

High School Theater Instructor

Inquiry Project

June 2003

1. Your name and what you teach.

My name is XXXXX XXXXX, and I teach Theater to 11th and 12th Graders at the Perpich Center for Arts Education's Arts High School, a magnet program sponsored by the State of Minnesota. At Art High, students dedicate 2/3 of their day to core academic subjects, and 1/3 of their day to work in a specific art form. About half of the students are from greater Minnesota and live in a dormitory on the Perpich Campus. The other half are from the Twin Cities Metro Area. Students' artistic potential and academic records are reviewed before they are admitted to the Arts High School Program. The project was conducted with 40 Theater students.

2. The question you started with.

I started with the question, "**What is the student's conscious awareness of the sequence and purpose of the various elements of theatrical process in the making of a public performance?**" I was wondering if they are just going through the process like puppets, or if, possibly, they really assess why and how they are doing things in enough detail to be able to repeat the process independently. Which was a pretty good question, I guess, but the answer was fairly obvious. "Yes--sometimes I know what's going on. Other times I don't figure it out until we're finished with the show, but generally I do figure it out. I remember it and can use it independently if I liked it."

3. How and why the question changed.

Since this answer seemed pretty obvious, and actually was not all that interesting to me, the question evolved a bit. I became focussed on a particular aspect of theatrical process that bugs me a lot. I began to look for ways to assess the fluctuations that occur in personal and group motivation in the course of the process of creating a production. This is something I'm interested in because there is always a big whiney slump somewhere in the middle of production work. This has been true of every one of the over 100 (200?) plays I have been involved in as an actor, stage manager, director, prop person, etc., as a child, as an adult, as a teacher, as a student, as a volunteer, as a professional, etc. This slump seems to be a stage in the process that is inevitable (as I have never been involved in a production that didn't have one), and more or less unpleasant, and some productions

never come out of it. It is my opinion that the way this particular stage of the process is handled, at its outset (within the first 3 days of the slump), has a great deal to do with the ultimate quality of the work in its final form. Which is not a brilliant observation, and why it took me so long to come up with it is kind of annoying, but it is, nonetheless, true.

So, how to form this topic into a question? I guess the question would ultimately be: **"Does a conscious personal and group assessment of factors affecting motivation at various stages of the theatrical process, while in process, improve the overall quality and outcome of the work?"** Something like that.

The answer is of course, yes. Which is also not brilliant--but it was a nice thing to land upon. Looking carefully and consciously at factors affecting motivation all along the route made the process more pleasant and productive, and I probably wouldn't have instituted so formal an inquiry into it had I not been involved in this project. The doldrums of the process is something I worry about and wrestle with, but I don't think it's something the students give a great deal of attention to, unless there is some forum or activity that forces the issue. They seem to just go along and do stuff, and sometimes they don't take a lot of responsibility for their own role in motivating good work. They feel put upon, and it's kind of fun to whine in secret when you're a teenager, and they don't really realize how they are sabotaging their own work with this stuff, and how keeping it secret doesn't do any good. Asking students to look critically at the whole question of motivation forced them to take some responsibility for it, to take some initiative in getting the lead out, and they were actually quite eager to do so. Once they consciously assessed and accepted the idea that they had some irrevocable power over the outcome, and that they could choose to use that power negatively or positively, they chose to use it positively. So--we had a really good time and made a really good show, and they were proud of themselves for stopping the whiney slump and making that happen. And it was interesting.

4. Any educational philosophy you think important or relevant to your question or inquiry.

I'm sure there are probably 300 Ph.D.'s out there, and some of them are probably still *living*, who have carefully examined questions of internal motivation in the adolescent (and the mature adult), people of academic stature who have done just such a project and found just such results. I probably even read some of them one time, in some place. But me--I had to live my own life, and make my own mistakes, and wonder why, and reinvent

my own wheel. I suppose the next phase of this process for me would be to correlate my findings with those of persons of greater eminence.

There are also probably many books out there on how to promote positive attitude, and the effect that positive attitude has on results, and so on. They probably don't recommend telling kids, "You'd better figure out how to pull your attitude together, or your show will stink, and it will be really embarrassing, and it will be your fault." Which is, partly, what I did. And they believed me, and didn't want that, so they pulled their attitudes together, and the show did not stink, and so they believed me even more. Who knows? They might just be really responsible kids, and it wouldn't work with some others, who don't care if the show stinks, and who don't care if it's their fault that it does; who, in fact, take great pleasure in wreaking that sort of havoc across the land (stinking shows). But with these two groups--this year--it worked. So, I'll probably try it again.

