whole group,. reflective discussions should be held following the exercises. The website for the MET has an extensive collection of close-up images of many different kinds of artwork. It is also effective to have students search and select their

own pieces to view. Sometimes, when carefully selected, the pieces of art or objects can have some of the same themes as the text of study, which can add an additional layer of interpretation and understanding or draw students' attention to nuances and details they might have missed. A second part of this practice in focus of attention deals with memory.

In Stanislavski's Chapter 2, exercises in listing as many details of an object as one can and then closing one's eyes to remember them are challenging for his actors to partake in as a way to hone their use of memory. For my students and in working with Shakespeare, I capitalized on our close proximity with the MET and its many paintings in connection with Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*. I also brought my students to observe sculptures which connected to emotions or themes of the characters and plays we were studying as a way to bolster understanding and the skill of noticing deeply. These can all be viewed online on the MET website, and in teaching outside of New York, this is a valuable resource on the web for classroom use. Any classroom objects could be utilized as well, and art in the wings of the school where students display their work can be a way to connect students with their school community and bring communities of learning together across different content areas.

Sometimes, I noticed that my students would focus even further into the work of art we observed to develop a line of inquiry that served as a lens in their study of character or themes in the play. These lines of inquiry, or things they found themselves naturally curious about, often lent themselves to serve as the natural first step to developing interpretations. Several of my preservice teachers were in their student teaching phase, and every now and then, one or two would be working already in a New York City public school. In adapting some of the experimental practices from class, they would share their experiences with their work in class and in their writing. From another journal article that I wrote for *Drama Magazine* entitled

"Drama Matters: Embodying Textual Analysis," two former students, Aristo Orginos and Mathew Anastasi, reflected on our practice in the MET and how they adapted it to their own classrooms. These parts of the Method sharpened focused attention and observation of details that aided the students in their reading to develop interpretation; moreover, they also provided opportunities for students to "forge" connections based on what their classmates observed both individually and collectively.

Aristo Orginos:

> The use of art creates strong pathways to understanding for students. In looking at art and finding the connective tissue between disparate pieces, students are encouraged to form more abstract connections. For example, examining Les Bourgeois de Calais, a sculpture by Auguste Rodin, one sees a tableau that renders the agony of one's loss of power in a single still image. A student who struggles with understanding Lear's agony and madness in the storm scenes of King Lear might be able to both bolster their understanding of the play by analyzing the very real and human emotions portrayed by the piece and simultaneously understand how to better draw abstract connections between seemingly unrelated pieces. In other words, using art to forge connections can be a powerful pedagogical tool that gives students the ability to understand that things can be connected not only through content but also through context. Asking students to then find pieces of art to connect to their understanding of scenes, no matter how abstractly, is a collective exercise; it not only stretches the brain of the students engaging in this activity individually, but, once shared among the other members of the class, gives other students the chance to see how their peers interpret what is unfolding in the play.

Here, Aristo reflected on aesthetic approaches that are based on more authentic and normative cognitive developmental processes, as per Dickson and Costigan (2011) and their writing on the Lincoln Center Education Institute where this practice was developed and explored. As reviewed in Chapter 3 and in the authors' words:

> Each individual has the capacity to explore and respond to any given work of art that challenges preconceived notions, stimulates fresh insights, and encourages deeper understandings. The process of response builds cognitive abilities in powerful, fundamental ways. Students develop a deep appreciation for the arts, gain practical insights into specific artworks, and strengthen core skills—such as abstract thinking and problem solving—that really apply across curriculum and throughout life. (p. 151)

In reviewing my own teaching journals on the practice over the years, I noted that Aristo was also reflecting on the social forces of experiencing art collectively and the power of the text to foster more complex connections in learners as part of a social literary experience. Students can unpack their experience studying the art from multiple viewpoints, perspectives, and connections, and, as is the case with drama in particular, through reflection of the interpretations from the collective character studies.

As with the Method, Stanislavski's system of reading to perform becomes performative reading in the classroom of literature where students study texts in dramatic form. These deeper understandings of art and literature are essentially our opportunity as educators, as Dickson and Costigan (2011) wrote:

> Over time, we and most of our participants have come to see that aesthetic practices aren't just about fostering more engaged learning—which we believe it does quite well—but are ultimately about enhancement of specific and focused, educational, and social values…. Aesthetic Education trusts and respects the power of the "text," whether it be the text of literature on the page or the text of drama, music, or art, to reveal rich and deep human values and to enhance deeper understandings, deeper questions, and more complex connections in learners. (p. 167)

In this second workshop on Concentration of Attention, my former students honed their skills of attention and observation in the context of viewing (or close-reading) a piece of artwork. This artwork was strategically selected to reveal some of the emotions that actors might portray in the current scene of study for the class, which is popularly known as King Lear's "Storm Scene." In this particular scene, characters Kent, Fool, and Lear experience the universal anguish of emotions and feelings associated with Love, Fear, and Grief. With complex texts such as Shakespeare's works, activities that drop students to *what is universal* in the implications of the play are helpful learning tools and ones that the instructional practices of Aesthetic Education provide many mediums for, in particular Drama and the Method actor's skills of observation,

focus of attention, and use of imagination. In the second part of this next workshop, it is important to see how students reflected on each other's observations and interpretations as they participated in a social close-reading process of the work of art.

Students collaborated on thinking *and interpreting* through these student-centered lessons, when thought involved incorporating the roles and attitudes of others—of their classmates and the work of art itself. Notice also how group discussions highlighted how students moved through the lesson.

These discussions and the scaffolding for them were inspired in part by Dorothy Heathcote and her work regarding 'Dropping to the Universal," which Wagner also covered in her writing. In this drama-based work, Heathcote moved with the movement of her process drama class and allowed her students essentially to craft their own learning process. It comes down to the teacher carefully selecting what to draw students' attention to, so they might have a memorable experience that shapes their thinking about what they are learning. In taking cues from this expert's work, I wanted to model my learning activities from this perspective; when students were going to learn a new element of the Method, I approached them in smaller segments, drawing their attention to the moving parts of an eventual integral whole which they had to explore, bit by bit, individually, personally, and collaboratively. In Wagner's (1976) words, "Heathcote demonstrates that it is not how much information you can give students that matters. What matters is how little the information you do give them can do when you focus on it long enough to let it fill with power and significance" (p. 23).

