1-1-2011

Contemplative Education CenterStage: Training the Mindful Performer

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Abstract

In the late 20th century and early 21st century, contemplative education/studies courses, concentrations, and initiatives have emerged in the academy. Although there has been significant discussion of postsecondary courses and programs that have integrated contemplative views and practices in the literature, there have been few studies of contemplative curricula and pedagogy in higher education. Additionally, there have been even fewer inquiries of the influence of contemplative education on performing arts training within conservatories and college and university departments. The aim of this qualitative study was two-fold: (1) to describe, interpret, and appraise the impact of contemplative education on the curricula of an interdisciplinary conservatory level performing arts program, MFA Contemporary Performance, at Naropa University; and (2) to disclose, compare, and analyze MFA student perceptions of the influence of contemplative education on their professional and personal development. The following questions guided this study: (1) How do faculty and students characterize contemplative education within the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program? (2) How does contemplative education impact the intended and operational curricula of courses within the MFA Contemporary Performance Program? (3) How do graduate students perceive the effects of contemplative education, offered by the MFA Contemporary Performance Program, on the development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives?
Based on the research methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship, this investigation provides a vivid description and interpretation of the intended and operational curricula of three core courses within the MFA program. These curricula were examined through five dimensions: intentional, curricular, pedagogical, structural, and evaluative. In order to shape our understanding of the contemplative and performative nature of the curricula, the significant and subtle qualities of the courses were further captured by preparation, context-building, reflective, showing, and closing conventions. Since the courses were grounded in postmodern view, they were evaluated according to Doll’s criteria of richness, recursion, relations, and rigor for the evaluation of postmodern curricula.

MFA first- and second-year students primarily characterized contemplative education as body/mind training for performance and personal development, sitting meditation, and cultivation of mindfulness and awareness. Student perceptions of the impact of contemplative education on the development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives, throughout the course of their two-year training, are presented in a dimensional analysis.

The research reveals eight different themes that intersect the three core curricula and interviews with MFA students and faculty. These thematics include inclusivity, nowness, silence, improvisation, goodness, heart, training, and space. The beginning letter of each theme combines to form the acronym, insights. The framework of insights connects and illuminates the most potent aspects of MFA Contemporary Performance values and training.
Acknowledgements

I would like to extend profound thanks to the members of my dissertation committee. Dr. Bruce Uhrmacher, the chair of my dissertation committee, encouraged me to launch this study of the emergent field of contemplative education in academe and provided invaluable guidance in my writing process. Dr. Paul Michalec, my academic advisor, has enriched and expanded my thinking throughout my doctoral journey. New landscapes of qualitative and quantitative research were revealed by the evocative teaching of and supportive dialogues with Dr. Nicholas Cutforth. Longtime mentor and Chair of the Theatre Department at Metropolitan State College of Denver, Dr. Marilyn Hetzel, offered important perspectives regarding the relationship between contemplative education and theatre training. Clinical Professor of Culture and Psychology, at the University of Denver, and Founder of The Spirituals Project, Dr. Arthur Jones, masterfully facilitated the oral defense discourse as outside chair of the committee.

I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to Naropa University. In particular, I convey gratitude to Academic Affairs, for making this inquiry possible, and the faculty, staff, and students of MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance, for sharing their mindful process and conservatory level training with me. Special thanks go to Director of MFA Contemporary Performance, Wendell Beavers; Core MFA Faculty, Barbara Dilley; MFA Administrative Director, Liz Acosta; and the MFA Class of 2009.

This study would not have transpired without the love and patience of my family – in particular the caring and wisdom of my parents, Gerald and Marilyn Bolmeier.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Jerry Sanders, whose never failing confidence in and unwavering support of me, made the entire process possible.
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Chapter One: The Quest for Meaning in the Academy

This above all, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
---Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (1.3.78)

The counsel that Polonius provides to his son prior to his departure for France, a new and different culture, is not unlike the advice a concerned family member might give to a daughter or son embarking upon the uncharted waters of college or university experience within the contemporary United States. Whether it might be down the street, or across the country, many incoming students view the journey through the academy as one that will empower them to more fully understand who they are in relation to themselves, their aspirations, their communities, and the world. They expect to engage in dialogue about the meaning and purpose of life; examine their values; and integrate their academic learning with what matters to them.

However, many colleges and universities have not capably navigated their students’ quests for meaning according to a “six-year national study of students’ spiritual development in American higher education, [funded] by grants to the University of California—Los Angeles’ Higher Education Research Institute from the John Templeton Foundation” (Astin, Astin, Chopp, Delbanco, & Speers, 2007, p. 28). In the findings from a 2003 pilot survey, more than half of student participants indicated that they were not encouraged to examine the spiritual dimensions of their lives, nor discuss their personal
values in the classroom. Jennifer A. Lindholm, Associate Director of the Office of Undergraduate Evaluation and Research and Director of the Spirituality in Higher Education Project at the University of California, Los Angeles, presented a summary of the results of the pilot survey in the 2007 September/October issue of *About Campus*:

Findings from our 2003 pilot survey of 3,680 third-year undergraduates attending forty-six institutions across the country suggest that although students express a high level of interest in spiritual matters, colleges and universities appear to be doing little either to help students explore such issues or to support their search in the realm of values and beliefs. For example, more than half of the students who completed the pilot survey said that their professors “never” provide opportunities to discuss the meaning and purpose of life. Similarly, nearly two-thirds said that their professors “never” encourage discussion of religious or spiritual matters. While 39 percent indicated that their religious or spiritual beliefs have been strengthened by new ideas encountered in class, 53 percent reported that their classroom experiences have had no impact on these beliefs. Overall, nearly half of the college juniors who completed the pilot survey reported dissatisfaction with how their college experience has provided opportunities for religious or spiritual reflection. (pp. 10-11)

This research pointed to the majority of the institutions’ failure to provide an education that connected the interior and exterior aspects of students’ lives. Some college and university curricula and pedagogies clearly have not integrated course content with student values and spiritual development.

In her article, Lindholm (2007) also provided student participant constructs of spirituality. Additional interviews with second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduates revealed that most often expressed their concepts of spirituality as the “ultimate beliefs” or “morals” of people, as well as “philosophy of life, [a core] part of who you are, and the values that you live by” (p. 12). Significantly, a majority of students viewed religion and spirituality to be highly different:

Regardless of their religious faith or lack thereof, students tended to view spirituality as an integral, “everyday” part of one’s life that encompasses
―emotional feelings‖ and an ―individual connection‖ to ―an intangible something larger than yourself.‖ On the other hand, students commonly perceived religion as focusing more on ―group concerns‖ and ―doctrinal points‖ and involving a place of worship where people may go on a regular or occasional basis. (p. 12)

Student conceptions of spirituality being an ―everyday‖ experience connected to "emotional feelings" and “an intangible something larger than yourself” suggest their innate understanding of what some would say is the holistic nature of being human (Dalai Lama, 2008; Oldenski & Carlson, 2002; Palmer, 2004). In addition, student comprehension of the differences between the constructs of spirituality and religion may somewhat ease institutional and faculty concerns around integrating spiritual content into secular curricula.

The document, Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience, published by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and American College Personnel Association (ACPA) in 2004, defines student spiritual development as a meaning making process:

Spiritual development, also described as spiritual intelligence, is currently understood as the process of perceiving and creating a wider sense of meaning and purpose and finding patterns in one’s understanding of the universe. It does not require religious belief or affiliation, though religion provides the structure and frame of reference through which some students experience and express their spiritual development. (p. 15)

This publication further states that students should have the opportunities to make meaning in their lives through different, yet connected domains of learning. These domains include academic, social, and institutional contexts.

Contemplative Education in the Academy

Focusing on the academic context, is it possible to create learning environments that connect course content with students’ quest for meaning in the 21st century academy?
At the heart of the schism between academic learning and spiritual development are curriculum and pedagogy designed primarily to train the rational mind rather than educate the whole person (Astin, 2004; Miller, 1994; Zajonc, 2003). Elaine Riley (2002), Assistant Professor of Instructional Leadership at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, discusses the fragmented nature of viewing curriculum according to a Cartesian epistemology:

Through Cartesian method, the rational mind has become a “subject” in juxtaposition to that which is not of mind, an “object” existing as separate from, indeed, “other.” In a similar way, separation of mind from body, mind from emotion, and mind from spirit has been transferred from its broad cultural use into the specific ways that we regard education and curriculum. (pp. 105-106)

Although a Cartesian model of curriculum development will not suffice in the education of the whole person, there are other ways to integrate the body, mind, heart, and spirit into learning within contemporary academic courses.

A field of inquiry and practice called contemplative education, or contemplative studies is developing in a significant number of college and university programs and initiatives throughout North America. Harold Roth (2009), Professor of Religious Studies and East Asian Studies and Director of Contemplative Studies at Brown University, offers a descriptive roster of the characteristics of contemplative studies as an emergent academic field:

1. Studying the underlying philosophy, psychology, and phenomenology of human contemplative experience.

2. Focusing on the many ways human beings have found, across cultures and across time, to concentrate, broaden and deepen conscious awareness as the gateway to cultivating their full potential and to leading more meaningful, ethically responsible, and personally fulfilling lives.
3. Attempting to:
   a. identify the varieties of contemplative experiences of which human beings are capable;
   b. find meaningful scientific explanations for them;
   c. cultivate first-person knowledge of them;
   d. critically assess their nature and significance. (pp. 2-3)

An enhanced attentiveness to and awareness of oneself and one’s environment in the present moment is a contemplative experience. Human contemplative experiences can be cultivated and deepened through a variety of contemplative practices.

“A contemplative practice is any act, habitually entered into with your whole heart, as a way of awakening, deepening, and sustaining a contemplative experience of the inherent holiness of the present moment” (Finley, 2000, p. 46). Among widely recognized practices are mindfulness meditation, contemplative reading, contemplative writing, and resting in silence (Kahane, 2009; Kirsch, 2009; Nelson, 2006; O’Reilley, 1993; Zajonc, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). “An operational definition of mindfulness meditation is paying attention on purpose in the present moment, nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2006, p.160). Such practices as the contemplative visual and performing arts, aikido, t’ai chi, qigong, yoga, and walking the labyrinth can facilitate embodied awareness of human contemplative experience (Artress, 2006; Bass & Jacob, 2004; Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, & Schure; Dilley, 2006; Hay, 2000; Haynes, 2003; Loori, 2004; Murray, 2006; “Teacher’s Wisdom,” 2009; Worley, 2001). “The Tree of Contemplative Practices” (n.d.) presents a vivid display of an abundant variety of contemplative practices (see Appendix A). The many practices that are visually portrayed are representative of the diverse ways humans can access and sustain contemplative experiences.
According to Arthur Zajonc (2006a), the Andrew Mellon Professor of Physics and Interdisciplinary Studies at Amherst College and Director of the Academic Program of the Center for Contemplative Mind, contemplative practice is a powerful way to develop and transform human consciousness:

Contemplative practice works on the human psyche to shape attention into a far suppler instrument, one that can appreciate a wide range of worldviews and even sustain the paradoxes of life, ultimately drawing life’s complexity into a gentle, non-judgmental awareness. (p. 2)

The ability to formulate thoughtful responses to the inner and outer complexities of human existence in the 21st century is vital. Therefore, the cultivation of a contemplative epistemology appears paramount to human acceptance and awareness of an interdependent and evolving global coexistence between diverse cultures and environments.

Brown University and Emory University have launched initiatives in contemplative studies; and the Program in Creativity and Consciousness Studies at the University of Michigan has developed interdisciplinary approaches to research, curricula, and pedagogies. The Program in Creativity and Consciousness website presents a summary of contemplative strategies that have been integrated into coursework at numerous colleges and universities:

The Contemplative Practice Fellowship program of the American Council of Learned Societies, launched in 1997, has supported coursework to integrate meditation and a range of contemplative modalities at over 80 institutions—including Amherst, Vassar, Brown, Smith, Wellesley, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, Bryn Mawr, Michigan, UMass, and UC Berkeley—might be noted as a landmark development along these lines. Extending from this initiative is an expanded epistemological continuum that includes silent meditation, contemplative approaches to reading, writing, movement, nature awareness practices, and creativity in and beyond the arts. When integrated with community engagement, diversity studies, and rigorous intellectual engagement across a variety of fields,
this continuum is unique in bridging interior and exterior engagement. (“Program in creativity & consciousness studies,” n.d.)

Brown and Emory have extended their contemplative studies continua into their medical schools. At Brown, medical students can select contemplative studies as an elective concentration which provides additional focused perspectives and practices in their training (Roth, 2009). Faculty from the medical school and graduate division of religion at Emory, in partnership with Drepung Loseling Monastery, combine “scientific and humanistic research to measure and assess contemplative practices in relation to preventive healthcare” (“Contemplative studies,” n.d.).

As contemplative education initiatives are just beginning in the 21st century academy, Naropa University continues its tradition of providing a contemplative liberal arts education to its community of learners:

Naropa University has offered mission-based contemplative education to both undergraduate and graduate students for more than thirty years. Informed by ancient Eastern educational philosophies, contemplative education at Naropa experiments with another way of knowing through its joining of rigorous liberal arts training and the disciplined training of the heart. Transcending the belief that knowledge arises in the thinking mind only, this educational philosophy invites students to embrace the immediacy of their interior lives as a means for fully integrating what they learn. (“About Naropa,” 2009)

At Naropa, contemplative views and practices permeate academic, social, and institutional domains of learning. Students, faculty and staff create meaning through and across these interconnected contexts.

The integration of contemplative education into academic, social, and institutional contexts creates possibilities for mindful learning across campus communities. According to Ellen Langer (1997), Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, mindful learning
develops the ability to regard ideas and experiences with openness, from multiple perspectives:

When we are mindful, we implicitly or explicitly (1) view a situation from several perspectives, (2) see information presented in the situation as novel, (3) attend to the context in which we are perceiving the information, and eventually (4) create new categories through which this may be understood. (p. 111)

In contemplating an issue of complexity, the mindful learner realizes there are many ways to comprehend the situation. Through contextual analysis and reflective awareness, a mindful approach to problem solving may widen the arena of potential and effective solutions.

The mindful learner is similar to what David Levine (2006), the Peter B. Ritzma Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, calls the reflective liberal self:

What I am calling the reflective liberal self confronts the world by embodying a point of view with which to investigate the given objects of the prehended world and to express considered as well as authentic responses to them. It expresses not just an independent standpoint but emanates from a center that itself is continuously evolving. Both thinking and acting presuppose a certain amount of understanding but never absolute and total foreknowledge. The twin impediments to a reflective liberal self are the rush to closure and fixity, owing to insecurity about continuous change, and the flight from commitment to what a given situation evidently calls for. (p. 209)

When the mindful learner or the reflective liberal self encounters a complicated challenge, the path to a solution is not a linear one, but rather a multidimensional and flexible process. While regarding a paradoxical situation, the mindful problem solver is capable of committing to taking the necessary time for resolution, rather than rushing toward a quick fix.
President of Harvard University, Drew Gilpin Faust, recently articulated her concerns about the brevity of attention span and the importance of focused reflection on complex concepts in a televised interview:

Well, I worry about attention span, because people will not listen to more than a couple of sentences or read more than a couple of sentences. Does everything have to be a sound bite? Is everything to be digested into something brief? And aren’t there complicated ideas that we ought to have the patience to give our attention to? . . . Do we sit back and think about things hard or do we always have to go to the next sound bite, the next stimulus? (Rose, 2009)

The rush toward a tidy solution to a difficult problem may be expedient, but not necessarily appropriate, nor effective. An ambiguous challenge requires sustained attentiveness and a willingness to step back and stay present to the situation. Contemplative practice provides pathways for focusing and sustaining attention, as well as cultivating openness to viewing situations from a variety of perspectives.

As students engage in learning experiences that shift their perspectives, the changes in their psychological, social, and philosophical assumptions may be disorienting. Contemplative education, within campus communities, can provide liminal or threshold environments for the integration of emergent views and transformative growth. Thus, contemplative learning and transformative learning can be complementary processes. Jack Mezirow (2000), Professor Emeritus of Adult and Continuing Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, describes transformative learning as a multidimensional process of interpreting experience:

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (pp. 7-8)
Contemplative practices can create awareness of habits and patterns of interaction that are not serving an individual or group well. The contemplative mind can regard multiple perspectives without judgment. This nonjudgmental witnessing can relieve anxiety and encourage risk taking throughout the transformative learning process.

**Studies of Contemplative Education in the Academy**

Although there has been notable discussion about postsecondary courses and initiatives that incorporate contemplative views and practices in the literature (Altobello, 2007; Brown, 1998, 2002; Burggraf & Grossenbacher, 2007; Hart, 2004; Hill, Herndon, & Karpinska, 2006; Holland, 2006; Kahane, 2009; Miller, 1994; Nelson, 2006; Rockefeller, 2006; Roth, 2006, 2009; Sarath, 2006; Thurman, 2006; Zajonc, 2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2009), there have been few studies of contemplative curricula and pedagogy in higher education. However, Maia Duerr, Principal at Five Directions Consulting; Arthur Zajonc; and Diane Dana, Operations and Program Manager at Zing Foundation, and former Research Assistant at Wellesley Center for Women, Wellesley College (2003) did report on a comprehensive investigation of programs within the academy, that integrated transformative and spiritual dimensions:

The purpose of this study was to document academic programs and other initiatives in North American universities and colleges that incorporate transformative and spiritual elements of learning to gauge the prevalence and character of these practices in higher education. An additional goal was to identify strategies that would support the development of this movement. We were particularly interested in identifying programs and initiatives in mainstream educational institutions, where these practices have been absent or devalued. The survey was conducted by researchers from the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society and Community for Integrative Learning and Action (CILA), with support from the Fetzer Institute. (p. 178)
The findings pointed to the need for studies to support the pedagogical efforts of the respondents. In particular, the participants wanted to learn about students’ experiences “of the transformative/spiritual classroom” (p. 209). Faculty participants also expressed significant interest in developing “their understanding of transformation and contemplation in higher education,” primarily through research and secondarily, through “faculty retreats and renewal” (p. 209).

A student’s perceptions of his phenomenological studies of his teaching practice in the East New York section of Brooklyn were featured in the article, “Descriptive Inquiry as Contemplative Practice,” in the September 2006 issue of Teachers College Record. Authors Kathleen Kesson, Professor of Urban Childhood Education, and Cecelia Traugh, Dean of the School of Education, at the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University, described the theory and practice of the “Descriptive Review,” as it was offered and implemented in the University’s graduate teacher preparation programs. In addition, they provided an analysis of a student’s “narrative of practice.” The narrative was the work of fellow author, Felix Perez III, an alumnus of the University’s undergraduate Urban Childhood teacher education program and graduate program in Literacy Education.

Kesson and Traugh (2006) presented Descriptive Review as a rigorous, contemplative approach to teacher education, designed to both transform and support students’ educational journeys in urban schools:

In our redesigned teacher preparation program at the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University, three courses in Descriptive Review are at the heart of our graduate program, and one such course is required of undergraduates. The intention of this inquiry-oriented restructuring is to educate teachers to be more mindful of what is happening in the classroom on cognitive, emotional, and social
levels, to learn to set aside their biases and assumptions in order to see the child in all his or her complexity, and to gain confidence in their own abilities to construct pedagogic knowledge. (pp. 1869-1870)

Kesson and Traugh indicated that they and other faculty in the Department of Teaching and Learning were in the process of conducting longitudinal research of undergraduate and graduate alumni of the teacher preparation programs to assess the long term impact of this type of teacher education.

In the conclusions section of this article, Kesson and Traugh (2006) voiced concern about asking student teachers to thoughtfully observe their habitual assumptions, as well as their school children’s lived experiences in challenging and sometimes, onerous learning environments. Yet, many of the students managed to mindfully engage in day-to-day teaching in urban settings and their narratives, according to the authors, revealed significant transformative understanding of themselves and their school communities. Kesson and Traugh described their students as being courageously open and present to their instructional circumstances and phenomenological processes. “[Our students] have become contemplative in the sense that contemplation is a state of being in which one is fully present and attuned to the world, bracketing thinking, judging, and analyzing, while trying to see clearly” (p. 1879).

Related to the investigation of contemplative and transformative elements in learning within and through the academy, Shauna L. Shapiro, Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology at Santa Clara University; Kirk Warren Brown, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University; and John A. Astin, Co-Director of the Mind-Body Medicine Research Group at California Pacific Medical Center (2008) prepared a review of research concerning “the significant effects of
meditation on education-related variables” (p. 9). They provided the following definition of meditation:

“Meditation,” as the word is used in this paper, is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of practices such as mindfulness meditation and Zen meditation (also called “zazen”). While techniques may differ, all types of meditation share the common goal of training an individual’s attention and awareness so that consciousness becomes more finely attuned to events and experiences in the present. (pp. 6-7)

The paper suggested that, based on empirical evidence, meditation may enhance academic and cognitive performance, as well as facilitate the reduction of academic-related stress and development of the “whole person.”

Shapiro, Brown, and Austin (2008) summarized their key findings under three categories:

**Cognitive and Academic Performance**

- Mindfulness meditation may improve ability to maintain preparedness and orient attention.
- Mindfulness meditation may improve ability to process information quickly and accurately.
- Concentration-based meditation, practiced over a long-term, may have a positive impact on academic achievement.

**Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being**

- Mindfulness meditation may decrease stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Mindfulness meditation supports better regulation of emotional reactions and the cultivation of positive psychological states.

**Development of the Whole Person**

- Meditation can support the development of creativity.
- Meditation supports and enhances the development of skills needed for interpersonal relationships.
• Empathetic responses are increased with meditation and mindfulness practices.
• Meditation may help to cultivate self-compassion. ("Key Research Findings")

The authors not only clearly articulated the potential benefits of meditation for higher education, but also offered thoughtful recommendations for future studies of meditation in educational settings.

Of particular pertinence to schools considering the integration of meditation into courses or programs was the section on best practices. Shapiro, Brown, and Astin’s (2008) review raised such important questions as: how might meditation best be integrated into curricula; should students be screened prior to instruction; and what should the qualifications be for teachers of meditation?

Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003), founding Executive Director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society and Professor Emeritus of Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, definitively has advocated for teachers of meditation to also be practitioners of meditation. Kabat-Zinn has further argued that teachers cannot provide meaningful, valid instruction without a committed, ongoing meditation practice:

Mindfulness meditation is not simply a method that one encounters for a brief time at a professional seminar and then passes on to others for use as needed when they find themselves tense or stressed. . . .It is both the work of a lifetime and, paradoxically, the work of no time at all—because its field is always this present moment in its fullness. This paradox can be understood and embodied only through sustained personal practice over days, weeks, months, and years. (p. 149)

It is Kabat-Zinn’s view that students can perceive the lack of authenticity and relevance in the instruction provided by a teacher who is not a regular practitioner of meditation.
At Brown University, Willoughby Britton (2009), Research Associate from the Department of Psychiatry in the Warren Alpert School of Medicine, conducted a study with student volunteers enrolled in two courses where they engaged in contemplative practices. Harold Roth (2009) taught Religious Studies 0500, “The Theory and Practice of Buddhist Meditation,” during the first semester, and “An Introduction to Contemplative Studies” during the second semester:

Each course featured a curriculum that included one 140 minute seminar weekly and three 50 minute meditation sessions per week. Each session was divided into 15 minutes of yoga, 25 minutes of meditation, and 10 minutes of discussion and journaling. Britton’s study (as cited in Roth, 2009)

Britton administered the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, the Five Factor Mindfulness Scale, and the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire to the study participants during each semester.

In her preliminary findings, Britton (2009) made the following observations:

Participation in these two courses and the associated meditation labs was associated with significant decreases in clinical symptoms, notably depression and anxiety. Class participation was also associated with significant increases in a multifaceted construct called mindfulness which includes enhanced clarity and maintenance of attention, and emotional non-reactivity. Decreases in clinical symptoms, particularly depression, were highly correlated with increases in mindfulness scores over the semester. Britton’s study (as cited in Roth, 2009)

Britton’s summary and Shapiro, Brown, and Astin’s (2008) review suggest that the practice of meditation correlates with several beneficial academic and psychological factors related to student learning and functioning in the academy.

Although not a study, John Miller’s (1994) presentation of themes from his students’ journal writings about their meditation practices is noteworthy. As Professor in the Centre for Teacher Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of
the University of Toronto, Miller has taught meditation as a part of his course, entitled “The Holistic Curriculum,” since 1988. The five themes he uncovered were described as follows:

- One theme for many students is that meditation practice provides them with the permission to be alone and to enjoy their own company.
- A second theme that emerges is that many students feel they become better listeners through meditation.
- Related to listening, a third theme that emerges is that people are able to witness their own lives from a larger perspective.
- A fourth theme that arises is that meditation can happen spontaneously in one’s daily life.
- A fifth theme that occurs is the developing sense of interrelatedness and connectedness. (pp. 127-129).

These themes share several characteristics with Britton’s (2009) preliminary findings, as well as with Shapiro, Brown, and Astin’s (2008) key findings.

Associate Professor of Contemplative Psychology and Faculty Director of the Center for the Advancement of Contemplative Education at Naropa University, Susan Burggraf (2009), also uncovered thematic connections within her study-in-progress, entitled Taxonomy of Contemplative Education at Naropa University. Burggraf conducted forty-two interviews with faculty in regard to their definitions of and approaches to contemplative education. In consultation with six focus groups of Naropa faculty, she developed themes from the transcribed interviews and then organized the themes into a taxonomy of contemplative education. In her initial written presentation of the taxonomy, Burggraf stated, that with some exceptions, contemplative approaches at Naropa “transcend disciplinary boundaries” (p. 1).
Purpose of this Study and Research Questions

Attuning the human sensory apparatus and breathing patterns to the present moment is a process that is familiar to those who meditate and those who study and prepare for performance. The findings of David M. Klein’s (1995) dissertation, *Trance and Acting: A Theoretical Comparative Study of Acting and Altered States of Consciousness and a Survey of the Implications in Current Actor Training and Craft*, suggested “a similarity between practical techniques of meditation and techniques utilized in actor training and craft” (p. 199).

Klein’s (1995) comprehensive study also pointed to the potential benefits of meditation to actor training and performance:

[Meditation] involves the stilling of the mind, which results in a new way of perceiving reality known as the Satori state. Though meditation is an introspective process, Satori involves full participation with the environment. . . .Experiential hallmarks of this state, including heightened awareness, concentration, spontaneity, receptiveness, stillness, deautomatization, self-forgetfulness, and nonattachment are all qualities sought by the actor as well. Because meditation is a method of achieving these qualities, it may benefit the actor to learn meditational techniques. (p. 199)

As a lifelong theatre artist and educator, as well as practitioner of a variety of meditative techniques, I was interested in the potential impact of contemplative practices on acting, vocal, and movement training in college and university performing arts departments. Could contemplative education enhance and even transform training in the academy?

The first aim of this study was to investigate how contemplative education would impact the development of communication skills in students of a conservatory style performing arts program. *Communication abilities* were defined as a dimension that included *interpersonal intelligence* and *intrapersonal intelligence*. Interpersonal
intelligence involves the “ability to understand and interact well with others” and intrapersonal intelligence has to do with the “ability to understand and use one’s thoughts, feelings, preferences, and interests” (Moran, Kornbacher, & Gardner, 2006, p. 25). Performers who have high interpersonal intelligence are more likely to approach the creation, rehearsal, and performance of a body of work as an ensemble. In theatre parlance, an ensemble is a group of performers, designers, and production staff members who intentionally develop a body of work as a unified entity, rather than as isolated individuals.

In the article, “Higher Education: Generation Gap,” by Julie York Coppens (2008), David Barker, M.F.A. Performance Coordinator at Arizona State University, voiced considerable concern, via a telephone interview, regarding contemporary acting and movement students’ lack of communication abilities:

The explosive kind of information world we’re in now—I think has worked to the detriment of this generation, because it has produced a young person who’s much more disconnected emotionally and much more distanced from empathy with the human condition. I teach acting and movement, and I find students are much less capable at placing themselves within the imaginary circumstances of a particular script, or bringing themselves into an emotional life that’s required by the playwright. I believe that’s because they stay in touch with each other via e-mail and texting and cell phones, which is a great way to share information, but is devoid of human contact... There is a decrease in the ability to communicate on a deeper, human, more sensitive level. It takes longer these days, even at the graduate level, to get to a place where they’re completely open. (p. 35)

When an actor can connect her inner world to the life of a character within a script, she has started the process of becoming present to the imaginary world of the play. Without the ability to access that connection, the actor cannot develop presence in performance.

The second aim of this inquiry was to study how contemplative education would influence the development of presence in students of a conservatory style performing arts
program. *Presence-in-performance* was defined as a moment-to-moment authenticity and vibrancy created by a performing artist onstage, or in the studio, and palpably perceived by other performers and audience members.

In *Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines*, Anna Deavere Smith (2000), Playwright, Actor, and Professor of Performance Studies at New York University, described the nature of presence, as she experienced it during a performance by operatic singer, Jessye Norman, in a Parisian concert hall:

> Presence is that quality that makes you feel as though you’re standing right next to the actor, no matter where you’re sitting in the theater. It’s the feeling you have that the performer is right in front of you, speaking to you and only you. It’s that wonderful moment when Jessye Norman sings in a quiet, so quiet you can hear a pin drop concert hall to an audience that is attentive like no other. It’s a moment when she seems to be singing as she’s never sung, and the audience seem to be listening as they’ve never listened. It’s the moment when it’s clear that everyone is there for the same reason. It’s not that frenzied desire for the diva, but a sudden calm that hits the hall, like it did one performance I saw in Paris, where they love her so much they named an orchid after her. (p. 9)

Smith continued her discussion of presence by positing that presence may be a state facilitated by both the performer and audience members. The occurrence of presence can unify an audience through a mutual experience of engagement. Presence in performance can create a sense of unity between performer and spectator, as well as between members of the audience.

Throughout this vastly interconnected world, audience members are increasingly diverse. In performing arts departments and conservatories, students need to prepare to perform for and interact with populations from a wide variety of heritages and cultures. Therefore, the third aim of this study was to investigate the effects of contemplative education on students’ sociolinguistic perspectives in a conservatory style performing arts
program. *Sociolinguistic perspectives* were defined as the interpretation of reality according to cultural assumptions, social norms, and ideological points of view (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Would contemplative education transform students’ sociolinguistic perspectives throughout their course of study?

Closely related to the sociolinguistic perspectives of a performer-in-training are his aesthetic preferences and choices. Aesthetic perspectives develop through a performer’s discoveries in the classroom, rehearsal studio, and production performances. Thus, the fourth aim of this inquiry was to study the impact of contemplative education on students’ aesthetic perspectives in a conservatory style performing arts program. *Aesthetic perspectives* were defined as “aesthetic signatures: the specific artistic manifestations that occur as artists develop their collections of work, producing aesthetic consistencies that profoundly speak of their individual experiences of self” (Press, 2002, p. 207).

The fifth aim of this study was to describe, interpret, and appraise the relationship between contemplative education and the intended and operational curricula of courses within a conservatory style performing arts program. The intended curriculum is the planned course of study, whereas the operational curriculum is the unfolding series of events and interactions that take place within a learning environment (Eisner, 1994b). How would faculty, as educators and artists, perceive the effects of contemplative view and practice on their disciplinary curricula, as well as students’ development as performing artists?

At Naropa University, in cooperation with Academic Affairs and the Performing Arts Department, I was most fortunate to have the opportunity to conduct a qualitative
study of the relationship between contemplative education and an innovative performing arts program. The Master of Fine Arts in Theater: Contemporary Performance is the first graduate program in North America to integrate contemplative education with interdisciplinary, conservatory level training in the performing arts. The program provides opportunities for graduate students to perform in canonical as well as original works of theatre and dance:

Naropa University’s MFA Theater: Contemporary Performance Program, founded in 2004, and Chaired by Wendell Beavers, focuses on the creation of original work and critical re-digesting of the theater and dance canon. Dance, physical acting, extended vocal techniques, experimental music forms, and contemporary forms of writing for theater including self-scripting and found text are all applied in the creation of work within the program. The MFA features substantial curriculum involvement by a number of internationally significant associated artists. The program is pioneering the definition and role of “co-curriculum” in its training of contemporary performance artists, theorists and teachers. Co-curriculum, or the shared creation of performance and pedagogical work between students, faculty and an international community of artists, has taken the form of a number of experimental collaborations since the program’s inception in 2004. These have included: projects with Anne Bogart’s SITI Company, Meredith Monk and The House, Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project, Katsura Kan (Butoh artist and Master Teacher); and numerous public workshop presentations by Naropa faculty and MFA students. (Trojan Women, 2009)

In addition to observing classes and interviewing faculty and students within the program, I also viewed numerous original and collaborative works created by students, as well as by students and faculty. Like in many conservatory style performing arts programs, the students integrated their class sessions with ongoing rehearsals and production work. Unlike most performing arts programs, students meditated during scheduled class times and regularly, in private practice.

With the understanding that the findings of this study would be specific to the culture of Naropa’s MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program, it was our
intention that they could be of utility to educators interested in the investigation and
cultivation of contemplative and transformative curricula and pedagogy in higher
education. Thus, the sixth aim of this inquiry was to offer this research to performing arts
departments and postsecondary institutions interested in the development of
contemplative units of study, courses, concentrations, and/or initiatives.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do faculty and students characterize contemplative education within
   the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program?

2. How does contemplative education impact the intended and operational
   curricula of courses within the MFA Contemporary Performance
   Program?

3. How do graduate students perceive the effects of contemplative education,
   offered by the MFA Contemporary Performance Program, on the
   development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance,
   sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives?

The impetus of the study was not necessarily to promote interdisciplinary
curricula and pedagogies, but rather to investigate an approach to teaching and learning
that integrated the body, mind, heart, and spirit. Spiritual Teacher and Philosopher, Jiddu
Krishnamurti (1953), stated that the purpose of education is to awaken the intelligence of
the whole person:

The function of education is to create human beings who are integrated and
therefore intelligent. We may take degrees and be mechanically efficient without
being intelligent. Intelligence is not mere information; it is not derived from
books, nor does it consist of clever self-defensive responses and aggressive
assertions. One who has not studied may be more intelligent than the learned. We
have made examinations and degrees the criterion of intelligence and have
developed cunning minds that avoid vital human issues. Intelligence is the
capacity to perceive the essential, the what is; and to awaken this capacity, in
oneself and in others, is education. (p. 14)
An integrated way of knowing and being is essential for the thoughtful leadership that is required in our 21st century world, from foreign policy to economic planning, from health care to environmental initiatives, from artistic innovation to alternative forms of conflict resolution. In our view, educators and students who are privileged with membership in the academy are particularly called to awaken for participation in an extraordinarily complex, interdependent global community.
Chapter Two: Training the Mindful Performer

Synchronizing mind and body is not a concept or a random technique someone thought up for self-improvement. Rather, it is a basic principle of how to be a human being and how to use your sense perceptions, your mind and your body together.
---Chogyam Trungpa (1988), *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the Buddhist mindfulness/awareness practices and Shambhala Training that inform the contemplative arts tradition at Naropa University. Also, selected approaches to and dimensions of performance and physical theatre have been included to explicate the interdisciplinary and somatic-based nature of training offered by the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program.