5. Brief Summary of the Project.

I administered surveys at the beginning, middle, and end of one theatrical project, after having worked through and focussed the ideas for the surveys through a more verbal and fluid process on two performance projects earlier in the year (no data included from these projects). The surveys assessed factors related to motivation in group performance, both internal and external, and solicited suggestions as to how these factors could be addressed most positively and productively by the individual, the leadership, and by the group, to get the best product. My intention was to navigate the traditional "slump" that occurs in a rehearsal period about halfway through the process in the most open and productive way possible. I think it worked. The production that was the focus of these surveys was a semi-improvisational adaptation of *Purgatorio*, from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*.

6. Instruments used to collect data.

A. At the Beginning of the Project:

Assignment:

Read and Summarize 6 Cantos of *The Purgatorio* by Dante Alighieri. Prepare a presentation for the class on your 6 Cantos, which includes the following:

The Action
Parallel Structures of Action
Analogies--contemporary
Questions
Meaning
Visuals
Student Involvement

Post Presentation Questions: How does this activity contribute to the process of making this play? For you personally? For us collectively?

Activity:

Read the Play, *Going up? Dante's Purgatorio*.

Post Activity Discussion: What are you looking forward to about this project? What are going to be the challenges of this project?

B. Half Way into the Project (when doldrums appear).

Process Survey:

Answer the following questions in sentence or paragraph form on a separate piece of paper. Number your answers to correlate with the questions. Try to be succinct. You do not need to go on at great length--just be specific, and move on. Two pages, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 pt., should be sufficient to answer these questions, if you are not rambling.

1. Describe where we are as a group at this point in the process. What have we accomplished? What is yet to be accomplished?
2. What is the general "feel" of the group momentum right now (after 1 month of exploratory activity, and 2.5 weeks of rehearsal)? Have you noticed any transitions or changes in momentum?
3. Describe your personal responses to the process at this point--how you are feeling right now, not how you were feeling two weeks ago.

4. Describe any similarities you see between how things are going in this theatrical process at this time, and how things were going in other theatrical processes you have experienced at this point in the process. Focus your comments on personal and group achievement of objectives, personal and group motivation or momentum, up to this point in the process.
5. Are there any obstacles you can see to personal and group achievement and motivation at this time? Do you have any ideas about how they could be removed? Please note them, if you do.
6. Do you recognize any objectives or active aspects of the process—either personal choices for performance development, or things found in the organized group activity—that are clearly at work right now, that motivate you or the group to stay the course?

C. After the process is complete:

Process Survey:

1. Describe where we are as a group at this point in the process (after performance). What have we accomplished?
2. Describe any transitions or changes in the "feel" of the group and in group momentum from the middle of the process through performance (you already wrote about the first 1/3 of the process).
3. Describe your personal responses to the entire process at this point—how you are feeling right now about what we did and how we did it.
4. Describe any similarities you see between how this process progressed, and the progress of other theatrical processes you have experienced. Focus your comments on personal and group achievement of objectives, personal and group motivation or momentum.

5. Were there any obstacles to personal and group achievement and motivation from the middle of the process through the performances? If you saw some, do you have any ideas about how they could be removed? Please note them, if you do.
6. Do you recognize any objectives or active aspects of the process—either personal choices for performance development, or things found in the organized group activity—that were clearly at work throughout, and that motivated you or the group to stay the course?

7. **Actual Data.**

A. At the Beginning of the Project:

1. Why did we do the summarizing activity? Answers.

1. To learn about the original text:

To do some actor research into the original text and its history, so that we can do a more informed, subtle, universal performance (7).

To divide up the reading and get more depth in what we read (3).

To draw parallels between different sections of the poem, common themes (2).

To analyze the language and rhythm of the poem.

To give us insight into the characters (2).

To help us learn and remember the story.

To give us all the same base level of understanding of the story and its themes (5).

2. Learning styles:

To give us hands-on experience with the text--to involve us in the reading.

To give us ideas about scenery and costumes and mood.

To address the book in a number of learning styles so everyone will get it.

To help us to visualize the book (3).

Begin to explore the telling of the poem through movement and action (2).

Because it's fun (2).

To get people excited about the show.

To learn and not to get a grade.

3. Point of View:

To work closely with some people we don't normally interact with (2).

To draw analogies between the poem and actual life (2).

- To get a number of different points of view on the book (3).
- To respond personally to the original before reading the play (which is the improvisational response of an earlier class).
- To give a personal response to the religious ideas in the story (2).
- To see where we're at in our own moral beliefs (4).