Concentration of Attention Workshop

Dropping to the Universal

AA: Greetings, class, thank you for trekking to meet me here at the museum for this workshop today. Following our reading from *An Actor Prepares*, today we are going to

focus our attention on just that—our attention to detail and how we can shape those details into meaning and movement. For today, you will need your reading journals, and something to write with. We will start first at the piece, "Les Bourgeois de Calais." Once we arrive at the sculpture, wait for further instruction.

(Students and teacher travel to the piece and circle the art with journals in hand and curious eyes.)

AA: Each of you will be assigned a different section of the art to view in detail, this will be our small circle; then, we will share our observations and shift to a larger section with a partner. That will serve as our medium circle of attention. Then, finally we will circle the piece and note all that we can about the sculpture as a whole, as our large circle of attention.

(Teacher assigns various sections of the artwork, for example, the hands, faces, and other small details.)

AA: Take five minutes to sketch or record your section. Remember to jot down your first observations, and then in closing, reflect back on what you see in connection with how it makes you feel. We will share with partners first, and then as a whole group when you are ready. This is our small circle of attention.

(Students raise eyebrows and walk to their assigned sections if needed; some are smiling and some look nervous.)

AA: Does anyone have any questions?

S3: What if we can't draw?

AA: Try. If for whatever reason that still makes you uncomfortable, jotting down observations is fine as well.

S4: Hmm…what I am looking for…?

AA: Any detail that crosses your mind. Questions are also okay.

(Students take on the challenge, and around eight minutes later, the students share with partners [Medium Circle] and then as a whole group.)

AA: What did you notice? What did you see? What questions do you have?

S1: Well, I see sadness and I am wondering why the hands and feet seem enlarged. But I did see fingers clasped around a head, I would use words like tension, anger, and I feel generally disturbed by the fingers.

S4: Yes, the feet are so pronounced, heavy, strong, and I feel like they are moving slowly—a little bit like maybe they don't want to go, I am not sure.

AA: Strong observations. Would anyone else like to share?

S5: I tried to draw the face of this figure. He just seems filled with shock and anguish to me.

S6: I agree—whatever is happening here has got to have something to do with being a prisoner or…

S2: Death. The whole thing feels like death.

AA: Sounds like we are ready to move to our large circle of attention. What about the entire piece?

S1: It's just all grief and despair, their faces are frozen with it. My partner said the same thing in our Medium Circle, "frozen with fear and anguish."

S6: Yes, but they feel, it feels strong somehow too, like—they're all in agreement about something.

S3: I wrote down prisoners of war, and death.

S2: Yeah, the ropes…it just feels like something is about to happen.

AA: Excellent job with your attention—let's look at the description:
The Burghers of Calais (1884–95) is Rodin's best-known public monument. The plaster and bronze casts in this case are small- and large-scale studies from different stages of the commission that Rodin considered independent works. The monument commemorates the heroism of six leading citizens (burghers) of the French city of Calais. In the fourteenth century, at the beginning of the Hundred Years' War, they offered their lives to the English king in exchange for the lifting of his siege of the city. By portraying their despair and haunted courage in the face of death, Rodin challenged contemporary heroic ideals and made an event from the past seem immediate and real. A full-scale bronze of The Burghers of Calais is on view in the Carroll and Milton Petrie European Sculpture Court (Gallery 548).

(Students exclaim various commentary surrounding the description and the artist's craft in connection with their observations.)

S3: Well, we were right about the despair.

S4: And that something was about to happen. Sheesh.

S1: Look, courage, despair, and death—we got all of that from the different circles.

AA: You did, and all without knowing. Here, you used your focus of attention to connect and to imagine. By observing the tiny relatable details, you sought to fill in the unknowns. For it is the unknowns that lead you to what is universal about human nature and the human condition. This skill is important for the actor but also for the reader, even seemingly abstract observations have meaning for us. And we can assume, of course, with the sophistication of a Rodin or a Shakespearean play—the composition will bring your attention to what matters about the art form. Further, connections and meaning are richer in contrast and comparison, so, by allowing yourselves (and your students) to observe and share, multiple interpretations and patterns will be revealed. You may even see how your movement during our performative reading is impacted by this attention to detail as well, which we will explore later on as well.

4.4 Workshop III: Units and Objectives

Units and Objectives, Tracking reading progress
Making Connections

Do you remember our reading our previous work with Units and Objectives? We've just finished Act 3, Scene 2 of *King Lear*. Gather with your scene partners (Kent(s), Fool(s), and Lear(s)). As a group, determine connections between your observations during part I and incorporate them into your units and objectives for performance. Remember, your "channel" and main objectives—from those set your intentions for your scenes. We will share them the next time we are together. But first, let's practice making connections and discussing how the emotion reveals itself in physical representation.

S2: I'm curious, all of these figures could be Lear. We could mimic those, right?

AA: That is one way of looking at it certainly. What might be another?

S3: Well, Kent shows great courage, as does his loyal Fool. Kent wants to protect Lear from himself, as does the Fool. I guess…the intention for that unit would be a hand on the shoulder, to comfort him.

S1: So, mimic the gestures of despair and the look of fear?

AA: Yes, you can pull from or be inspired by them as you see them. You might also consider something else. Can fear and courage look the same sometimes?

S5: Yes. You can feel fear but look courageous and you can feel courageous with fear inside. I get it—it's bringing that humanity to it.

S2: So—these men could ALL be Lear. Or they could be the other characters as well?

S3: Say more.

S5: What matters is where we focus our attention. None of our guesses were wrong. As long as our performance is focused and set with true intention, we can mimic the figures or not—as long as it feels the same in mood and tone. Lear is feeling a storm of betrayal, loss, grief, and the agony of feeling powerless. But Kent and the Fool have different intentions within that scene.

AA: If Kent is afraid but wants to protect Lear—will he show fear?

S5: He actually mentions the word Fear in his line, I think, but he calls it an affliction.

S3: Ahhh okay, I am seeing this—so, in theory, our performances can highlight the courage of Kent, the love of the Fool, and the storm of Lear's agony all in one? I mean, Kent or the fool could be feeling powerless as well—they care about Lear and…

S1: There is so much emotion going on in just this one scene!

S2: So, as long as there is a reason, a true one, tied to emotion, it should show up in my physicality. But like, I can't just play worried or sad.

AA: Correct. The details that you observed have already focused your understanding of the emotions, and those, in combination with the given circumstances of your character in your scene, will drive your movement. What matters, is what you decide to show in your intentions as you move from moment unit to unit as part of your overall objective—work inwardly and then outwardly. Your task is to bring the emotion to the lines as naturally as possible: Just as our emotions drive our own physicality often. You will have the rest of workshop today to plan and rehearse with me alongside you for questions and thinking out loud. Next class, we will share our performances and reflect on the product. For now, journal about your thoughts on the practice today before meeting with your scene groups.