Cultivating Mindfulness and Awareness

Novelist, Essayist, and Philosopher, Aldous Huxley (1992), posited that although an individual needs the “personal, conscious self,” one’s sole identification with this self *eclipses* the power and creativity of a “deeper and wider self:”

We have to learn, so to speak, to get out of our own light, because with our personal self – this idolatrously worshiped self – we are continually standing in the light of this wider self – this not-self, if you like – which is associated with us and which this standing in the light prevents. We eclipse the illumination from within. And in all the activities of life, from the simplest physical activities to the highest intellectual and spiritual activities, our whole effort must be to get out of our own light. (pp. 54-55)

So, the essential question becomes how can a person allow the personal self to rest, as she steps into the light of her authentic nature—her expanded self?
Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Master, Scholar/Teacher, and Founder of Naropa University, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1993), stated that in order to realize the authentic self, a human being needs to transform the preoccupation with the personal self into an empathetic understanding of and compassionate action toward all sentient beings:

The basic mahayana vision is to work for the benefit of others and create a situation that will benefit others. Therefore, you take the attitude that you are willing to dedicate yourself to others. When you take that attitude, you begin to realize that others are more important than yourself. Because of that vision of mahayana, because you adopt that attitude, and because you actually find that others are more important—with all three of these together, you develop the mahayana practice of training the mind. (p. 1)

According to the teachings of Chogyam Trungpa, the Mahayana Buddhist process of training the mind is a way for one to recognize and appreciate the illumination of the expanded self. The process of training the mind ideally leads to an awakening to the true nature of oneself and the perceived world.

Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, Daniel Vokey (2008), discussed the Mahayana training of the mind as a three-part educational process, which begins with students’ attentive listening to Buddhist teachings; continues with their contemplation of perceptions about the nature of nonduality and interdependent existence; and concludes with the practice of meditation:

Through the Mahayana path, hearing is properly followed by contemplating---in this case, critically investigating both accounts of and arguments for nonduality through one or more of (1) individual study and reflection, (2) group discussion and debate, and (3) question-and-answer sessions with a trustworthy teacher. The task of contemplation is to examine what we have heard thoroughly until we are confident both that we understand “the view” of interdependence-emptiness correctly and that it holds up under dialectical cross-examination. In other words, this process is not complete until we can explain and defend to our own complete satisfaction the arguments that undermine naïve belief in the independent existence of self and other. (p. 302)
According to Vokey, the process of contemplating the teachings is not one of blind acceptance, but rather of rigorous, critical thinking. It is also important, in Mahayana Buddhist view, to move beyond intellectual understanding of concepts to the direct experience of meditative practice.

In the introduction to the *Naropa University Self-Study Report* (2009-2010), the educational process articulated by Vokey (2008), is similarly defined as “the three *prajnas* or levels of knowing” (p. 3). However, the Naropa report referred to all three levels as the inclusive term, *contemplative pedagogy*, or *contemplative learning*:

When one is presented with material, step one—hearing—is to approach the material with an open and precise mind, attending closely and without bias to what is being presented. The second step—contemplating—involves re-visiting the material through analysis, discussion, debate, and interaction from the perspective of one’s own personal experience. In this step, the learning becomes more personal. The final step—meditating—Involves a process of letting go of conceptual or categorical thinking, which cultivates greater awareness, openness, and self-knowledge. (p.3)

*Contemplative learning* varies within the intended and operational curricula of different departments at Naropa (see chapter one, section four for definitions of intended and operational curriculum). However, as Susan Burggraf (2009) suggested in her taxonomy of contemplative education, *contemplative pedagogy* is present throughout diverse disciplines (see chapter one, section two).

In *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, Chogyam Trungpa (1988) described the level of knowing, meditation, as one that is synchronized between the body and the mind of the practitioner:

The practice of meditation is very precise. It has to be on the dot, right on the dot. It is quite hard work, but if you remember the importance of your posture, that will allow you to synchronize your mind and body. If you don’t have a good posture, your practice will be like a lame horse trying to pull a cart. It will never
work. So first you sit down and assume your posture, then you work with your breath; tshoo, go out, come back to your posture; tshoo. When thoughts arise, you label them “thinking” and come back to your posture, back to your breath. You have mind working with breath, but you always maintain body as a reference point. You are not working with your mind alone. You are working with your mind and your body, and when the two work together, you never leave reality. (pp. 40-41)

Sitting meditation, as so eloquently expressed by Chogyam Trungpa, is a powerful way for a human being to experience mindfulness, in solitude, or in community with others.

Jeremy and Karen Hayward (1998), former students and close associates of Chogyam Trungpa, discussed how the practice of mindfulness creates a sense of synergy between the mind and body, as well as trust in the efficacy of the process:

When you are mindful, you are here, actually living your life, and your mind and body function harmoniously together. Practice itself develops trust in the effectiveness of practice. Gradually, a “residue of mindfulness” develops naturally in you, a general atmosphere of mindfulness in which you need not struggle. Your mind can appreciate resting in mindfulness, almost naively, and you become familiar with the sense of being present. (p. 94)

A continued practice of mindfulness breaks conditioned patterns of response to thoughts and circumstances; and instead, opens spacious awareness of creative possibilities and options that arise in the present moment.

In a clear way, Hayward and Hayward (1998) explained that mindfulness, or shamatha, and awareness, or vipashyana, are complementary practices:

As you continue to practice mindfulness, both in sitting practice and in daily life; your practice expands to include awareness of the outer environment as well as the inner environment of your thoughts and emotions. The distinction between mindfulness and awareness comes from the Buddhist tradition of practice. The Sanskrit word for mindfulness is shamatha, which literally means “development of peace” but is sometimes used to mean “taming the mind.” The Sanskrit word for awareness is vipashayana, which can also be translated as “insight.” Mindfulness is the attention to detail and settling of mind. Awareness in the more global sense of space, openness, and clarity that develops out of mindfulness as your practice strengthens. (pp. 94-95)
In Buddhist view, the combined practices of mindfulness and awareness lead to perceiving oneself and interactions with others not only with receptivity, but also with discernment (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). This expanded, yet discerning perception can develop the ability to make choices with equanimity and positivity (Zajonc, 2009).

Arthur Zajonc (2009) defined positivity as a loving way of acknowledging the inner goodness of every human being, no matter how despicable his actions may be. In Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry, Zajonc presented the Dalai Lama’s attitude toward the Chinese invaders of his country, Tibet, as one of positivity:

The Dalai Lama sought to see something positive in those who persecuted him and his people. In every situation, no matter how dire, there is something worthy of the human being. Can we find it and then attend to it instead of the negative alone? This does not mean we should call good bad and bad good. We see with clear and steady eyes the injustices being done and may act to oppose them, but the unjust act does not blind us to the hidden good within each and every person. We hold up the noble dimension within the adversary and attempt to work with it. It is a faithfulness to the highest within each of us. (p. 77)

So, ideally, the cultivation of mindfulness and awareness is a process of building qualities of positivity and faithfulness, even under the most difficult of circumstances. In the view of the Dalai Lama, the mindfully aware person has the choice to recognize and confront negativity, without demonizing the perpetrator of injustice.

In The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions, Shauna L. Shapiro, Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology at Santa Clara University and Linda E. Carlson, the Enbridge Endowed Research Chair in Psychosocial Oncology at the University of Calgary (2009), defined mindfulness awareness as “big M mindfulness” (p. 4). In their view, mindfulness
awareness is an open and accepting way of experiencing conditions and situations as they arise, in the present moment:

Mindfulness awareness is fundamentally a way of being—a way of inhabiting one’s body, one’s mind, one’s moment-by-moment experience. It is a natural human capacity. It is a deep awareness; a knowing and experiencing of life as it arises and passes away each moment. Mindful awareness is a way of relating to all experience—positive, negative, and neutral—in an open, receptive way. This awareness involves freedom from grasping and from wanting anything to be different. It simply knows and accepts what is here, now. Mindfulness is about seeing clearly without one’s conditioned patterns of perceiving clouding awareness, and without trying to frame things in a particular way. It is important to learn to see in this way because how a person perceives and frames the moment generates one’s reality. (p. 5)

The authors acknowledged Buddhist tradition for their concept of mindfulness; and expressed their intention to integrate mindful practice and mindful awareness into a Western medical and therapeutic context.

**Becoming a Warrior Artist-in-the-World**

Among the many important contributions that Chogyam Trungpa (1988) made to Western culture was the vision and transmission of Shambhala. One of the central premises of the Shambhala vision is training in warriorship. To become a warrior-in-the-world, one does not display aggression, but rather cultivates the attributes of fearlessness, gentleness, and bravery. In sensing and appreciating the basic goodness of his own nature and of the phenomenal world, the warrior encounters life with mindful awareness.

According to Tibetan tradition, Shambhala was an enlightened culture, where members of society lived by principles of warriorship and compassion.

The principles of Shambhala warriorship are linked with the Kingdom of Shambhala, which may or may not have actually existed (Trungpa, 1988). In Warrior-
King of Shambhala: Remembering Chogyam Trungpa, Acharya (Senior Teacher) of Shambhala Buddhism, Jeremy Hayward (2008), described the Kingdom of Shambhala:

The Kingdom of Shambhala is a mythological kingdom that is said to have existed at the time of the Buddha. Its reputation is known throughout Asia and as far north as Siberia. In Tibet it is said that the first king of Shambhala visited the Buddha and asked him for teachings that he and his subjects could put into practice without becoming monastics but continuing to pursue the householder’s life in the world. In response the Buddha taught the Kalachakra Tantra, the highest tantric teachings of Buddhism.

Some scholars believe that Shambhala may have actually existed on earth somewhere in the region of the southern Gobi desert, while others say that it only has mythological significance. Many Tibetan teachers say that the Kingdom of Shambhala exists as a Pure Land that is visible only to those who have sufficiently purified and awakened their own hearts and minds through the practice of meditation. And some accounts say that, though the Kingdom existed on earth for a period during the time of the Buddha, it eventually disappeared into a more subtle realm when all subjects reached a high stage of development in their spiritual path. (p. 8)

Chogyam Trungpa created Shambhala Training, from the Shambhala vision, as a secular path to develop warriorship in everyday life through meditation and other practices.

One of the primary practices taught through Shambhala Training is lungta, or raising windhorse. According to Chogyam Trungpa (1988), when one steps forth in bravery from a place of aggression and fear into the living windhorse energy, one becomes empowered to meet the challenges of everyday existence. In their text about Shambhala warriorship, Sacred World: The Shambhala Way to Gentleness, Bravery, and Power, Jeremy and Karen Hayward (1998) discussed the symbolic meaning of the terms, wind and horse:

The use of the term wind to symbolize universal living energy is common to many peoples throughout the world. Wind suggests forces that normally can be observed only by their effects, just as the physical world can be detected only by movement of trees or clouds; one cannot directly see the physical wind. Likewise,
one cannot perceive *chi*, or *wind*, directly, but one can certainly experience its effects.

The horse represents the fact that humans can ride on the energy of wind. This living energy is not merely an abstract philosophical idea or a sentimental religious belief but can be an actual experience available to all of us. The grace and power of the horse gave early peoples the ability to travel great distances; it was close as humans came to flying, before the airplane. (p. 144)

According to Hayward and Hayward, raising the energy of windhorse facilitates the creative process and the process of creating contemplative art raises windhorse.

Contemplative art is a way of approaching and practicing art or any human activity in a mindful or wholehearted manner (Hayward & Hayward, 1998; Trungpa, 2008). Hayward and Hayward outlined four foundational steps necessary to practicing any form of contemplative art:

1. *Preparation:* Choose and prepare the materials to be used and arrange the space you’ll be working in, pause and sit with your uncertain, blank mind without thought of how to proceed.

2. *Appreciation:* Extend your perceptions into the space with curiosity and inquisitiveness, and with a light playful touch, appreciate the details of whatever you’re working with.

3. *Execution:* Open your mind and heart, raise your windhorse and execute your art form, without self-consciousness or judgment.

4. *Ending properly:* Finish by letting go of your result and then cleaning up properly. (pp. 243-244).

The focus of contemplative artmaking is the active, moment-to-moment process of developing work.

Singer, Composer, and Creator of Interdisciplinary Performance, Meredith Monk (2005), expressed that creating art is a process that includes working with one’s fear:

Every time you make a piece, fear is always there and you’re always working with it, playing with it, allowing the interest and curiosity of what you’re making
to become more compelling than the anxiety. Then you’ve actually walked through the fear, and there’s a sense of discovery. (p. 468)

Thus, an artist or anyone who embarks on the voyage of creation needs to understand that the navigation of fear and curiosity are a part of the journey.

*Dharma art* is a concept, developed by Chogyam Trungpa (2008), which “refers to art that springs from a state of mind on the part of the artist that could be called the meditative state” (p. 1). According to Chogyam Trungpa, “in meditative art, the artist embodies the viewer as well as the creator of the works” (p. 1). This idea of concurrent embodiment is similar to the idea of *metaxis*, “the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of image” (Boal, 1995, p. 43).

In his Dharma Art teachings, Chogyam Trungpa (2008) also advocated that the artist should create work in a direct and nonjudgmental way:

> Our message is simply one of appreciating the nature of things as they are and expressing it without struggle of thoughts and fears. We give up aggression, both toward ourselves and others, that we have to make a special effort to impress people, and toward others, that we can put something over on them. (p. 2)

In Chogyam Trungpa’s view, the making of genuine art is a mindful and unselfconscious process that occurs in the present moment.

In recalling Chogyam Trungpa’s Dharma Art teachings, Meredith Monk (2005) reflected on how they have impacted her identity and work as an artist:

> Chogyam Trungpa pointed out that there is always something to keep in mind when you’re creating: “Is the work you’re making of benefit?” The Dharma Art teachings are very uplifting; they point out an awareness of the process itself and the relation between artmaking and practice. Artists develop a personal sense of discipline in the act of creating work, so in a sense the Dharma Art teachings verbalize and delineate something which is usually discovered instinctively. But the teachings are valuable for everyone to become aware of the elements that exist
in every moment of perception. I always think of myself, particularly in my
singing, as being a conduit of these fundamental energies. The teachings are a rich
reminder of why I became an artist in the first place. (pp. 467-468)

In our view, Meredith Monk is a warrior artist-in-the-world, who has mindfully created
work that is innovative and beneficial to herself and to her audiences.

A warrior artist-in-the-world moves through fear and self-consciousness to access
her imagination, as well as collective creativity, in the present moment. In this context,
imagination is viewed as the juxtaposition of different realities (Rose, 2008). As a
“conduit” of these realities, the warrior artist-in-the-world is empowered “to look at
things, to think about things as if they were otherwise” (Greene, 2001, p. 65).

Developing Presence in Performance

Authentic presence in performance requires an actor’s moment-to-moment
understanding and revealing of a character’s nature, as well as mindful communication
with fellow performers and the audience. It takes courage for a performer to become
vulnerable to and intimate with an audience. It also takes commitment for an actor to stay
present to the ever changing, exterior and interior qualities of the character he plays.

Theatre Innovator, Human Rights Activist, and Company Director of the Theatre
du Soleil, Ariane Mnouchkine (1999), described the actor’s moment-to-moment
presence-in-role as a series of clear visions:

I believe that theatre, the work of the actor, are dependent upon the clarity of a
vision at every second. For an actor to be able to perform, he must have not a
clear view of things, but clear visions, in the visionary sense of the word, not only
in the ‘project’ sense (of course one also needs a clear project). But the actor is
always in the present; he must play the present of the character at every instant.
That’s the way in which we work. An actor must have the strength and the
imaginative musculature to receive, to generate visions; then to transform them
into clear images for the others. He can only do this if he knows how to receive
visions, states, emotions of great clarity. (p. 119)
The kind of visionary awareness articulated by Mnouchkine is similar to the Satori state, as presented in David M. Klein’s dissertation study (see chapter one, section four).

According to Klein (1995), the Satori state of “receptiveness” and “heightened awareness” embraces “full participation with the environment” (p. 199). An actor’s environment is the stage and the liminal space between her and the audience. So, how does the actor’s Satori state impact audience members?

Actor, Director, and Professor of Acting and Movement at Penn State School of Theatre, Mark Olsen (2006), has theorized that the communication between the actors and the audience is ideally an interdependent exchange of energies. In Olson’s view, a dynamic production is a balance of Yin (female quality) and Yang (male quality) interplay between the audience and the actors. Olsen’s creative application of principles of the Tao, to actor/audience interaction, is well worth serious consideration by theatre researchers and practitioners:

As the Tao suggests, there is a continuous interplay, a dynamic interdependency of energy that flows. A successful production is one in which there are moments of receptivity as well as moments of active participation on the part of both the audience and the players. Live theatre is particularly exciting because each performance has the potential to lift off into a flow dynamic where everyone in the theatre chamber hits a wavelength together. Those moments of collective humanity, akin to what people hope for in a church experience, provide a certain form of sustenance for everyone. At the very least it provides an experience to alleviate the sensation of separation.

From this perspective, good acting is a dynamic flow between the players onstage. If an actor is all on output and isn’t really listening or responding in the moment, but is instead enacting a replay of a former rehearsal, there is not flow and the performance will lack authenticity. The players will all appear wooden and essentially dead. When, on the other hand, there is a lively give and take of energy, a focused combination of Yin and Yang energy flowing effortlessly between them, the air suddenly becomes electrified with potential, and everyone, including the viewers, is exposed to a level of reality where time and space
disappear and the truth, however elusive, is revealed in its subtle and not so subtle form. (pp. 66-67)

This Taoist perspective places presence in performance in a holistic context, where actors and audience co-create the performance experience moment-to-moment. The collective creativity, shared by those in the “theatre chamber,” mirrors the Buddhist view of interdependent existence between humans and the phenomenal world.

**Creating Performance from a Continuum**

According to Richard Schechner (2003), Performance Studies Founder/Scholar, Director, and Professor of Performance Studies at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, performance is a transformational process that originates from the polarities of efficacy, defined as ritualistic invocation, and entertainment:

The whole binary continuum efficacy/ritual—entertainment/theater is what I call “performance.” Performance originates in impulses to make things happen and to entertain; to get results and to fool around; to collect meanings and to pass the time; to be transformed into another and to celebrate being oneself; to disappear and to show off; to bring into a special place a transcendent Other who exists then-and-now and later-and-now; to be in trance and to be conscious; to focus on a select group sharing a secret language and to broadcast to the largest possible audience of strangers; to play in order to satisfy a felt obligation and to play only under an Equity contract for cash. These oppositions, and others generated by them, comprise performance: an active situation, a continuous turbulent process of transformation. The move from ritual to theater happens when a participating audience fragments into a collection of people who attend because the show is advertised, who pay admission, who evaluate what they are going to see before, during, and after seeing it. The move from theater to ritual happens when the audience is transformed from a collection of separate individuals into a group or congregation of participants. (pp. 156-157)

In Schechner’s view, during some periods of Western theatre history, performance has manifested in more efficacious form and throughout others, more as entertainment.

Although Schechner has posited that performance reflects social structure, he also has voiced that it can invoke change and catalyze cultural transformations.
Physical theatre is an efficacious contemporary genre that has deep roots in the traditions of the Greek Chorus and the Italian Commedia dell’Arte (Aristotle, 2007; Gordon, 2007; Lecoq, 2007). Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2007), Senior Lecturer in Performance at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, has also expressed that physical theatre is historically and contextually connected to avant-garde theatre and avant-garde dance:

[The] process of contextualizing physical theatre needs to take into consideration its location both within avant-garde theatre, particularly that production considered to be ‘body-focused,’ and also within the context of avant-garde dance and its particular parameters which set the body as the centralizing unit within the theatrical space. In examining this double influence one must not forget that cross-references between the two forms of avant-garde production abound. The locating of physical theatre within the avant-garde means that attention must be given to issues of anti-establishment within the context of alienation and transgression common to both forms. (p. 21)

In attempting to describe physical theatre, a genre which is not easily defined, we learned that physical theatre is based more in oral tradition than canonical knowledge.

Dymphna Callery (2001), Playwright and Senior Lecturer in the Drama Department at Wolverhampton University, confirmed our view that it is difficult to place parameters around the field of physical theatre:

Physical theatre is not codifiable. The term is applied to such a diverse range of work that it has become virtually undefinable. Yet some significant parallels emerge from any investigation of those working in this field, and these features serve as a broad paradigm:

- the emphasis is on the actor-as-creator rather than the actor-as-interpreter
- the working process is collaborative
- the working practice is somatic
- the stage-spectator relationship is open
the live-ness of the theatre medium is paramount.

The method of working is based on the idea that theatre is about craft, celebration and play, rooted in collaboration, and made by an ensemble dedicated to a collective imagination. (p. 5)

Within Eastern and Western performance traditions, physical theatre has manifested as an efficacious form of communication between performer and spectator.

Physical theatre, as presented by Callery (2001), is the core of the interdisciplinary curricular and pedagogical approach to training offered by the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program. As stated in the Naropa University Self-Study Report (2009-2010), the MFA learning outcomes include students’ mastery of:

1. a wide repertoire of professional skills in acting, dance, physical movement, and voice;
2. a performance sensibility as evidenced by the ability to engage in improvisation and novel textual materials;
3. a traditional contemplative practice that provides inspiration for their creative work and ensures coordination between body and mind. (pp. 186-187)

The MFA view toward performer training is grounded in the synchronizing of the body and mind (Trungpa, 1988). The warrior artist-in-training mindfully works toward the mastery of performance skills from experiences of embodied awareness.

Mark Olsen (2006) has suggested that training in mindfulness facilitates freshness and spontaneity in the performer’s relationship to time:

The actor works in the medium of time. Condensed moments, comic timing, pauses, silences, pacing, tempo—these are just a few of the elements of time an actor must master. To master these elements implies being free of them as well. Mindfulness is a method of finding this freedom. In true mindfulness, time is elastic, unfixed, and playful—allowing for freshness, a fluidity that audiences desperately want to experience. (p. 108)
In the MFA Contemporary Performance program, mindfulness and awareness are not only skills to be learned at a specified time during meditation class, but rather strands of embodied sensibility that connect course work, rehearsal sessions, and performance throughout the two-year period of training.
Chapter Three: Reading MFA Contemporary Performance Training at Naropa

Joy is not a term that is used much in the context of education, but if the arts are about anything, they are about how they make you feel in their presence—when you know how to read their form. The arts, when experienced in the fullness of our emotional life, are about becoming alive.

---Elliot W. Eisner (2002), *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*

Becoming Acquainted with the Naropa Community

Before reading the dynamic qualities of the MFA Contemporary Performance program, I started to become acquainted with the greater Naropa community. This acquaintanceship began with meeting then-President of Naropa University, Thomas B. Coburn, and Wife, Leigh Berry, then-Advancement Associate of Naropa, at the *Uncovering the Heart of Higher Education: Integrative Learning for Compassionate Action in an Interconnected World* Conference, sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies and the Fetzer Institute, in San Francisco, California. During the early evening of Friday, February 24, 2007, Naropa University hosted a reception for the conference participants. At the reception, Dr. Coburn, Ms. Berry, and I discussed the seminal significance of the conference’s focus on integrative learning in higher education. It is with warmth and appreciation that I recall our conversation and their gracious interest in my background as a theatre artist and educator. Our brief talk sparked my deep interest in contemplative education at Naropa. Indeed, attending and presenting at this conference was a groundbreaking experience for me, as I learned that there was a growing interest in contemplative education within many college and university
communities throughout North America. The end of the conference marked the start of my serious consideration of focusing on the study of contemplative education for my doctoral dissertation.

Back home in Denver, Colorado, my initial research revealed what I already had assumed through anecdotal evidence—that the premier institution of contemplative education in North America was next door, in Boulder! So, in March 2008, I wrote to Thomas Coburn expressing interest in designing and conducting a study regarding faculty and student perceptions of contemplative learning at Naropa University. Once more, Dr. Coburn demonstrated his gracious nature, by immediately responding to my request with interest and recommending that I discuss my proposal further with then-Assistant Dean of Curriculum and Instruction, Jeremy Lowry. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Lowry and I met for our first conversation, during which he asked thoughtful questions and made supportive suggestions about several faculty members who could potentially have interest in my proposed research. Also, during the 2008 spring semester, my circle of acquaintances widened to include Susan Burggraf, then-Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, Associate Professor of Contemplative Psychology, and Faculty Director of the Center for the Advancement of Contemplative Education; Wendell Beavers, then-Chair of the Performing Arts Department and Founding Director of the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program; and Liz Acosta, then-Administrative Director of the Performing Arts Department.
Research Methodology

Again, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do faculty and students characterize contemplative education within the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program?

2. How does contemplative education impact the intended and operational curricula of courses within the MFA Contemporary Performance Program?

3. How do graduate students perceive the effects of contemplative education, offered by the MFA Contemporary Performance Program, on the development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives?

In consideration of the nature and purpose of this study, I selected educational criticism and connoisseurship as the methodology by which I described, interpreted, and appraised the relationship between contemplative education and the intended and operational curricula of courses within the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program (see chapter one, section four for definitions of intended and operational curriculum). Creator of this qualitative form of inquiry and Professor Emeritus of Stanford University School of Education, Elliot W. Eisner (1994b), discussed the relationship of educational connoisseurship to educational criticism:

The act of knowledgeable perception is, in the arts, referred to as connoisseurship. To be a connoisseur is to know how to look, to see, and to appreciate. Connoisseurship, generally defined, is the art of appreciation. It is essential to criticism because without the ability to perceive what is subtle and important, criticism is likely to be superficial or even empty. The major distinction between connoisseurship and criticism is this: connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure. (p. 215)

As researcher, it was my intention to apprehend and reveal the significant, subtle, and unique aspects of selected programmatic courses and of the Nalanda Campus in which they took place.
As educational connoisseur, I perceived the courses through five closely related dimensions: intentional, curricular, pedagogical, structural, and evaluative (Eisner, 1998). Eisner (1994a) recommended that intentional, curricular, pedagogical, structural, and evaluative dimensions be included as “key elements” in the systematic investigation of a school culture (p. 11). The intentional dimension focused on the learning objectives for a particular course. The curricular dimension included the nature and quality of the course content, as well as how the students encountered the curriculum. The pedagogical dimension encompassed the instructional aspects of a course, or how the curriculum was mediated. The structural dimension described the organizational time frame of a course and the course time frame in relation to the program’s master schedule. And, the evaluative dimension functioned not only as a way to describe the methods through which students’ work and performance were assessed, but also to serve as a reflection of instructional, programmatic, and institutional values.

As a way to further capture the multi-dimensional qualities of the courses, I developed five types of interactive conventions that could shape our understanding of the performance curricula, adapted from the work of Jonothan Neelands, Chair of Drama and Theatre Education in the Institute of Education, University of Warwick, and Tony Goode, Freelance Performing Arts Professional. The term, convention, is defined as Neelands and Goode (2000) described it in their text, Structuring Drama Work: A Handbook of Available Forms in Theatre and Drama:

Conventions are indicators of the way in which time, space and presence can interact and be imaginatively shaped to create different kinds of meanings in theatre. Particular conventions will, therefore, emphasize different qualities in the theatrical possibilities of time, space and human presence. (p. 4)
**Preparation** conventions occurred when class participants would transition from ordinary time to the creative learning environment of the studio. Prior to entering the studio space, the instructor and students would remove their shoes and place them on shoe racks in the hallway. Then, during the beginning of each class session, the instructor would lead the students in a bow of greeting and acknowledgement of warriorship (see chapter two, section two for a description of warriorship). Most often after the bow, but at times prior to it, the class participants, sometimes including the instructor, would engage in body/mind warm-up exercises.

The concept of **context-building** conventions originated in the work of Neelands and Goode (2000). **Context-building** included communication between instructor and the entire class, as well as between students in small groups, to establish, clarify, and at times, expand the context of performance content and activities. Neelands and Goode recommended **context-building** when it could be useful to:

- clarify the context through fixing time, place, people involved;
- create atmosphere through use of space, light, sound;
- draw attention to contextual constraints or opportunities;
- find and make symbols and themes for the work;
- check out possibly different interpretations of the context held in the group. (p. 9)

During performance classes, **context-building** conventions took place during class lectures; teacher and student demonstrations; whole group discussion, improvisation, and/or writing; panel presentation; and/or small group planning, improvisation, and/or rehearsal sessions between students.
Showing conventions encompassed the informal sharing and presentation of student performance work to the entire class and occasionally, in showcase format, to invited guests and/or for the general public.

When the instructor and the students reviewed concepts and critiqued performance work, they engaged in reflective conventions (Neelands & Goode, 2000). In several classes, a brief review of previously presented ideas and completed work would regularly precede new material to be learned. The reflective conventions also emphasized inner work, such as mindfulness/awareness meditation and resting in silence.

As with preparation conventions, closing conventions provided a way for students to transition from one environment into another. At the close of each class session, the instructor and students would “bow-out,” as they had “bowed-in” at the start of their time together. As they re-entered ordinary time, class participants would place their shoes on their feet in the hallway and walk to another destination.

Since students’ views of their learning were integral to this study, I created four inter-related dimensions through which their perceptions were presented. I learned how students perceived the impact of contemplative education on the development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives throughout their course of study in the contemporary performance program (for definitions of the four dimensions see chapter one, section four).

The methodology of educational criticism was most appropriate in the disclosure of the MFA performance community because “it aims not at the reduction of complexities but at their illumination in order that the factors and qualities that make situations unique as well as general can be understood” (Eisner, 1994b, p. 382). Written
criticisms of the course curricula and of the Nalanda Campus setting were offered through four dimensions developed by Eisner (1994b, 1998): description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics.

As educational critic, my intention was to render vivid descriptions of the subtle and complex aspects of faculty and student encounters with each other and creative work within the studio environment. Through the framework of the interactive conventions, the composition of written passages was designed to immerse the reader in the artistic and contemplative practices of contemporary performance training.

According to Eisner (1998), to interpret is to place what has been observed into context:

If description can be thought of as giving an account of, interpretation can be regarded as accounting for. Educational critics are interested not only in making vivid what they have experienced, but in explaining its meaning; this goal frequently requires putting what has been described in a context in which its antecedent factors can be identified. It also means illuminating the potential consequences of practices observed and providing reasons that account for what has been seen. (p. 95)

Eisner’s educational dimensions guided and shaped the interpretations of my descriptions. As a seasoned theatre artist and educator, my experiences and expertise also served as lenses for the creation of contextual interpretive frameworks. In addition, I elucidated and interpreted descriptive text through discussion of selected perspectives from the areas of Contemplative Dance Practice (Dilley, 2006); Dharma Art (Trungpa, 2008); Jungian Psychology (Pascal, 1992); new music-theater (Salzman, 2000); Roy Hart Theatre (Kalo with Whiteside & Midderigh, 1997; Newham, 2000); Shambhala Buddhism (Trungpa, 1988); and/or Viewpoints Theory and Practice (Beavers, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Bogart & Landau, 2005; Overlie, 2006).
As I appraised the contemporary performance program, my evaluative commentaries reflected my values. These values have been and continue to be shaped by my background as an arts advocate, researcher, and practitioner for numerous and diverse educational programs and professional arts organizations throughout the United States. In our view, educational dimensions were evaluated from the perspective of a comprehensive body of knowledge as to how many performing arts programs operate within American campus communities. As evaluator, my primary aims were to expand awareness and increase understanding about Naropa’s program, as well as gage the efficacy of the integration of contemplative education into its conservatory style training.

The evaluation of the featured curricula was further formulated by four criteria, richness, recursion, relations, and rigor, created by Postmodern Curriculum Theorist, William E. Doll, Jr. (1993). The term, richness, “refers to a curriculum’s depth, to its layers of meaning, to its multiple possibilities or interpretations” (p. 176). Doll described recursion as a reflective function, where review and critiquing are integrated in a meaningful way throughout the curriculum. The term, relations, pointed to the curriculum’s connections, within its pedagogical structure, and to the culture(s) in which it is situated. The fourth criteria of postmodern curricular evaluation, rigor, included “purposely looking for different alternatives, relations, connections” (p. 182). Since each curriculum was postmodern in perspective, it was important, in our view, to evaluate each curriculum through a postmodern framework.

Eisner (1994b) described the thematics dimension of educational criticism as “the distillation of the major ideas or conclusions that are to be derived from the material that preceded it” (p. 233). Taking into account that the thematics yielded by this study were
unique to the MFA Contemporary Performance Program, there may be qualities that could function as extrapolations for other performing arts programs:

Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful, case derived, and problem oriented rather than statistical and probabilistic. Extrapolations can be particularly useful when based on information-rich samples and designs, that is, studies that produce relevant information carefully targeted to specific concerns about both the present and future. (Patton, 2002, p. 584)

It was our intention to thoughtfully emphasize important aspects of the thematics that might serve as a guide for future research and practice in the fields of contemplative education and performing arts training.

Research Design

Participants.

The group of participants, for this investigation, was purposeful through the selection of “information-rich cases—cases from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance and therefore worthy of in-depth study” (Patton, 2002, p. 242). The participants included all second-year students and faculty of all observed classes within the MFA Contemporary Performance Program. Through the strategy of snowball sampling, the group of participants diverged to include then-President Thomas Coburn, other faculty and key staff within the Performing Arts Department, and self-selected first-year students.

Although it was our intent to include the entire student body of the MFA program—a group of 32 performing artists, ranging in age from 24 to 56, the second-year artists provided the primary student representation for this study. There was not a consensus among first-year students that their classes could be observed. It was
discovered that one first-year student was not comfortable with the possibility of being observed during class sessions. Also, several faculty and staff suggested that there might be some collective reticence to the observational process, since the first-year class was comprised of the youngest student body in the program’s history. Therefore, no classes for first-year students were observed. However, first-year students were invited to be included in the study through face-to-face, confidential interviews with the researcher. So, several first-year students presented their views regarding the effects of the program’s contemplative education on their personal and professional development, through the interview process.

**Observations.**

Table 1. *Observations of MFA Contemporary Performance Second-Year Courses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Courses</th>
<th>Number of Observed Instructional Sessions</th>
<th>Number of Scheduled Meetings per Week</th>
<th>Duration of Instructional Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Featured Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation Practicum</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice/Song</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewpoints Seminar</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental/Somatic Technique</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequencing Workshop (2-week intensive)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy Teach Back (elective)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout a seven and a half-week period of time, from February 27, 2009 through April 29, 2009, I observed the operational curricula of three different core
courses for the graduating class of 2009, a group of nineteen, second-year students. The observations focused on culminating sections of a progressive two-year curriculum for each required course. The start date of these observations was determined by the end date of the rehearsals for and subsequent performance run of Trojan Women, a major production, co-presented by the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program and University of Colorado’s ATLAS Center for Arts, Media and Performance, in which second-year students were intensively involved. During the three-week schedule prior to spring break, I observed class sessions from the Meditation Practicum and Voice/Song courses. No classes met during spring break, from March 21 through 29. Then, starting Tuesday, March 31 and continuing through Wednesday, April 29, I continued to observe class meetings from the Meditation Practicum and Voice/Song courses and began observations of the Viewpoints Seminar sessions.

Also, I had the opportunity to observe several sessions of two other core courses, Sequencing Workshop, a two-week ensemble playwriting/directing intensive, and Developmental/Somatic Technique, as well as the final meetings of one elective course, Pedagogy Teach Back, for second-year students throughout the seven and a half-week period of time.