In this workshop, a few different things are happening: Students are sustaining focus, practicing attention, and sharing multiple perspectives on a work of art. They are all, however, then shifting their gaze from themselves to the work of art, then back again to themselves (recognizing emotions and how they can be physically represented), and then towards the art again. They are also making connections across very different pieces of artwork (sculpture and painting) and tracking their reading process through units and objectives. Students are making creative choices and backing those choices with intention in their performance work. Scenes following this practice were varied in some that highlighted the loyalty of the Fool, the fears of Kent, or the agony of Lear, but each scene was articulated through movement as a response to

the text. Finally, they were engaging with the reading process through organic feeling. They were noticing deeply the details as evidence of the human condition and the art as the human contribution. Moreover, they were actively learning and collaborating on interpretation. I would have been interested in using further practice from Emotion Memory, but I did not feel comfortable in asking non-acting students to remember moments of grief, sadness, betrayal, or anguish from their lives, so I utilized the sculpture and a series of other art pieces that were so rich with emotion that they would help the students get there in place of that personal work.

In *Drama Magazine* from an article I wrote with my students entitled "Drama Matters: Embodying Textual Analysis," my former graduate student, Mathew Anastasi, experimented with a character analysis through a close read of several pieces of artwork with his students. The exercise honed the skill of noticing deeply, focus of attention, observation, and fostering multiple interpretations of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* by exposing students to different works of art arranged on the smartboard and in print. In addition, it fostered possibilities for them to build off each other's interpretations of the artwork while honing the skill of abstract observations. Ideally, this process should happen at multiple times over the course of performative reading activities. Similar to the actors' rehearsal process in which they engage with text, and per Dr. Bruni Ashley's earlier comments, they *move to know what they think and feel* and then constantly return to the script through cycles of performative reads. This student-centered discovery process should be scaffolded with the same tools an actor takes to role—utilizing sense memory, physical action set with intention, awareness of objectives—and by bringing their own abstract observations or attention to details to *voice* their character.

Mathew Anastasi:

MA: What do you see? What do you notice?

S1: That's a very small balcony.

S2: Oh, look at the way Romeo is facing her!

S3: Romeo looks like he's at the same height as her which is strange because we know she's supposed to be looking down at him.

MA: Good! Talk to me, keep going here…

S4: They're both positioned here to be in equal power.

MA: Good! Rotate scenes! We're onto something!

I noticed how easy it was to push the students' thinking to deeper levels of engagement. One of the reasons this gallery walk worked so well was because of the range of interpretations from each artist. This allowed the students to dig into the inquiry questions to guide them. Students became obsessed with hunting down the symbolism in each image and deciding on which character was portrayed to have more power.

This worked especially well as an inquiry project once it came time to attack the [text of the] balcony scene with our own actors and further drama pedagogy. Students were noticing the power plays on their own and acting accordingly.

This activity culminated with each student selecting a partner and acting out the scene of lines. After the first run-through, each student flipped and acted in the other character's role. What I saw was each student taking a very different approach to the role.

It is important to highlight that this practice can be online (when going to an art museum is not possible). Former student Arielle Schwartz revisited her experience from another term and class and explored this activity via the MET website (from on our Zoom class during the pandemic). In her reflection, she discussed not only the ideas surrounding the importance of learning to concentrate on the myriad details of various art pieces, but also the value of the communal experience of joining in discussion regarding the observation of pieces of artwork. Further, this process reminded her of being a former artist herself and her own connections between the use of language and movement tied to the body from her own personal experience with dance:

> The following are some of my reflections from the process of studying our final play, King Lear, using the Lincoln Center framework. These reflections, combined with the other activities, conversations, and reflections of Amanda and my peers, hint at the creation of community that occurred simultaneously with our academic work as actors, students, and educators:
>
> I'm noticing that spending class looking at art, while extremely engaging and intellectual, felt like a much-needed brain break from so much of the other work I am currently doing. As a student participant in the activity of stages of art observation with very specific question prompting, I could feel how smoothly the observations and analysis of the artwork transitioned into conversation about King Lear. Even though so many peers are already familiar with the work and I am not, this artistic method of introducing the play made me feel as though I already held knowledge about the play and knew what to expect from this week's reading of it--in some ways it leveled the playing field. It was interesting to notice myself noticing. In our first round of observing the Ugolino statue, I noticed I was particularly struck by eyes and, in the second round of observation I was fascinated with coming up with stories for the overall piece and for each of the characters.
>
> As an educator, I found myself thinking about which questions I responded to and which questions influenced how and what I was thinking about. I have a bachelor's degree in both English and Dance and have danced since I was fairly young. As such, guidance was in part directive but gave me full autonomy over my movement, allowed for interpretation of the direction, and taught me about my body, helping me grow as a dancer by broadening my range of movement.
>
> Until the Lincoln Center framework and the artistic observation activity, I had never thought about the way questions in the classroom and how they are framed can do this same thing. Like the way I was guided to new understandings in Gaga dance classes, I could see myself responding to different Lincoln Center observation questions in ways that broadened my understanding of the painting and noticed the ways my and others' understandings were deepened differently.

As explored in the workshop examples above and the reflections of my former students, the students who participated in activities or workshops such as these often make thoughtful observations through circles of attention and active perceiving, which aid them in bringing their own interpretations to artwork and text. Students also gain confidence in their interactions with complex text as they become more critical, pose questions, and develop a broader context for the emotions and ideas within the text through their imaginative abstract observations: They become expert readers through personal transactions. They use sensory learning with their bodies and

voices to acquire multiple interpretations, building off each other's perspectives as they become more empathetic through performance, thus strengthening the classroom community and beyond. As a result, they artfully transact and immerse themselves in text worlds.

From Lincoln Center Education and the *Capacities for Imaginative Learning*, these workshops exercise the following skills in application:

2. **Notice Deeply:** To identify and articulate layers of detail in a work of art or other object of study through interaction with it over time.
3. **Make Connections:** To relate what you notice to your knowledge, experience, and other people's perspectives. To make comparisons with details and ideas in other art works, texts, and subjects.

In the next section, I review Stanislavski's Emotion Memory in connection with the final workshop on Dynamic Transaction.

4.5 Workshop 4: Emotion Memory

Exploring the "Magic If" through Emotion
Crafting Dynamic Transactions

In preparation for the workshops on Stanislavski's teachings on Emotion Memory, I began to integrate lessons into my class at Teachers College that guided students through the use of personal memories to explore their characters' emotions and feelings. This part of the Method as an interpretive strategy highlights opportunities for students to connect with their character in some way or to practice empathy in understanding their character. This dynamic transaction with the text of study helps each student have a personal reading experience which aids them in developing interpretation. But what I noticed most overall was that with this opportunity to reflect on and perform the emotions of our characters also came a change in the classroom dynamic: Students were more willing to be imaginative, vulnerable, and share thinking.

From Stanislavski's perspectives, this helps the actor discover elements which are necessary to perform his part by natural means. For the student of literature in the English content area, sympathy or empathy is transformed into active reaction or, in Stanislavski's words, *transformation of human sympathy*. However, in my classroom, this agency in exploring the *human spirit* of the actor's reading and performing brought the human spirit into my classroom in ways I had not encountered previously. I observed that my teachers were more comfortable shifting their gaze between the subject and themselves (the learner)—in exploring the emotions of their character in context and out of context in reflection of their own lives. Interpretations were developed out of opportunities to share the feelings of their characters as well as the feelings the characters inspired in the viewers of performances in class in connection with the implications of Shakespeare's plays.

Pulled from the Method, and in addition to basic drama warm-ups such as breathing exercises, physical warm-ups, and vocal warm-ups, I guided my students, preservice English teachers, through improvisation in character. Following practice breathing, students chose lines of importance to them and practiced reciting them in three ways: whisper, medium tonality, and projection. They were then guided through improvisation activities followed by distilled elements of Emotional Recall, in which students were safely encouraged to write a letter to their characters, which allowed them to pose questions to the characters, interrogate them, or perhaps connect with them through curious or imaginative ways.

Next, students were asked to create their physical representation of these emotions and feelings. For example, they could walk the space of the classroom from that Emotional Recall. They explored the uses of the body and reflected on the emotions displayed or not displayed—or perhaps hidden—through the study of their characters. These efforts would guide students

through a process to connect with aspects of human nature that were apparent nearly 500 years ago, just as they are today. Essentially, the individualized and personal transactions with the text, once shared, informed group thinking. It should be noted that for this section of the Method and the actor's work, I only invited students to think about the characters' emotions and not their own, which was problematic within the context of the work, but I felt was a safer application. As with the last workshop, or any time students had to work with emotions that might hold a negative connotation for them, it was only studied through works of art and not through their own Emotion Memory.

I struggled with this approach to the work but, again, felt it was better to explore the emotions in artwork that were separate from them; in some ways, the effect was the same. Looking at a statue where the person was filled with grief still allowed the student to notice the same details about the emotion, separate from themselves, and still incorporate it into their own performances or hold critical discussions about units and objectives in the text. This led to deeper understandings regarding character choices which resulted in that feeling of grief.

For example, themes regarding gender and performance developed through posing questions and sitting with the unknowns about why Shakespeare would have explored these themes in that way. My teachers were asked to think about how their character might walk, move, and/or interact with other people (characters) by moving about the classroom with the focus on intentional internal emotion and empathizing and recognizing the restrictions that character would have had in Shakespeare's time or today. As conflict began to inevitably develop in the text, students tracked their own perspectives on the conflict based on the decisions and motivations of their characters through the lens of Emotion Memory in the implications of the play.

This process allowed students to challenge the text and each other in the reading process, developing a tolerance for problems, paradox, and ambiguity found within the text as an opportunity for students to become aware of their own biases and perspectives regarding themes directly related to our world today.

In another article in *Drama Magazine* entitled "Drama in the Time of COVID: Art as Healing," my former student, Avram Lessman, reflected on this practice in his words:

> The relationship between the body and emotion is a funny thing. Stand tall with your chin raised, and you will feel better and prouder than you have all day. Hunch over, and you will invariably feel worse. Learning what to do with our bodies to enhance our portrayal and empathize with these characters is the lynchpin upon which this class balances. The expectation to get out of our seats and walk in our character's shoes—in the literal sense—not only sets this practice apart from prototypical literary experiences, it also allows us to treat literature, as Rudine Sims Bishop says, as a "sliding glass door."

In the next section, a dramatic reconstruction, based on a workshop regarding Emotion Memory reveals some of the connections that students made regarding the link between emotion and the body. I observed, as they did, that even with distilled Emotion Memory practice, students engaged differently with the text: They were more experimental in their responses to the dramatic literature through deeply personal interpretations. Later, in performing their characters, scenes were thoughtful, intentional, and moving. The following workshops were on Zoom due to quarantine during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Emotion Memory Workshop, Part I

Harnessing the Poetry of Memories through Story Exchange

AA: Greetings all, welcome to workshop. Today we will explore the use of emotions and memories, first, our own, and then, second, those of our chosen characters. As you may recall from our discussions around An Actor Prepares, this part of the practice will be adapted and distilled from the Method, and Narrative 4,[2] so that we can safely explore the actor's work with memory and emotion in ways that we are comfortable doing so for the purposes of reading a play. So, to this purpose, I ask that you only work with a memory that brings you the emotion of joy.

Step 1: Please find a photograph that reminds you of this memory. It may be a moment from your past, present, or future. It will likely include a person, place or thing (or pet!). Be mindful of sharing photos of others and ask me if you are unsure about any step of this activity. Something to note; memories bring nostalgia, which can help you explore joy in its many forms including "happy tears" so to that point, choose only what you are confident you can share with comfort. You will share first with a partner and then later as a whole class. I will share as well.

Step 2: Once you have chosen your photo, journal about it for five minutes please. Note any detail that you can see with your eyes compositionally, and then challenge yourself to remember (or invent) the story for this memory. Get as many ideas, observations, and thoughts or details down on the page as you can in that time. Do not worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar, as these will be just for you to track your thinking.

Step 3:

AA: All right, everyone, now that you have your photos chosen, and you have given yourself time to remember your memory in detail, prepare to head into Zoom rooms with your partner. Select a Partner A and B. Now this next part is very important: This is a listening activity as much as it is a speaking and story exchange. Once inside your Zoom meeting room, take turns telling about photos and sharing your memories with your partner. When you are both done doing this, we will have a short reflection period where your partner can ask you questions about your memory. Following that is the most important part—you will then **exchange** stories. With grace, respect, and fastidious attention to detail, you will share your partner's memory, **as if it was yours**. What questions do you have?