In addition, I attended numerous MFA Contemporary Performance program events and showings (see section two of this chapter for definition of showing conventions). The departmental works I viewed included: a matinee presentation of the large-scale production, Trojan Women; three culminating course showings; seven thesis performances; and the graduation ceremony and celebration. Also, I was in attendance at
*Faculty Out Front*, a showcase of faculty work from Naropa’s Performing Arts, Music, and Visual Arts Departments.

**Interviews.**

In order to ascertain the intended curricula of the three featured core courses, I conducted one-on-one, in-depth interviews with the four faculty members who designed and taught these performance classes, as well as with a visiting Naropa BFA faculty member/MFA alumna, who participated in an artist-teacher panel, and a guest lecturer. At the time of the interviews, all of the aforementioned individuals, with the exception of the 2008-2009 guest lecturer, had been associated with the MFA program from the time of its start in the fall of 2004.

Numerous additional face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with other faculty and staff members of the Performing Arts Department. The additional faculty interviewees had also been teaching for the program from its inception. One staff member had served in her capacity as administrative director for three and a half years and the other, a program alumna, as production coordinator for two years.

Also, I conducted one-on-one, in-depth interviews with second- and first-year students who decided to participate in this part of the inquiry. The primary purpose of these interviews was to learn student perceptions of how contemplative education influenced their development of *communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives*, and *aesthetic perspectives* in classes, rehearsal, and performance (for definitions of these dimensions see chapter one, section four).

It was my intention to develop conversational partnerships with the interviewees, referred to by Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Northern Illinois State University,
Herbert J. Rubin, and Professor Emeritus of Public Administration at Northern Illinois State University, Irene S. Rubin (2005), as *responsive interviewing*:

The goal of responsive interviewing is a solid, deep understanding of what is being studied, rather than breadth. Depth is achieved by going after context; dealing with the complexity of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting themes; and paying attention to the specifics of meanings, situation, and history. To get that depth, the researcher has to follow up, asking more questions about what he or she initially heard. (p. 35)

Although many follow-up questions ensued during the course of initial interviews, interviewees were invited to request second interviews, if they wanted to elaborate on answers and/or divulge further information. One guest lecturer, two second-year students, and one first-year student did request the opportunity to participate in second interviews. And, at the start of the study, I requested two interviews with Senior Performance Faculty Member, Barbara Dilley, due to her depth of knowledge about Naropa and service, as former President of the University. Since she graciously accepted my offer, I received invaluable information regarding the University’s history, as well as knowledge of her artistic, administrative, and educational contributions to the Naropa community.

In preparation for the initial interviews, I wrote *interview protocols* (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) as a guide for me as interviewer and for the interviewees (see Appendix B for student interview protocols and Appendix C for faculty interview protocols). These protocols listed the main questions in a way that Rubin and Rubin (2005) entitled a *tree and branch model*:

In this model, the interview is likened to a tree with the trunk as the research problem and the branches as the main questions, each dealing with a separate but more or less equal concern. In the interviews, the researcher would try to ask all the main questions and then follow up on each to obtain the same degree of depth, detail, vividness, richness, and nuance. (p. 145)
As Rubin and Rubin recommended, the main questions of the interview protocols were designed to be logically related as an invitational guide for conversation, rather than as a rigid format to be strictly followed. Prior to the interview sessions, interviewees were invited to review the interview questions, listed on their own copies of the protocols. Most interviewees chose to refer to their copies during the interview sessions. However, the protocols received by the interviewees did not include the dimensions, written after the questions in parentheses, as noted in the appendices of this dissertation. Since the initial writing of the protocols, I slightly altered the dimension notations to reflect shifts in emphasis and meaning revealed through data analysis.


Throughout a nine-week period of time, from Thursday, March 5, 2009 to May 7, 2009, I conducted a total of thirty interviews. Twenty-five of these were initial interviews and five, were second interviews. Eight initial interviews and two second interviews were conducted with faculty, as well as interviews with two key Performing Arts staff members. Ten initial interviews and two second interviews were conducted with second-year students; and three first interviews and one second interview, with first-year students. As previously mentioned, one interview was also conducted with Thomas Coburn, who was nearing the end of six-years of leadership and service as President of Naropa. The faculty and staff interviews were one and a half hours in duration and the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MFA Contemporary Performance</th>
<th>Number of First Interviews</th>
<th>Number of Second Interviews</th>
<th>Total Number of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFA Core Faculty</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Faculty</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting BFA Faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Lecturer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Year Students</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naropa Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. MFA Contemporary Performance and Naropa Administration Interviews
student interviews, one hour. Members of the MFA community had intensive academic, advisory, and artistic production commitments, so interviews were strategically scheduled between class, meeting, and rehearsal sessions. Due to the high level of activity on the Nalanda Campus, most interviews were conducted onsite, either in my office or in faculty offices.

With the verbal and written approval of the interviewees, I audio taped all interview sessions, in tandem with my note taking, for the purpose of preserving the data and facilitating transcription of the interviews. Note taking provided a back up in the case of technical difficulties with the digital recorder, as well as an invaluable way to write follow-up questions that emerged during the course of the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The tapes and transcriptions have been stored safely; and the information therein has been and will continue to be kept confidential.

Confidentiality.

Although I did not conduct one-on-one interviews with all second-year students, all second-year students did sign informed consent forms granting permission for me to observe them during second-year class sessions. Also, all students, faculty, and staff who agreed to participate in the interview part of this study signed informed consent forms. Prior to interviewees granting verbal and written permission to be interviewed, I explained the nature and goals of the research and my role as researcher. In addition, I invited each participant to ask questions and present concerns about the study prior to, during, and after the interview session.

The University generously offered me the use of a spacious office during the course of my data collection. The office was located near other administrative and several
faculty offices on the second floor of the Nalanda Campus. The course sessions took place in the first floor studio classrooms. So, my office was easily accessible, yet removed from the studio and student meeting areas. Although the office contained a window that faced the hallway, I pulled a shade to cover the window and closed the door to provide a quiet and confidential environment for the interview process.

All students mentioned or cited in the study were assigned pseudonyms. Since the reputation and work of the faculty gave credibility and validity to the study, I approached each faculty member individually, with an additional consent form, to request the mention of his/her real name in the dissertation. All faculty and staff members, as well as the President of the University granted permission for their real names to be used in the dissertation text and in reference to this study.

**Artifacts and documents.**

The reading of important course, programmatic, and institutional documents facilitated my greater and more precise comprehension of the intended and operational curricula of the observed courses, as well as the curricular arc of the MFA Contemporary Performance program in its entirety. The course documents I reviewed included syllabi, assessment forms, handouts, articles, poems, a student thesis portfolio, and in the case of the *Voice/Song* class, copies of new music scores, created by Composer/MFA Associated Artist, Gary Grunde (2009). The perusal of production programs and photos also provided significant information and insights about the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of performance work co-created by MFA students, faculty, and guest artists. In addition, I read published texts and unpublished manuscripts written by MFA faculty (Beavers, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2008; Berland, n.d.; Dilley, 2006, 2009; Wangh, 2000).

**Data analysis.**

Data collection and data analysis were concurrent processes throughout the course of this study. Following observations of class sessions, as I rode the bus from Boulder to my home in Denver, I read through my field notes and began writing in vivo codes in the margins of the notepaper. In vivo codes are a way of coding that “derive from the terms and the language used by the social actors in the field, or in the course of interviews” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 32). Likewise, after transcribing interviews, I wrote in vivo codes in the margins of the transcriptions. My next step was to cross-reference in vivo codes between field notes and interview transcriptions. Then, I linked codes together, holding common properties and ideas, into categories. I considered these categories to be the emergent themes of this inquiry. Data simplification, however, was not my primary analytic purpose. Rather, I regarded my coding process as “essentially heuristic, providing ways of interacting with and thinking about the data” (Coffee & Atkinson, p. 30).

As I examined my categories, I reviewed data that seemed incongruent with the patterns and regularities within and between the emergent themes. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “the cases that do not fit your emerging explanations are your
friends. They surprise you, confront you, and require you to rethink, expand, and revise your theories” (p.208). In following Miles and Huberman’s recommendation, I uncovered evidence for the creation of a new dimension through which to examine student perceptions of contemplative education in the MFA Contemporary Performance program.

Through the aforementioned process of re-examining data, and of comparing and contrasting emergent themes with key concepts located within course, programmatic, and institutional artifacts and documents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I was able to progress from analyzing categories to “finding conceptual and theoretical coherence in the data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 47). The writing of educational criticisms of MFA program courses was shaped by Eisner’s (1998) five dimensions and my adaptation of Neelands and Goode’s (2000) conventions, as well as based on the conceptual frameworks developed through my data analysis process and procedures.

Validity.

According to Eisner (1994b), one of the means through which credibility is established in educational criticism is the process of structural corroboration:

Structural corroboration is a process of gathering data or information and using it to establish links that eventually create a whole that is supported by the bits of evidence that constitute it. Evidence is structurally corroborative when pieces of evidence validate each other, the story holds up, the pieces fit, it makes sense, the facts are consistent. (p. 237)

The evidence presented through educational criticism in this study was corroborated by relevant theoretical and practitioner perspectives. The criticism of each core course included a presentation of theories and practice from the field(s) of the course, through interpretive commentary. In addition, a dimensional analysis of the impact of contemplative education on student personal and professional development further
contributed to the process of structural corroboration and thus, to the credibility of the study.

Another means of determining the credibility of an educational criticism is called *consensual validation*. “Consensual validation is, at base, agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and theemics of an educational situation are right” (Eisner, 1998, p. 112). Upon writing the first draft of a course criticism, I submitted it to the course faculty for review and commentary. Then, I incorporated the feedback into the second draft of the criticism. Fortunately, for this researcher, the comments received from faculty were complimentary and recommendations for changes, minor. The process of faculty review applied to all criticisms included in this study.

An educational criticism is intended to provide multiple ways of viewing and understanding an educational program, environment, and/or community. The vivid, complex, and subtle qualities of an educational situation should be clearly and expressively represented in the writing of a criticism. “An educational critic’s work is referentially adequate when readers are able to see what they would have missed without the critic’s observations” (Eisner, 1998, p. 114). If, in the reading of this study’s educational criticisms, the audience’s perceptions of the MFA Contemporary Performance program are illuminated and expanded, the third means of credibility, *referential adequacy*, will be substantiated.

**Potential Benefits of the Study**

It is our intention that the results of this study will benefit the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program; the greater community of Naropa University;
conservatory style performing arts programs; performance scholars and practitioners; and those engaged in the research and formation of contemplative studies courses, initiatives, concentrations, and/or departments. Some of the intended outcomes of this inquiry include:

- an emergent operational definition of contemplative education for the MFA Contemporary Performance Program;
- a vivid, clear, and comprehensive description, interpretation, and appraisal of the impact of contemplative education on the intended and operational curricula of featured core courses within the MFA Contemporary Performance Program;
- a dimensional analysis of the impact of contemplative education on student personal and professional development within the MFA Contemporary Performance Program;
- recommendations for future directions in curriculum development within the MFA Contemporary Performance Program, based on the study findings; and
- recommendations for future research in contemplative education and performing arts training.

It is our profound hope that the path of this research will result in the fruition of illuminated perception and expanded knowledge of Naropa’s MFA Theater program for those interested in interdisciplinary, conservatory level performing arts training and/or contemplative studies.

About the Researcher

In the second section of this chapter, I mentioned that my values have been shaped by my background as an arts advocate and practitioner. My teaching experience in theatre, dance, oral interpretation, storytelling, and integrated arts, as well as performance work as a director, choreographer, actress, singer, and liturgical artist, abundantly reveal
the centrality of the arts in my life. As a performance artist and educator, it is my view that learning through the arts is an integrative way to develop the body, mind, heart, and spirit; facilitate creativity; and build connections within and between communities.

Congruently, my contemplative views and practices inform my personal and professional ways of perceiving and experiencing the world.

Since the educational critic develops evaluations based on her frames of reference and values, Eisner (1994b) discusses whether or not researcher values should be stated prior to the presentation of evaluative commentary. In response to his own question, Eisner argues that it is “reasonable to have it both ways” (p. 232). It is my premise that the reader will clearly perceive my points of view and values through encountering the educational criticism texts. However, as transparency is important in qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), I would like to offer this section as a glimpse of the biases and values that I bring to the study.
Chapter Four: The Ground, Path, and Fruition of MFA Contemporary Performance Training

The hour is striking so close above me, so clear and sharp, that all my senses ring with it. I feel it now: there’s a power in me to grasp and give shape to my world.

I know that nothing has ever been real without my beholding it. All becoming has needed me. My looking ripens things and they come toward me, to meet and be met.

---Rainer Maria Rilke (1996), Rilke’s Book of Hours: Love Poems to God

Introduction

The act of beholding is more than observing. It is, as Rilke so eloquently expresses, a meeting that ripens, that which is observed, with all one’s senses and perceptivity. My beholding of the MFA Contemporary Performance community emanated from the ground of my experience. And, this chapter is the fruition of my path of learning about and within the community. Ground, path, and fruition are Buddhist concepts that guide understanding of human experience, development, and expression.

In her text, Contemplative Dance Practice, Senior MFA Faculty Member and former President of Naropa University, Barbara Dilley (2006), described ground, path, and fruition, as they have shaped her life as artist, educator, and human being:

“Ground, path and fruition” is a classical Buddhist paradigm for how to explore the human journey. In Dharma Art, the ‘ground’ is our experience and this means everything. . . .The ‘path’ means to become attentive to what we do, think, say,
see, hear – just that. Receive the perceptions without any bias. The larger awareness begins with this direct and awake discipline of paying attention to it all – being mindful. So we learn to pay attention to what we think, observe, feel, want, hate, ignore. Mindfulness practice is remembering something we knew but have forgotten. And ‘expression’ is the fruition. We express who we are – naturally and all of the time. (p. 2)

This Buddhist paradigm provided a useful and purposeful framework for the observing of class sessions and thesis performances; conducting interviews; and then, contemplating my encounters with the MFA community. It is my intention that the translation of the qualities of the MFA Contemporary Performance program engages the reader in a visceral visualization of and vicarious participation in (Eisner, 1998) the ground, path, and fruition of the community members’ journeys.

**The Founding Vision of Naropa University**

Prior to embarking on an exploration of the MFA environment, it is important for the reader to become aware of the ground of the visionary and historical heritage of Naropa University. The *Naropa University Self-Study Report (2009-2010)* provides a well-presented and soundly documented summary of the founding of the University:

Naropa University was founded in 1974 by Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master, scholar, and artist now recognized as one of the foremost teachers of Buddhism in the West. With the founding of Naropa, Trungpa realized his vision of creating a university with a Buddhist heritage that would combine contemplative studies with traditional Western scholarly and artistic disciplines. His intention was that Naropa University would gather together to support many wisdom traditions in addressing contemporary problems. Today, Naropa University is evidence of this nonsectarian vision of wisdom and service.

Naropa’s founding was inspired by Nalanda University, which flourished in India from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries CE. At Nalanda University, Buddhist philosophy and the discipline of meditation provided an environment in which scholars, artists, and healers from many Asian countries and religious traditions came to study and debate. Nalanda was known for education that joined intellect
and intuition, scholarly rigor and spiritual inquiry, and an atmosphere of mutual appreciation and respect among different traditions. The University takes its name from Naropa, the eleventh-century abbot of Nalanda University. Renowned as a great Buddhist scholar, teacher, and practitioner, Naropa recognized that the acquisition of knowledge alone does not lead to wisdom and a deep understanding of the world. Various accounts of Naropa’s life portray his gradual realization that his study of words and texts had not automatically produced wisdom or appreciation for the meaning behind the words. After leaving his position at Nalanda and traveling across the Indian subcontinent for several years, Naropa came to understand that entering a dialectic tension between an object and its interior, a word and its meaning, with the support of a particular set of practices and the guidance of a teacher resulted in a more direct and accurate encounter with the world. (pp. 1-2)

The legacy of the abbot Naropa and founding vision of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche are very much alive today, as Naropa University continues to offer courses and programs, grounded in contemplative education, to a community of undergraduate, graduate, and extended studies learners.

**Overview of the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program**

Although the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program is new at the University, its programmatic vision, goals, and objectives are in alignment with Naropa’s founding vision and current mission statement (see the “Naropa University Mission Statement” in Appendix D). The departmental vision is presented on the MFA Contemporary Performance website:

The Naropa MFA Theater: Contemporary Performance Program is developing a new paradigm integrating contemplative practice and interdisciplinary conservatory level performance training. Its first class of 18 entered in the fall of 2004. The two-year program has immediately taken its place as a visionary training, attracting an ensemble of professional artists and a faculty which includes some of the best known and most important innovators of new techniques, aesthetics and theater education, developed over the past 25 years. The program is devoted to innovative research and rigorous conservatory style training supported by Naropa’s unique commitment to contemplative education. It is deeply committed to presenting both reinvented classics and provocative
Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche had envisioned the integrative type of program that has been launched and developed by the Founding Director of the MFA Contemporary Performance program, Wendell Beavers, along with experienced artist/educators from Naropa and other performance programs and companies.

As a “founding faculty member of NYU’s Experimental Theatre Wing (ETW) in 1978 and a principal architect of ETW’s unique physical theater/dance cross training curriculum,” Wendell Beavers was uniquely qualified to create a new interdisciplinary, conservatory style performing arts program at Naropa (Bales & Nettl-Fiöl, 2008, p. 252).

Also of significance, Mr. Beavers’ studies of Shambhala Buddhism, introduced to the West by Trungpa Rinpoche, helped to prepare him for the integration of contemplative view and practice into a contemporary performance program:

I viewed the program as a kind of culminating confluence of 1) my personal path as an artist/educator who is a Buddhist practitioner, and 2) a founding faculty member of a program at another college (ETW at Tisch), also with deep roots in eastern view, and 3) my career path as a western artist whose work was based on basic dharma principles which had either developed independently or been appropriated by the western modern art tradition and lineage. Academically, the program was founded for the following reasons: 1) to further facilitate the teachings of Chogyam Trungpa, his brilliant translation of dharma and Buddhism, into western psychological language, and the language of creative process into the Performance Studies Conversation; and 2) to train (and accredit) a generation of teaching artists in specific techniques, which had given birth to the experimental theater and dance movement of the 1960’s and ‘70s, having included Grotowski, the post modern dance revolution (viewpoints), and the significant intercultural influence of the east. (W. Beavers, personal communication, April 22, 2009)

Wendell’s visionary views generated the initial intended curriculum of the program.
The current intended curriculum, or planned course of study (Eisner, 1994b) of the two-year MFA Contemporary Performance program, is summarized in the *Master of Fine Arts in Theater: Contemporary Performance* fact sheet (2009):

The MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance offers an integrated curriculum that includes:

- psychophysical acting work of Jerzy Grotowski;
- viewpoints, as performance technique and directing/choreographic method;
- vocal work, integrating Roy Hart, extended vocal technique, traditional speech and bel canto approaches;
- somatic physical techniques and contemporary dance/movement forms;
- contemplative arts and meditation training;
- techniques of generating text through ensemble playwriting and self-scripting.

Emphasizing ensemble work, in addition to technical training, the program trains students to create original work (both solo and ensemble) and provides tools for performance and reintegration of traditional forms. The program is committed to creating new techniques and aesthetics in collaboration with students and to establishing a home for the next generation of innovators and practitioners of performance.

Students are expected to work in a technically and aesthetically extended physical, vocal and emotional range. They should have the maturity and desire to create original work, to work with the traditional play form and work under direction. The program is designed to support professional performance and teaching careers in an interdisciplinary, critical theater. Considerable production work in a variety of scales, with particular emphasis on political and social relevance, is ongoing especially in the second year. The cultivation of teaching skills is addressed in the training.

The curriculum is supported by a contemplative practice and view component grounded in the environment of a Buddhist-inspired university. This includes formal meditation practice and study of Buddhist teachings on the nature of mind. All techniques refer to mindfulness and awareness as a ground and point of view.
This reflects the program’s commitment to the reintegration of dance and theater; and to supporting the evolution of contemporary acting/performance technique in its journey away from Freudian or Gestalt-based American method. (p. 1)

The intended curriculum is designed to reflect the departmental vision of the MFA program and the mission of the greater Naropa community.

**Featured Curricula of this Study**

The intended and operational curricula of the following MFA 2009 spring semester, required second-year courses are featured in this study: *Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World; Voice/Song: The Rilke Project;* and *Viewpoints Seminar.* Again, the operational curriculum is defined as the unfolding series of events and interactions that take place within a learning environment (Eisner, 1994b).

Significant, representative segments from the aforementioned courses are described and interpreted through the framework of Elliot Eisner’s (1998) dimensions: *intentional, curricular, pedagogical, structural, and evaluative;* and through the interactive *preparation, context-building, showing, reflective, and closing* conventions that faculty create for their students (for definitions of the dimensions and conventions, see chapter three, section two). Also, relevant theories and views of select researchers and practitioners are occasionally cited to support and elucidate interpretive commentary. In addition, a description of the Nalanda Campus, as the literal and symbolic ground where these courses take place and the creative process engendered, introduces the reader to the MFA environment.
Dimensional Analysis of Student Perceptions

The chapter concludes with a dimensional analysis of student perceptions’ of the impact of contemplative education on the development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives (for definitions of the aforementioned abilities and perspectives, refer to chapter one, section four). Through the review of this analysis, as well as descriptions and interpretations of the featured curricula, the reader is invited to consider how contemplative education influences the rigorous conservatory level performance training of MFA students.

The Nalanda Campus

Figure 1. The front entrance to the Nalanda Campus of Naropa University.
As one approaches the Nalanda Campus, complementary symbols of the East and West frame the front entrance. The stars and stripes of the American flag fly next to the seal of Naropa University (see the “The Naropa Seal” in Appendix E). One of three instructional campuses of Naropa University, Nalanda is located in east Boulder, Colorado. As home to performing and visual arts classrooms, studio spaces, and offices, as well as an events center for the School of Extended Studies and greater Naropa community, the Nalanda facility is 55,000 square feet in size. In addition, this campus houses a meditation hall, administrative offices for Extended Studies, the Office of Marketing and Communications and temporarily, the University Archives.

Although the Nalanda Campus is nestled near the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, stepping through the front entrance feels like walking into a tropical climate zone. Green warmth permeates the senses as one gazes up at a two-story environment of palm trees and towering cacti.
Figure 2. The Atrium at the Nalanda Campus

Contemplating the swaying of pine trees through the sunlit windows of the atrium, one can connect with the outer natural world from an inner sanctuary of greenery. This space invites lingering in the lush play of light and shadow prior to proceeding to one’s destination.
Turning left from the front entrance, one opens glass double doors, each etched with the Naropa seal, to access the first floor corridor. Immediately to the left is the Meditation Hall. Two black and white matted calligraphy prints aesthetically adorn the wall to the right of the entrance to the hall. Before reaching the actual Meditation Hall/Shrine Room, #9103, one enters a vestibule area, #9102, where an “Explanation of the Shrine Banner” is posted (see Appendix F). Also displayed is a print of the Buddha and painting by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Since it is customary to remove one’s shoes prior to entering the meditation hall, chairs and a shoe rack are provided to facilitate this process. This liminal space, often referred to as “the post-meditation hall,” is a place where one can center oneself and relax, before and after engaging in meditation within the environment of the hall/shrine room.

Students, faculty, and staff from the MFA Contemporary Performance program practice meditation, collectively and individually, in the Meditation Hall/Shrine Room on the Nalanda Campus. Also, other students, faculty, and staff of the Naropa community meditate in this hall and in the meditation halls at the Arapahoe Campus and the Paramita Campus.
Blue sky
Burgundy on bamboo bathed in clear light
Listening eyes, singing heart
Quiet clouds

Before and after meditating in this luminous setting, I contemplated the colors and symbols of the shrine banner. “The Explanation of the Shrine Banner” (n.d.) posted in the vestibule area provided the context for my reveries:

The symbols representing the wisdom traditions are clockwise from the top: Taoism, Islam, Hinduism, Wicca or Pagan Traditions, Native American Traditions, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. The symbol in the center is the Naropa University Crest.

The open space between each symbol is equally significant in symbolizing the importance of remaining open to that which we are not aware. The intentionally open space represents the great spiritual traditions other than those represented on
the banner, as well as traditions that may be generally unknown. (see Appendix F for the complete text)

Figure 4. The Shrine Banner

The shrine banner not only offers an aesthetic and symbolic invitation to contemplative experience, but also visually represents Naropa’s institutional identity as Buddhist-inspired, ecumenical, and nonsectarian.

Upon departing from the meditation hall, one views a framed portrait of Naropa’s founder, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and a long corridor which also serves as the Nalanda Gallery. The warm earth tones of light beige and gold walls punctuate the multi-hued work exhibited by student and guest artists. Proceeding down the hallway, one sees faculty offices to the right and classrooms to the left, including a Visual Arts Studio, Dark Room, and Art Therapy Studio.
The walk continues to be visually stimulating, as one begins to notice numerous framed posters of past events at Naropa, with evocative titles like, “Beats and Other Rebel Angels: A Tribute to Allen Ginsberg” and “Naropa 25: 25 years of contemplative education: 2500 years of tradition.” To attend current Naropa events, one rounds a corner to enter a large carpeted space with multiple portable chairs. As noted previously, many events sponsored by the School of Extended Studies and the University take place in the Nalanda Events Center, #9158.

Just as one suspects that this path, as fascinating as it has been, may never lead to the MFA classrooms, one turns in the opposite direction to continue the labyrinthine journey to the performance studios. After passing several undergraduate performance studios and large Events Studio and Dojo, one arrives at the MFA Theater terminal. On one side is a large performing arts classroom which also serves as the Nalanda Studio Theater, #9190. Peering through the entrance, one sees red meditation cushions piled high next to stacked chairs on hard wood flooring. Gazing across the theater, there are black traveler curtains that can be drawn to create a performance area, or pulled to reveal an open classroom/rehearsal space. Looking upwards, one sees a lighting grid which can support the hanging of multiple instruments. Directly across the hall from the studio theater is the #9190 storage room, which contains an eclectic variety of set pieces, props, and costumes, as well as a large schedule posted on a bulletin board.

This master schedule is the axis around which all MFA Theater classes, rehearsals, and events revolve and evolve. Regularly scheduled class sessions, in the Nalanda Studio Theater and other MFA Performance Studios, #9195 and #9185, are
listed for the benefit of first- and second-year students, as well as for faculty and guest artists. In addition, members of the MFA community can write rehearsal times and locations on this document, with maximum time allowances of two hours for student rehearsals. Although one can refer to online and paper schedules of MFA program classes and events, the dynamic and regularly updated master schedule, located onsite near the performance studios, is the most accurate and timely source of scheduling information and changes.

After scanning the master schedule to note the locations of the class sessions I planned to observe, I turned toward a young man with smiling eyes. “Are you a prospective student?” he asked in an encouraging manner. “Oh, no I’m not, however I’m looking forward to observing second-year classes!” I enthusiastically responded. During an ensuing friendly and informative conversation with this second-year student, I learned that it was customary to place one’s shoes on one of the hallway shoe racks, before entering a performance studio classroom. So, prior to observing my first course session, I became acquainted with one of the ways members of the MFA community readied themselves for class. This was the first preparation convention I learned.

**Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World**

The way to experience nowness is to realize that this very moment, this very point in your life, is always the occasion. So the consideration of where you are and what you are, on the spot, is very important.

---Chogyam Trungpa (1988), *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*
As I gazed softly at the Flatirons through the performance studio window, sunlight illuminated a landscape of undulating branches and pulsating leaves. Closing my eyes, I heard a concert of bird calls and cricket responses, accompanied by the currents of a flowing stream. Immersed in this sensory sanctuary, I felt like I had entered an enchanted mountain forest.

Upon opening my eyes, I directly looked at another emergent view. The undulating branches transformed into legs propped up against the walls of the studio. The leaves became pulsating feet and outstretched hands and fingers. Glancing to the right of my meditation cushion, I realized that the chorus of birds and crickets was emanating from a recording, playing on a silver boom box. The soothing sounds of a mountain brook were actually the sounds of sighing and yawning. I had entered a sanctuary, but it was formed by a group of fourteen MFA second-year students, personally and collectively exploring their body/minds in performance studio #9185, rather than by a canopy of trees and water swirling around rocks.

“Good morning! Stay where you are.” The melodious voice sounded from within a sea of jackets and sweatshirts strewn over blue exercise mats. A lithe lady, wearing a grey jersey top, burgundy vest, blue jeans, and striped socks, stepped gracefully toward the boom box, lowering the volume of the chirping birds and crickets. Since she moved
closer to where I was seated, I could see a dragon pin displayed on the left side of her vest and the glint of exotic looking earrings. (I later learned the earrings were from Bali.)

Exuding a gentle, yet powerful presence, Senior MFA Faculty Member, Barbara Dilley, then began a brief lecture about Sanctuary, one of the basic forms of Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP):

We’ve been cultivating our approach to Sanctuary throughout the semester; and I think of it as a specific discipline – a soft discipline – an open exploration of body/mind. When you practice Sanctuary in another environment, your approach should be inclusive. As you practice Sanctuary individually, check to see if you have censored anything. Be inclusive. Integrate any practice. Inclusivity is an important view. I’m going to discuss the first aspect of cultivating personal mindfulness. Then, I will coach the second aspect, which is harvesting.

The first aspect is about settling down. This can be disconcerting. There can be awkwardness; this is okay. It varies what settling down feels like, when you shift the energetic field. You may need to stand on your hands. (pause) For example, you may feel, “I need to integrate intense imagery within my being.” You’re paying attention to your body/mind without judgment. And, you can choose to experience this aspect for a long delicious period of time.

The second aspect is about responsiveness. Where is my kinesthetic delight today? When we do this, we are going to cut our medical costs. We know what we need to do to be gentle, strong, open; we don’t need to join a gym. This second aspect is also about contemplating – allowing thoughts to come up and bringing them into movement and breath. You’re willing to bring everything in – imagination, disturbances, questioning. Have something to write with on the edge of the space – at home and/or in the studio. I do this in preparation for class design; a project; or working with a difficult relationship. Then, be willing to harvest. In harvesting, you can also do nothing – even be willing to sleep.

For the next fifteen minutes, work with harvesting. You have much to contemplate – your work, projects, portfolios. The overarching theme is inclusivity.

Some students begin to slowly walk across the studio space, while others stretch into yogic postures. Shiny hued and worn crumpled journals and pens emerge from
backpacks and exercise bags, as many start writing, sitting cross-legged or resting in prone positions.

Barbara coaches from the sidelines:

I think the idea of moving and thinking is revolutionary. It’s a great way to expand our narrow concepts.

Just as in meditative training, when we talk about fresh start, we re-assemble, remembering that thoughts are illusive, insubstantial.

So when we are making Sanctuary into a discipline, just as in meditation, we create clear boundaries; make a clear time period for this practice; and stick with it.

The atmosphere expands to include audible sighing and toning to accompany the stretching and writing. Barbara removes her socks and joins the class participants. The movement of the group seems almost choreographed as one young man forms a bridge position while two women simultaneously roll into shoulder stands. Several students extend their arms and whirl together, as if taking off in patterned, slow motion flight.

Arms cradling knees close to the chest, Barbara rocks smoothly from side to side on smooth hard wood.

During this class session in early April, Barbara clearly facilitated the Sanctuary form through preparation, context-building, and reflective conventions. In doing so, she was meeting three of the goals as listed in the 2009 spring semester course syllabus:

- To explore the ‘translation’ of contemplative arts to other venues.
- To find support and skills for teaching and other creative projects.
- To engage with the process of ending and the design of a ceremony and celebration to complete the MFA journey. (pp. 1-2)
The emphasis on the *harvesting* component was designed to prepare students, *warrior-artists-in-training*, for integrating this *basic form of Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP)* into their personal and professional lives (for a discussion of *warrior artist-in-the-world* see chapter two, section two).

As described in her text, *Contemplative Dance Practice*, Ms. Dilley (2006) initially created *CDP* as a summer program. Since 1980, *CDP* has been an integral part of the contemplative and meditative arts tradition at Naropa University:

The **CONTEMPLATIVE DANCE PRACTICE** form trains personal and group mindfulness of body/mind by joining sitting meditation practice together with spontaneous dance/movement improvisation.

The insight and knowledge of bodymind is cultivated through deep listening on many levels of perception, in the exploration of impulses, in still and moving postures, and with gentle attention to the breath.

Inspired by the Shambhala and Dharma Art teachings of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, CDP is an experiential class offering the time and space for deep and profound investigations into the experience of ‘NOW-ness’ – this present moment. Self, others, and space shape the ‘dance’ of each session. (pp. 11-12)

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1988) described the synchronization of the body and mind in *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*. In chapter two, section one of this dissertation document, the reader can find a brief summary of the eloquent commentary of Trungpa Rinpoche. Also, chapter two, section two provides an introduction to Chogyam Trungpa’s Dharma Art teachings.

**Sitting meditation.**

Burgundy rectangle on sunlit hardwood,
Inner meeting outer within horizontal stable space;
Calm cushion resting
Students settle into cross-legged postures on burgundy meditation cushions – some sipping from water bottles – all finally facing the center of the rectangular formation in which they are seated. A pervasive calm seems to emanate from the community and from the horizontal space of the rectangle.

Seated within the group, Barbara begins coaching the sitting meditation session:

So already having been somatically engaged, come to the sitting discipline, listening to *kinesthetic delight.* After the openness of the *Sanctuary* practice, sitting can be a way of containing the complexity of living on the earth. Through the discipline, we are connected to the ancestors and not necessarily to Buddhism. Throughout history, we have rested and contemplated things.

(A bell sounds. Spines straighten, palms resting on thighs.)

Listen to the sound of the bell and consider what it offers. It creates a boundary. The support of a firm edge is necessary.

So settling down, it can be helpful to close the eyes.

(Eyes close as chests rise with the inhalation of the breath.)

The restraint of the meditation discipline can be inviting. Invite openness of the joints. Invite the chi force to be present. The study of alignment is endless because we change so much. The intention of this clear upright posture, below heaven and above earth, is to allow breath its most efficacious journey. *Shamatha* is our most basic practice – noticing thoughts and returning to breathing. *Shamatha* is training the mind. *Shamatha* means *calm abiding.*

There is a place where we slightly raise our gaze to expand our awareness of the space, light in the room, sounds in the parking lot. In cultivating *vipashayana* or *insight,* sometimes there is a natural return to the simplicity of *shamatha.* This can shift from day to day, but it is also developmental.

There is an ongoing passage between inner and outer awareness. I will experiment and coach you on some eye practices. However, you can stay with your regular gaze, if you wish.

Practice **infant eyes.**

(Some eyes slowly open, accompanied by audible exhalations of the breath.)
You can shift from this way of seeing, back to your regular gaze, or even to a direct looking. It is important in our exploration to allow the gaze to move on the diagonals, so we are comfortable with the spiral movements.

Now let’s turn to peripheral seeing. Let the play between the eye practices continue for the last few minutes of our sitting time.

(Barbara strikes a meditation bell twice, signaling the end of the sitting meditation session. Most students rest on their cushions for several more minutes. Some stand and then cross the floor to leave the studio space for a short break.)