(Following questions, students are off to Zoom meeting rooms.)

[2] https://narrative4.com/

Step 4: Story Exchange group share

(Students are nervous but accept the challenge, and the teacher shares her partner's memory first to provide a model.)

AA: This is a picture of a sand trail that I walk every day since quarantine. It's the only place I find joy. It's freeing to walk the winding trails and listen to the terns and seagulls above. I shuffle past others who keep their appropriate six feet (and beyond) distance. A mother and child went by me one day, her son on his bright red and white tricycle with a birthday hat. Others, along with myself, wished him a "Happy Birthday" as the teary-eyed Mother ushered him onward. Moments like that made this sand trail feel the most human, the most real during this odd time, perhaps folks felt safer outside or maybe for others like me, this was our only chance to even interact with another soul. It was kind of beautiful in a weird way. I remember smiling often as the impossibly tall Duckweed waved in the ocean winds at sunrise, midday, and sunset, just as restless as me, I suppose. The fresh air, a saving grace and comfort during unprecedented times. Every step, echoing the rolling of pounding waves, seems to heal my body and mind. I know others are not so lucky, so it is with gratitude that I share this place of memories.

S1: This is my son. He is holding a dandelion. It's a little squished in his chubby little curious fingers. He picks them too close to the bloom and shuffles over with a big smile as he calls "Momma" and places them in my waiting palm. A smile comes to my face as I realize these moments are never too precious. We've taken to laying on the picnic blanket outside to escape from the cooped up feeling of late and quarantine. Every day we carry Tonka trucks and colored pencils and sketchbook out for tinkering and drawing. Sometimes, we cuddle and read or draw letters and numbers, fish, dragons and birds on the pages, each trying it in our own way. His smile is so bright and innocent, he knows not what we face-but then again neither do we. Yesterday eve we had a Zoom playdate on the porch just beyond here with some of his preschool buddies and the other children had smiles like just like his, while the mothers could not hide their worry. It's amazing to think that a little squished dandelion could bring so much joy, but then again, I've got about twenty of them dried and crumbling upstairs, but their memory remains.

Following each story exchange, students clapped for each other. In the culminating discussion, students reflected on the experience both through the lens as student participant and as teacher.

AA: Thank you all for participating, I know that was new, and a bit nerve-wracking. What did you notice? What did you see?

S3: All the happy memories had some bits of sadness in them.

S5: Yes, there seemed to be a fine line with joy and other emotions.

S3: I was pretty scared to do this, but I do feel like I know you all a little better to be sure.

S2: Indeed. From behind this screen lately, things have been pretty lonely and that exercise made me feel connected.

S1: It kind of seemed like each memory started somewhere and then built into another memory.

AA: Let's look at this for a little bit. Please continue.

S1: Well, I don't want to speak for everyone, but as I was listening, each starting memory led to at least one other, if not more.

S3: This is true, I had to remind myself to go back to where I started even I my own journal reflection.

S5: Is there something to that, I wonder? Are memories linked infinitely or?

AA: For the actor, yes. The tool of Emotion Memory is like learning to travel across memories and select what you wish to revisit. Sometimes the memory itself is the connection, but other times it's just the feeling and the actor must decipher what is most useful.

S2: So, it's like remembering how to feel?

AA: In a way certainly, but in shifting our gaze from ourselves to the character and the play we empathize with the character through the use of given circumstances and the Magic If? Then we shift back and forth until something comes from the remembering.

S5: So, we take on the perspectives of the character, search for memories or emotions that help us remember what...say...disappointment feels like?

AA: Sometimes, yes, but it is also a layered process that works as a system with all of the other elements in tandem, all shifting around, connected to and informing the actor. It is also in part connected with sympathizing with the emotions of the character and empathizing with them so that you feel a deep understanding for their situation or intentions and use this in performance. Where the actor cannot do this, however, they must build in a backstory to help them navigate the choices their character inevitably makes.

S1: So, when do we get to try this?

AA: In our next workshop, you will select a short scene or monologue to practice this kind of work. Expectations are that your units and objectives will be completed, and you will have already prepared the answers from our Magic If workshop (psych analysis questions). Finally, it's imperative that you self-select based on the intentions you've

worked out for the character—ones that you feel completely comfortable with and performing. What questions do you have?

S5: Is it okay to pick a sad or angry moment?

AA: Each of you must have a Zoom with me prior to class next week to discuss your selection and the process so that I can determine if it is safe.

Emotion Memory Workshop, Part II

Exploring Emotion, in character, through the use of imagination
Character Letters or Diary Entry in Character

As part of the Zoom between workshops, students and I discussed selected scenes and monologues from *King Lear*. Then, I gave them a choice of two writing tasks to help initiate this process: They could compose a letter to a character OR they could craft a diary entry as a character. Some students did a variation on these, as seen in the next student writing reflection as well as from *Drama Magazine* in an article I wrote entitled "Drama in the Time of COVID: Art as Healing." Here, former students, Arielle Schwartz and Avram Lessman, reflected on this process of connecting deeply with a character:

Arielle Schwartz:

I began attempting to create a diary entry from Cordelia's perspective as a modern teenager…in taking on the character, I thought about how Cordelia might have felt in a business-like meeting encounter with her father and sisters. I decided to take notes as if I were Cordelia. I filmed my notes being created (and even added a crying effect with a few drops of water). I felt anxious and tightly wound and decided to create some abstract art to release the tension. As I began scribbling, I understood the tension was, in fact, a result of me taking on the character and my journaling and doodles became a representation of the scene. I added quotes, colors, and symbols to represent what struck me most. This creation was done on lined paper and felt like a continuation of my earlier ideas. I think about this work as almost performance art and I wonder, were I not in a drama class, would my creation have been less experimental?"

Avram Lessman:

While going through these various exercises I likened the experience to two analogies. One, we were emptying our bodies of our natural habitations and psychosomatic tendencies to create empty vessels to fill with our selected characters. We replaced what

> was removed with emotions and backstories we manifested. The second analogy was that we did these exercises to take on emotion, as if forging new neural pathways in our minds. Playing different characters added depth to my experience and reinforced my continued enjoyment.