Looking between things, the rectangle of burgundy cushions appears to be an island of calm on a still sea extending beyond the horizon.

In cultivating the practice of vipashayana, Barbara differentiated five ways of seeing. Her “Five Eye Practices” included:

- Closed eyes: internal seeing; rest; refresh
- Peripheral seeing: soft focus; seeing from the corner of the eyes
- Infant eyes: seeing before naming
- Looking between things: the space “between;” negative space
- Direct looking: investigate; study; absorb

At the close of the sitting meditation, I realized I had seen the session in these five different ways. Also, I recalled that I often “played” between these eye practices during the direction of a theatre production; choreography of a movement/dance piece; or creation of a lesson plan. In my view, the regular playing between these five eye practices could enhance creative thinking and innovative development of performance work.

Barbara coached the practice of sitting meditation as both a reflective convention and as a context-building convention. The ongoing practice of sitting meditation, a central discipline of the Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World course, met
another primary course goal of “continuing the exploration of the Naropa heritage of sacred world, warrior-artist-in-training, and the contemplative and meditative arts” (Dilley, 2009, p. 1).

As Barbara facilitated the Sanctuary and sitting meditation sessions, she often spoke of kinesthetic delight. In Contemplative Dance Practice, Ms. Dilley (2006) discussed the development of kinesthetic delight as a “central discipline” of CDP:

Bringing mind and body together in the moment we listen for the “voice” of the body/mind. We honor the gestures/sounds/stillness with curiosity, allowing our felt-sense to just be – simple and at ease. We take care of this voice with “maitri” (loving kindness). We begin to sense our kinesthetic delight. This quality of delight moves through the whole of our bodymind and dares to know all the levels of thoughts, feelings, impulses, sensations – the named and the unnamed – with openness. We develop confidence and are not afraid of who we are. (p. 12)

The other central disciplines of CDP are the ongoing return to nowness and the building of respect for the ensemble of CDP participants.

Again, these two CDP central disciplines are described in Barbara’s (2006) text, Contemplative Dance Practice:

Willing to come back to now – this moment. Through the practice of sitting meditation and the cultivation of mindfulness and awareness in improvisational movement we train to gently return to here, this moment – over and over. This discipline is explored in both stillness and in motion. This supports the investigation of the many levels of perception.

Respect for the ‘ensemble’. While we are part of this “classroom village” we are gentle and kind to one another. We participate in each practice session with respect and friendliness. Our personal journey is deeply entwined with each other. ‘Other’ is the mirror reflecting back parts of ourselves that we may not care to see. ‘Other’ is the friend and the guide. ‘Other’ becomes the ‘teacher.’ Decorum – clear and direct communication and atmosphere – strengthens the power of this time shared with like-minded explorers. (p. 12)
The training of mindfulness and awareness and cultivating of *kinesthetic delight* are central to *CDP* and to the *Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the World* course.

**Warrior women artist-teacher panel.**

Students alternate between stretching and swigging water during a break from the first segment of their three-hour class. Barbara enters the studio with Joan and Cara; and they sit on chairs that have been previously placed in a semi-circular arrangement. Next Janet enters and Barbara invites her to sit in the remaining vacant chair. The sounds of talking and laughter quiet into near silence, as the fourteen students, taking the roles of audience members, sit on the floor, some on meditation cushions, facing the panel of Naropa faculty.

**BARBARA:** *(to members of the panel)* Thank you for participating in our *Warrior Women Artist-Teacher Panel* today. Why don’t you start with discussing how you came to Naropa and your current work as an artist and teacher.

**CARA:** Well, I moved to Boulder in 1993 and started at Naropa in 1997. *(to Barbara)* Barbara invited me here. I am the artistic director and choreographer for *Still Moving Dance*, a contemporary dance company based in Denver, although I’m not making work right now. I’m in the repose section of creative work—the work is not creating work. *(to Janet)* I do have two studios and do applied work there.

**JOAN:** I found the MFA program through googling Wendell. *(Wendell Beavers is Director of MFA Theater: Contemporary Performance and Joan’s former teacher at NYU). I had been working full time with computer software and felt stale as an artist until I enrolled in the grad program. Actually, I had been in Boulder for one day in 1985. Also, I had started an Aikido practice. Through my time here as a student and now as faculty, I have grown. I sometimes have a conflict between a militant performing artist view and being a teacher. I still make work and *(to Barbara)* Barbara is a mentor.

**JANET:** I’m a native of Boulder, although I live in Denver. I was composing, playing and recording original music for prepared guitar when I met Mark. *(At the time of the panel discussion, Mark Miller was Former Chair of the Music Department. Currently, he again serves as chair.) He brought me to Naropa to
teach private students and eventually, to teach classes. After seven to eight years, I took the chair for him. Finding balance between artist life and the rest of life can be difficult.

CARA: I’m wondering about the Buddhist path of making art.

BARBARA: My initial response to the Buddhist teachings was that I should give up my dance practice. However, in 1979, Trungpa Rinpoche first started teaching dharma art. (Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Master and Visionary Scholar, Chogyam Trungpa, founded Naropa University.) I found the dharma art teachings to be liberating in regard to my self-consciousness. It was in the journey of being a teacher in the classroom that I moved from narrow uncertainty and stuck up my head from my self-absorption and asked (to students) “who are these people?” The students who come to Naropa do so because something is vibrating in their systems. The arts are a vehicle for a personal journey. I was inspired by how Trungpa Rinpoche translated languages. So I keep exploring how to translate dharma images into work in the classroom. Chogyam Trungpa’s adjustments were inspiring! He is a mentor – showing how teaching might work. The role of the bounded Self and my personal journey of exploring this are what have been helpful for students. I’ve only learned experientially. There is always tension.

The five conditions for sharing wisdom according to the Dharma are important to understand in establishing teacher-student relations. These five classical teaching conditions include: the teacher, the students, the subject matter or teaching, the time, and the place. As teacher, I ask, “who am I?” Regarding the students, I want to discover who they are and why they are in my class. In preparing to present concepts and/or practices to a group of students, I consider the nature and complexity of what I am about to teach. The other elements of course preparation include learning the time of day or evening during which a class will take place, as well as the appropriateness of the class location. Questions that accompany these five conditions are: “what do I want to teach; what do I need to learn to teach; and what have I forgotten to teach?”

JANET: Sometimes, we as teachers forget the conditions in which we find our students— are they hungry, is the room comfortable?

JOAN: I try not to get obsessed with the driving need to teach stuff. At times, it’s important to stop and regard the students and ask (pauses and turns to the student audience), “how are you?” As advocated in Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1985), we need to cultivate a “transaction of generosity.”

CARA: I try to be a model of learning, listening, and being a person of curiosity. It can be hard to be in the gap with students; you feel exposed.
BARBARA: One of the hardest parts of the contemplative path is to remember to re-collect. When things are scattered, I can pull myself around myself. I can recollect.

JOAN: I consider myself to be a new contemplative practitioner. The language of my dharma/spiritual advisors provide counsel about how I make choices as a teacher in the classroom.

JANET: Where is the evidence of this shared territory between contemplative practice and artistic practice?

BARBARA: This is an important question for Naropa at large and relates to our accreditation review.

CARA: I think art practice is always contemplative.

BARBARA: The genuine contemplative arts teacher is an active contemplative practitioner. Sometimes this is shared in class and sometimes it isn’t. Also, there is the question of “how do we assess our students’ work?” I sometimes feel impoverished in academia because the scholar is considered to be the top rung and the artist is second rung.

JANET: I feel conflict between practicing learning (of music) and practicing practice. This process slips back and forth.

JOAN: It is helpful, I think, to share with students that there are two practices that take a lot of time—the artistic practice and the contemplative practice. Sometimes, we have to drop aside one of the practices. Sharing this with students can help them to relax. I don’t have a problem identifying this in the classroom.

BARBARA: Shamatha, an ancient sitting practice of regarding thoughts, creates mindfulness and awareness. Then we can adjust “doing so much.” (to Joan) Taught from a body-mind perspective, yoga and aikido teach this as well. Contemplative arts at Naropa immediately engage multiple levels of awareness.

JANET: As I have gotten older, the creation of music has become more about listening.

Simultaneously raising one hand and pulling a striped leg warmer with the other, a young woman with blondish dreadlocks asks, “How do you meet the needs of diverse students?”
CARA: My mentor, who is an 88-year-old African American, Pilates master teacher, says that you must ask your students specific questions about where they are coming from, culturally and in regard to state of mind. Such questions might include “where did you come from today,” or “did you come from the North or from the South?” “How was the subway ride today?”

JOAN: I try to be transparent about stating my opinion. For example, I might say, “this is my aesthetic, but each of you has a different aesthetic.” I always ask, “Where is the student in this moment?”

JANET: I ask myself, “What is the desired outcome of each student?” I make a point of learning about each student, so that I can hold in mind the objectives of each student. Then I teach the class, as a whole, with each individual’s objectives in mind.

A masculine voice sounds from within the cluster of students. “What is the relationship between direct and indirect instruction in your teaching? I suppose this could relate to evidence.”

CARA: I start with teaching form.

BARBARA: Although I tend to more open and spacious, I do try to be specific and articulate what I am setting up in a teaching situation. The way I teach is not the way I was trained. I come from a high privilege art world—New York in 1960. Now I am interested in teaching how to be a learner. (pause) Evidence is the feedback students provide many years later.

JANET: Yes—evidence emerges many years after formal education. A student returned to visit me with a story of how he considered what to take with him out of a burning house, based on an assignment I had given to him and his classmates. For this particular assignment, I had asked the students to write a list of the ten most absolutely essential material possessions in their lives.

BARBARA: I created exercises for the classroom based on performances with the Grand Union (innovative improvisational company). Evidence of this exists through Grand Union performances on DVD’s.

JOAN: When I worked with Mary Overlie (Creator of Viewpoints theory) at NYU, I never received precise instruction. I needed to learn how to articulate instruction as a teacher at Naropa.

CARA: I create my own choreographic vocabulary that interests me with my students. My teaching has to interest me.
JANET: *(nods in agreement)* In my teaching, the greatest pleasure is to experience that which I have never seen nor heard before.

BARBARA: *(to Cara, Janet, and Joan)* We appreciate you sharing your insights and time with us.

*(B. Dilley, J. Bruemmer, J. Miller, & C. Reeser, personal communication, February 27, 2009)*

Barbara stands to speak with Janet. Cara briefly speaks with a student and then exits the studio with Joan. Several students follow Cara and Joan, while others converse as they gather and stack meditation cushions along one wall of the studio.

Barbara had invited Naropa faculty: Joan Bruemmer, then-Interim Co-Director of BFA Performance; Janet Feder, then-Chair of the Music Department; and Cara Reeser, then-Interim Co-Director of BFA Performance, to discuss their professional backgrounds and views of the relationship between their arts, contemplative, and teaching practices with her second-year MFA students. The *Warrior Women Artist-Teacher Panel* was an integral segment within “Part II: The Path of Teaching and Learning” of the *Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World* course. As a part of the first meditation practicum class session I observed, this significant *context-building* convention, creatively and comprehensively met three previously mentioned course goals, listed in Ms. Dilley’s 2009 spring semester syllabus:

- To find support and skills for teaching and other creative projects.
- To explore the ‘translation’ of contemplative arts to other venues.
- To continue the exploration of the Naropa heritage of sacred world, warrior-artist-in-training, and the contemplative and meditative arts. (p. 1)
The panel discussion drew attention to contextual opportunities for integrating the contemplative arts with the art of teaching.

As a veteran integrator of the contemplative and teaching arts, Barbara expressed, during an interview, that she “extends her awareness to the whole of the room” and that “intentional bearing witness to the students’ process helps to guide students’ attention” (B. Dilley, personal communication, April 14, 2009). In regard to Barbara, I would like to offer a verbal snapshot of this master teacher and artist who did not fully describe her background during the panel discussion.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Founder of Naropa University, extended two important leadership opportunities to Barbara Dilley. The first was to develop and chair the Dance Department at Naropa. The second was to serve as President of the University. It was during her tenure as President, from 1985 through 1993, that Naropa became an accredited academic institution with a board of directors and a more nonsectarian approach. Barbara’s professional dance performance experience with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and the Grand Union in New York City, provided a running start for her directorship of the dance program. However, I believe Ms. Dilley truly became a master warrior-in-the-world, as she courageously and rigorously led Naropa University as President, with no previous experience in college administration.

**The contemplative artistry of the Meditation Practicum IV course.**

Barbara brings lifelong artistry and leadership abilities to the design and teaching of the *Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World* course. The sessions I
observed are a part of “the fourth practicum in the contemplative traditions and practices of Naropa University created for the MFA in Contemporary Theater” (Dilley, 2009, p.1).

Class sessions take place once a week for three-hours. In my view, the three-hour time period provides a spacious opportunity for the preparation, context-building, reflective, showing, and closing conventions to occur and interact. Students are graded on a Pass/Fail basis according to class participation, presentation of book reviews, discussion of required reading, and completion and exchange of reflection papers (see “Solo and Dyad Exchange” in Appendix G). The syllabus sets forth the attendance policy in an invitational tone: “The presence of your company is requested but not required” (p. 2). During the practicum’s “Part III: Ceremony and Celebration,” Barbara facilitates the second-year students’ creation of a ceremony to celebrate their graduation from the MFA program (see Appendix H).

**Voice/Song: The Rilke Project**

No longer can composers create new music or new music-theater for voices without some specific understanding of the kinds of performers and techniques involved, and performers themselves have increasingly become creators or cocreators as new kinds of vocalism, in conjunction with technological transmission, amplification, and modification, present an enormous array of choices. These choices offer a wide array of vocal types and a complex palette of expression, extending in one direction toward traditional language and theater forms and in the other to nonverbal and emotive expression.

---Eric Salzman (2000), *Some Notes on the Origins of New Music-Theater*

**Class meeting.**

As I open the door to the Nalanda Studio Theater, #9190, the late afternoon sun illuminates a semi-circle of red meditation cushions arranged in the center area of the studio space. Walking barefoot across hardwood floors, three students chat and carry
cushions to expand the semi-circle into a large circular formation. Upon entering the studio, to my right, I notice a man energetically arranging papers near an upright piano. Stepping nearer to the piano, I announce my first visit to the Voice/Song class by saying, “Hello. I’m Linda. You must be Gary.” Turning toward me, Composer, Musician, and MFA Associated Artist, Gary Grundei, responds in a congenial manner, “Welcome Linda. I heard you were visiting today.” Not wanting to further interrupt Mr. Grundei’s preparation for class, I gesture to a chair near the piano and quickly ask, “Should I sit here?” Offering me a far better vantage point for my observations, Gary graciously invites me to sit with the students and faculty in the circle for a class meeting.

By the time I get situated in the circle with a notepad, pen, and meditation cushion, its circumference has already expanded to accommodate eighteen students, seated on cushions. Wendell Beavers, Director of MFA Contemporary Performance, enters quickly and quietly sits just outside the circle, followed by Actor, Singer, and Core MFA Faculty Member, Ethelyn Friend. As Ethelyn, known as Ethie by the MFA community, begins to silently count the number of students in attendance, she states, “Hello everyone. Today’s meeting is a required part of your training.” When Ethie and Gary cross the floor to join the circle, a young lady gracefully rises from her cross-legged position and rapidly walks toward the door saying, “I’ll get Deidre.” Several students move their cushions to make room for Gary and Ethie.

Upon settling into a comfortable seated position, Ethie invites those assembled to *bow in*. Almost simultaneously, we place our hands on our thighs, in a seated *warrior position*, and bow toward the center of the circle. After the bow, Ethie continues,
“Attending class sessions is mandatory and they can be expanded to include other important work with which you are involved.” The door swings open and two students tiptoe across the space to join their classmates. The circle widens again to include the entire second-year student body, nineteen students, as well as Ethie, Gary, and me, with Wendell in close proximity.

Ethie’s mellifluous quality of voice invites attentive listening from the circle of class participants:

We are starting a new course component, “the rilke project.” You will be applying your eight-octave sound and creating music in a community. You will be using outside sources to create song or sound, which is the essence of what it is to be an interpretive artist. Taking the image from a line of a Rilke text, you will bring it inside and allow it to inspire. I have thought of each of your voices and want to work with each of you to create music for your eight-octave voice.

I am somewhat jolted from my concentrated listening to Ethie’s presentation of objectives for “the rilke project,” when a resonant bass voice sounds to my left, “why the choice of Rilke?”

Ethie responds, “Like Alfred Wolfsohn, Rilke accesses the inner aspects of the psyche. Rilke’s landscapes of imagery and symbolism are striking and deep.” Glancing at Gary, Ethie continues, “Gary will use voices of the students to compose.”

In response to Ethie’s nonverbal cue, Gary begins his presentation of objectives for and thoughts about “the rilke project:”

I am honored by the concept of composing music for students. This way of working is new and exciting to me. I feel like we are creating structure together. I encourage you to work together, as your MFA experience is drawing to a close. Rilke’s writing forms the foundation of the composition. His body of work is deep and evocative. Of the many possibilities, there could be spoken text against music. This project is about creating auditory landscapes, not presenting a musical production.
As Gary passes “rilke project questionnaires” around the circle, Ethie states, “There will always be two studios included in this course” (see “the rilke project (2009)” in Appendix I). Gary adds, “It is important to tell me or Ethie honestly if an approach is uncomfortable, or if you’re not getting what you want from the class.”

When students begin completing the questionnaire, Wendell quietly exits the studio and one young lady looks up from her writing, “When is the showing?” Ethie answers, “It will be after spring break, probably during the last class.” Some students write quickly without looking up; others hold positions of stillness prior to noting their commentaries on the questionnaire forms.

After several minutes, Gary begins to collect questionnaires from those participants who have completed their writing. One woman bends over outstretched legs, as a young man engages in slow and fluid shoulder rolls. Three students continue to write. Ethie interjects, “Who can speak German?” One young lady immediately raises her right arm high, while another student slowly rotates his hand from side to side. As Gary gathers the remaining questionnaires, Ethie continues, “We want to spend not too much longer in the circle.”

In an encouraging tone, Gary recommends, “Let’s just relish and hear what you have brought in.” Most students cross energetically toward backpacks and gym bags resting on the floor near the studio entrance; and others remain seated. Those who have left the circle return with various copies and collections of poetry and prose by the eminent Austro-German 20th century writer, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1926).
A young woman enthusiastically volunteers to read her selection from Rilke’s

*Letters to a Young Poet* (1934):

You are so young, so before all beginning, and I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love *the questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, that cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (pp. 33-34)

Several students respond with silent nods of appreciation.

Another young lady holds *Rilke’s Book of Hours: Love Poems to God* (1996) in the air and then lowers the text to begin her oral interpretation of “I Live my Life in Widening Circles:”

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.

I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I’ve been circling for thousands of years
and still I don’t know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song? (p. 48)

One member of the circle throws her head back, emitting an audible sigh of delight. Two other students lean forward, hugging their knees toward their chests. Another stretches from side to side and smiles.

Straightening his shoulders, a young man with curly dark brown hair pulled into a top knot, opens a sepia-hued book with a green binding and starts reading:

Once I took your face into
my hands. Moonlight fell on it.
Most incomprehensible object
under overflowing tears.
Like something docile, that quietly endures,
it felt almost the way a thing feels.
And yet there was no being in that chill
night, which endlessly eludes me.

O these places toward which we surge,
pushing into the scant surfaces
all the waves of our heart,
our pleasures and our weaknesses,
and to whom do we finally hold them out?

To the stranger, who misunderstood us,
to the other, whom we never found,
to those slaves, who bound us,
to the spring winds, which promptly vanished,
and to silence, that spendthrift. (Rilke, 1996, p. 81)

Silence alternates with expressive readings of Rilke’s works around and across the circle
(to view representative student selections of poetry for “the rilke project,” see Appendix J). Upon the cessation of the readings, Gary grins and comments, “That was beautiful.

Please send these works and others that have not yet been selected to me.”

Gary continues, “Now I have a poem I would like us to take a look at and read
together.” After everyone in the circle receives a copy of “Buddha in Glory” (Rilke, 1982) from Gary, we begin our choral interpretation:

Center of all centers, core of cores,
almond self-enclosed and growing sweet –
all this universe, to the furthest stars
and beyond them, is your flesh, your fruit.

Now you feel how nothing clings to you;
your vast shell reaches into endless space,
and there the rich, thick fluids rise and flow.
Illuminated in your infinite peace,

a billion stars go spinning through the night,
blazing high above your head.
But in you is the presence that will be, when all the stars are dead. (p. 69)

Upon the completion of the reading, Gary thanks the group for its participation; and Ethie invites everyone to take a quick break and stack the meditation cushions near the studio entrance.

The class meeting began with the preparation convention of bowing in and continued with the context-building conventions of Ethie and Gary presenting their objectives for “the rilke project,” as well as students participating in the context-building by writing their intentions for the project in the questionnaires. The context-building and showing conventions interacted, as the participants read their Rilke selections aloud to their classmates.

During an interview, Gary explained that MFA second-year, voice/song training culminated in the application of Roy Hart Theatre vocal “method” to the Western canon of music-theater. In the past, second-year students had applied the techniques of Roy Hart Theatre to selected works of Bertolt Brecht (1898 – 1956) and Kurt Weill (1900 – 1950), as well as to compositions by Harold Arlen (1905 – 1986). Mr. Grundei elaborated that since the class of 2009 was exceptional in its musical abilities, Ethie and he decided to develop a “more organic” final project for this group. After considerable research and conversation, Gary and Ethie decided that the profound “aesthetical value of and contemplative, spiritual strand within the work of Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1929),” perhaps the greatest 20th century lyrical poet of the West, would challenge and complement the extended vocal ranges of the second-year students (G. Grundei, personal communication, April 8, 2009). In addition, Gary expressed that “the rilke project” would
provide opportunities for class participants to compose music individually and in collaboration with each other. Gary also stated that participation in the project would offer closure to students during their final semester of the MFA program.

**Alfred Wolfsohn and the Roy Hart Theatre.**

Since 1992, Ms. Friend has been affiliated and actively involved with the Roy Hart Theatre of France. In “The Roy Hart Theatre: Teaching the Totality of Self,” Laura C. Kalo, with George Whiteside and Ivan Midderigh (1997), described the nature of the extended vocalism of the Roy Hart Theatre:

The vocal “method” of the Roy Hart Theatre is based on an extended vocal range able to reach beyond the normal musical concepts of bel canto singing, and into the experimental realm of vocal production. This extended range is explored through sounds not typically heard in everyday experience: bird-like chirps, belly growls, nasal cries, bright screams, dark moans, tender melodies, and chorded sounds involving the simultaneous production of overtones. All sounds are explored; no aspect of human experience is excluded. Simply put, the focus is on singing the totality of the self. (pp. 185-186)

The Roy Hart Theatre’s approaches to connecting the vocalist with the totality of the human psyche originated in the pioneering vocal work of German born Alfred Wolfsohn (1896 – 1962).

Wolfsohn explored an extended range of his own voice as a way to ease his mental anguish, after surviving being a medic in the front-line trenches of World War I:

In extending the range of his voice and holding in mind the extreme emotive sounds he had heard in the trenches he realised that his voice could express an extensive collage of emotions, moods and characters which embraced not only the dark and agonising sounds of suffering but those of the utmost joy and pleasure. As a result of vocal catharsis, not only did he cure his illness, but he became convinced that there exists a universal human voice of much broader circumference than had hitherto been imagined. (Newham, 2000, p. 35)
In 1930’s Germany, Wolfsohn applied his vocal discoveries to the teaching of singing. However, being of Jewish descent, he decided to flee Nazi-occupied Germany in 1939.

According to Voice and Movement Therapist, Paul Newham (2000), after the end of World War II, Wolfsohn renewed his investigation and teaching of extended vocalism in London:

Through consistent and in-depth work, Wolfsohn enabled his pupils to exceed what they had hitherto believed to be the fixed boundaries of vocal expression. Wolfsohn’s intention was not to nurture the diligence and technical proficiency of the ‘voice beautiful’, but to utilise the potential range of the human voice as a probe and a mirror, investigating and reflecting the many aspects of the human psyche. Therefore, those who took lessons with him committed themselves not only to a thorough psycho-archeology of their psyche, but to the process of acquiring the courage and the ability to express the many aspects of themselves through the voice. (pp. 35-36)

In his quest to explore the parameters of a “universal human voice,” Wolfsohn was influenced by the ground breaking work of Swiss Psychiatrist, Carl Jung (1875 – 1961).

In particular, Wolfsohn was fascinated by Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious. According to Jungian Analyst, Eugene Pascal (1992), “in the realm of the unconscious Jung observed various layers, each reaching farther and farther down away from a personal level into an area that is utterly impersonal” (p. 57). Wolfsohn had keen interest in making “lower” levels of the unconscious audible through human vocalization (Newham, 2000).

In his text, Jung to Live By: A Guide to the Practical Application of Jungian Principles for Everyday Life, Pascal (1992) described the nature of the “impersonal” state of the collective unconscious:

These deeper layers of our unconscious communicate with our ego-consciousness via mythical and poetic images, stories and feelings that consist entirely of
elements and characteristics of the human species, the voice of uninfluenced primal Nature, filtering up to our human ego-awareness. They are not part of an individual’s personal development and history but rather of the development and history of the human species as a whole.

The deepest layers appear to be indifferent to egocentric concerns and purposes and to operate in ways that are beyond the ken of our egos. Jung called the collective unconscious the objective psyche, and wrote that it had a purposiveness of its own, intentionally warding off the occasional one-sidedness of our egos and directing things toward the completeness and wholeness of the psyche in general. (p. 59)

The dynamic interaction of the unconscious and conscious aspects of the human psyche was a central concept for Wolfsohn’s living legacy, the Roy Hart Theatre.

Long time protégé of Wolfsohn, South African born Roy Hart (1926 – 1975), continued the research and work of his mentor, after his death. Accomplished Actor and Teacher, Hart expanded Wolfsohn’s primarily therapeutic approach to extended vocalism to include aesthetic expression, as well as theatre demonstrations and performances.

According to Newham (2000), Roy Hart Theatre work was and is acclaimed for its high quality therapeutic and artistic value:

With the death of Wolfsohn in 1962, Roy Hart announced clearly that it was his intention to further the work towards theatre and invited the group to join him in the pursuit of experiments in a new form of vocal dramatics. The ‘Alfred Wolfsohn Voice Research Centre’ now became the ‘Roy Hart Theatre’ and what had begun with small voice demonstrations slowly took the shape of theatrical performances. All members of the Roy Hart Theatre – particularly Roy Hart himself – became renowned for their incredible ability to refract their voices through every contour of the sound prism, producing an incredible acoustic spectrum from the bleak to the divine. In 1969, the composer Peter Maxwell-Davies composed a full length piece for Roy Hart called *Eight Songs for a Mad King* with subsequent performances given internationally and in response to which Hart was described as an artist who commands all the voices of the human register – ranging from the deepest bass to the highest soprano. (p. 39)
Beyond his own splendid vocal register, Hart believed that every human being was capable of cultivating an eight-octave range of voice.

Kalo, with Whiteside and Midderigh (1997), discussed how Roy Hart and his colleagues approached the development of the eight-octave voice as not only a form of extended singing, but also as a way of life:

Where the members of the group had learned from Wolfsohn to practice singing as a “redemption of the body,” Hart’s journey in sound now led the group toward what Hart called an “eight-octave approach to life,” the belief that every person has the potential to sing across eight octaves. Their vocal research was influenced as much by the organic development of the company members’ individual lives as by the continued expansion of their vocal range. They began meeting not only to sing and explore their voices but also to share their daily experiences and nightly dreams. The telling and interpreting of dreams in particular became more integral to their work together. As those discussions progressed, they found they were becoming students not only of voice, but of life. They began to speak of “living the voice,” the notion that if only all possible human feelings can be expressed vocally, without judgment, one can live consciously without being controlled by one’s feelings. (pp. 189-190)

During their time in London, working from The Abraxas Club, the Roy Hart Theatre attracted positive attention from such luminaries as the British Theatre Director and Author, Peter Brook, and Polish Theatre Director, Jerzy Grotowski (1933 – 1999); and performed to mixed reviews in international theatre festivals. In 1974, the company relocated to a chateau in the Cevennes region of southern France, from where it still operates today, the Centre Artistique International Roy Hart Chateau de Malerargues.

**Applying Roy Hart Theatre vocal work to interpreting the texts of Rilke.**

Screeching, sighing, vocalized “ahs” moving from low to high pitches, loud yawns, and soft moans emanate from nineteen bodies stretching and rolling on the hard wood flooring of the Nalanda Studio Theater. Listening with eyes closed, one imagines a
futuristic orchestra warming up for an inter-planetary concert. A bell sounds and silence ensues. A conductor requests that the musicians “sense the music of their sounds.” With eyes open, one notices the musicians’ scores lay on the ground nearby. Upon closer viewing, the scores are actually texts by the great author, Rainer Maria Rilke; the musicians, second-year MFA students; and the conductor, Roy Hart Theatre teacher, Ethie Friend.

After repeating the ringing of a small hand bell, Ms. Friend continues, “From a position of rest, allow the text to come into the inside. Allow it to affect breathing and the inside of your bodies, hanging out with how that makes you feel.”

As the students begin the first movement of extended vocalizations, Ethie side coaches, “Engage in movement of an image and then return to the neutral body.” The sounds of high-pitched toning, guttural growling, and tuneful sighing crescendo, accompanied by the participants’ somatic expansions and contractions, until the bell rings again. Ethie voices, “Now bring the body in.” During this time, Ms. Friend guides the pupils’ participation between improvisatory kinesthetic interpretation and a state of neutrality or “alert stillness” (Callery, 2001, p. 33).

Upon several more moments passing, Ethie simultaneously sounds the bell and states, “Pause, but don’t let go of it. Keep it flickering, burning inside.”

The momentary quietude sounds like the silence between movements of a symphony.

The dulcet tones of Ethie’s instruction seem to signal a second movement. She continues, “Now take a little element of it to distill it. What is the distillation, the
concentration of it? You can take awhile to find it. Look for something that can be repeated.”

Within seconds, the *second movement* begins to have a more patterned musicality as one hears repetitions of sounds.

Like an experienced conductor, who is well acquainted with a musical score and the abilities of orchestral musicians who are playing it, Ms. Friend cues, “Thirty more seconds.”

The bell sounds.

Ethie directs, “Count to three and do your sound in a short period of time.”

The realm of sound quickly develops a staccato rhythm and livelier expressive quality.

The chorus of sound transforms into a choreographic *divertissement* when Ethie side coaches, “Go around the room and hear individual expressions.” Students glide and dart toward each other, concurrently producing their sounds and listening to their fellow creators. A unique interaction of graceful gyrations, percussive pulsating, languid swaying, and sudden jumps combine with *coloratura trilling*, groaning, coyote-like howling, and high-pitched laughter. An embodied collage of sound and motion unfolds into a grand *toccata*, providing a glimpse of the interpreters’ individual and collective understanding of Rilke’s work.

Ethie’s attentive gaze embraces the improvised *finale*, before she brings the *movement* to a close by sounding the bell for the last time during this session.
The foundation for this context-building class segment had been established throughout the students’ course of study in Roy Hart Theatre vocal work with Ms. Friend. For close to two years, Ethie had facilitated the development of her pupils’ eight-octave ranges and extended singing abilities. Ethie had coached students in one-on-one and small group studio sessions.

According to Kalo, with Whiteside and Midderigh (1997), the most important aim of a Roy Hart Theatre teacher is to listen to and encourage the student’s exploration of voice and embodied connection to the psyche through vocal expression:

The centerpiece of the Theatre’s teaching “method,” used by all of the members without exception, is the singing lesson – the teacher working one-on-one with the student. Using only a piano, the teacher guides the student in vocal exploration, allowing any and all sounds as they come. . . .The teacher’s responsibility is to allow the student to re-connect to the voice, as well as to the sounds of the unconscious. . . .It is a transformative pedagogy, a way to reunite body and soul by confronting the realities contained in one’s own voice. (pp. 196-197)

As Ethie closely watched and listened to her pupils applying Roy Hart theatre vocal work to their texts, the quality of sound seemed to mirror aspects of the visionary depth of the prose and poetry of Rilke. The group interpretation, guided by Ms. Friend, offered a sonic view of the collective unconscious and profoundly current relevance of Rilke’s work.

**Co-creating music around Rilke’s poetry.**

During the next Voice/Song class, Gary gathers the twelve female second-year MFA students together for a studio session to co-create a music piece based on poem by Rilke, chosen by one of the students, Ellie. As they sit in a semi-circular arrangement on the floor in the Nalanda Studio Theater, Ethie works with the seven male second-year
MFA students, to co-develop a vocal composition based on another student-selected poem by Rilke, across the hall in performance studio, #9195.

In a vibrant tone, Gary launches his session by stating, “My goal is to create a piece in the 45 minutes. Ellie, could you read your poem for us?”

Ellie nods in agreement and begins reading “My Life is not” from her copy of *Poems from the Book of Hours*:

> No, my life is not this precipitous hour through which you see me passing at a run.  
> I stand before my background like a tree.  
> Of all my many mouths I am but one,  
> and that which soonest chooses to be dumb.

> I am the rest between two notes  
> which, struck together, sound discordantly,  
> because death’s note would claim a higher key.  
> But in that dark pause, trembling, the notes meet, harmonious.  
> And the song continues sweet.  

(Rilke, 1941, p. 21)

Gary thanks Ellie for her reading and asks if she would be willing to have the group work with it. Ellie responds, “Yes, that would be interesting.”

Gazing at the entire group, Gary asks, “Do any images, thoughts, or sounds come to you?”
Erin offers to read the poem in the language in which it was composed, German:

Mein Leben ist nicht diese steile Stunde,  
darin du mich so eilen siehst.  
Ich bin ein Baum vor meinem Hintergunde,  
ich bin nur einer meiner vielen Munde  
und jener, welcher sich am frühesten schliesst.

Ich bin die Ruhe zwischen zweien Tonen,  
die sich nur schlecht aneinander gewohnen:  
denn der Ton Tod will sich erhohn—

Aber im dunklen Intervall versohnen  
sich beide zitternd.  
Und das Lied bleibt schon.  
(Rilke, 1941, p 20)

After Gary expresses appreciation for Erin’s reading, he conjectures, “What if we hold the intention to sing a note? Imagine a collective note.”

Some students focus on Gary and others look at each other, as several students sound the same note. Then others join in by singing another note, which harmonizes with the first sound.

Gary continues, “Tamara, will you sound a note? Then, could everyone else sound Tamara’s note as a hum or ‘ah’? After Tamara starts, enter at your own rate, intuitively.” Upon Tamara sounding a note, the other students close their eyes – several match Tamara’s pitch with humming and others produce resonant “ahs.”

Gary exudes, “Great! Let’s try Ellie reading the poem and pausing when Tamara starts the sound on the word ‘run.’ After everyone joins the sound, then Ellie will continue the reading.” As the students follow Gary’s directions, he crosses to the piano with his copy of the poem and sits on the piano bench, continuing his watching and
listening of the group. Upon the completion of the slightly altered interpretation of “My Life is not,” Gary responds in a thoughtful tone, “Beautiful.”

Accompanying himself on the piano, Mr. Grundei sings, “Of all my many mouths.” He then asks the ladies to sing his freshly created composition.

Continuing the line of poetry as song, Gary sings, “I am but one” – then repeats the same words in a complementary musical phrase. When he nods at the students, they repeat what Gary has just sung.

Upon composing a harmony for the entire line, “Of all my mouths I am but one,” Gary asks those singers who are comfortable singing in a lower range to sing this newly created part, as the other participants repeat the melody.

After the ladies sing together in two parts, Gary works with Ellie to learn the final line of the stanza, “and that which chooses to be dumb” as a musical solo.

Next, the entire first stanza of “My Life is not” is discussed and refined by the students and Gary. Ideas for breathing, cueing, pacing, and dynamics are exchanged. In an enthusiastic, yet soothing tone, Gary suggests, “Take this work as an opportunity to be present. Imbue the work with meaning.”

After Gary invites the class participants to obtain their digital recording devices, the musical deconstruction of the first line of the next stanza, “I am the rest between two notes” starts. Gary has the students sing “I am the rest” in unison and then repeat the words after a pause of silence. He requests that Chandra cue the group in the repetition of the phrase. Upon teaching “between two notes” as a two-part harmony in a minor key, Gary asks for student recommendations regarding the rhythmic delivery of the phrase.
After several participants make suggestions for different ways to interpret the rhythms of the entire line, Gary conducts the singers in rehearsing “I am the rest between two notes.”

Prior to the ensemble singing of the first stanza and first line of the second stanza, some students reach for their recording devices and activate them. A tunefully evocative interpretation of the initial part of “My Life is not” ensues.

Gary exclaims, “Awesome! We will return to and expand upon this work during future sessions.” Several students smile, seemingly pleased with the work they have accomplished. Others stand and stretch, emitting relaxed yawns and talking softly. Some cross the floor to return recording devices to and pull out water bottles from backpacks and gym bags.

During following Voice/Song classes, Gary facilitates the continuance of the musical development of the entire poem, “My Life is not.” As he continues to compose portions of the piece and provide direction for its vocal interpretation, the students experiment with improvisational components and create choreographic elements.

**The interpretive artistry of “the rilke project.”**

Throughout the seven and a half-week period of time that I observed the Voice/Song class sessions, Ms. Friend, Mr. Grundei, and the second-year MFA students demonstrated their interpretive artistry as an ensemble. Ethie and Gary facilitated the students’ co-creation of song and sound; and the class members supported original student compositions through their performance participation. Also, Gary and Ethie joined the students in portions of *preparation, context-building, showing, reflective, and closing* activities. During rehearsals and the final *showing*, Ethie sang as a *tenor* in the
choral work, “buddha in glory,” composed by Mr. Grundei (2009), based on the text by Rilke (1982).

The preparation, reflective, context-building, showing, and closing conventions were skillfully integrated throughout each two-hour class session, which occurred twice a week. The beginning of most sessions combined the preparation convention of bowing in with a reflective circle time when announcements would be made and brief review of previously presented ideas discussed, in the Nalanda Studio Theater. Also, Ethie and Gary utilized this period of time to become aware of students’ states of mind through conversational exercises. The circle time also sometimes served as a context-building convention, when new concepts and evolving compositions were introduced and written materials circulated. After the initial preparation, reflective, and context-building conventions ended, Ethie would usually conduct another preparation convention, Roy Hart Theatre-style body/mind warm-ups. Then the context-building conventions would continue as two small group sessions, one lead by Ethie in performance studio, #9195 and the other, lead by Gary in the Nalanda Studio Theater, #9190 occurred. When the two small groups re-joined as one group in #9190, the context-building, showing, and reflective conventions interacted. Sometimes, each group would show its work to the other group and other times, students would present their compositions-in-progress to the entire class. Generally, the informal showings would be followed by an encouraging critiquing of the work by students and faculty, a reflective convention. Also, the whole group of students would rehearse “buddha in glory” under Gary’s direction. Together,
those assembled would participate in the closing convention of bowing out, prior to departing from the studio environment.

The final class session showcased individual and collective student compositions, as well three new scores composed by Mr. Grundei (2009). All presented work was inspired by a wide variety of texts written by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1926).

The prodigious variety of student compositions included a choral work, piano solo, pop-style duet, performance art piece, and an extended vocalized trio. In addition to writing and rehearsing their creations beyond their regular course and other production responsibilities, these composers also performed in their own and others’ work.

When Mr. Grundei (2009) composed “I read it here in your very word” and “eve,” he deliberately created sections for improvisational extended singing in the scores (to view copyrighted scores of “I read it here in your very word” and “eve” see Appendix K). Each of these compositions was performed by a different ensemble of student performers.

During my class observations of student improvisational encounters with the “I read it here in your very word” score, I noted hesitancy on the part of some in their approaches to the work. Their cautionary stances were understandable in that some students were neither musicians nor music improvisers. With considerable encouragement from Gary and time working with the piece, the vocal variety of the improvisatory elements became more potent. Therefore, by the time of the final class session, I expected the performance of this score to be somewhat polished, with interesting improvisatory interludes. However, at the final showing, I was truly astounded by the superior quality of the singing and presence of the performers. The singers’
evocative improvising truly captured the bluesy depth that I believe Gary was intending in his score.

The showing ended with Ethie, Gary, and the entire second-year class delivering a stirring performance of Gary’s (2009) splendid score, “buddha in glory” (to view the copyrighted score of “buddha in glory” see Appendix K). Mr. Grundei composed this work “for the Naropa University MFA Contemporary Performance Department’s Class of 2009” (p. 1). As the students and Ethie sang, Gary conducted and accompanied them on piano. During this final presentation, three participants also contributed to the richness of the performance – one by strumming a ukulele and the other two by shaking and striking percussive instruments.

As with all MFA Theater: Contemporary Performance courses, the second-year students were evaluated for their work in the Voice/Song class on a Pass/Fail basis. In order to provide a more comprehensive evaluation for her class participants, Ethie presented each of these students with a customized progress report at the close of the 2009 spring semester.

Viewpoints Seminar

Viewpoints appears everywhere in life: in the way people move, the way animals flock, the way cars pass on the highway. Frequently, when someone first learns the names of the individual Viewpoints, they become obsessed with spotting them at work everywhere: “Did you see how those people over there responded Kinesthetically to each other?!” Of course, this is the way life always is and has been; but naming the Viewpoints allows us to dissect reality into something identifiable and perhaps repeatable onstage.

---Anne Bogart and Tina Landau (2005), The Viewpoints Book
Space and story viewpoints.

As I enter performance studio #9185, Performing Arts Administrative Director, Liz Acosta, passes forms to eighteen second-year MFA students. The early afternoon sun provides abundant natural lighting for each student to complete two forms, one for graduation and the other for the diploma. Ms. Acosta advises, “Carefully check your diploma information to make certain it is correct.” One young man quietly enters the studio and joins his fellow students in scrutinizing their paperwork, seated on burgundy meditation cushions.

Wendell Beavers, Director of MFA Contemporary Performance and Core Faculty Member, stands on the sidelines with an expression of contentment that the class of 2009 is making another ensemble effort toward its upcoming graduation. As the class members pass their forms to Liz, everyone is aware that the departmental graduation ceremony will take place one month from today’s Viewpoints Seminar session. When Ms. Acosta exits with the paperwork, Mr. Beavers crosses the floor to sit, directly facing the students. In an invitational tone, he states, “Let’s bow in.” All assembled straighten their backs and place the palms of their hands just above their knees in seated warrior positions; slide them up their thighs; and together bow in.

“We will start by walking together through the viewpoints open space,” Wendell directs in an energetic, yet relaxed way. The students arise from their cushions and begin striding barefoot around and across the hardwood studio flooring. Moving toward the sidelines and watching the flow of movement, Wendell adds, “This is an intuitive drift through space.”
Then Wendell simultaneously joins the walking through space and coaches, “We’re going to work now with more presence, working with physical alignment.”

Cross-the-floor movement intertwines with patterns of sunlight and shadow.

Wendell voices, “We can up the ante by working with the empty spaces. We’re going to work with space, amongst and between, to working with the architectural frame. Work with the near and far dots and lines, dots looming from the floor pattern. We have lines and shapes formed by the groups in space.”

Looking between things, the movement of Wendell and the students begins to resemble electrons dancing around an ever shifting nucleus. I become aware of the interrelated connectivity between myself as the observer and the observed – the interplay of movement, light, shadow, with the studio floor, cushions, walls, ceiling, and my pen and paper.

My quantum mechanics musings return to direct looking, when I hear the sound of Wendell’s voice. He encourages the class participants to continue to warm up, while working with “five different kinds of focus” (see definitions of “five eye practices” in “Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World” section in this chapter).

After several more minutes of warm ups, Wendell directs the students to be seated for a Viewpoints lecture on Space. As the participants return to the grouping of meditation cushions, some reaching for water bottles from gym bags and back packs, Wendell crosses the floor to obtain his lecture notes and a cushion. The students settle into comfortable seated positions, when Wendell seats himself on his cushion facing the assembled group. Upon making several remarks about the nature of working with spatial
relationships in the viewpoints open space, Mr. Beavers (2000) begins reading an

*INTRODUCTION TO SPACE: The Classic Progression* “The whole world is a stage. . . .

and we as players but do play our part etc. . . .”:

This verity, usually quoted with a bit of a sigh of both resignation and relief that we are absolved of certain obsessive struggles, turns out to be yet another half truth (which one could argue makes it an untruth) foisted upon us by the aged gods of theater. The whole truth is that the world is a potential stage. The world awaits the performer’s intention and extraordinary awareness to actually become a stage. Far from simply playing our part, the contemporary performer is charged with the responsibility of creating the stage by this power of intention. In the post post-modern era, meaningful theater, or performance, requires this effort on the part of the performer. Whenever this effort is not made we get the unborn, the stillborn, or perhaps just a rote repeat of outmoded formulae. We get the half live.

The half-truth “that we do but play our part,” denies the very essence of the modern performer. It is our obligation as artists and our responsibility, to not only play on the stage, before watchers, but to create the stage, and subtly direct the focus of the watchers as well. This intention has its basis in ordinary, everyday attention. However, through training, which thoroughly engages both mind and body, this ordinary attention matures into extraordinary intention, focus and awareness. This mature awareness of the performer has the power to transform the performer, the activities of the performer, the watcher, and the arena of performance. . . . The Viewpoints are a way to map the mind’s relationship to body and its environment. Mind, body, environment; this is the terrain of the actor, the dancer, the contemporary performer. Viewpoints Practice is initially the practice of pointing things out to oneself and physically manifesting this information. Following this definition, performance is therefore the activity of pointing out for others what is there in experience all of the time. The Viewpoints are a tool to manifest all of the varieties of our experience of “how things are.” It teaches us how to integrate our own individual process of discovery with “performing” or showing our discovery to others, the watchers.

The Viewpoints body of work, or technique, is perceived as “new,” or “other” because it refuses to draw familiar lines around the actor, or the activities of performing and watching. The viewpoints work for instance treats the empty space as equal to the occupied space. The empty space is as alive as the performer. In fact the empty space gives rise to *things or events*. The empty space gives rise to filled space, corporality.
Inaction gives birth to action; stillness to movement; silence to sound. There is no action without conscious inaction, there is no movement without conscious stillness and there is no sound without a full experience of silence.

The “performer’s body” in the Viewpoints work also includes what we normally perceive as “not our body.” In working with the viewpoints, all of the things we perceive and with which we interact are also experienced as “our body.” The wall, the chair, the actor, the spoken word of the actor, the proverbial cup which the actor lifts to her lips while “acting,” are all of equal importance. These elements are given equal attention and are thereby empowered to “play their part.” The parts all of these elements play, how they organize themselves in any given moment, are of little concern to the actor. The actor puts these elements into play by applying an extraordinary quality of attention. The performer who is performing well is occupied by this activity and has no interest or attention left over. In this way the truth of the moment is revealed.

The performer/actor therefore is engaged in a two-fold activity; exercising acute awareness and then manifesting what is experienced or perceived in action. The performer directs the perception of the watcher by "pointing out” elements of the perceptual and sense fields. The pointing out activity of the performer is applied to the performer or “doer’s” own awareness first. The first activity of the performer is to point out to oneself. But in creating performance we include the others, the watchers. (The watchers in the traditional western view are the audience. But this process doesn’t assume this narrow view necessarily. The watchers could as well be the unseen gods. Regardless, in every instance, the first watcher is our own mind. Who the watchers are makes no immediate difference to the actor.) As performers therefore, we are engaged in both experiencing and enlarging our own awareness and leading the others, the watchers into experiencing and enlarging their awareness. (pp. 1-2)

The entire group of students listens in rapt attentiveness to Mr. Beaver’s reading, some taking notes. Wendell pauses and silently gauges the student response to the oral presentation of his text.

As he notes their level of focused concentration, he announces, “I will continue with reading from my writing on the Viewpoint of Story.” Mr. Beavers (2000) places the first text under his next one, Story, and then starts his second reading:

The Viewpoint of Story has a particular provenance which is rooted in a moment of dance history which declared itself anti-story, anti literal and anti illusion.
Several of the most powerful storytelling experiences in the theater I ever witnessed were performances of the Grand Union, a group made up of participants of the Judson Dance Theater. Its members were perceived as both heroic and legendary performers and disgusting cheapeners of the magic that was supposed to happen in the theater. The divide was mostly generational and the result of a natural sort of overthrow of what came before. Their brand of open improvisational performance featured precipitous surprises and a kind of high drama difficult to explain because of the ordinary circumstances from which it always managed somehow to arise. The next “thing” to happen always seemed inevitable after the fact, but completely impossible to anticipate the moment before. This was storytelling which got labeled post modern but in retrospect had a particular link to shamanistic storytelling.

It may be jarring to link post modernism with shamanism because we associate shamanism with the cultivation and communication of spiritual or other worldly things. Post modern performers of the sixties and seventies were looking into themselves and their immediate environment. They were communicating or pointing out the nature of the material world before us. There was not supposed to be anything other worldly about it. The ordinary magic that they practiced and bequeathed to the next generation was quite subversive to the modern dance sensibility, not to mention the high art theater world of ballet etc. That material world they pointed to was the body and its movement possibilities unadorned by rarified styles of moving (Steven Paxton); the chair and its simple presence and percussive qualities (David Gordon); the wall and its flatness and emotional resonance when repeatedly struck with a pillow (Yvonne Rainer). If shamanism is bringing the unknown into the known, a sort of birthing reality where the performer/shaman is the midwife, then this would be a good description of what these artists were doing. It is also a very good description of viewpoint improvisation in general and viewpoint storytelling in particular. It might also stand as a good definition of viewpoints acting.

In a sense the actor who acknowledges the viewpoints is reciting. Viewpoints acting is an act of recitation as the Victorians practiced it; that is as a declamatory underlining kind of oratory. What is being read however—the text so to speak—in the viewpoints is enlarged to include the whole field of perception and sensation.

In the story work it is exhilarating to find oneself reciting, enacting, being moved by a previously ineffable story. The story here emerges via sensation, or unfolds through a succession of visual images participated in by the performer. The story viewpoint is the arena where immediate perception and sensing meet memory and imagination. Viewpoints storytelling is the joining of our ability to generate mental associations with our ability to project them unto otherwise innocent people, objects or environments.
The Story Viewpoint, because of its origins in dance, is also quite different from Storytelling as most actors think of it. It is, in its fundamental practice, the very antithesis of Spolin style theater games which relate to storytelling. As in the other viewpoints we want to establish story as a source for generating movement or action in space. In the viewpoints, Story is cultivated first as source. Actors are quite attached to story as product and in fact see the telling of stories as perhaps their primary function. Because of this it is sometimes a difficult leap, but a very rewarding one, to flip the role of story and look at it primarily as a source for generating movement, visual imagery, action etc. In training, to establish story as source, it is necessary to give up one’s attachment to the story product. Practicing the story viewpoint does acknowledge story as product but its life as product is not separated from its life as process. The essence of viewpoint storytelling is to plough the product back into the source as immediately and directly as mind and body will allow.

In viewpoint story work there is no separation of the story and the teller. The teller becomes the story as completely as mind and body will allow. There is therefore no one left over to stand outside the story and narrate. This is achieved by first absolving anyone entering this activity of the responsibility of “telling a story” or in any way communicating outwardly the inner succession of imagery which is being experienced. Secondly the first observer/witness of the story, that is the performer, must allow the story to change. Sticking to a storyline which precedes the actions of the performer is the beginning of the alienation of the teller from the story. Consequently, this is discouraged completely. The story is changed or affected by what is occurring moment to moment, so ones previous work with perception of space, time, shape and sensation comes directly into play. The third instruction therefore is to include the activities of others in our own story. In solo work this means including ones previous actions. In this case our own movements, and the visual imagery we generate, are the “other” in solo work. In fact we are asked to include everything one perceives and feels into the story to the extent that this is what is driving the story. (pp. 1-2)

Upon the cessation of Wendell’s reading, a lively discussion between teacher and students ensues. The topics include postmodern dance and theater, as well as the Viewpoints languages of space and story.

The context-building and reflective conventions, provided through Wendell’s readings of his texts about Viewpoints space and story, were central to this class session. The philosophical and practical information, as well as postmodern historical context
presented by Mr. Beavers, were critical for the students’ comprehensive understanding and review of the viewpoints material during this culminating seminar. As a key teacher and developer of The Viewpoints, Wendell offered a first-hand, in-depth view and knowledge of this body of work.

**Further viewpoints history and perspectives.**

Artistic Director of SITI Company and Chair of the Graduate Directing Program at Columbia University, Anne Bogart, and Director, Playwright, and Member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, Tina Landau (2005), provided a holistic definition of the Viewpoints in their text, *The Viewpoints Book:*

- Viewpoints is a philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage.
- Viewpoints is a set of names given to certain principles of movement through time and space; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens onstage.
- Viewpoints is points of awareness that a performer or creator makes use of while working. (pp. 7-8)

Bogart and Landau’s development of a series of “Physical Viewpoints” and “Vocal Viewpoints” originated from Mary Overlie’s invention of the “Six Viewpoints.”

Choreographer, Dancer, and Founding Faculty Member of the Experimental Theatre Wing of the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, Mary Overlie (2006), articulated the postmodern historical and aesthetic underpinnings of her Viewpoints theory, as well as approaches to Viewpoints training within the chapter, “The Six Viewpoints,” from *Training of the American Actor:*
The Six Viewpoints presents, through practical experiential practices, a different understanding of communication and approach to dialogue. It releases the existing materials of theater, formerly organized into various rigid hierarchical orders, into a fluid state for reexamination. It defines and makes practical a new perspective on art that came into being in the late 1950s and continued to develop throughout the ‘60s and ‘70s.

At that time, the processes of minimalism and deconstruction caused a change in basic perspectives on art. Simply working with materials and concepts by accepting them on their own merit became a major source for art. This shift redrew the lines defining art around an entirely different set of concerns. The new work focused on bringing the audience beyond a definitive message, reaching instead toward a more fluid dialogue with possibilities and interaction. It was distasteful to make statements such as, “This is how I think of the world,” which seemed overly concerned with the familiar and intent on distilling what had already been learned, thus removing the art, the artist and the audience from the adventure and challenge of pure experience. This new movement was more interested in taking things apart to access more information. Contemplation and redefinition and the accidental, incidental and everyday became primary sources of art. The repositioning of the source of art from imagination and visions to observation and interaction de-prioritized hierarchical ownership of art, and resulted in the massive shift away from the artist’s being defined as a creator/originator. Absorbed in a dialogue with materials, the new artist could be more accurately defined as an observer/participant. Artists developed an entirely different set of skills, which focused on their ability to read space with their bodies, dissect time from various perspectives, and listen and see without the prejudice of the creator. . . .Viewpoints is an elaborate articulation of this artistic and philosophical process, composed of the isolation of the practical materials of theater and their languages, conceptual frames and established physical and mental practices.

Viewpoints is designed to help artists develop their own aesthetic perceptions by isolating six basic theatrical materials, so that each can be explored while the artists focus on developing their perceptual and interactive abilities. Because this work is done directly by the artist, not coached by a director, teacher or other higher authority, it promotes the development of a personal source of information, personal integrity. This work cannot be taught in a right/wrong, good/bad format. Guidance is only given to insure clarity of focus and separation of each of the six languages. One of the seminal points of Viewpoints is that it is not art, but simply a system for making art.

To underline this point, the initial stages of these training practices are not presented in the context of theatrical events or scene work. The artist is asked simply to stand in a bare room and discover the languages of space, shape, time,
emotion, movement and story. The goal of this work is to arrive at a dialogue with the six materials, to actually begin to communicate with them on your own. At the beginning of this work, and throughout its study, the artist and the materials must be given equal value. Because of the importance of nonhierarchical position, choice is of no importance in much of this work. In fact, it must be aggressively avoided. Space is as important as the artist, and makes as many moves on the artist as the artist makes on it. Choices come much later in this study, and when they enter, the artist is in an entirely different relationship to the process of choice-making and creativity. (pp. 188-190)

In his introduction to Training of the American Actor, Editor Arthur Bartow, described Overlie’s Viewpoints system as a uniquely American way to train performers.

Bartow (2006) continued his discussion of Overlie’s work by presenting definitions of her Six Viewpoints materials:

- Space (ability to perceive physical relationships)
- Story (ability to perceive and collect information over a period of time and make conclusions)
- Emotion (ability to perceive states of feeling and to be put into states of feeling)
- Shape (ability to respond to form)
- Time (ability to perceive duration and systems designed to regulate duration)
- Movement (ability to identify kinetic states through memory). (p. xxxvi)

As mentioned in Overlie’s aforementioned textual excerpts, her development of the Six Viewpoints Theory was deeply influenced by the postmodern New York performance scene.

The pioneering work of Merce Cunningham (1919 – 2009) pulled Overlie to travel from California to New York City, where she met Barbara Dilley. At that time, Ms. Dilley, who had performed with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 1963 to
1968, was dancing in an innovative, improvisational dance/theater group, the Grand Union. After Ms. Overlie moved to New York in 1970, she and Barbara formed and performed in another improvisational company, the Natural History of the American Dancer.

Along with Mary Overlie and Anne Bogart, Wendell Beavers was and continues to be a major developer of Viewpoints practice and training. From 1977 to 1985, Mr. Beavers danced with Ms. Overlie; and in 1978, Wendell was appointed as a Founding Faculty Member of New York University’s Experimental Theater Wing, where he continued to teach until 2003. In her acknowledgments section of The Viewpoints Book, Ms. Bogart (2005) stated that Wendell Beavers “carries Viewpoints with him everywhere.”

Although Overlie (2006) acknowledged that the East and West Coast art worlds of the 1960s and ‘70s offered fertile fields for the growth and development of the Six Viewpoints, she attributed the landscape and painter mentors of her upbringing in Montana as her originating source of inspiration:

Finally, the landscape of Montana itself contributed to the development of Viewpoints work. The vastness of this land was ultimately the petri dish in which my first thoughts about Viewpoints were formed, and to fully understand the nature of this work, one must consider the physical influence of the landscape. The minimalism and high altitudes of the Montana landscape, and the sparse population, engender a sense of clarity and vision and allow time to think about distant things. Distance itself encourages a sense of taking time and of timelessness. One feels in contact with the world, as though it is possible to reinvent everything that has already been discovered from the bare elements that started it all. The minimalism of this landscape is strangely empowering. At the same time, the endless space inspires awe. In this place, there is no need to separate from the environment in order to find yourself. You find yourself through your surroundings, or you don’t find yourself at all. (p. 218)
Having been born in Wolf Point, Montana, I understood the Six Viewpoints at a deeper, more visceral level after having read this passage. Could this deconstructed, minimalist theory and horizontal approach to practice have been created by anyone other than an artist born and raised in the vast expanse of land and sky that is Montana? It is my view, that in a shamanistic way, Mary Overlie generated her Six Viewpoints backwards from where she started – within the spacious landscape of Montana.

**Group viewpoints improvisation practice.**

During the next Viewpoints Seminar session, the afternoon sun again illuminates the performance studio environment, as those assembled *bow in*. Wendell announces, “We’ll warm up with exercises emphasizing the kinesthetic, which may evolve into image.” Soon thereafter, fifteen students and their teacher stride around and across the studio floor.

Wendell combines coaching with walking in a vigorous, yet fluid fashion. Dressed in a black short-sleeved t-shirt and black pants, Mr. Beavers is similarly attired to his students. He and most participants are barefoot, with some wearing socks and leg warmers. Maintaining a relaxed focus, Wendell directs the students in a series of exercises:

This is a ritual walk. We’re going to walk and become more and more present in the room. Settle into a walk to nowhere – moving to a sacred walk. This is about simple presence in the space – noticing the breath and a little bit about physical sensation. Notice the organs and glands and inner space. Try about 70% walking and 30 to 40% scanning the space – opening to empty space. Fall onto the front foot and accelerate your gait. Go with the minimum effort and maximum yield. *(pause)* At your own pace, pass to a moment of vertical balance, a point of stillness. You can close your eyes. We want to experience the continued rising and falling that continues in the body. Stay with that internal sensation of motion.
Wendell moves from within the group to the sidelines; and observes the students poised in positions of stillness.

After a few moments of silence, Wendell continues, “Now allow yourself to fall out of balance off your spot. You can catch yourself softly on your front foot and then bring yourself back to your balance point.”

Most students follow Wendell’s directions with their eyes closed.

As Wendell continues to focus on the students’ movement, he articulates:

Great! Our vocabulary will be dots, lines, floor patterns. When you are standing in stillness, work on balance, rising, falling – anything somatic in relationship to space. Feel all of the internal motion, shifting and rising and falling; channel it; and bring it back to balance. Try to stay in your spot. Feel the limits; try to contain them.

After several moments pass, Wendell interjects:

Please grab a partner. Let’s try a duet form of stepping into the River. We’re identifying the kinesthetic focus. Movement begins with connecting to gravity, the sensation of gravity – weight – limit. It doesn’t have to be eye-to-eye. It can take you off your spot. It’s about maintaining the process of sensation within stillness. One person moves; and then the partner moves. Move from inner stillness and be sure to recover your balance.

In pairs, with eyes open, one participant moves, and the partner responds kinesthetically. Then the process repeats itself with the originating responder generating movement.

Some students move from their spots and others don’t. All follow Wendell’s direction of recovering their balance.

Wendell thoughtfully responds, “Good.”

Upon the undulating motions ceasing, one young man exclaims, “That was fun!”
As the students cross the floor to seat themselves on the meditation cushions, Wendell conveys, “The conversational thing is magical. It’s a two person conversation.”

Turning to the entire group, Wendell asks, “Anything else you want to report?”

The same young man replies, “Even though I focused into exclusive dialogue with my partner, Penelope, I found myself also focusing on Clarissa.”

Wendell comments upon Travis’s response; briefly discusses the nature of movement or kinesthetic sensation; and then invites a small group of students to compose an improvisation that incorporates the viewpoints languages of space, time, and movement:

In Viewpoints, you can hold two or three things at the same time. Sometimes people become very frustrated in working with kinesthetic sensation, especially those without movement background. Gravity, weight, momentum – we take the levers that move us and yield. We need to notice movement and channel it. Sometimes, there weren’t clear beginnings, middles, and endings to your movements in pairs. What creates a movement is that it has a beginning, middle, and end. Movement has a language and you can speak it. Space has a language and you can speak it.

Let’s try several of you composing, incorporating movement related to others and space/time. The menu is space, time, and movement.

Almost simultaneously, five ladies stand and walk toward the center of the studio. Travis walks toward the boom box and starts some music.

The choreography of movement is backlit by brilliant sunlight streaming through the studio windows and back entrance.

Wendell crosses toward the boom box; pauses the music; and comments upon the students’ work. The ladies stop their composing, when Wendell interjects, “Why don’t you continue and consider you don’t have to have gravity?”
When the music resumes, the quality of the movement seems lighter, more buoyant.

Upon the close of the movement improvisation, an observer student turns to Wendell and communicates, “I thought your directive freed them.”

Wendell briefly discusses the connection between improvisation and the Shambhala warriorship concept of letting go:

Improvisation is watching people cope with circumstances. The concept of improvisation really comes from the meditative lineage of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. You can only do it well, if you give it up. The more subjective you can be, the more you can reflect the object, the objective environment.

At the close of his remarks, Wendell invites the students to take a break. I leave to conduct an interview with then-Production Coordinator of MFA Contemporary Performance, Angela Delichatsios.

**Body and awareness/perception practice.**

The following excerpts from Mr. Beaver’s (2000) Viewpoint writing, *Movement: The Kinesthetic Focus*, provided insightful views of the nature of kinesthesia, or the inner sense of movement:

Gravity, weight and momentum are a birthright or kind of golden heritage. If you will allow them to do their work; that is if you could allow them to move you; that is if you could allow these natural forces to move you rather than you completely moving yourself from thoughts and ideas; then physical virtuosity will be no problem. You will physically be able to do whatever you want to do if you work with them. If you don’t, you will be seriously stuck in your own effort. You will be in your own way so to speak. You will block yourself. You do have to give something up to claim this heritage of birthright however. What you give up is control and certain attachments to patterns of effort. You are not in total control, at least not in the same way you have fooled yourself into thinking you are now. You are in partnership with natural forces bigger than you, that in fact are you and then a little more. It would be good if we could think of creating movement or making movement as a kind of negotiation, partnership or “dance” with these
forces. We put them into play by our intention or awareness and we ourselves will discover what is being made as it evolves.

We are also giving up our attachment to certain sensations of effort or muscle work. I agree that it can be a serious struggle to allow oneself to be born along by natural forces but you are here now to make this effort. Perhaps you can remember learning how to float in water, what a big struggle that might have been, to relax enough to be born up by the water. This is the kind of struggle we are talking about now—the struggle to allow ourselves to be supported, to be moved. The force of gravity in this case is quite analogous to water. The gravity we are experiencing here and now is bearing you down, and you allow your foot to catch you and push you up and forward. Water was bearing you up when you were learning to swim and you perhaps fought it just as hard. This whole situation of working with weight is not about no effort it is about appropriate effort. Too much effort will obliterate your ability to sense your weight; too little will not allow you to participate in gravity as a conscious source of movement. (p. 5)

Throughout the Viewpoints Seminar, gravity, weight, and momentum were frequently referenced in regard to kinesthetic sensation during context-building and reflective lectures, discussions, and exercises.

In the same Movement: The Kinesthetic Focus manuscript, Beavers (2000) applied the Buddhist concepts of ground, path, and fruition to the relationship between the performer and her physical being:

The body is the ground. The body has immediate availability and potential for experiencing which we could call its nature. This is what a body is—an entity which can experience. The body, the whole body, with its proprioceptive sensors and differentiated brain is in this case viewed as a medium, some thing which comes in contact with not-itself, explores that and joins that. The viewpoints are on one level a conceptual map of the joined landscape. The perceiver and the perceived are put on a continuum of experience.

Awareness and physical experiment are then the path. The path is what one engages in doing. The path is the activity the body engages in to know itself. In this work we have begun to break the body down into types of experience or fundamental ingredients of the body. The body has weight, what is weight, how does it function. We investigate by working with a certain relationship to mind and body as described above. The body is in relationship to things seemingly not itself, that is environmental circumstances of gravity, hard bounded borders of
floor and wall, what are these things, how do they function in relationship to body.

The fruition of acknowledging the body as ground through practicing the path of open exploration and direct perception, is authentic expression. It is authentic by definition because of its relationship to ground and path. Forming a relationship to ground and path, body and awareness/perception practice, leads to inevitable results. This inevitability is one way at arriving at the truth. (pp. 10-11)

According to this view, The Viewpoints is a cartographic system designed to guide the perceiver on a journey of experiential discovery.

**The cartographic artistry of the Viewpoints Seminar.**

During this 2009 spring semester class, one of Mr. Beavers’ central *intentions* was to provide a culminating review of the viewpoints material, as it had been presented throughout the course of the MFA Contemporary Performance curriculum. The viewpoints *languages* of space, story, movement, shape, time, and emotion were reviewed through the *context-building*, *showing*, and *reflective* conventions. The *pedagogical* approaches of lecture, discussion, selected exercises, and group viewpoints improvisation practice were also implemented to meet another primary course objective – to prepare the soon-to-be graduates for teaching the Six Viewpoints in their chosen careers.

Another of Wendell’s *intentions* for the review process was for the students to reflect upon the relationship of the viewpoints material to other selected curricula within the MFA program. This *reflective* convention was realized through discussion of viewpoints and other MFA curricular views and practices, as well as participation in various integrative exercises. As during prior viewpoints courses, student work was *evaluated* on a Pass/Fail basis.
The Viewpoints Seminar included nine two-hour sessions, which generally took place twice a week in performance studio #9185. Each session incorporated a well-balanced combination of the preparation, context-building, showing, reflective, and closing conventions. Wendell created a curricular space where the deconstructed viewpoints languages connected to form a cartographic whole. Also, the MFA second-year students played significant, co-creative roles in the unfolding of the operational curriculum.

It is my view that Viewpoints practices could serve as a preparation system for generating work in many fields. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau (2005) discussed the potential application of Viewpoints to playwriting, directing, theatre design, painting, music, film and architecture, as well to sports, the animal kingdom, and waiting tables. I would like to add scientific inventing; fiction and poetry writing; community garden planting and cultivating; diversity training; and transformative teaching and learning to the list. As Bogart and Landau stated, “Viewpoints appears everywhere in life” (p. 199). Or, in reference to Overlie’s (2006) text, Viewpoints may facilitate finding or reinventing oneself in one’s surroundings.

Student Perspectives About Contemplative Education

The purpose of contemplative education is to facilitate our becoming expert human beings. Meditators and actors are examples of expert human beings.

---Travis Jones, MFA Contemporary Performance Second-Year Student (2009)
Characteristics of contemplative education.

During face-to-face interviews, MFA Contemporary Performance second- and first-year students primarily characterized contemplative education in the following ways:

- body/mind training for performance and personal development
- sitting meditation
- cultivation of mindfulness and awareness

Although many students had experienced such contemplative practices as sitting meditation and yoga prior to entering the program, most had not integrated these practices with their previous training and work in the performing arts.

In addition, all interviewed students expressed that contemplative view and practice were integrated across the performance curriculum. The comments of second-year students, Mark and Lydia, were representative of their peers’ perception:

Contemplative education is how various mindfulness practices are introduced throughout different classes. It affects the way classes are taught. This program provides space for and teaching of how to be present. It [contemplative education] is about letting everything in and also asking, “What doors do I want to consciously open?” (M. Dane, personal communication, April 3, 2009)

Contemplative education is the basis of the program; it is integrated throughout the program. . . . It [contemplative education] sinks into everything, all of the performance techniques. (L. Atienza, personal communication, March 16, 2009)

Students also referred to this integral form of education as body/mind training.

Several students discussed body/mind training as connected to and supportive of their performance work. Second-year student, Erin, described contemplative education as “body-mind training which connects with somatic and voice work” (E. Nordland,
personal communication, March 5, 2009). Similarly, second-year student, Travis, expressed, “This program offers mind-body training for performance” (T. Jones, personal communication, March 9, 2009). First-year student, Molly, explained that the body/mind training, provided by the program, helped her to integrate her performance abilities:

Every performance course is about experiencing the body/mind without judgment. It [body/mind training] is very collaborative. It’s integrated into everything we do and study. It has helped me meld my performance skills. (M. Goodstein, personal communication, May 7, 2009).