Here, note that Arielle and Avram explored emotions as a tool to better understand the text from within this assignment. Even though they worked with different characters and different ways of developing their use of emotions through various activities, they both reflected that it was the use of them which created further understanding of characters and human nature in general. By accepting the given circumstances of Cordelia and being at the mercy of Lear and her older sisters, tension and anxiety were fostered, drawing attention to Shakespeare's use of Cordelia as a powerful figure in the overarching implications of the play. For Avram, the reading process became deeper as he took on the emotions of his characters. This activity bolstered their performances the following week when students took creative risks. The same occurred in our reflective discussion after students shared varying interpretations and challenged each other in the process.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

> There are more things in heaven and in earth, Horatio,
> than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
>
> *Hamlet,* Act I, sc. 5

5.1 Further Reflections on Practice from Chapter 4

These last 7 years, I have been engaged as a teacher and researcher in an exploration of the place and value of Drama in the English Language Arts classroom. I have conducted my exploration as a doctoral student and instructor at Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York. My own exposure to Drama and Theatre as an art form, however, began when I was only 12 and had the opportunity to perform with the New England Shakespeare Festival. My love of theater and acting thereafter wove itself into the fabric of my life, most especially throughout my university education and in professional acting experiences following. However, I do not think I could recognize or fully understand the impact that my education in drama had on my personal and professional life until I found myself coming to the end of this doctoral teacher research project.

The findings from my research were revealing to me as I never quite appreciated before the power of drama to shape learning for preservice English teachers. In the course of this study, I also came to recognize and appreciate the uniquely influential power of the instruction I received in Stanislavski's approach to training actors through what came to be called "Method Acting"—a system of training actors that I have found to be adaptable to teaching drama (especially Shakespeare) to in-service English teachers who might teach Shakespeare or almost any genre of literature to their own young adult students.

5.2 Learning to Interpret

Research Question #1: How might learning to develop a character through the use of the Method inform the development of interpretation for preservice teachers of English?

I have learned that when a student is given the opportunity to explore the Method actor's process while reading, their learning becomes more memorable through deep emotional connections with the text; active learning through physical action; opportunities to be creative and use their imagination in response to reading; and participation in collaborative interpretations. All of these can be shaped over time and through multiple interactions with the script to foster diverse interpretations. The Method as a reading strategy for interpretation also inspires a personal transaction with the text, in which students take ownership over the tracking of their own reading: The reading process becomes student-centered.

The development of interpretation became personal for my students and was derived from their personal transaction with the text while reading. This seemed to happen because of exploration with both Units and Objectives as well as with the *Magic If.* In setting their intentions to their lines and tracking units, they began to understand their characters' situation and relate to their own worlds. In doing so, when the *Magic If* (What if this were me?) was applied, students began to take their characters' positions personally and defend them in the decisions they inevitably made. Furthermore, through the emotional understanding (use of Emotion Memory) and connection to the characters, students began to develop what I observed as empathy for their characters. When this happened, the interpretations became individual and far more diverse across the classroom community. Students seemed to accept that there would be multiple interpretations regarding the implications of the play based on how each of their classmates connected to their characters. For example, during my final term while exploring

Twelfth Night, three of my students were tracking Olivia's character, and each student found different aspects of her archetype they could connect to (romantic, bold, independent, and loyal). These aspects informed their overall performance(s) of Olivia (which were very different), but the students were also united in her role in the overall interpretation of the play in terms of what her character symbolized about human nature and the human condition.

These multiple and diverse interpretations were observed across other sections of this course during the six terms that I taught it. For example, some students found Lear a narcissistic psychopath, in contrast to others who found him misunderstood through the eyes of Kent, the Fool, and Cordelia. Others found Romeo to be clinically depressed, while others found the gender dynamics of Viola and Orsino an opportunity to apply critical lenses such as Gender. It seemed that the ability to challenge normative readings and offer diverse and sometimes controversial interpretations was bolstered by the intense character study through the Method. Learning to develop a character became almost synonymous with learning to develop an interpretation. For my students, the process of drama through the eyes of an actor was an accessible process and seemed to create spaces for them as readers to see parts of themselves in the text as well—which, of course, often happens when an audience views a theatre performance. Often, directors, playwrights, and actors hope this will happen. The nature of drama creates avenues for experiential learning and a reflection of the self for participants of all kinds, whether viewing a performance or participating in the drama or its modalities.

5.3 Impact on Students, Prospective Teachers, and Classroom Cultures

Research Question #2: How does the application of the Method as an interpretive reading system shape the preservice teachers' experience with Shakespeare's use of language?

The preservice teachers in my course felt that more complex interpretations were developed from the pedagogy of the Method framework and the performative reading workshops. They felt that opportunities to imagine and work collaboratively in the way an actor does strengthened their understanding of character and, thus, their interpretations regarding the implications of the play overall. More importantly, this deeper study of character allowed each student to have their own individual transaction with the language of the play—one that shaped not only interpretations but also how they felt about the implications of the play in comparison or contrast with their own personal worlds. Where language was once a barrier, it became tool to convey the most fundamental emotions found inside of it and throughout the structure of the plays we encountered. The exploration of the language seemed to also create bonds and classroom community.

Shakespeare's language became a rhythm and beat to explore what was happening to the characters or how they were speaking to each other. For example, former students Arielle Schwartz and Jamie Primeau reflected on the power of the work to create connection and classroom community in their class commentaries (these come from my article written with these students for *Drama Magazine* entitled "Drama in the Time of COVID: Art as Healing." They shared their perspectives on the close bond they felt with the class during this work as well as the pleasure or sense of freedom they found in engaging with the text by using creativity and imagination in interpreting Shakespeare's language and finding meaning in connection with their own worlds.

Arielle Schwartz:

> Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning, and a separation from normalcy, the Teaching of Shakespeare class felt like a weekly moment of grounding and connection (two things I found myself constantly yearning for throughout the unprecedented isolation of a year-plus in quarantine). So much of this came from

> moments of vulnerability and lowered inhibitions which accompanied invitations to get silly, improvisational exercises, experiments with new characters and ways of being, and showing up to class openly and vulnerably.
>
> After one class, I wrote: "As usual, I am finding the value of transparency and vulnerability in educational spaces to be particularly salient. Our conversation at the beginning of the class about sharing oneself with students was so meaningful to me as a student and fantastic advice for me as an educator."
>
> In my weekly reflections, I found myself constantly and unexpectedly enjoying new and uncomfortable pieces of acting and improvisation, feeling surprised and held by the community these shared experiences created. In none of my other classes (even ones in which we shared highly personal pieces of writing and reflections about identity) did I feel the same kind of connection. In my last reflection I wrote, "You are all so special and I feel so deeply grateful to everyone in this class for such an amazing experience. Huzzah!" I recall, while writing that, feeling that it so inadequately described the partnership, commitment, and trust I felt toward and from each individual in the class.
>
> Jamie Primeau:
>
> Through creative exploration, we each were able to make Shakespeare our own, to adapt and understand the Bard's words in a way that made sense to us, thus adding another level of beauty to the work. As James Baldwin once wrote of Shakespeare, "Under this light, this revelation, both myself and my past began slowly to open, perhaps the way a flower opens at morning, but more probably the way an atrophied muscle begins to function, or frozen fingers to thaw." I think that's a perfect metaphor, the frozen parts of our minds began to thaw, some lovely flowers opened up, something new was created. Baldwin also brilliantly said, "The greatest poet in the English language found his poetry where poetry is found: in the lives of the people."
>
> In other words, the meaning of Shakespeare lies within us—both teachers and students, creators and listeners. It also lies in the stories of those around us, however they choose to share and interpret the text with us. It's almost like a giant collaborative quilt, woven together to make the story all the more meaningful over time and with great thoughtfulness. Like Shakespeare's words, it's very much open to interpretation. But when assessed with lenses, it allows us to dig not only deeper into other people's humanity, but also our own. I would've never found this untapped and limitless resource that I certainly plan to integrate into future English classrooms I lead.

In my own teaching journal and in reflecting on Arielle's and Jamie's sentiments, I wrote about being shocked and, in truth, terribly relieved that somehow, on Zoom, we were able to have this experience with each other (and Shakespeare's plays) during those times. I realized that with the performative reading came opportunities for students to see themselves as artists in

other ways as well. They began to engage with creative assignments and seek options to reveal their learning through their own passions, creative talents, and imaginative ways of being. The physical work seemed to crack open creative inhibitions, and I noticed that my students expressed themselves more freely and vulnerably in their writing, assignments, and reflections. Perhaps releasing their imaginations became an untapped well source to the universal in the text.

Some of my students from another term reflected that this performative reading work changed their interactions with their own students and the teaching of Shakespeare as well, in terms of their own experimentation with practice at the secondary level. Former student Aristo Orginos shared narrative reflections regarding this practice with his colleagues and students:

> Aristo Orginos:
>
> "We need kids to act more," I suggested to my co-teacher. We were both a bit nervous; outside of some high school acting, neither of us had any formal training in the teaching of acting, nor in the craft, so we were hesitant to assess the acting skills of our students. But the arguments for having students act seemed to outweigh the complications. It was an additional modality and access point with which students could engage in a complicated text…. If we placed students into "acting troupe" groups, it would bolster the sense of community in our classroom in a way that written text analyses never could. Chrissy [my co-teacher] then booked our school's small black box theater, giving us a deadline, and we set to work on getting kids to act.
>
> What we saw on stage was heartening. Students who were scared to put themselves out there, who had just ten minutes before resigned themselves to a failing grade out of fear, were acting. Students who self-described themselves as "hating reading" were delivering emotive performances of these centuries-old characters. We found that students were even encouraging each other, which added to the classroom community environment so important to equitable learning spaces:
>
> STUDENT 8: So, I wanted to shout-out STUDENT 6, because they don't talk much in class, but they did a great job on stage today.
>
> Asking kids to perform Shakespeare **helped them to better see early Modern English conversationally as opposed to a series of impossibly complex linguistic obstacles.** The conclusion of each performance was met with cheers from the class. When we asked students to share feedback at the end of class, they praised specific interpretations and commented on the growth of their peers directly.

Aristo Orginos commented again on his experience with the performative reading work and how it influenced his interpretive process as well as how he predicted the practice may impact students and educators when reading Shakespeare's works:

> […] In other words, by approaching Shakespeare's characters from an empathetic point of view, rather than a coldly analytical one, students may find ways to understand the motivations and trials of characters in a much more real way than a close reading could provide. When it comes to these performative or artistic exercises, one cannot forego critical interpretation of class, race, or gender. One cannot read *Romeo and Juliet* without understanding how power structures beyond their control renders their relationships impossible; one cannot read *Othello* or *The Merchant of Venice* without understanding how and why race is a driving force of the conflict; one cannot read *Twelfth Night* without understanding how gender and gender expression impacts character relations. These critical questions are not ancillary to understanding Shakespeare; they are integral.

5.4 Limitations and Impact

Research Question #3: In what ways does the use of the Method impact or limit the classroom environment and student interactions?

5.4.1 Limitations

Creating this immersive, student-centered reading experience through the lens of Method actor (an aesthetic stance) took much time to develop—time that, in truth, would be difficult but not impossible for the English teacher to always dedicate during the average classroom window and from within the average ELA curriculum limitations. The scope and sequence of this practice as student-centered meant dedicating much time to exploration, student comfortability, and progress, while constantly adapting and crafting learning opportunities pulled from Drama and experts in the field.

This process works best as an apprentice model, or an immersive community of practice which mirrors a dramatic rehearsal process that requires extra time for planning and implementation. For example, in my planning and implementation of the pedagogy, I had to orchestrate an immersive and social experience in which students could, over time, enhance their

knowledge of the practice by transacting with the text from the viewpoint of a Method actor. My practice changed each and every single term when faced with new students who came to the practice from unique and diverse backgrounds as well as varied experiences with Drama or none at all.

5.4.2 Impact

In a classroom setting like this, students would be able to utilize interactions with each other in character as chances to pose questions and make connections to other works of literature in relation to the text of study. With the focus of shifting into a physical representation of character on their feet, students would shift into physical action, which provokes multiple perspectives regarding character motivation. By providing students with opportunities for reading comprehension as a transactional process, dramatic literature is highlighted as a sophisticated work of art, with many layers all informing each other.

Research Question #4: In what ways do preservice teachers enlarge their response to Shakespeare's plays through the applications of the Method as a reading strategy?

Might Drama or the "dramatic act" come naturally to us, as Heathcote suggested, as a tool in our everyday lives and in the exploration of complex text? How might we utilize its capabilities to enlarge students' responses to reading dramatic texts in the English classroom?

Students of Method work learn to be more comfortable in their own bodies, practice breathing correctly, project their voices, and understand the psychology of gesture and physical movement. These engaged readers learn to mine for subtext and empathize with others the way actors do. They also learn to collaborate with others and create imaginatively in their response to the literature, either through creative tasks or performance. Performative reading shifts practice from text-focused to student-centered as they find agency in their own learning. The field of

Drama, its practice and theory, focuses on inquiry and the artist's process through a synthesis of mind and body-reading.