Although many students related body/mind training to a variety of performance classes, they most often mentioned it in connection with sitting meditation and the *Meditation Practicum* course taught by Core Faculty Member, Barbara Dilley.

Second-year student, Lia, stated, “The connection to the body/mind is accessed through the consistent meditation practice and contemplative perspective provided in Barbara Dilley’s classes” (L. Chi, personal communication, April 7, 2009). Congruently, second-year student, Lydia, suggested, “Body/mind training is, in part, sitting in meditation and allowing the contemplative view to take place” (L. Atienza, personal communication, March 16, 2009). In complementary fashion, another second-year student, Clarissa, commented, “Sitting meditation trains the mind and develops a deep connection with the self” (C. Lacey, personal communication, March 17, 2009). The body-mind-spirit connection, to which Clarissa referred, is a component of the fruition of sitting meditation.

The majority of students also realized the central importance of the cultivation of mindfulness and awareness, as ground, path and fruition, through sitting meditation and other forms of body/mind training. According to these students, the complementary
practices of shamatha, mindfulness and vipashayana, awareness, facilitated the integration of their inner landscapes with their performance work and living in the world. Clarissa conveyed that the process of developing mindfulness and awareness through sitting meditation “integrates inner and outer experience” (C. Lacey, personal communication, March 17, 2009). In accordance with Clarissa’s point of view, second-year student, Meredith, articulated that through the practices of mindfulness and awareness, she had learned and engaged in “the skill of having inner focus within the external process of performance” (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009). Second-year student, Blythe, expressed that the contemplative education, offered by the program, “develops awareness – an ability to see and thus, consciousness about making choices in the world” (B. Mascia, personal communication, March 6, 2009). Travis concurred with Blythe’s view, when he relayed that “awareness comes from sitting practice – awareness of what is real, within oneself, and without, in the world” (T. Jones, personal communication, March 9, 2009).

Contemplative education and the development of communication abilities.

Throughout the interview process, all students discussed contemplative education as beneficially influencing the development of their communication abilities, within themselves and without, in the program and in life. As presented in chapter one, section four, communication abilities were defined as a dimension that included interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. According to Moran, Kornbacher, and Gardner (2006), interpersonal intelligence involves the “ability to understand and interact
well with others” and intrapersonal intelligence has to do with the “ability to understand and use one’s thoughts, feelings, preferences, and interests” (p. 25).

In the area of interpersonal intelligence, several students discussed that contemplative education reduced their need to control or fix their fellow students during interactions in the classroom and rehearsal. Lia conveyed that contemplative education facilitated a spacious recognition and honoring of her classmates identities and stages of development:

   My idea of people keeps shifting. Contemplative education has allowed me to place more space around the ensemble, so I don’t fixate. I find that my fixations dissipate through reflection and letting go of thoughts in meditation. I have discovered a maturity that allows everyone to be whom and where they are. (L. Chi, personal communication, April 7, 2009)

Similarly, Meredith mentioned that contemplative education helped her to be more accepting of herself and others when engaged in interpersonal relations.

In particular, Meredith voiced that when assuming a teacher or leadership role in rehearsals, contemplative view permitted her “to still my inner critic – to not take things personally and allow others to deal with their own issues” (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009).

First-year student, Russell, and second-year student, Erin, expressed that contemplative view and practice provided ways of recognizing their own goodness and thus, the goodness of those with whom they studied and worked. Their understanding of goodness cultivated gentleness, patience, and empathy toward themselves and others:

   Contemplative education provides a way to be a good human being – developing an open heart in making work. In a stressful situation, it’s easy to blame people. Instead of blaming others, it’s important to find gentleness within oneself and then, to extend gentleness. (R. Adler, personal communication, May 7, 2009)
Contemplative education has created a space where I have become more patient with myself. This space has also included room to become more empathetic with others and allow them a place to be. I guess I would call this sense of empathy, compassion. (E. Nordland, personal communication, March 5, 2009)

The recognition of goodness in oneself and the world, as well as cultivation of gentleness and “an open heart,” are Shambhala warriorship principles, introduced in the Meditation Practicum course, and discussed/practiced throughout other contemporary performance classes and many student thesis show rehearsals. Most students articulated, during the interview process, that Shambhala principles were integral to their development as communicators and artists.

Meredith and Clarissa commented that contemplative education offered an expressive form of communication, verbal and nonverbal, through which they could individually and collectively reference their experiences of learning and creating in the studio. Clarissa relayed that contemplative education facilitated her “ability to articulate and language her experience in the process of making work” (C. Lacey, personal communication, March 17, 2009). Meredith agreed with Clarissa’s perception that contemplative education generated a specific and evocative way of communicating about process and experience:

Contemplative education provides a language that we share around being reflective about our process and tracking what’s occurring. A practice as simple as the bow has meaning and purpose. Many of us brought the bow into our thesis work. (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Again, the bow was a preparation and closing convention, when students and faculty bowed together to each other, while engaging in a moment of mindful silence and acknowledging presence in community. During most interviews, the interviewee and I
would *bow in*, just prior to the start of the interview, and *bow out*, at the cessation of our conversation.

In reference to other forms of nonverbal contemplative communication, Clarissa and Russell mentioned that during stressful situations, resting or reflecting in silence, prior to conversing and creating with others, helped them to be more present to their fellow students/performers and thus, more effective in communication:

> When a product [showing] is expected, we tend to fall into old habits. It can be difficult to stay present. It is then that I ask myself, “What tools can I use?” Taking a moment of silence before and after creation can be helpful. Also, the sound of the mindfulness bell can remind us to return to a space of nowness, the present moment. (C. Lacey, personal communication, March 17, 2009)

> When challenging things develop in class and rehearsal, taking the time to be quiet – reflectively silent, and listening before responding, improves the quality of response. When more friction is happening, you need more time to listen to yourself and others in order to allow thoughts and feelings to germinate. (R. Adler, personal communication, May 7, 2009)

The majority of students in the program indicated that the development of listening skills were of central importance in contemplative education and performance work.

Several second-year students voiced that the *council process*, introduced by Barbara Dilley during a previous semester of the two-year *Meditation Practicum* course, served as an empowering way to listen to others and honor diverse points of view. Barbara described *council process* as a contemplative community exchange, when a *talking stick* would be passed between those seated in a *listening circle*. The person holding the *talking stick* would express her concerns, as the other members of the circle would listen. The *council process* provided an opportunity for every member of the circle to speak in turn, while the other members listened. Barbara relayed that prior to the start
of this study, the practice of the \textit{listening circle} was reviewed during the first section of
the 2009 spring semester \textit{Meditation Practicum} course (B. Dilley, personal
communication, March 9, 2009).

Blythe and Erin conveyed that the deep listening that occurred during \textit{council}
process built trust amongst the participants; and recommended that the process take place
more frequently:

Last year, students did air grievances during a council process, which raised the
level of trust between us. At this point in time, we still have some issues of
distrust. I would like to see Barbara Dilley facilitate a listening circle in the
community once a week. The listening circle is not about dialogue – rather it is
about deep listening. (B. Mascia, personal communication, March 6, 2009)

Within the space that contemplative education creates, there is room enough for
all of us. Barbara started a council process, which actively began building a strong
sense of community. During the council process, we sit in a circle and listen to
whoever is speaking, without needing to form a response. It is empowering and
could be further developed in our program. (E. Nordland, personal
communication, March 5, 2009)

Other second-year students also acknowledged the community-building strengths of the
\textit{council process} and thus decided to incorporate it into rehearsal sessions for their thesis
shows.

In preparation for Meredith’s thesis production, \textit{Four More}, cast member and
second-year student, Penelope, explained that the \textit{council process} fostered a collaborative
environment:

For our thesis piece, we did not use a director. It was a very collaborative process.
Every voice of the four-member cast was present and heard. Rehearsals began and
ended with ritual; we bowed in and out of our time together. We spoke from the
heart during short periods of time – about two minutes, through a mini-council
process. We winged it in terms of our responses to each other. Sometimes, we
would go around the circle, listening to each other again. Sometimes, the process
would spark further discussion. We became better communicators and generated
personal stories and original songs. These stories and songs were integrated with short stories and already created songs around our theme of love. (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009)

According to Penelope, the contemplative rehearsal rituals engendered more effective interpersonal communication, as well as fueled individual and collective creativity.

In the realm of intrapersonal intelligence, many first- and second-year students concurred that contemplative education generated acceptance of their self-perceived admirable traits, along with less exemplary qualities. This acceptance of their “good” and “bad” characteristics was viewed, by some, as a route to deepening their artistic performance abilities.

Lia and Lydia articulated that the extended voice techniques of Roy Hart Theatre, as taught by Core Faculty Member, Ethie Friend, encouraged the practice of inclusivity and expanded their emotional range in performance:

Spaciousness of mind develops through the vocal and movement work in this program. Our extended voice training allows weird, bad sounds to emerge. Roy Hart Theatre is very Buddhist, permitting all parts of the self to exist, or rather co-exist. When creating a role or movement piece, you can allow aspects of self into your vocabulary that you otherwise would not have known. The expressing of your ugly aspects, allows you to express more fully in performance. (L. Chi, personal communication, April 7, 2009)

With contemplative dance practice and/or the viewpoints as the ground, the blank canvas on which we are to paint our masterwork, the other techniques taught in the mfa are supportive. the roy hart vocal technique truly encourages one to discover the voice and allow it to be released in all its glory and misery. the knowledge of the voice, all its hidden crevices, and further exploration into them is a rich and vital way for the performer to continue growing as an artist and as a human being. . . .we humans spend so much time disembodying from our voices to become “civilized.” roy hart vocal technique/philosophy decolonizes the voice and accepts marginalized sounds as beautiful, perfect, necessary. (Atienza, 2009, para. 5)
According to Lydia, the theory and practice of Roy Hart Theatre furthered her growth as a human being, as well as artist. Her writing, intentionally presented in lower case script, was excerpted with her permission, from her master’s thesis manuscript.

Russell also indicated that Roy Hart work challenged him vocally and deepened his growth as a human being:

Roy Hart work is so different from other theatre vocal training. The Roy Hart approach to the voice is about the development of the individual human being, rather than goal-oriented performance. At first, it was easy for me. However, during the second semester, Ethie noted that I had fallen into patterns. I couldn’t see the walls I had put up around my vocal and personal development. So, I attempted to open myself more to the work and through personal growth. The contemplative definitely exists in Roy Hart practice. (R. Adler, personal communication, May 7, 2009)

By the end of his first year in the MFA Contemporary Performance Program, Russell had observed that his vocal development and personal growth were interconnected and concurrent processes. In addition, he viewed the Roy Hart Theatre approach to extended voice training as inclusive and contemplative.

**Contemplative education and the development of presence-in-performance.**

Presence is a state of being highly attuned to self and environment. The dynamic qualities and elusive nature of presence have intrigued performing artists and educators, as well as political, corporate, media, and religious leaders.

In this study, presence was discussed in relationship to the contemplative education and conservatory level training of students of the performing arts. As defined in chapter one, section four, presence-in-performance was a moment-to-moment authenticity and vibrancy created by a performing artist onstage, or in the studio, and palpably perceived by other performers and audience members.
Students were asked now contemplative education influenced the development of four attributes of presence-in-performance: openness, courage, confidence, and commitment. Several second-year students voiced that they cultivated openness and courage through their training to become warrior artists-in-the-world.

Although the Shambhala vision of warriorship is introduced in chapter two, section two of this document, Chogyam Trungpa’s (1988) presentation of the ecumenical nature of human warriorship and concept of bravery is offered, in this section, for the reader’s further understanding:

The current state of world affairs is a source of concern to all of us: the threat of nuclear war, widespread poverty and economic instability, social and political chaos, and psychological upheavals of many kinds. The world is in absolute turmoil. The Shambhala teachings are founded on the premise that there is basic human wisdom that can help to solve the world’s problems. This wisdom does not belong to any one culture or religion, nor does it come only from the West or the East. Rather, it is a tradition of human warriorship that has existed in many cultures at many times throughout history.

Warriorship here does not refer to making war on others. Aggression is the source of our problems, not the solution. Here the word “warrior” is taken from the Tibetan pawo, which literally means “one who is brave.” Warriorship in this context is the tradition of human bravery, or the tradition of fearlessness. The North American Indians had such a tradition, and it also existed in South American Indian societies. The Japanese ideal of the samurai also represented a warrior tradition of wisdom, and there have been principles of enlightened warriorship in Western Christian societies as well. King Arthur is a legendary example of warriorship in the Western tradition, and great rulers in the Bible, such as King David, are examples of warriors common to both the Jewish and Christian traditions. On our planet earth there have been many fine examples of warriorship.

The key to warriorship and the first principle of Shambhala vision is not being afraid of who you are. Ultimately, that is the definition of bravery: not being afraid of yourself. Shambhala vision teaches that, in the face of the world’s great problems, we can be heroic and kind at the same time. . . . The premise of Shambhala vision is that, in order to establish an enlightened society for others, we need to discover what inherently we have to offer the world. So, to begin with,
we should make an effort to examine our own experience, in order to see what it contains that is of value in helping ourselves and others to uplift their existence. (pp. 28-29)

Although it is often not easy to probe the depths of our human experience, the performing artist bravely takes on this task in order to bring authenticity to her presence in the studio and onstage. The authentic performance creates a sense of intimacy between performer(s) and audience members, thereby uplifting performer and spectator alike, into the present moment (Smith, 2000).

Meredith articulated that the attribute of courage was connected with the concept of the “open-hearted warrior” in her performance work:

I like the word courage. There’s something about that word. It’s connected with the open-hearted warrior, which has been a strong image for me in my creative work. The warrior has a raw, open heart to take what the world will give, but not to run away. (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Meredith’s classmates, Chandra and Mark, also expressed that the open heart of the warrior represented courage to face the challenges of being present, in performance and in life.

Mark and Chandra discussed that becoming an open-hearted warrior artist-in-the-world could include the conditions of aloneness and sadness. Mark described the warrior’s heart as “open, raw, and alone” and the warrior’s existence as one of “aloneness” (M. Dane, personal communication, April 3, 2009). Chandra aspired to hold “a genuine heart of sadness as a spiritual practitioner and artist” (C. Greene, personal communication, May 7, 2009).

One of the central premises of Shambhala vision is that the genuine heart is one that is tender and “sad.” The sadness refers to a heart that is open to fully experiencing
the joys and sorrows of human existence and directly perceiving the phenomenal world.

According to Chogyam Trungpa (1988), the warrior, who approaches herself and the world with a genuine heart, awakens to a gentle fearlessness or courage:

[When] a human being first gives birth to the tender heart of warriorship, he or she may feel extremely awkward or uncertain about how to relate to this kind of fearlessness. But then, as you experience this sadness more and more, you realize that human beings should be tender and open. So you no longer need to feel shy or embarrassed about being gentle. In fact, your softness begins to become passionate. You would like to extend yourself to others and communicate with them. (p. 49)

Another way that Trungpa Rinpoche references genuine heart is awakened heart. The awakening process, that Trungpa states is a necessary process, achieved through sitting meditation, can feel uncomfortable and unnerving.

Penelope conveyed that the awakening process, cultivated through watching and training the body/mind, was scary, but important for the development of courage and presence:

Emotions are central to performance work. The accessing of these emotions can feel terrifying and take you to vulnerable places. However, as you return to these places, again and again, you become more courageous and less afraid.

Watching your mind and experiencing being in the space and seeing what arises, builds presence and openness. A full commitment to being in the space, moment to moment – fully being and committing – is presence. I would add full, embodied commitment. Having a connection, or synchronization between mind and body, with kinesthesia, is presence. (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009)

Mark and Meredith agreed with Penelope that watching and training the body/mind required courage and built commitment to being present, moment to moment.
Meredith and Mark suggested that the contemplative education, offered by MFA Contemporary Performance, facilitated their commitment to remembering to stay present and be aware of their inner strengths:

The concept of returning has come up during this last semester – remembering to return to the breath with a commitment to stay open. Also, it is important to check within to see if you are doing what you want to do. It takes courage to be an artist in this crazy world. (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Commitment builds in this program because it is about your interior self, growing and developing, as opposed to an outside authority figure telling you what to do. (M. Dane, personal communication, April 3, 2009)

With graduation a month away, these two second-year students indicated that openness, courage, and commitment were all qualities necessary to maintain confidence and presence in their work in the world.

Second-year students, Clarissa, Penelope, and Lia, and first-year student, Molly, discussed that contemplative view and practice developed broader acceptance of and willingness to unmask diverse aspects of self, thus a greater confidence in performance work, within the classroom, and rehearsal/production process:

Sitting meditation has provided a way for me to train and see the mind. Through this process, I have been able to access diverse aspects of self and realize that they are all welcome in my performance work. I have developed confidence in whatever I can bring to the table and commitment to bring body, mind, and spirit to the work. (C. Lacey, personal communication, March 17, 2009)

Through contemplative education, I have become more confident about fully committing to delving deeply into class and performance work, as well as being emotionally exposed. (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009)

Contemplative work facilitates really knowing who you are – letting yourself know who you are. Deep emotions have come up through the Roy Hart work, revealing their existence within me. Knowing those emotions leads to confidence in performance, without having any mask. (L. Chi, personal communication, April 7, 2009)
Bowing in and meditating before rehearsal have developed a sense of ensemble. Being able to view my mind, through sitting practice, has helped me to speak my mind within an ensemble. In the past, I have been afraid of “ruffling feathers” – of rejection. Now, I have a more spacious mind. The contemplative process has helped tremendously to build confidence in my own voice and talents in critiquing. (M. Goodstein, personal communication, May 7, 2009)

The development of confidence, along with the attributes of openness, courage, and commitment, is the path and fruition of presence-in-performance. Contemplative education appeared to facilitate the realization of and engagement in moment-to-moment authenticity, throughout the performance exchanges between first- and second-year warrior artists-in-training.

**Contemplative education and the development of sociolinguistic perspectives.**

In this study, sociolinguistic perspectives were defined as the interpretation of reality according to cultural assumptions, social norms, and ideological points of view (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). As mentioned in chapter one, section four of this manuscript, in the 21st century, students from performing arts departments and conservatories, need to prepare to perform for and interact with increasingly diverse audiences. Contemporary performance first- and second-year students had a wide variety of views regarding the impact of contemplative education on their awareness of diversity issues and cultural perceptions.

Second-year students, Blythe, Penelope, Meredith, Clarissa, and Lydia voiced that contemplative education offered more support for their growth as individual performers and human beings, than understanding of the social-cultural contexts of identity development. Blythe stated, “In this program, individual identity, rather than cultural or class identity, is emphasized” (B. Mascia, personal communication, March 6, 2009).
Penelope concurred by saying, “There is not an investigation, in our program, of how identity shapes performance and community” (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009). Meredith articulated, “It is a weakness in the program that it is not connected with such larger issues as politics and identity” (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009). Clarissa expressed, “The diversity piece in this program was a great disappointment. There was a lack of sharing around diverse cultural values” (C. Lacey, personal communication, March 17, 2009). In agreement with Clarissa, Lydia conveyed:

I feel distressed and sad that neither performance studies, nor social context was included in the training for this class. With this bright class of students, I have felt a lack of ability to communicate the diversity issues of my life path. This year, there has been a lack of languaging and dialoguing about diversity. During my first year of studies, the performance studies teacher made a big difference in communication around diversity. Within our contemplative view, we need to access multiple voices. (L. Atienza, personal communication, March 16, 2009)

Lydia had taken a one-year leave, after her first year as a student in MFA Contemporary Performance. Thus, she had not experienced her first year of contemplative education and performance training with the Class of 2009.

From another vantage point, as discussed by several students in the aforementioned section on contemplative education and interpersonal communication, second-year student, Travis, and first-year student, Molly, stated that contemplative education had helped them to become less judgmental of disparate points of view. Travis relayed, “Contemplative education is about cultivating openness and spaciousness – tolerating irritation with no pre-judgment” (T. Jones, personal communication, March 9, 2009). Similarly, Molly conveyed, “Contemplative education has helped me to become less judgmental of points of view that are widely different from my own. I can be more
spacious, if someone does not treat with me with respect” (M. Goodstein, personal communication, May 7, 2009).

Also, due to the wide age-range of students, 24 through 56, Penelope and Lia expressed that contemplative education had broadened their perspectives about working with an intergenerational population. Penelope mentioned that contemplative education facilitated “the curbing of judgments and prejudices and also, the practicing of negotiation skills within an intergenerational community” (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009). In a complementary way, Lia articulated, “Dealing with diverse ages has broadened my perspectives. Leaving the program, I will have more compassion for diversity of background and training” (L. Chi, personal communication, April 7, 2009).

Second-year students, Penelope and Blythe, and alumna and then-Production Coordinator, Angela Delichatsios, conveyed that the contemporary performance community and the university-at-large were conscious of and committed to the integration of contemplative education and diversity in policy and practice. Penelope voiced that in her view, the contemporary performance program was “open to a more diverse approach” (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009). Blythe communicated:

The program needs more faculty and guest artists of color. Also, Naropa publicity press could show more people of color. Yet overall, I think our program and greater university community are trying to become more inclusive. (B. Mascia, personal communication, March 6, 2009)

In accordance with Penelope and Blythe, Angela articulated that Naropa was committed to diversity and sustainable development, as well as contemplative education.
Also, Angela explained that during her time as a student, the program offered an

*Introduction to Performance Studies* course:

The introduction course was very theoretical. The instructor also offered an experiential praxis course, in which the issues presented, were performatively exciting. He also brought a contemplative side to the academically and intellectually rigorous curriculum. (A. Delichatsios, personal communication, April 9, 2009)

Angela further relayed that the performance studies classes launched her integrative thinking about performance work and contemplative education, within a social and cultural context.

Meredith made an impassioned statement about the importance of bringing contemplative view and practice into life, beyond the campus community:

I would like to see the Mahayana practices of compassion and loving kindness extrapolated and brought more into the larger world. I hate that contemplative practice is seen as an elite practice. I posit that it is necessary to take it [contemplative education] into the world. (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Many of the students expressed similar passion for integrating contemplative practices, beyond their graduate studies, into lives of work and service in the world.

**Contemplative education and the development of aesthetic perspectives.**

There was more commonality than difference in how students described the influence of contemplative education on the development of their aesthetic perspectives. In this study, aesthetic perspectives were defined as “aesthetic signatures: the specific artistic manifestations that occur as artists develop their collections of work, producing aesthetic consistencies that profoundly speak of their individual experiences of self” (Press, 2002, p. 207).
Erin, Travis, Blythe, and Meredith mentioned that contemplative education built patience and trust in themselves and the ensemble, as they created work in class and rehearsal sessions. Erin voiced, “The contemplative process has helped me to be easier on myself – more patient in watching myself as I create and perform” (E. Nordland, personal communication, March 5, 2009). In a similar fashion, Travis commented, “Contemplative education has influenced my aesthetic perspectives by the development of patience and trust, as well as openness to more sources of ideas for performance work (T. Jones, personal communication, March 9, 2009). Blythe articulated, “In character development work, I trust more, in what will arise in the space, and have more patience in receiving feedback from the environment and my fellow performers” (B. Mascia, personal communication, March 6, 2009). Meredith expressed, “Contemplative education has helped bring my performance aesthetic to the forefront of my awareness. This process has developed my ability to dwell in a space of possibilities and let performance happen in its own time” (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Blythe, Clarissa, and Lia communicated that contemplative view and practice facilitated an intuitive path toward creating performance work:

My performance palette has expanded, so that now it is easier to not fall into old habits and patterns. My eyes have been opened to habitual responses. Contemplative practices have built a bridge to an intuitive place, from which more options that are unique and unexpected, originate. (B. Mascia, personal communication, March 6, 2009)

Contemplative education has helped me to slow down and discover the nature of my performance aesthetic. I have learned to value my own experience, my own intuition around text and analyzing work. It’s an embodied, feeling process. When approaching a text, I have become sensitive to a whole body response. Prior to this program, I did not work in this intuitive way. (C. Lacey, personal communication, April 14, 2009)
Contemplative education has really helped in the development of my performance aesthetic. It has allowed for a deeper understanding of the material. My creative work has emerged from an expanded, intuitive knowing. This knowing allows the ritualistic to manifest more fully. The iconic imagery that manifests from a place greater than me can permit powerful theatre to unfold. (L. Chi, personal communication, April 7, 2009)

The accessing of intuitive knowing was a significant way to develop aesthetic perspectives for these performing artists.

In her symposium paper, “The Creative Attitude,” Suffolk University Professor Emerita of Chemistry, Maria Teresa Miliora (1987), presented intuition as an important function, along with imagination, of the creative process:

It is through the intuitive function that we realize creative inspirations and insights, but we may experience the realization at any level—sensory, emotional, imaginal. Thus, if we develop greater awareness of these levels, we develop greater sensitivity and receptivity to creative insights. (p. 146)

Miliora’s presentation examined intuitive discovery as an initial stage of the creative process. Her writing supports Blythe, Clarissa, and Lia’s discussions of intuitive knowing, as connected to their development of unique aesthetics in performance.

Penelope and Lydia also conveyed that contemplative education helped them to improve their abilities in improvisation and to incorporate improvisational work into their aesthetic perspectives:

To me, improvisation is the performance ability most connected with contemplative education. Contemplative practice has helped me to become better in improvisation – seeing what arises in the space and responding to nowness, the present moment. (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009)

I have never been completely comfortable with improvisation. However, it has become a more natural process due to the contemplative art practices that I have experienced in this program. I realize that improvisatory work has contributed to my growth as an artist in ways I never imagined. (L. Atienza, personal communication, March 13, 2009)
Improvisatory work is central to the theory and practice of the program’s contemplative education and performance training.

Erin and Lydia expressed that contemplative education had transformed their views of and relationship to performance:

Contemplative view and practice have changed my relationship to performance. It’s an energetic shift in consciousness. As I perform, I am fully embodied. As I watch performance, I am fully present. (E. Nordland, personal communication, March 5, 2009)

Contemplative education has shaken it [performance aesthetic] up and stripped it bare. My performance aesthetic is still in a formative stage of development. I would have never guessed that I would discover a new voice. Body/mind training and contemplative practice have helped me in the processing of artistic manifestation. (L. Atienza, personal communication, March 16, 2009)

As mentioned by other second-year students, Lydia utilized contemplative view and practice to facilitate the writing and rehearsal of her thesis production.

Lydia’s (2009) artist statement described her evolutionary voice, explored and presented through her original identity performance show, mangyan:

it is my intention to create a piece which occurs through location of poetic voice through cellular memory, and phantoms of colonization. through studio time, research, ensemble collaboration and support, this voice will be given space to arise in vocal expression, movement, use of minimal set properties including bamboo and grass thatch, film projection, and use of lighting. the performance techniques we will use in studio are somatics and developmental movement, roy hart vocal technique, grotowski exercises, suzuki training, contact improvisation, contemplative dance practices, and the viewpoints.

this is an identity piece, an answer to the question asked of me more often than any other, the age old question, “what are you?” this piece is also a search for the mangyan and my connection and/or disconnection to the mangyan, aboriginal people from the island of mindoro in the philippines where my mother is from. between my experiences as pinay – an american-born filipina, my mother’s attitudes as a tagalong – a “civilized” filipina, accounts of the philippine-american war, footage from the film, pearl of the orient – a piece of pro-coca cola propaganda, the common thread is my self and how i came to be where and who i
am. i intend to splay open the vessel and shed light on the shadow of what it is like to be a minority in a colonizing country.

through the voice of this show as ritual, i intend to connect more deeply with the earth and my ancestors, to those here now who are ready to witness and receive, and to my self in my artistic and healing journey. (para. 1, 2, & 3)

The showing of *mangyan* revealed the transformation of Lydia’s sociolinguistic and aesthetic perspectives. The presence-in-performance was dynamic and palpably witnessed and received by the audience members, seated in close proximity of the playing area in the Nalanda Studio Theater. It was powerful theatre!

The development of the second-year students’ “aesthetic signatures” (Press, 2002) was most publicly viewed during their thesis production showings. However, there were also many quiet moments during class, when one might catch a glimpse of a student’s evolving performance aesthetic manifesting in the space.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Contemplative education includes studies of the history, psychology, and social-cultural context of human contemplative experience, as well as development of experiential knowledge through contemplative practices. An enhanced attentiveness to and awareness of oneself and one’s environment in the present moment is a contemplative experience. Human contemplative experiences can be cultivated and deepened through a variety of contemplative practices (see “The Tree of Contemplative Practices” in Appendix A).

In the late 20th century and early 21st century, contemplative education/studies courses, concentrations, and initiatives have emerged in the academy. According to Mirabai Bush (2010), Executive Director of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, courses that incorporate a wide range of contemplative practices, have been designed and taught by 145 Contemplative Practice Fellows, at 101 colleges and universities throughout North America:

Together [Contemplative Practice Fellows] are designing pedagogical methods and building a body of knowledge that is formulating a new way of teaching—and of learning and knowing—that complements critical thinking and the scientific method. They are demonstrating how contemplative development opens the mind to new possibilities, cultivates wisdom through deepening one’s relationship to the world, and encourages compassion and empathy through an understanding of the interconnection of all life. (p. 163)

A program of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, Contemplative Practice Fellows is funded by the Fetzer Institute. Some of the curricula and pedagogies created
by the *Contemplative Practice Fellows*, as well as contemplative approaches and methodologies developed by other college and university faculty, have been presented in such scholarly journals as *Teachers College Record, Educational Leadership,* and *Journal of Transformative Education.*

Although there has been significant discussion of postsecondary courses and programs that have integrated contemplative views and practices in the literature, there have been few studies of contemplative curricula and pedagogy in higher education (see chapter one, section three). Additionally, there have been even fewer inquiries of the influence of contemplative education on performing arts training within conservatories and college and university departments (see chapter one, section four).

For more than thirty years, Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, has offered a contemplative liberal arts education to its community of learners. At Naropa University, in cooperation with Academic Affairs and the Performing Arts Department, I was most fortunate to have the opportunity to conduct a qualitative study of the relationship between contemplative education and an innovative performing arts program. The Master of Fine Arts in Theater: Contemporary Performance is the first graduate program in North America to integrate contemplative education with interdisciplinary, conservatory level training in the performing arts.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do faculty and students characterize contemplative education within the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program?

2. How does contemplative education impact the intended and operational curricula of courses within the MFA Contemporary Performance Program?
3. How do graduate students perceive the effects of contemplative education, offered by the MFA Contemporary Performance Program, on the development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives?

In consideration of the nature and purpose of the study, I selected educational criticism and connoisseurship as the research methodology. Creator of the methodology and Professor Emeritus of Stanford University School of Education, Elliot W. Eisner (1994a, 1998), recommended that a school culture be perceived through five closely related dimensions: intentional, curricular, pedagogical, structural, and evaluative (for definitions of the dimensions, see chapter three, section two).

In addition to apprehending the study’s featured courses: Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World; Voice/Song: The Rilke Project; and Viewpoints Seminar through these dimensions, I developed five types of interactive conventions that could shape our understanding of the contemplative and performative aspects of the curricula, adapted from the work of Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode (2000). The significant and subtle qualities of the interdisciplinary, conservatory level courses were further captured by the preparation, context-building, reflective, showing, and closing conventions (for definitions of the conventions, see chapter three, section two).

Since students’ views of their learning were integral to this study, I created four inter-related dimensions through which their perceptions were presented. I learned how first- and second-year students perceived the impact of contemplative education on the development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives throughout their course of study in the
contemporary performance program (for definitions of the abilities and perspectives, refer to chapter one, section four).

The qualitative methodology of educational criticism was most appropriate in the disclosure of the MFA performance community because “it aims not at the reduction of complexities but at their illumination in order that the factors and qualities that make situations unique as well as general can be understood” (Eisner, 1994b, p. 382). Written criticisms of the course curricula and of the Nalanda Campus setting were offered through four dimensions developed by Eisner (1994b, 1998): description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics (for definitions of these dimensions, refer to chapter three, section two).

The purpose of this concluding chapter was fivefold: 1) to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions; 2) suggest an emergent definition of contemplative education for the MFA program; 3) present eight themes that connected significant aspects of MFA Contemporary Performance values and training; 4) offer suggestions for future directions in curriculum development within the MFA Program, based on the study findings; and 5) make recommendations for future research in contemplative education and performing arts training.

How do faculty and students characterize contemplative education within the MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance Program?

Mindfulness awareness is fundamentally a way of being—a way of inhabiting one's body, one’s mind, one’s moment-by-moment experience. It is a natural human capacity. It is a deep awareness; a knowing and experiencing of life as it arises and passes away each moment. Mindful awareness is a way of relating to all experience—positive, negative, and neutral—in an open, receptive way. This awareness involves freedom from grasping and from wanting anything to be different. It simply knows and accepts what is here, now. Mindfulness is about
seeing clearly without one’s conditioned patterns of perceiving clouding awareness, and without trying to frame things in a particular way. It is important to learn to see in this way because how a person perceives and frames the moment generates one’s reality.

---Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson (2009), The Art and Science of Mindfulness

**Introduction.**

In our view, Shapiro and Carlson’s discussion of mindfulness awareness provided a clear and thoughtful way of describing contemplative perspective and experience. Their perception of mindfulness awareness is similar to the view of mindfulness and awareness, cultivated through the practice of *shamatha/vipashayana* meditation.

According to Jeremy and Karen Hayward (1998), former students and close associates of Chogyam Trungpa, Founder of Naropa University, mindfulness, or *shamatha*, and *vipashayana*, or awareness are complementary practices:

As you continue to practice mindfulness, both in sitting practice and in daily life; your practice expands to include *awareness* of the outer environment as well as the inner environment of your thoughts and emotions. The distinction between *mindfulness* and *awareness* comes from the Buddhist tradition of practice. The Sanskrit word for mindfulness is *shamatha*, which literally means “development of peace” but is sometimes used to mean “taming the mind.” The Sanskrit word for awareness is *vipashayana*, which can also be translated as “insight.” Mindfulness is the attention to detail and settling of mind. Awareness in the more global sense of space, openness, and clarity that develops out of mindfulness as your practice strengthens. (pp. 94-95)

The cultivation of mindfulness and awareness, through the sitting practice of *shamatha/vipashayana* meditation, was one of the primary ways MFA Contemporary Performance faculty and students characterized contemplative education.
Faculty characterization of contemplative education.

Core Faculty Barbara Dilley defined shamatha and vipashayana, as she provided instruction in sitting meditation to second-year students, during a session of her Meditation Practicum IV course:

Shamatha is our most basic practice – noticing thoughts and returning to breathing. Shamatha is training the mind. Shamatha means calm abiding. There is a place where we slightly raise our gaze to expand our awareness of the space, light in the room, sounds in the parking lot. In cultivating vipashayana or insight, sometimes there is a natural return to the simplicity of shamatha. This can shift from day to day, but it is also developmental. There is an ongoing passage between inner and outer awareness. (B. Dilley, personal communication, April 3, 2009)

The teaching of shamatha/mindfulness and vipashayana/awareness, through sitting meditation, was central to the Meditation Practicum IV course; and served as the cornerstone for the MFA program’s contemplative approach.