The process of interpretation for the actor and the student of English might differ only in the final result of their work, in that actors work to build performance and students of literature build a response to literature through a literary essay or other means to show what they have learned. Still, even in the literature classroom, there is an opportunity for students to try performing as well. At Teachers College, it was often in these moments, during performances, where students were, in fact, the *most engaged* during the reading process.

When students have the ability to *deeply notice* the complex layers of a piece of literature, either dramatic or nondramatic works, an opportunity might develop for the students to learn more about themselves and others. This could occur when reading moves away from an otherwise purposeless and stale activity to an opportunity for students to grow their ability to empathize and deepen their emotional intelligence. What they begin to notice about the literature, they might also begin to notice in their worlds around and beyond them.

Similar to what students must do as engaged readers, they learn to contrast themselves and their own perspectives against or with the characters in the play or the piece of nondramatic literature, and in this compare-and-contrast, they can find deeper meaning. In doing so, they constantly reflect on the depth of their own experiences and the knowledge they can apply to reading the text before them. Moving one step further, actors set physical movement and intention to the way they deliver their lines, allowing them to connect to what is being stated in the text and what meaning may be hidden between the lines. This is when their reading becomes visible. Engaged readers not only think about their own reading experience but learn to apply that learning experience beyond the spaces of their own world or classroom.

Language and its nuances and subtext become visible as well, and students take this experiential learning with them. The physical exploration of ideas shapes the text into a composition that students become aware of over time by moving through it with their minds and bodies. In the ways a Method actor self-selects aspects of their own personality, knowledge, or perspectives of the role, students learn to do the same with the characters they seek to understand. I would like to continue studying this idea that builds on Drama practice to engage with Shakespearean texts and nondramatic texts as well.

Perhaps, if students are given an opportunity to see themselves and others in the texts of Shakespeare and beyond, their experience with the art form would become a more memorable learning experience that moves beyond simply knowing and shifts into understanding. In this *art as experience*, through the mind and body as well as emotional, imaginative, and physical reading practice of the Method actor, students could solidify their learning in the body. Like the actor's work, like that of performative reading, their interpretations are developed inwardly and might guide them to be more reflective on the art, the human condition, and to *truly know and understand something for themselves.*

It may be that incorporating these elements of Stanislavski's Method acting, as I have done in this project, also highlights the beauty of dramatic texts as the sophisticated, complex works of art that those in the field of Drama already know them to be.

It is also possible that approaching nondramatic texts through the incorporation of Stanislavski's Method may yield similar results. Students who study texts as actors learn how to engage with the reading process and reap the rewards of a well-told story in sharing the human experience and unpacking the human riddle. Most important, they learn to think for themselves: to challenge, to question, to take ownership of their own interpretations. Echoing Heathcote,

students learn to truly know something for themselves. The process of an actor, and the Method actor in particular, crafts a unique relationship with the text and the reader. The reader learns to immerse themselves in the voice and ideas of a character. In taking on this new kind of reading process for a time, students begin to discover other ways of thinking about the ideas raised in the text. In particular, when readers explore this same text as an acting ensemble, these ideas are explored as a group. This I think distinguishes the classroom reading process from others as students witness their peers forming contrasting ideas about the same characters. The discussion around these ideas highlights interactions between students in character, which sheds light on the stories and the students' perspectives.

With nondramatic texts, such as a novel, the Method could be applied through the elements of Physical Action and Emotion Memory. Students might focus on a particular character in exploring them physically during scenes of dialogue or through physical improvisation activities based on the plot or characters. Or with poetry, for example, students can select certain words that stand out to them and reflect on the emotional connotation of the words. Sometimes, they can take things one step further and craft movement based on these observations, which can lead to reflection on layers of meaning or intention. In truth, the heart of this work is about taking a careful, slower, more connected look at words and their use to reveal meaning. As students explore words with their bodies, they explore their own use of words and language as well. Students become more connected to the use of the language overall and, in the process, more connected to their classmates. In my experience, it seems even the use of just these two elements of the Method enhanced the reading experience for my students and perhaps made them feel as though they can explore interpretation differently.

Exploring dramatic or nondramatic texts using the ensemble approach seems to motivate not only the reading process overall but also human connection and collaboration. Throughout this teaching experience, I learned that, in many ways, we are disconnected from ourselves, our bodies, and each other. Often in classroom settings, it is very difficult to create moments where students and teachers can truly connect with each other, let alone the text of study. This method seems to do both. A shift in learning happens when students carefully pay attention to characters they read about and, likewise, when they pay careful attention to the thoughts of their classmates while reading this way. It was my observation that many times when my students moved between their own character study, be it extensive or short-activity-based, and the physical activities, they motivated each other to think more deeply. In the process of this shift, students also motivated each other to perform. Somehow in the efforts towards engaging readers to form interpretation, they also developed the skills of performative reading and collaboration. When students worked in pairs or small groups for scene study, they gradually became more comfortable with performing their interpretations and sharing ideas within the whole class.

I noticed this same occurrence in my secondary classrooms, and I believe it may have something to do with the nature of drama and the safe spaces drama creates through the practiced use of vulnerability and courage. When students constantly work through these, they grow more comfortable with themselves and others. This kind of learning is social and emotional. The ensemble engages and motivates a more thoughtful reading and interpretive experience, while it also teaches participants about the world of drama. When exploring dramatic texts, I think this is especially important so that students understand the value and the process of the art form.

Teachers in the English content area spend much time writing curriculum and designing lessons in hopes of achieving the same goals and objectives that are already explored through

Drama and Drama curricula. Why not use the tools that are already available and in place? Why not bring the wealth of knowledge, theory, and practice into the classroom and share them so that students have an opportunity to engage actively in reading and beyond? Why not give students agency in their own learning, spark their curiosity, and provide them with the tools they need to show their learning with imagination and creativity? Finally, why not give them the ability to bond with others, collaborate, and truly *experience* literature? All this to say that the work itself holds value towards the actuation of life skills necessary for individuals beyond the classroom: to build the ability to empathize, to harness one's own imagination, to read and speak with confidence, and to collaborate with others. It is time to recognize the value of pedagogy from Drama and the practices of the ancient art of theatre, and acknowledge how important they are to our learning communities and beyond.

Figure 1

Milbank Chapel, The Teaching of Shakespeare, 2022

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare, Sonnet XVIII

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