Director of MFA Contemporary Performance, Wendell Beavers, described the relationship between contemplative view and practice and the interdisciplinary conservatory level performance curriculum:

There were two aspects to the contemplative approach of this program:

1. The Meditation Practicum curriculum which introduces formal meditation practice instruction in shamatha/vipashayana meditation (mindfulness-awareness practice), which was taught by Chogyam Trungpa to his students directly from his lineage of Vajrayana Buddhism from Tibet; and presents Naropa’s context of contemplative practice and view as it has met Western artists, psychologists, and intellectuals; and

2. The selection of performance techniques: voice, acting, dance, creation of work, based in that view. All technique is, in a sense, contemplatively-based in that its approach is direct perception first, followed by action. (W. Beavers, personal communication, April 22, 2009)
Roy Hart Theatre was one example of a performance technique, offered by the MFA program, which facilitated direct perception through the vocal expression of its participants.

Core Faculty Ethie Friend discussed that Roy Hart Theatre method encouraged students to explore and extend their voices spontaneously, without prior judgment as to how their voices would sound:

The Roy Hart approach helps students to separate thoughts and judgments about their voices from their extended vocalizations. Roy Hart has to do with the expression of the whole voice—cracked, broken sounds—corded sounds—coming from a deep place in the body. These sounds can emanate from the unconscious. (E. Friend, personal communication, April 16, 2009)

The dynamic interaction of the unconscious and conscious aspects of the human psyche, expressed through extended voice, is a central concept of Roy Hart Theatre.

In regard to the MFA program’s contemplative education, Ms. Friend conveyed that it was important “to cultivate the qualities of openness and presence in students” (E. Friend, personal communication, April 16, 2009). Student views of the influence of contemplative education on four attributes of presence-in-performance: openness, courage, commitment, and confidence, were discussed in the dimensional analysis of student perceptions at the close of chapter four.

Composer and MFA Associated Artist, Gary Grundei, communicated that a significant characteristic of the program’s contemplative education was the practice of awareness. During a conversational interview, Gary commented, “It is important to work from where you are. The creative process is an invitation to really get in touch with your
own self—to gain awareness of yourself, in the interest of making art” (G. Grundei, personal communication, April 8, 2009).

Mr. Grundei’s commentary was reflective of the concept of *Dharma Art*, developed by Trungpa Rinpoche. In Chogyam Trungpa’s (2008) view, the making of art is ideally created in a state of mindfulness and awareness:

Our message is simply one of appreciating the nature of things as they are and expressing it without struggle of thoughts and fears. We give up aggression, both toward ourselves and others, that we have to make a special effort to impress people, and toward others, that we can put something over on them. (p. 2)

The *dharma art* teachings were intended to provide guidance in the appreciation of and living within the phenomenal world as well as in making art. *Dharma Art* principles were transmitted by Barbara Dilley to second-year students in the *Meditation Practicum IV* course. Also, Wendell Beavers and other faculty referenced *dharma art* teachings, as they conducted class sessions in the performance studio environment.

**Student characterization of contemplative education.**

MFA Contemporary Performance second- and first-year students primarily characterized contemplative education in the following ways:

- body/mind training for performance and personal development
- sitting meditation
- cultivation of mindfulness and awareness

These primary characteristics were congruent with how faculty viewed contemplative education provided by the MFA program. Student characterization of the program’s contemplative education was fully presented in the dimensional analysis of student perceptions at the close of chapter four.
The student perspectives were significantly reflective of the somatic-based nature of their contemplative education and performance training. In the dimensional analysis, students characterized contemplative education as “body/mind training for performance and personal development.” As realized through sitting meditation and contemplative dance and other contemplatively-based performance techniques, most students viewed perception as an embodied process. In other words, these students perceived body and mind as connected, rather than separate.

In *Radical Knowing: Understanding Consciousness through Relationship*, Christian de Quincey (2005), Professor of Consciousness Studies at John F. Kennedy University, described the relationship between the body and perception:

In somatics, the entire organism is considered an “organ of perception,” to borrow a phrase from the eighteenth century German scientist-philosopher Goethe. Instead of “body” or “mind,” we can speak, both literally and metaphorically, of a “body of experienced meaning.” We could equally speak of the “experience of embodied meaning,” where, through interacting with our environment, our organism literally incorporates messages into the substance of its flesh. (p. 158)

It was through their *experiences of embodied meaning* that students engaged in contemplative practices and performance work. They developed performance abilities; honed communication skills; and forged aesthetic perspectives through experiential learning.

Arthur Zajonc (2010), Andrew Mellon Professor of Physics and Interdisciplinary Studies at Amherst College and Director of the Academic Program of the Center for Contemplative Mind, posited, “We are most powerfully affected by deep and sustained experiences, which leave enduring imprints on our very constitution and consciousness” (p. 108). Earlier in the text, *The Heart of Higher Education*, Zajonc had presented an
elegant argument in support of the centrality of experience to knowledge across all disciplines.

The majority of MFA Contemporary Performance students articulated that the cultivation of mindfulness and awareness was integrated throughout and within their experiences of sitting meditation and other forms of body/mind training. Yoshiharu Nakagawa (2000), Holistic Educator and Professor at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, presented Arthur Deikman’s (1982) view of awareness as “the observing self;” and explained why the cultivation of awareness should be included in holistic education:

[Arthur Deikman] (1982) calls awareness “the observing self” as distinct from “the thinking self,” “the emotional self,” and “the functional self.” The observing self is the transparent center, that which is aware. This fourth self is most personal of all, prior to thought, feeling, and action, for it experiences these functions” (p. 94). It is a deeper self than other selves. “We are awareness, and that is why we cannot observe it; we cannot detach ourselves from it because it is the core experience of self” (p. 103). Contemplation or meditation cultivates this observing self and thereby enters the deeper dimensions of the Self and reality. . . .The discovery of awareness, or the observing self, is surely one of the greatest contributions of contemplative traditions to education, because it has disclosed a different aspect of the human being other than the mind, the body, and the emotion. The history of education has paid little attention to this aspect; therefore, it would be a primary task of holistic education to develop a system of education that includes the art of awareness as an integral part. (pp. 179-180)

According to MFA student perception, the observing self was realized through somatic-based contemplative practice and performance techniques. First- and second-students alike voiced that mindfulness and awareness were cultivated through embodied experiential learning across the contemporary performance curriculum. Most also conveyed that the program’s contemplative education had transformed their views in regard to communication, performance, and aesthetic perspective (see chapter four, section ten).
Emergent definition of contemplative education for the MFA community.

Based on how faculty and students characterized contemplative education, I have suggested the following emergent operational definition of contemplative education for MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance. This definition is offered as a starting place for conversation around how contemplative education functions within the contemporary performance program.

*Contemplative education is an experiential and transformative way of learning that cultivates mindfulness and awareness through body/mind training across the MFA Contemporary Performance curriculum.*

**How does contemplative education impact the intended and operational curricula of courses within the MFA Contemporary Performance Program?**

A person of practical wisdom is more than a mechanic, fixing that which is, but is a creator, imaginative of insight. Helping such a person emerge and develop requires a certain pedagogy, not the pedagogy of mimesis (copying) but the “pedagogy of practice” wherein the practice is not mere repetition but the practice of doing, reflecting, visioning, doing yet again with a “difference.” Such a pedagogy is one of transformation, of transforming an individual’s nascent, natural instincts, interests, powers, abilities into mature, reflective, successful, and productive ones. A curriculum organized around such practice—itsel honoring the play of performance and the performance of play—is dynamic, not stagnant. Like a play, the performance has structure but also flexibility as the performer (the “currerer” running the curriculum course) interacts with the audience and the other actors (the environment). The play (or curriculum) becomes transformed as it is produced by the players acting and interacting. In this sort of performative process, a semi-stable, semi-permeable structure and fluid habits continually and dynamically interact that new knowledge and new forms keep emerging. One might well call this not only a transformative curriculum but also an emergent one.

--- William E. Doll, Jr. (2005), *The Culture of Method*
**Introduction.**

The transformative curriculum that William Doll discussed was very similar to the MFA Contemporary Performance curriculum. The intended curricula were designed to cultivate *the play of performance and the performance of play* through embodied, experiential pedagogy. MFA intended interdisciplinary curricula were developed to facilitate creativity, versatility, awareness, and collaboration in performance work (see chapter four, section three). Through my observation of myriad course sessions and showings, it was evident that *the play (or curriculum) becomes transformed as it is produced by the players acting and interacting.*

The MFA program’s *pedagogy of practice* is rooted in concepts of physical theatre from Eastern and Western performance traditions (see chapter two, section four). “The method of working is based on the idea that theatre is about craft, celebration and play, rooted in collaboration, and made by an ensemble dedicated to a collective imagination” (Callery, 2001, p. 5).

**Contemplative approaches of the featured curricula.**

In his aforementioned characterization of contemplative education, Wendell Beavers communicated that there were two aspects to the contemplative approach of the program. Those aspects included: formal instruction in sitting meditation through the practice of mindfulness and awareness; and contemplatively-based performance training.

The first contemplative approach formed the heart of the intended and operational curricula of one of the featured courses of this study, *Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World.* The second contemplative approach was central to the intended and
operational curricula of the other featured courses, *Voice/Song: The Rilke Project* and *Viewpoints Seminar*. Again, the intended curriculum is the planned course of study, whereas the operational curriculum is the unfolding series of events and interactions that take place within a learning environment (Eisner, 1994b).

**Evaluating the intended and operational featured curricula.**

Since the featured courses of this study were postmodern in perspective, it was of utmost importance that the criteria for evaluating the curricula be postmodern and relevant. Postmodern curriculum theorist, William E. Doll, Jr. (1993), presented four criteria for the evaluation of postmodern curriculum in his seminal text, *A Post-Modern Perspective On Curriculum*. All four of these criteria were highly appropriate for the evaluation of the featured curricula of MFA Contemporary Performance.

**Richness.**

The first of Doll’s (1993) criteria, *richness*, referred “to a curriculum’s depth, to its multiple possibilities or interpretations” (p. 176). The primary reason for the depth of the featured curricula was the superior quality of the teaching. Each faculty member was a master teaching artist. The instructional mastery of the teaching was evident through my observations of class sessions, as well as the congruence between the intended and operational curricula. The *multiple possibilities or interpretations* were revealed through the innovative variety and integration of each course’s *dimensions* and *conventions* (see chapter four, final summations within sections seven, eight, and nine).
Recursion.

The second of Doll’s (1993) criteria for the evaluation of postmodern curriculum was recursion. In Doll’s perspective, recursion was defined as a reflective process. “Thus, in recursion it is a necessity to have others—peers, teachers—look at, critique, respond to what one has done” (p. 178).

The critiquing of student work is an integral part of studio performing and visual arts courses in most postsecondary departments and pre-professional and professional conservatories. As a part of the reflective conventions, teacher and peer critiquing of student performance work was prevalent throughout the featured intended and operational curricula. The critiquing I observed was constructive, informative, and positive in tone.

According to the Edsel Bryant Ford Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, Teresa M. Amabile (1996), studies have suggested that evaluative feedback can undermine or support creativity in real-world situations:

[Studies] suggest that in real-world settings, creativity may be undermined by evaluation that conveys incompetence or threatens self-determination, but creativity may be supported by evaluation that is work-focused and constructive (even when negative), that provides information about performance improvement, or that conveys positive recognition of competence and valued work. (p. 152)

Many MFA second-year students were planning on entering the competitive New York City arts scene upon graduation. Therefore, in my view, it was critical for them to receive informative feedback; and recognize their performance strengths and creative abilities, through their final critiquing sessions in the program.
In the Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World, Voice/Song: The Rilke Project, and Viewpoints Seminar courses, the reflective conventions also emphasized inner work, such as the practices of shamatha and vipashayana/mindfulness-awareness meditation and resting in silence. In my view, this recursion work was also important for these students, in preparation for and support of careers in the performing arts.

Additionally, since each of these three courses was the culminating semester of a two-year curriculum, the comprehensive review of previously presented concepts and work served a significant reflective function. The dimensions and conventions of the courses intertwined to weave a tapestry of beginnings and endings.

According to Doll (1993), the nature of beginnings and endings in a recursive curriculum was interconnected:

In a curriculum that honors, values, uses recursion, there is no fixed beginning or ending. As Dewey has pointed out, every ending is a new beginning, every beginning emerges from a prior ending. Curriculum segments, parts, sequences are arbitrary chunks that, instead of being seen as isolated units, are seen as opportunities for reflection. In such a frame, every test, paper, journal entry can be seen not merely as the completion of one project but also as the beginning of another—to explore, discuss, inquire into both ourselves as meaning makers and into the text in question. This curriculum will, of course, be open not closed; like post-modernism itself, it is Janus-faced, eclectic, interpretive. (p. 178)

Through observing the final class sessions of the 2009 spring semester, there was indeed a Janus-faced closing/opening, reviewing/generating quality to the unfolding events and interactions. As the students were ending their two-year course of study, they were beginning their lives as warrior artists-in-the world.
Relations.

Doll (1993) presented relations as his third criteria for evaluation:

The concept of relations is important to a post-modern, transformative curriculum in two ways: in a pedagogical way and in a cultural way. The former might, naturally, be called pedagogical relations, referring to those within the curriculum—the matrix or network which gives it richness. The latter might, just as naturally, be called cultural relations, referring to those cultural or cosmological relations which lie outside the curriculum but form a large matrix within which the curriculum is embedded. Both relations are important; each complements the other.

In focusing on pedagogical relations, one focuses on the connections within curriculum’s structure which give the curriculum its depth as this is developed by recursion. Here the twin processes of doing and reflecting-on-doing are important, and through these processes the curriculum becomes richer with the passage of time. (p. 179)

Based on the criteria of richness and recursion, as presented in the second portion of this section, the pedagogical relations, within the featured curricula, were of superior quality.

In regard to cultural relations, some students expressed that the program training did not address the social-cultural contexts of identity development. However, other students articulated that due to the wide age-range of students, 24 through 56, the program’s contemplative education had broadened their perspectives about working with an intergenerational population (see chapter four, section ten). Chi-Ying Cheng, Assistant Professor of Psychology, Singapore Management University; Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks, Associate Professor of Business, University of Michigan; and Fiona Lee (2008), Professor of Psychology, University of Michigan, defined social identities as “aspects of the self that are based on memberships in important social groups” (p. 1178).

It is important to note that the aforementioned student commentary regarding social and cultural identity integration was in reference to the contemporary performance
program at large, rather than to the featured curricula of this study. Nonetheless, the perception of a lack of programmatic support in the social-cultural contexts of identity development, on the part of some students, pointed to the need to consider these contexts in future curricular planning.

Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, and Lee (2008), posited that individuals’ perceived integration of multiple social identities, contributed to improved creativity in the knowledge domains connected to those identities:

Drawing on social identity and the creative-cognitive approach, we have shown that high identity integration (i.e., perceptions that multiple and conflicting social identities are compatible) contributes to enhanced creative performance in tasks for which knowledge associated with both identities is relevant. These findings show that the management of multiple social identities has theoretical implications for understanding the psychology of creativity and practical implications for increasing individuals’ capacity for creativity and innovation. (p. 1183)

Since critical creative endeavor is central to the MFA program at large, the practical implications of Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, and Lee’s findings might prove useful in future conversations around curriculum development.

**Rigor.**

Doll’s (1993) presented *rigor*, as his fourth criteria for postmodern evaluation:

[Rigor] draws on qualities foreign to a modernist frame—interpretation and indeterminacy, to mention but two. In dealing with indeterminacy, one can never be certain one “has it right”—not even to the 95th or 99th percentile of probability. One must continually be exploring, looking for new combinations, interpretation, patterns. (p. 182)

Doll’s definition of *rigor* was similar to Harvard Psychologist Ellen Langer’s (1997) of mindful learning.
In *The Power of Mindful Learning*, Langer (1997) suggested that there are multiple creative possibilities in mindful decision-making:

> [When] we are mindful, we are implicitly aware that in any particular situation there is no absolute optimum standard for action. *From a mindful perspective, one’s response to a particular situation is not an attempt to make the best choice from among available options but to create options.* (pp. 113-114)

As mentioned at the start of this section, the cultivation of mindfulness/awareness was at the heart of the featured curricula, as well as all MFA performance courses.

As one potent example of curricular *rigor*, students and faculty interpreted a wide variety of texts, written by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1926), through original music-theater composition and performance in the *Voice/Song* course. The final class session *showcased* individual and collective student compositions, as well three new scores composed by Associated Artist, Gary Grunlei (see chapter four, section eight).

Doll (1993) concluded his presentation of the criteria for evaluation of postmodern curriculum with further discussion of how *rigor* combines *interpretation* with *indeterminacy*:

> The quality of interpretation, its own richness, depends on how fully and well we develop the various alternatives indeterminacy presents. In this new frame for rigor—combining the complexity of indeterminacy with the hermeneutics of interpretation—it seems necessary to establish a community, one critical yet supportive. (p. 183)

Doll’s integrative way of framing *rigor* was most descriptive of the intended and operational featured curricula, as *supportive* and *critical* in guiding experiential and transformative learning.
How do graduate students perceive the effects of contemplative education, offered by the MFA Contemporary Performance Program, on the development of their communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives?

I don’t think that art comes from art. A lot of artists apparently think so. I think it comes from the awakening person. Awakening is what you might call the spiritual. It is a linkage to something flowing very rapidly through the air, and I can put my finger on it and plug in, so to speak. Do artists need a spiritual way or do they need art? You can say that one is the same as the other. Everything tends toward awakening, and I would rather use the word **awakening** than a word derived from some system – because there are many systems.
---Isamu Noguchi (1968), *A Sculptor’s World*

**Introduction.**

The process of *awakening* is similar to the way of perceiving reality known as the *Satori* state. Characteristics of the *Satori* state include heightened awareness, concentration, receptiveness, spontaneity, and stillness (see chapter one, section four). In his dissertation study, David M. Klein (1995) discussed that these qualities are cultivated through meditation practice and desired by actors. Therefore, Klein suggested that the actor could further his training through the development of meditational methods. The purpose of this section was to present a review of contemporary performance student perceptions of how contemplative education influenced their *awakening* of important abilities and perspectives.

**Development of communication abilities.**

Throughout the interview process, all students discussed contemplative education as beneficially influencing the development of their communication abilities, within themselves and without, in the program and in life (see chapter four, section ten). Communication abilities were defined as a dimension that included interpersonal
intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence (see chapter one, section four). According to Moran, Kombacher, and Gardner (2006), interpersonal intelligence involves the “ability to understand and interact well with others” and intrapersonal intelligence has to do with the “ability to understand and use one’s thoughts, feelings, preferences, and interests” (p. 25).

MFA student commentary was similar to the five themes, uncovered from student journal writings about their meditation practices, presented by Holistic Educator, John Miller (1994):

- One theme for many students is that meditation practice provides them with the permission to be alone and to enjoy their own company.
- A second theme that emerges is that many students feel they become better listeners through meditation.
- Related to listening, a third theme that emerges is that people are able to witness their own lives from a larger perspective.
- A fourth theme that arises is that meditation can happen spontaneously in one’s daily life.
- A fifth theme that occurs is the developing sense of interrelatedness and connectedness. (pp. 127-129).

In particular, first- and second-year MFA students communicated that contemplative education had helped them to become better listeners. Most of these students placed a high value on their improvement in listening skills, indicating that quality listening was essential to their growth as performing artists and human beings (see chapter four, section ten).
**Development of presence-in-performance.**

Presence-in-performance was discussed in relationship to the contemplative education and conservatory level training of first- and second-year students. In this study, presence-in-performance was defined as a moment-to-moment authenticity and vibrancy created by a performing artist onstage, or in the studio, and palpably perceived by other performers and audience members (see chapter one, section four). Students were asked how contemplative education influenced the development of four attributes of presence-in-performance: openness, courage, confidence, and commitment.

Most students indicated that the cultivation of each of these attributes contributed the development of presence-in-performance (see chapter four, section ten). Contemplative education appeared to facilitate the realization of and engagement in moment-to-moment authenticity, throughout the performance exchanges between first- and second-year warrior artists-in-training.

**Development of sociolinguistic perspectives.**

Sociolinguistic perspectives were defined as the interpretation of reality according to cultural assumptions, social norms, and ideological points of view (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). In the 21st century, students from performing arts departments and conservatories, need to prepare to perform for and interact with increasingly diverse audiences (see chapter one, section four).

Contemporary performance first- and second-year students had a wide variety of views regarding the impact of contemplative education on their awareness of diversity issues and cultural perceptions. Some students voiced that contemplative education
offered more support for their growth as individual performers and human beings, than understanding of their social and cultural identities. Other students communicated that contemplative education had helped them to become less judgmental of disparate points of view (see chapter four, section ten).

According to Elizabeth J. Tisdell (2006), Associate Professor of Adult Education at Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, a multi-dimensional approach, which includes creative and arts-based pedagogy, can facilitate culturally responsive and transformative learning:

By helping learners engage on the personal, cultural, structural, political, and the artistic levels of the cultural imagination, there is a greater chance that education can be transformative, both for learners and educators. To be sure, there are always limits to the extent at which any higher education experience can be transformative (Gore, 1993). However, by continuing to draw on different modes of knowledge production to inform educational work, including drawing on the cultural imagination through the use of symbol, art, music, and creativity, there is more of a chance for learning to be transformative and culturally responsive because learners are invited to express their culture according to the creative manifestation of their own cultural imagination.

Tisdell’s suggestions are congruent with Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, and Lee’s (2008) findings that individuals’ perceived integration of multiple social identities, contributed to improved creativity in the knowledge domains connected to those identities (see the previous section in this chapter).

**Development of aesthetic perspectives.**

There was more commonality than difference in how students described the influence of contemplative education on the development of their aesthetic perspectives. In this study, aesthetic perspectives were defined as “aesthetic signatures: the specific artistic manifestations that occur as artists develop their collections of work, producing
aesthetic consistencies that profoundly speak of their individual experiences of self” (Press, 2002, p. 207). Some second-year students communicated that contemplative view and practice facilitated an intuitive path toward creating performance work.

Transpersonal Psychology Pioneer, Frances E. Vaughan (1979), provided a comprehensive definition of intuition:

Philosophers concerned with universal truth and epistemology have regarded intuition as a way of knowing in which the separation of subject and object is transcended. The knower becomes one with the known, and knows from inside, by identification with, rather than information about, what is known. The word *intuition* comes from Latin *in-tuere*, which can be translated as looking, regarding, or knowing from within. As a way of knowing, it is experiential and holistic. When one knows something intuitively, one knows it for sure, although one may not be able to explain the feeling of certainty. Intuition is true in the same way that sensation is true: it is your experience, and you know it for what it is. In this sense intuition is much more than a hunch or vague feeling. It may at times come into awareness only marginally, and seem vague, but if given attention, it can become increasingly clear and useful. (p. 49)

The students similarly described intuition as originating from their own experience and connecting with their evolving aesthetic perspectives. They also mentioned placing more trust in and granting more attention to their intuitive knowing (see chapter four, section ten).

Suffolk University Professor Emerita of Chemistry, Maria Teresa Miliora (1987), presented intuition as an important function, along with imagination, of the creative process (see chapter four, section ten):

It is through the intuitive function that we realize creative inspirations and insights, but we may experience the realization at any level—sensory, emotional, imaginal. Thus, if we develop greater awareness of these levels, we develop greater sensitivity and receptivity to creative insights. (p. 146)
Miliora’s presentation examined intuitive discovery as an initial stage of the creative process. Her writing also supported student descriptions of intuitive knowing, as connected to their development of unique aesthetics in performance.

First- and second-year students alike commented that contemplative education transformed their relationship to performance, as performers and as audience members (see chapter four, section ten).

The commentary, offered by the study participants in this section, suggests that the effects of contemplative education on the development of students’ communication abilities, presence-in-performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives, were perceived as beneficial and transformative. These findings were similar to one of the categories in Shapiro, Brown, and Austin’s (2008) summarization of key findings, prepared for a review of research concerning “the significant effects of meditation on education-related variables” (p. 9).

As indicated in chapter one, section three, and described in Shapiro, Brown, and Austin’s (2008) review, this category referred to the relationship between meditation and holistic development:

**Development of the Whole Person**

- Meditation can support the development of creativity.
- Meditation supports and enhances the development of skills needed for interpersonal relationships.
- Empathetic responses are increased with meditation and mindfulness practices.
- Meditation may help to cultivate self-compassion. (“Key Research Findings”)
The authors not only clearly articulated the potential benefits of meditation for the “development of the whole person,” in higher education, but also offered thoughtful recommendations for future studies of meditation in educational settings.

**Thematics of MFA Contemporary Performance Values and Training**

The research revealed eight different themes that intersected the featured curricula and interviews with members of the MFA community. These *pervasive qualities or thematics* (Eisner, 1998) seemed to form a matrix that connected and illuminated the most potent aspects of MFA Contemporary Performance values and training. The descriptions of the themes were enhanced and elucidated by related literature.

**Inclusivity.**

The first thematic was *inclusivity*. MFA students were encouraged to practice inclusivity in their course and performance work. What inclusivity meant, in this context, was for each student to bring her whole self – thoughts, feelings, sensations, comfortable and uncomfortable, to meditation sessions and the performance studio.

When Barbara Dilley was reviewing a basic form of *Contemplative Dance Practice* called *Sanctuary*, during a *Meditation Practicum IV* class session, she encouraged the students to practice *inclusivity*:

> We’ve been cultivating our approach to *Sanctuary* throughout the semester; and I think of it as a specific discipline – a soft discipline – an open exploration of body/mind. When you practice *Sanctuary* in another environment, your approach should be inclusive. As you practice *Sanctuary* individually, check to see if you have censored anything. Be inclusive. Integrate any practice. Inclusivity is an important view. (B. Dilley, personal communication, April 3, 2009)

This *inclusivity* required a kind of self-monitoring on the part of each class participant.
Dymphna Callery (2001) likened this type of self-monitoring to a “compass needle working like a seismograph to register the internal vibrations of the nervous system” (p.22). The seismic readings could be witnessed and attuned through an individual’s body/mind or “inner computer [which] eventually would become second nature” (p. 22).

Second-year students, Lia and Lydia, articulated that the extended voice techniques of Roy Hart Theatre, as taught by Ethie Friend, facilitated the practice of inclusivity and expanded their emotional range in performance:

Spaciousness of mind develops through the vocal and movement work in this program. Our extended voice training allows weird, bad sounds to emerge. Roy Hart Theatre is very Buddhist, permitting all parts of the self to exist, or rather co-exist. When creating a role or movement piece, you can allow aspects of self into your vocabulary that you otherwise would not have known. The expressing of your ugly aspects, allows you to express more fully in performance. (L. Chi, personal communication, April 7, 2009)

with contemplative dance practice and/or the viewpoints as the ground, the blank canvas on which we are to paint our masterwork, the other techniques taught in the mfa are supportive. the roy hart vocal technique truly encourages one to discover the voice and allow it to be released in all its glory and misery. the knowledge of the voice, all its hidden crevices, and further exploration into them is a rich and vital way for the performer to continue growing as an artist and as a human being. . . we humans spend so much time disembodying from our voices to become “civilized.” roy hart vocal technique/philosophy decolonizes the voice and accepts marginalized sounds as beautiful, perfect, necessary. (Atienza, 2009, para. 5)

According to Lydia, the theory and practice of Roy Hart Theatre furthered her growth as a human being, as well as artist. Her writing, intentionally presented in lower case script, was excerpted with her permission, from her master’s thesis manuscript.
The second thematic was *nowness*. Trungpa Rinpoche (1988) discussed *nowness* as the ability to recognize and reside in the present moment:

*Nowness*, or the magic of the present moment, is what joins the wisdom of the past with the present. When you appreciate a painting or a piece of music or work of literature, no matter when it was created, you appreciate it *now*. You experience the same nowness in which it was created. It is always *now*.

The way to experience nowness is to realize that this very moment, this very point in your life, is always *the* occasion. So the consideration of where you are and what you are, on the spot, is very important. (p. 96)

When she discussed contemplative view and practice, during *Meditation Practicum IV* class sessions, Barbara Dilley often mentioned Chogyam Trungpa’s concept of *nowness*.

Ms. Dilley (2006) described the concept of *nowness*, or the present moment, as an integral part of the program she invented, *Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP)*:

Inspired by the Shambhala and Dharma Art teachings of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, CDP is an experiential class offering the time and space for deep and profound investigations into the experience of ‘NOW-ness’ – this present moment. Self, others, and space shape the ‘dance’ of each session. (p. 12)

Several second-year students also referred to *nowness* as the present moment. Clarissa and Penelope used the term, *nowness*, in reference to contemplative practice.

During an interview conversation, Clarissa conveyed, “[The] sound of the mindfulness bell can remind us to return to a place of nowness, the present moment” (C. Lacey, personal communication, March 17, 2009).

Penelope commented upon *nowness*, in reference to contemplative education and the performative ability of improvisation, when she voiced, “Contemplative practice has helped me to become better in improvisation – seeing what arises in the space and
responding to nowness, the present moment” (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009).

**Silence.**

The third thematic was *silence*. Throughout the ages, artists, philosophers, theologians, and educators have pondered and argued the meaning of *silence*. As a pause that grants meaning prior to the utterance of an evocative line from a dramatic monologue, or the playing of the final movement of a symphony, *silence* is beautiful and empowering. However, *silence* as an individual or collective response to abuse, discrimination, and/or oppression is repressive and disempowering. Sometimes, it is unclear whether or not *silence* connotes a beneficent potentiality or a portending of doom, as when the dying Hamlet’s final words to his friend, Horatio, are “the rest is silence” (5.2.337).

Poet, Professor, and Practitioner of *Raja* and *Hatha* Yoga, George Kalamaras (1994), suggested that *silence* is a genuine way to create meaning:

> As an authentic mode of knowing, silence is not opposed to language, which I define as the human capacity for vocal and written utterance. Rather, silence and language act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge. (p. 8)

*Silence* and sound work together in an integral fashion to make music, as well as other sonic forms of the performing arts, such as theatre productions, poetry readings, and performance art.

As he read aloud to second-year students from his text, during a *Viewpoints Seminar* class session, Wendell Beavers (2000) voiced, “Inaction gives birth to action; stillness to movement; silence to sound. There is no action without conscious inaction,
there is no movement without conscious stillness and there is no sound without a full experience of silence” (p. 2).

Swiss Philosopher, Max Picard (2002), posited that silence is continuously present in its relationship to language:

Silence is present in language. . .even after language has arisen out of silence. The world of language is built over and above the world of silence. Language can only enjoy security as it moves about freely in words and ideas in so far as the broad world of silence is stretched out below. From the breadth of silence language learns to achieve its own breadth. Silence is for language what the net stretched out below him is for the tightrope walker. (p. 37)

The net of silence offered quietude; and surrounded and supported linguistic and performative expression, within the MFA studio environment.

Second-year student, Clarissa, and first-year student, Russell, conveyed that during stressful situations, resting or reflecting in silence, prior to conversing and creating with others, helped them to be more present to their fellow students/performers and thus, more effective in communication:

When a product [showing] is expected, we tend to fall into old habits. It can be difficult to stay present. It is then that I ask myself, “What tools can I use?” Taking a moment of silence before and after creation can be helpful. (C. Lacey, personal communication, March 17, 2009)

When challenging things develop in class and rehearsal, taking the time to be quiet – reflectively silent, and listening before responding, improves the quality of response. When more friction is happening, you need more time to listen to yourself and others in order to allow thoughts and feelings to germinate. (R. Adler, personal communication, May 7, 2009)

Clarissa and Russell mindfully chose the practice of silence to release anxiety and return to an awareness of the present moment.
Silence, accompanying the preparation and closing conventions of bowing in and bowing out, provided a bridge between everyday living in the world, and perception and action within the performance studio space. Playwright, Former Master Teacher of Acting for New York University’s Experimental Theater Wing (ETW), and Associated Artist for MFA Contemporary Performance, Stephen Wangh, articulated that “the moment just before one bows is my favorite moment, similar to the expectant space of waiting at the start of a new class. Moments of silence and waiting are accepted at Naropa” (S. Wangh, personal communication, March 19, 2009).

As mentioned in chapter four, section nine, second-year student, Meredith, referred to the bow as form of contemplative language:

Contemplative education provides a language that we share around being reflective about our process and tracking what’s occurring. A practice as simple as the bow has meaning and purpose. Many of us brought the bow into our thesis work. (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009)

The bow was a preparation and closing convention, when students and faculty bowed together to each other, while engaging in a moment of mindful silence and acknowledging presence in community. During most interviews, the interviewee and I would bow in, just prior to the start of the interview, and bow out, at the cessation of our conversation.

Improvisation.

Improvisation, or the art of responding to what arises in the present moment, in life and art, was the fourth thematic. Improvisational work was central to the three featured courses of this inquiry: Meditation Practicum IV: Warrior Artist-in-the-World;
Voice/Song: The Rilke Project; and Viewpoints Seminar, as well as to greater part of the entire MFA Contemporary Performance curriculum.

In the well-known and delightful text, Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art, Author, Violinist, Composer, Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990), offered a comprehensive and vibrant description of the nature of improvisation:

Improvisation is acceptance, in a single breath, of both transience and eternity. We know what might happen in the next day or minute, but we cannot know what will happen. To the extent that we feel sure of what will happen, we lock in the future and insulate ourselves against these essential surprises. Surrender means cultivating a comfortable attitude toward not-knowing, being nurtured by the mystery of moments that are dependably surprising, ever fresh. . . . When we drop the blinders of our preconceptions, we are virtually propelled by every circumstance into the present time and the present mind: the moment, the whole moment, and nothing but the moment. This is the state of mind taught and strengthened by improvisation, a state of mind in which the here and now is not some trendy idea but a matter of life and death, upon which we can learn to reliably depend. We can depend on the world being a perpetual surprise in perpetual motion. And a perpetual invitation to create. (pp. 21-22)

Improvisation provided places of potentiality for members of the MFA community to relate, create, and re-create, moment to moment.

Wendell Beavers discussed the connection between improvisation and the Shambhala warriorship concept of letting go, during a Viewpoints Seminar class session (see chapter four, section nine):

Improvisation is watching people cope with circumstances. The concept of improvisation really comes from the meditative lineage of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. You can only do it well, if you give it up. The more subjective you can be, the more you can reflect the object, the objective environment. (W. Beavers, personal communication, April 9, 2009)

The ability of letting go and residing in nowness was cultivated through improvisatory work in the Viewpoints Seminar and the other featured curricula.
In his text, “Re-locating Technique,” Mr. Beavers (2008) presented his perspectives about the importance of improvisation to contemporary dance curriculum:

It would be good to resurrect improvisation not only as a viable performance form but also as a technique, which lies at the core of composition. Improvisation should be placed also at the core of choreography. The postmodern generation bequeathed a very sophisticated set of forms and tools to disassemble both the dancer and the dance and created at least the possibility of a multiplicity of aesthetics. Contemporary dance curriculum must address the nature of forms, how they are generated as well as how they are inhabited. Postmodern improvisation as it was originally derived from the work of John Cage, Robert Dunn, and many others is a powerful and effective way to understand these things. (p. 132)

Improvisation was an integral part of Barbara Dilley’s program, Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP). The CDP form facilitated the development of second-year students’ dance/movement improvisational abilities in the Meditation Practicum IV course.

The improvisational nature of CDP was discussed in Ms. Dilley’s (2006) text, Contemplative Dance Practice:

The CONTEMPLATIVE DANCE PRACTICE form trains personal and group mindfulness of body/mind by joining sitting meditation practice together with spontaneous dance/movement improvisation.

The insight and knowledge of bodymind is cultivated through deep listening on many levels of perception, in the exploration of impulses, in still and moving postures, and with gentle attention to the breath. (p. 11)

Second-year students seemed very comfortable in combining the practice of sitting meditation and dance/movement improvisation, during my observations of Meditation Practicum IV class sessions.

Ethie Friend and Gary Grundeii also encouraged their students to incorporate improvisation into original performance work. During the Voice/Song course, second-year students seemed to gradually and steadily gain confidence and skill in performative
improvisation (see chapter four, section eight). Class participants developed their improvisational abilities through the contextual opportunities to practice improvisation in extended vocal, as well as bel canto styles.

**Goodness.**

The fifth thematic was goodness. According to Trungpa Rinpoche, it is trust in human basic goodness that instills the bravery to step out of the domain of our preconceptions and surrender to the unknown of the present moment. In *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, Chogyam Trungpa (1988) presented a vision of basic goodness which contains as a central premise the human ability to appreciate and experience inherent goodness and its deep connection to the beauty of the phenomenal world:

It is not just an arbitrary idea that the world is good, but it is good because we can experience its goodness. We can experience our world as healthy and straightforward, direct and real, because our basic nature is to go along with the goodness of situations. The human potential for intelligence and dignity is attuned to experiencing the brilliance of the bright blue sky, the freshness of the green fields, and the beauty of the trees and mountains. We have an actual connection to reality that can wake us up and make us feel basically, fundamentally good. Shambhala vision is tuning in to our ability to wake ourselves up and recognize that goodness can happen to us. In fact, it is happening already. (p. 31)

According to Chogyam Trungpa, basic goodness is a reality within and around us of which we may or may not be aware. The Shambhala vision offers a view of human goodness that we may have forgotten, yet which we have the potential to recall.

In order to develop awareness and appreciation of basic goodness, Trungpa Rinpoche (1988) advised the practice of sitting meditation:

In the Shambhala tradition, the discipline for developing both gentleness towards ourselves and appreciation for our world is the sitting practice of meditation. The
practice of meditation was taught by the Lord Buddha over 2,500 years ago, and it has been a part of the Shambhala tradition since that time. It is based on an oral tradition: from the time of the Buddha this practice has been transmitted from one human being to another. In this way, it has remained a living tradition, so that, although it is an ancient practice, it is still up to date. . . . By meditation here we mean something very basic and simple that is not tied to any one culture. We are talking about a very basic act: sitting on the ground, assuming a good posture, and developing a sense of our spot, our place on this earth. This is the means of rediscovering ourselves and our basic goodness, the means to tune ourselves into genuine reality, without expectations or preconceptions.

MFA Contemporary Performance teaches the ancient practice of sitting meditation as a living tradition. The program offers this training, yet makes clear that it is the choice of each student whether or not to incorporate the view and practice into his performance work and life in the world.

Barbara Dilley (2006) discussed Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP) as a way to recognize and celebrate the basic goodness of the participants:

CDP can be practiced by anyone who is willing to sit down for a while, begin to explore the sense perceptions and practice awareness with others. Then we simply bring that awareness into gestures, bring it to our moving/dancing/singing bodies and share this as an offering of our basic goodness. This is the original vision from Trungpa Rinpoche. After that we create whatever is important for us, for this moment in time, for our friends, for the life. (p. 11)

MFA students also communicated that the recognition of their basic goodness helped them to become more gentle and compassionate toward themselves and their classmates, during class sessions and rehearsals (see chapter four, section ten).

First-year student, Russell, and second-year student, Erin, expressed that contemplative view and practice provided ways of recognizing their own goodness and thus, the goodness of those with whom they studied and worked. Their understanding of goodness cultivated gentleness, patience, and empathy toward themselves and others:
Contemplative education provides a way to be a good human being – developing an open heart in making work. In a stressful situation, it’s easy to blame people. Instead of blaming others, it’s important to find gentleness within oneself and then, to extend gentleness. (R. Adler, personal communication, May 7, 2009)

Contemplative education has created a space where I have become more patient with myself. This space has also included room to become more empathetic with others and allow them a place to be. I guess I would call this sense of empathy, compassion. (E. Nordland, personal communication, March 5, 2009)

Russell’s commentary included the mention of goodness in connection with the development of an open heart and gentleness.

Heart.

An open heart was the sixth thematic. The recognition of basic goodness and the cultivation of gentleness and open-heartedness are Shambhala principles. These principles were introduced in the Meditation Practicum course, and discussed/practiced throughout other contemporary performance classes and many student thesis show rehearsals. Most students voiced, during the interview process, that Shambhala principles were integral to their development as communicators and artists (see chapter four, section ten).

The open-hearted warrior was a powerful metaphor for several second-year students. Meredith articulated that the attribute of courage was connected with the concept of the open-hearted warrior in her performance work:

I like the word courage. There’s something about that word. It’s connected with the open-hearted warrior, which has been a strong image for me in my creative work. The warrior has a raw, open heart to take what the world will give, but not to run away. (M. Montague, personal communication, April 6, 2009)
Meredith’s classmates, Chandra and Mark, also suggested that the open heart of the warrior represented courage to face the challenges of being present, in performance and in life.

Mark and Chandra conveyed that becoming an open-hearted warrior artist-in-the world could include the conditions of aloneness and sadness. Mark described the warrior’s heart as “open, raw, and alone” and the warrior’s existence as one of “aloneness” (M. Dane, personal communication, April 3, 2009). Chandra aspired to hold “a genuine heart of sadness as a spiritual practitioner and artist” (C. Greene, personal communication, May 7, 2009).

MFA Associated Artist and Composer, Gary Grundei, expressed, “The artist’s call is to stand in the fire and to live on the edge of that, bravely with an open heart” (G. Grundei, personal communication, April 8, 2009). The lived experience of the artist as an open-hearted warrior was an evocative image for Mr. Grundei, as well as for second-year students, Meredith, Mark, and Chandra.

Trungpa Rinpoche (1988) described the warrior’s genuine heart as an awakened heart, which is recognized by the warrior through sitting meditation practice and the rediscovery of basic goodness:

Basic goodness is very closely connected to the idea of bodhicitta in the Buddhist tradition. Bodhi means “awake” or “wakeful” and citta means “heart,” so bodhicitta is “awakened heart.” Such awakened heart comes from being willing to face your state of mind. That may seem like a great demand, but it is necessary. . . .So through the practice of sitting still and following your breath as it goes out and dissolves, you are connecting with your heart. By simply letting yourself be, as you are, you develop genuine sympathy towards yourself. (pp. 44-45)
The open, awakened heart and gentle fearlessness of the warrior artist facilitate the synchronization of body and mind in performance and life.

Training.

The seventh thematic was training.

One of the Shambhala principles, the synchronization of body and mind, is one of the primary premises of all MFA performance training. In the Shambhala tradition, the sitting practice of shamatha, or mindfulness and vipashayana, or awareness opens pathways for the synchronization of body and mind. One characteristic of this synchronization is direction perception. Trungpa Rinpoche (1988) explained the difference between direction perception, or first perception and perception screened by a person’s inner dialogue:

Sometimes, when we perceive the world, we perceive without language. We perceive spontaneously, with a prelanguage system. But sometimes when we view the world, first we think a word and then we perceive. In other words, the first instance is directly feeling or perceiving the universe; the second is talking ourselves into seeing our universe. So either you look and see beyond language—as first perception—or you see the world through the filter of your thoughts, by talking to yourself. . . .Synchronizing mind and body is looking and seeing directly beyond language. (p. 53)

The insight generated by the synchronization of body and mind is not a concept, but rather an experience of direct perception.

As previously presented in this chapter, and stated by Wendell Beavers, Director of MFA Contemporary Performance, “All technique is, in a sense, contemplatively-based in that its approach is direct perception first, followed by action” (W. Beavers, personal communication, April 22, 2009). Mr. Beavers further communicated that “contemplative view and practice prepares the ground for authentic action, compassionate action, useful
action, appropriate action (which is connected to real circumstances clearly perceived)” (W. Beavers, personal communication, April 22, 2009).

**Space.**

The eighth thematic, *space*, was referred to by faculty, students, and other artists alike, as an inner and/or outer environment in which to create and relate.

Wendell Beavers (2000) presented the Viewpoints perspective of *space*, in relationship to the actor and performing/watching activities, as he read aloud from his text during a class session:

The Viewpoints body of work, or technique, is perceived as “new,” or “other” because it refuses to draw familiar lines around the actor, or the activities of performing and watching. The viewpoints work for instance treats the empty space as equal to the occupied space. The empty space is as alive as the performer. In fact the empty space gives rise to *things or events*. The empty space gives rise to filled space, corporality. (p. 2)

Although empty *space* may appear inviting for the creation of work, it can also seem scary, as the actor steps into unfamiliar terrain and encounters unacknowledged aspects of her psyche.

Endowed Chair of Theatre for Youth/Playwriting at University of Texas, Austin, Suzan Zeder, with Movement Specialist, Jim Hancock (2005), suggested that an inner *space of creation* provides potentiality for different levels of exploration:

The space of creation exists within each of us in our brains and our bodies. It is where we formulate our ideas, where all our past experiences and feelings are filed away in the memory of mind and muscle. Below the surface of our waking world are unconscious territories where we have hidden what we do not wish to remember, where fears and phobias, too powerful to name, appear as shadows. These are rich and fertile landscapes for us to explore in our work as writers, but access to these deeper dimensions of self is sometimes difficult. This space is sometimes so private that we deny access of ourselves to ourselves. We may be unaware that there is a deeper level, or we may be content to rest on the surface of
our thought, feeling, and experience. Lots of writers make their livings writing what has been written before and are paid good money to do so, churning out screen plays, television scripts, scenarios, and even plays based on familiar models and tropes. But this is rarely the writing that changes the field or the artist. To do that, you must go deeper into territory that is uncharted and new. (pp. 10-11)

In accordance with Zeder’s views that the artist’s unconscious is an important source for innovative ideas, acclaimed Actor, Composer, and Writer, Steve Martin, recently voiced his views on the connection between writing and the subconscious.

In a televised interview, Martin expressed that space needs to be created for the integration of the writing process with the inspiration that emanates from the subconscious:

Well, I think you sort of ebb and flow between inspiration and conscious work. And I can feel myself writing along, writing along, and then go, oh! [It’s] almost like you’re writing – a sentence, noun, verb – whoops, what happened there? And all you have to do is create the space for that to happen. . . . [I] really believe that creative work is subconscious. . . . I think it’s by practice, really practice. You have to practice in the conscious world, start to trust, slowly trust that subconscious. (Rose, 2010)

Martin continued the interview by communicating that his ability to tap into the subconscious, while composing music for banjo playing, was not immediate – rather developed over time.

MFA second-year student, Penelope, commented that being fully committed to fully residing in the space, despite feelings of vulnerability, was necessary for the development of presence-in-performance:

Emotions are central to performance work. The accessing of these emotions can feel terrifying and take you to vulnerable places. However, as you return to these places, again and again, you become more courageous and less afraid.
Watching your mind and experiencing being in the space and seeing what arises, builds presence and openness. A full commitment to being in the space, moment to moment – fully being and committing – is presence. I would add full, embodied commitment. Having a connection, or synchronization between mind and body, with kinesthesia, is presence. (P. Webb, personal communication, March 12, 2009)

Independent Curator and Adjunct Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Mary Jane Jacob (2004), agreed with Zeder (2005) and Penelope that making work in creative space could be a disquieting experience for the artist.

Thus, Jacob (2004) recommended that safe, yet critically challenging spaces be developed in order to facilitate the artist’s meaning-making process and practice:

The process of creativity—being in the space of art-making is risky, unsettling, troubling. So to practice, as Yvonne Rand points out, we need to be able “to rest in our own experience of discomfort” as we work in a territory that is new and, for us, previously unexplored. Through practice, we overcome the anxiety of not knowing and develop a capacity for uncertainty, a capacity to tolerate and ultimately to mine chaos. Hence the space of art needs to be a safe space in which the artist can operate. It is a buffer zone in which to practice...openly. But by “safe space” I do not mean one that is cozy or luxurious. It is a safety net for the mind as it stays open, unknowing, floating in a zone of instability. (p. 167)

As educational critic, I viewed the MFA community as one that provided a safe space, a liminal zone, for the exploration and creation of performance work.

The beginning letter of each thematic combined to form the acronym, insights:

I – Inclusivity
N – Nowness
S – Silence
I – Improvisation
G – Goodness
H – Heart
The insights formed a framework which connected and illuminated the most efficacious aspects of MFA Contemporary Performance values and training. These insights have revealed, in part, the authentic wisdom of the program. Wisdom is defined as the expression or fruition of mindful learning.

Recommendations for MFA Contemporary Performance Curriculum Development

The featured curricula were superior, according to criteria of richness, recursion, relations, and rigor, established by Postmodern Curriculum Theorist, William E. Doll (1993), for the evaluation of postmodern curriculum. Also, as recently mentioned, the findings of the study suggested that students perceived the effects of contemplative education on the development of their communication abilities, presence–in–performance, sociolinguistic perspectives, and aesthetic perspectives, as beneficial and transformative.

In the area of communication, the council process was mentioned as an empowering way to listen to others and honor diverse points of view, by several second-year students. These same students recommended that more frequent council process sessions could build greater trust and facilitate better communication between members of the MFA community (see chapter four, section ten).

Therefore, the first recommendation for MFA curriculum development is extracurricular in nature. A council process could take place, on a weekly and voluntary basis—outside of the regular MFA course schedule—somewhere on the Nalanda Campus. A leader, trained in the art of this contemplative community exchange, would
facilitate each session. The leader could be a member of the MFA faculty, or greater Naropa faculty or staff. Also, the leadership responsibility could rotate between skilled facilitators.

It would be worth researching the *World Café Community* as a similar model to the *council process*. In his text, *The Living Classroom*, Professor of Religious Studies at Youngstown State University, Christopher M. Bache (2008), described his adaptation of the *World Café* concept:

In a number of my courses I’ve instituted what I call *Friday Cafés*. In a course that meets three days a week, I will often spend two days lecturing followed by a Café on Friday. A Café is not just a glitzy name for the same old class discussion but a distinctive kind of conversation that is carefully choreographed and harvested. The essence of the Café model is deceptively simple—small, intimate conversations around well-framed questions. In these conversations, participants periodically rotate around the room, allowing ideas to cross-pollinate and new combinations of insights to emerge. The gold of the process is in the details, and *The World Café* is filled with practical suggestions for interrupting old conversation habits and seeding new ones. (p. 121)


The second recommendation for MFA curriculum development would be to consider offering one or more courses in performance studies. The former performance studies curricula, provided by MFA Contemporary Performance, and those offered by other performing arts programs and departments, could provide relevant and inspirational ideas for curriculum design. Also, it is recommended that the contemporary performance program continue to produce and present works of critical cultural, social, and political relevance.
According to Nathan Stucky, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Speech Communication at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and Cynthia Wimmer (2002), Former Member of the Governing Council of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, performance studies is a field, which is broad and varied in disciplinary scope:

Performance studies concerns itself broadly with culture and identity: it involves a study of the human as a performing being. Humans construct performances in everyday conversational interaction, in play, and more obviously in orchestrated rites, rituals, festivals, and theatrical shows. The array of subjects performance studies scholars have chosen to examine hints at the breadth of the field. A good deal of attention centers on performances that specifically mark cultures, such as religious rituals, formal theatre, dance, sporting events, and music. Much work in performance studies addresses formal performance as it appears in cultures around the world. However, the scholarship sometimes centers on more ordinary forms of expression, such as storytelling or everyday talk. There has also been much interest in social issues as they intersect with performance. In consequence, a number of scholars have focused on performance as it relates to gender, class, or race, as well as on an array of subjects including street theatre, performance art, staged resistance, political rallies, scrapbooks, gallery installations, political demonstrations, parades, and workplace performances. Any listing can only be suggestive of the range of performance studies, because the scope of the field emerges through ongoing exploration. (p. 11)

Based on the findings of this study, it would be recommended that the MFA program particularly include the exploration of social and cultural identities in the design of performance studies curriculum. MFA course offerings, in the emergent field of performance studies, would enrich and enhance its experiential and transformative approach to performance training.

**Recommendations for Future Research in Contemplative Education and Performing Arts Training**

The first comment in regard to contemplative education and performing arts training is related to a limitation of this study. During the course of the research, my class
observations were restricted to second-year course sessions. Although the inquiry of MFA Contemporary Performance was rich in contextual and communicative opportunities, the observation of first-year courses would have rendered an even more vivid programmatic landscape.

The nature and attributes of presence have been of fascination to this scholar-practitioner for many years. It was a privilege to learn the MFA first- and second-year student perceptions of how contemplative education influenced their development of *presence-in-performance*. It would be interesting to investigate how contemplative education might impact the development of presence in students from other conservatory level performing arts programs and creative arts departments.

A broader research question would be – Can presence, as a state of being and way of communicating and/or performing, be taught in the performing arts, contemplative studies and other fields? Leadership Scholar, Sharon Daloz Parks, posed a similar question in her presentation about presence and the cultivation of adaptive leadership.

In her text, *Leadership Can Be Taught*, Parks’ (2005) brilliant discussion of the qualities of presence is as relevant to performing as an artist, as communicating as a corporate executive:

The ability to hold steady and to improvise in the midst of the conflict and tumult of adaptive work depends on cultivating an inner consciousness of the connectivity of which one is a part—especially when there is a high degree of voltage on the wires. It requires the ability to recognize and intelligently manage strong feelings—one’s own emotions and the emotions in others (as individuals, as factions within the group, and within the group as a whole). It requires an understanding of one’s self in relationship to audience, the ability to pay close attention, to listen, to feel, and to bring one’s own heart-mind into the present in a way that responsively holds both the self and the group in the work. It combines mindfulness and centeredness in the right proportion. The practice of presence is
integral to the capacity to be a creative agent in the moment—poised on the edge between the known reality and the emergent possibility. *Presence* is the meeting place between the inner life of a person and the outer life of action in the world. (p. 100)

As one might ascertain from the title of her book, in Parks’ perception, presence can be taught.

Although my intuitive view is in complete accordance with Parks’ perspective, I am fascinated by the prospect of further investigating the pedagogical possibilities of the practice of presence. As MFA Contemporary Performance continues through “the play of performance and performance of play” (Doll, 2005), in my view, it is important that related research emerge from the wings and move centerstage.

President Emeritus of Naropa University, Thomas B. Coburn, provided significant perspective about contemplative studies in higher education as an emergent field:

In liberal arts education, curricula are shaped by time and space. As an example, curricula in gender and women’s studies were developed by individuals in small liberal arts colleges. Now, there is not a university or college that does not have a women’s studies program. In the field of contemplative studies, we are currently where women’s studies were forty years ago. (T. Coburn, personal communication, April 24, 2009)

Dr. Coburn’s commentary points to the realization that contemplative education is a young field that will need care and nurturance to develop into an abundant crop of programs and departments, throughout college and university campus communities.

As courses and initiatives in contemplative studies are beginning in higher education, it would be pertinent to learn about the effectiveness of curricular and extracurricular endeavors through the lenses of faculty, student, and administrative perception. Studies could be launched, utilizing quantitative and qualitative
methodologies, formal and informal evaluation, and assessments within and across different domains of learning. Gathering evidence of the efficacious nature of contemplative education, through research in academe, will advance its status from innovative initiative to well-established field.
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Appendix B

Interview Questions for Students

These questions are intended to be a guide for a conversational partnership between the interviewer and interviewee. It is highly probable that follow-up questions will emerge during the course of the interview.

1) How did you come to join this program? (GENERAL QUESTION)

2) What experiences, if any, in contemplative studies and practice have you brought to the program? (GENERAL QUESTION)

3) How would you characterize the contemplative education offered by this program? (GENERAL QUESTION)

4) How has the contemplative education offered by this program impacted your psychophysical and vocal development as a performer, as well as range of abilities in movement, improvisation, and interpretation of role and text? (AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES AND PRESENCE-IN-PERFORMANCE)

5) How has the contemplative education offered by this program helped or hindered you in the development of your own performance aesthetic? (AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES)

6) How do you perceive that contemplative education impacts the ensemble process of creating, rehearsing, and performing a body of work in this program? (AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES AND COMMUNICATION ABILITIES)
7) How has contemplative education influenced or not influenced the development of commitment, confidence, courage, and openness, as you have prepared for and engaged in performance? (PRESENCE-IN-PERFORMANCE)

8) How do you think that the contemplative education component affects your awareness of diverse political, cultural, and/or social issues and/or points of view? (SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES)

9) How would you describe the relationship between contemplative education and courses of study within the program such as movement, voice, acting, somatics, viewpoints, and the thesis portfolio seminar? (AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES, COMMUNICATION ABILITIES, PRESENCE-IN-PERFORMANCE, AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES)

10) How do you see, at this moment in time, that you will integrate the training of this program into your career? (COMMUNICATION ABILITIES)

11) How do you feel that contemplative view and practice contribute to the choices you are making for your career and life? (COMMUNICATION ABILITIES)

12) What metaphor would you devise to describe yourself as performer in this moment? (AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES)
Appendix C

Interview Questions for Faculty

These questions are intended to be a guide for a conversational partnership between the interviewer and the interviewee. It is highly probable that follow-up questions will emerge during the course of the interview.

1) How long and in what capacities have you taught for this program? (GENERAL QUESTION)

2) Please describe your background as performing artist and educator. (GENERAL QUESTION)

3) Please describe your background as a practitioner of contemplative practice(s), as well as teaching experience in contemplative studies and practice. (GENERAL QUESTION)

4) How would you characterize the contemplative education offered by this program? (GENERAL QUESTION)

5) How do you integrate contemplative elements into the curriculum of the course(s) that you teach in this program? (CURRICULAR DIMENSION)

6) How do you mediate these elements in the teaching of your students? (PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION)

7) How does the module schedule help or hinder your teaching and the rehearsal processes in this program? (STRUCTURAL DIMENSION)
8) How do you think that the contemplative education offered in your course(s) influences students’ integration of knowledge and development as performers? (CURRICULAR AND EVALUATIVE DIMENSIONS)

9) How do you perceive that contemplative education facilitates, or does not facilitate the building of ensemble in your course(s)? (CURRICULAR AND EVALUATIVE DIMENSIONS)

10) What kinds of proficiencies should be developed and knowledge acquired by the time a student completes your course(s)? (INTENTIONAL DIMENSION)

11) How are students evaluated in your course(s)? (EVALUATIVE DIMENSION)

12) What metaphor would you devise to describe yourself as an educator-performer in this moment? (GENERAL QUESTION)
Appendix D

Naropa University Mission Statement

Inspired by the rich intellectual and experiential traditions of East and West, Naropa University is North America’s leading institution of contemplative education.

Naropa recognizes the inherent goodness and wisdom of each human being. It educates the whole person, cultivating academic excellence and contemplative insight in order to infuse knowledge with wisdom. The university nurtures in its students a lifelong joy in learning, a critical intellect, the sense of purpose that accompanies compassionate service to the world, and the openness and equanimity that arise from authentic insight and self-understanding. Ultimately, Naropa students explore the inner resources needed to engage courageously with a complex and challenging world, to help transform that world through skill and compassion, and to attain deeper levels of happiness and meaning in their lives.

Drawing on the vital insights of the world’s traditions, the university is simultaneously Buddhist-inspired, ecumenical and nonsectarian. Naropa values ethnic and cultural differences for their essential role in education. It embraces the richness of human diversity with the aim of fostering a more just and equitable society and an expanded awareness of our common humanity.

A Naropa education—reflecting the interplay of discipline and delight—prepares its graduates both to meet the world as it is and to change it for the better. (“Naropa University self-study report,” 2009-2010, p. 37)
Appendix E

The Naropa Seal

The Naropa University seal was designed by Naropa’s founder, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, on whose teachings the school’s philosophies are based; thus, its meaning speaks to the Naropa experience with simultaneous relevance to the school’s history and its present-day form.

The Sanskrit words written in Tibetan on the ribbon at the bottom of the seal—“prajna garba”—literally mean “womb of wisdom,” but translate more loosely as “place where wisdom is nurtured.” The word “prajna,” meaning wisdom, differs from the traditional academic view of knowledge. Often defined by Trungpa Rinpoche as “knowingness,” prajna encompasses greater insight, independent of accumulation of facts or information.

The wheel of dharma, or wheel of teachings, appears at the center of the seal and signifies the power, communication and reach of Buddhist-based teachings. At the center of the wheel of dharma is the “coil of joy,” which symbolizes the transformation of the three “poisons” (passion, aggression and ignorance) into the three “wisdoms” (appreciation, clear seeing and openness).

The wheel of dharma has another, secular significance: a great monarch could roll his or her chariot wheels over great distances, spreading teachings and understanding into the world at large. The connotation here is of spreading benefit, rather than proselytizing.

Literally, “prajna” is the flame that burns conceptual mind. The flames surrounding the seal create a mandala and boundary around the learning space. That space requires unconditional commitment to learning without a personal agenda. (“The Naropa Seal,” n.d.)
Appendix F

Explanation of the Shrine Banner

The symbols representing the wisdom traditions are clockwise from the top: Taoism, Islam, Hinduism, Wicca or Pagan Traditions, Native American Traditions, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. The symbol in the center is the Naropa University Crest.

The open space between each symbol is equally significant in symbolizing the importance of remaining open to that of which we are not aware. This intentionally open space represents the great spiritual traditions other than those represented on the banner, as well as traditions that may be generally unknown.

The blue color was chosen from among the five colors Naropa University uses in various ways as the Five Buddha Families, the Five Elements, or the Five Wisdom Energies: Karma, Wind, Green; Padma, Fire, Red; Ratna, Earth, Yellow; Vajra, Water, Blue; Buddha, Space, White. These are the five banners located in various places on our campuses.

Blue was chosen from among these because as the Vajra family it includes the domain of intellect. Within the Five Wisdom tradition, this attribute, intellectual understanding, is understood as a principle way Westerners may make a connection to contemplative wisdom, one of the fundamental tenets of Naropa University.

The yellow, representing the Ratna family, symbolizes the inherent richness which may arise from the various traditions at Naropa interacting and exchanging with one another, yet remaining pure in their individuality. [Posting at Meditation Hall of the Nalanda Campus, n.d.]
Appendix G

MEDITATION PRACTICUM IV – SOLO AND DYAD EXCHANGE
March 2009

What’s the credo of the ‘young-warrior-artist-in-training’?

What disciplines/activities support your connection to reflective/intuitive space?

How do you arouse your confidence/lungta/windhorse?

What are obstacles to confidence?

Do these phrases represent practices for the contemplative student? Why and/or why not?

Show up
Pay attention to what is true
Tell the truth without fault or blame
Be open to outcome but not attached to outcome

---Angeles Arrien (1993), The Four Fold Way
1. Consider, reflect, recall endings in your life. What happened? What was felt, expressed, denied? What was the arch of the experience: beginning, middle, end? Was there integration?

2. According to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969), there are 5 stages in human attitudes toward death and dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages can also be triggered by a major change in adult life and do not necessarily take place in an orderly way. (Callanan & Kelley, 1997). In considering the ending of this program, have you experienced one or more of the stages?

3. What is incomplete in your journey over the past 2 years of the MFA program? Is there something you can initiate to create more completion? A conversation. A letter. Give gratitude. Ask for forgiveness. Acknowledge inspiration received from someone’s way of being. Feedback not yet extended

4. What rituals, ceremonies, have meant something to you in the past? What aspects were meaningful? What images do you have now for a ceremony to end this part of your life path?

5. What about a celebration? A feast? Everyone together and rejoicing in the accomplishments? What image pops into your mind about a celebration?
Appendix I

the rike project (2009)
Gary and Ethie

Name:

Please indicate at least one hope, desire, or intention that you hold for this class. Feel free to list more as you wish. Especially be sure to indicate here if you have interest in composing work for this project or collaborating on the composition(s). Also, we’d love to know what ranges or qualities of your voice that you’re interested in exploring or developing further.

Are there any fears or concerns you have related to this project that you would like us to know about?

Tell us about how much time you plan to spend outside of class each week working on material for this project.

If you have sung in a traditional choir, please indicate which part you have sung in the past (soprano, alto, tenor, bass). I presume you have been studying with Ethie long enough to understand, however, that this may have no relevance whatsoever on what you will sing in this class.
Appendix J

Voice/Song – the rilke project (2009)

Representative Student Selections from the Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke

My Life is not

No, my life is not this precipitous hour
through which you see me passing at a run.
I stand before my background like a tree.
Of all my many mouths I am but one,
and that which soonest chooses to be dumb.

I am the rest between two notes
which, struck together, sound discordantly,
because death’s note would claim a higher key.

But in that dark pause, trembling, the notes meet,
harmonious.
    And the song continues sweet.
(Rilke, 1941, p. 21)

You see, I want a lot

You see, I want a lot.
Perhaps I want everything:
the darkness that comes with every infinite fall
and the shivering blaze of every step up.

So many live on and want nothing,
and are raised to the rank of prince
by the slippery ease of their light judgments.

But what you love to see are faces
that do work and feel thirst.

You love most of all those who need you
as they need a crowbar or a hoe.

You have not grown old, and it is not too late
to dive into your increasing depths
where life calmly gives out its own secret.
(Rilke, 1981, p. 27)
I am too alone

I am too alone in the world, and not alone enough
to make every minute holy.
I am too tiny in this world, and not tiny enough
just to lie before you like a thing,
shrewd and secretive.
I want my own will, and I want simply to be with my will,
as it goes toward action,
and in the silent, sometimes hardly moving times
when something is coming near.
I want to be with those who know secret things
or else alone.
I want to be a mirror for your whole body,
and I never want to be blind, or to be too old
to hold up your heavy and swaying picture.
I want to unfold.
I don’t want to stay folded anywhere,
because where I am folded, there I am a lie.
And I want my grasp of things
true before you. I want to describe myself
like a painting that I looked at
closely for a long time,
like a saying that I finally understood,
like the pitcher I use every day,
like the face of my mother,
like a ship
that took me safely
through the wildest storm of all.
(Rilke, 1981, p. 25)
Autumn

The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up, as if orchards were dying high in space. Each leaf falls as if it were motioning “no.”

And tonight the heavy earth is falling away from all the other stars in the loneliness.

We’re all falling. This hand here is falling. And look at the other one... It’s in them all.

And yet there is Someone, whose hands infinitely calm, hold up all this falling. (Rilke, 1981, p. 89)

Moving Forward

The deep parts of my life pour onward, as if the river shores were opening out. It seems that things are more like me now, that I can see farther into paintings. I feel closer to what language can’t reach. With my senses, as with birds, I climb into the windy heaven, out of the oak, and in the ponds broken off from the sky my feeling sinks, as if standing on fishes. (Rilke, 1981, p. 101)

A Walk

My eyes already touch the sunny hill, going far ahead of the road I have begun. So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp; it has its inner light, even from a distance—

and changes us, even if we do not reach it, into something else, which, hardly sensing it, we already are; a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave... but what we feel is the wind in our faces. (Rilke, 1981, p 177)
**Evening**

The sky puts on the darkening blue coat
held for it by a row of ancient trees;
you watch: and the lands grow distant in your sight,
one journeying to heaven, one that falls;

and leave you, not at home in either one,
not quite so still and dark as the darkened houses,
not calling to eternity with the passion
of what becomes a star each night, and rises;

and leave you (inexpressibly to unravel)
your life, with its immensity and fear,
so that, now bounded, now immeasurable,
it is alternately stone in you and star.
(Rilke, 1982, p. 13)

**Eve**

Look how she stands, high on the steep facade
of the cathedral, near the window-rose,
simply, holding in her hand the apple,
judged for all time as the guiltless-guilty

for the growing fruit her body held
which she gave birth to after parting from
the circle of eternities. She left
to face the strange New Earth, so young in years.

Oh, how she would have loved to stay a little
longer in that enchanted garden, where
the peaceful gentle beasts grazed side by side.

But Adam was resolved to leave, to go
out into this New Earth, and facing death
she followed him. God she had hardly known.
(Rilke, 1986, p. 101)
Woman in Love

That is my window. Just now
I’ve been so softly wakened.
I thought I’d taken wing.
How far does my own life reach,
and where does Night begin?

I could think that everything
all around was still myself:
transparent as with a crystal’s
depths, as dark, as mute.

Even the stars I could contain
within me; so capacious
my heart feels to me; so easily
it let him go again

whom I had perhaps begun
to love, perhaps to hold.
Like something strange, undreamt of,
my fate now gazes at me.

For what, then, am I placed down
amid this endlessness,
exuding fragrance like a meadow,
moved this way and that,

calling out and frightened
that someone will hear the call,
and destined to disappear
inside some other life.
(Rilke, 2001, p. 275)
Appendix K

Music Scores by Gary Grundeit
Texts by Rainer Maria Rilke

I read it here in your very word

Freely \( \text{Cm7}(b5) \)\( \text{F7alt} \)\( \text{G7alt} \)\( \text{F7alt} \)\( \text{Cm7}(b5) \)\( \text{F7alt} \)\( \text{G7alt} \)\( \text{F7alt} \)

g. grundeit
text: R.M. Rilke

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I read it here in your very word

But before the first death came murder.

A screaming

Shattered the voices that had just come together to speak you.

(Just come together to speak you) to make of you a bridge.

A veil the illusion of every thing.

Tempo I

You said live out loud, and die you said lightly and

And what they have stammered ever since are fragments of your ancient name.
Eve

Text: Rilke

W: Look how she stands,

-high on the steep facade of the cathedral,

-simply holding in her hand the apple,

-simply holding in her hand vocal sound?

judged for all time as the guiltless guilty (judged for all time)

for the growing fruit her body held.
which she gave birth to.

She left to face the strange New Earth.

Oh, how she would have loved to stay a little longer in that.
en - chan - ted gar - den.
where the peace - ful gen - tle beasts
grazed side by side.

But A - dam was re - solved to leave,
But A - dam was re - solved to leave,
in - to this New Earth
Much Slower

Tempo 1 = 75

Revisit lines:
Simply holding...
Judged for all time...
Enchanted garden...
For the growing...
Oh, how she would... (last one)
and others
S

\[ \text{percu ssion start} \]

\[ \text{a billion stars go spinning through the night} \]

A

\[ \text{Ah} \]

T

\[ \text{Ah} \]

B

\[ \text{Ah} \]

S

\[ \text{amazing high above your head} \]

A

\[ \text{Ah} \]

T

\[ \text{Ah} \]

B

\[ \text{Ah} \]

S

\[ \text{But in you is the presence that will be when all the stars are old} \]

A

\[ \text{Ah} \]

T

\[ \text{Ah} \]

B

\[ \text{Ah} \]
buddha in glory

S

A

T

B

percussion stops
on beat 4

S

A

T

B