2. What are you looking forward to about the project?

- The number of characters and what can be done with them (2).
- The humor, the irony (5).
- I like the modern take (3).
- It's quite a bit funnier than I thought it would be (2).
- I like the blind envious, but can't quite picture how they would move.
- The ensemble movement possibilities (2).
- Various specific scenes (7).
- I like the way the elevator moves around (3).
- I was surprised how easy it was for me to lay out the play in my mind.
- The open-ended way we can stage each setting.

What might be some challenges of this project?

- Making sure they understand that there are floors of the hotel (2).
- Will people who don't know anything about Purgatory understand the story?
- Timing the jokes. Catching the Jokes (Lots of Irony). (2)
- Understanding the Historical Context--making it clear to the audience.
- Rendering the Poetry in 3 dimensions.
- The Serious Relief Scenes (as opposed to comic relief).
- The Movement and Dance Sequences (2).

B. Process Survey--Half Way into the Project (when slump appears).

1. Describe where we are as a group at this point in the process.

What have we accomplished?

- Deep examination of text for meaning and structure. (3)
- Crappy first draft--skeleton blocking. (9)
- Scenes with the most complicated movement take the longest (bringing abstractions to life).

- In the exploration stage.
- We are mostly off book (4).
- Things keep changing and evolving.
- We are halfway to being an ensemble.

What is yet to be accomplished?

- Two scenes not read or written, some choreography not started. (3)
- Keep energy up, pick up cues. (3)
- Deeper look at intention and character. (5)
- Things need to be set and stop evolving.
- We're somewhere in between script just hot off the press and ironing out the kinks.
- tighten up blocking, secure movement and timing, polish work. (2)
- I'm going to have to find more sources of motivation to differentiate my characters. They all seem the same.

2. What is the general "feel" of the group momentum right now (after 1 month of exploratory activity, and 2.5 weeks of rehearsal)? Have you noticed any transitions or changes in momentum?

- group and self getting sluggish, tired, distracted, laconic. (5)
- need to stay focussed.
- Like cats let out to play after a long winter, we are excited, but will always need new "toys" to stay excited.
- Scenes moved quickly the first week, but all that momentum gave way to a slowdown period right afterwards.
- Momentum broken in Spring Break. Spring Fever.
- We've been doing this for 7 weeks, and it seems endless.
- I feel enthused, but as if we are falling behind and don't have enough time. We need to get all the scenes figured out and finished so that we can put our focus on tweaking and perfecting them.
- Everything takes forever, and we are not accomplishing the goals we set at the beginning of the day. We get something done, just not everything. (3)
(Director's note: This was cleared up by explaining that it was not necessarily my primary objective to "finish" every scene that is scheduled in the course of the day--that we could just do part of it, and I would be satisfied--and I asked them to surmise a few other objectives I might have-

-which they quite readily did--and this controversy passed, and everyone relaxed about it.)

- The movement process seems very ambiguous and abstract to me, and I'm very confused.
- The group has been getting frustrated with the vagueness of some of the things we are doing and no matter how many times I try to reassure them that it is coming together they still are doubtful.
- I'm going to have to find more sources of motivation to differentiate my characters. They all seem the same.
- We are getting things done and progressing very well.
- The workers outweigh the whiners.
- We all feel this is a cool play and are excited to see how it will turn out.
- "If you don't like it--WHY ARE YOU HERE????"

3. Describe your personal responses to the process at this point--how you are feeling right now, not how you were feeling two weeks ago.

- pretty good, exited about process & product.
- worried because one of the leads missed three days.
- energy slump because I'm sick.
- I have senioritis.
- I have the most trouble later when all is together and we just keep running through with nothing new.
- I'm having personal problems and am having trouble "checking the baggage at the door."
- It is aggravating to keep track of the changes, nothing is set. (2)
- I feel content. I would like to have a better feel for character and intention, but that will come about quickly the more I play.
- I'm getting frustrated with people being absent and needing to leave early or at a certain time. (2)
- I am an athlete not a ballerina.
- I am loving my parts and playing around with them. I need to stay focussed and not let other people's problems bring me down.
- Things aren't going very quickly, but I think Barbara and Bonnie know what they're doing, so I'm going to trust the process. I'm learning something, even if we aren't deciding a lot right now.

- I try my hardest to continue on in spite of "slacker" vibe that tempts me not to read my script one more time or not to memorize that scene.
- I think I am just about over the hump, and others will be too, as soon as the workshops are done and we have finished blocking the show.
- I am feeling very good about the way things are going. I think the choreographer has really good ideas, and I like being so many characters.
- I like the script and find it funny and original.
- I'm anxious to work out specific actions and details. I feel assured that it will turn out well once we get them in place.

4. Describe any similarities you see between how things are going in this theatrical process at this time, and how things were going in other theatrical processes you have experienced at this point in the process. Focus your comments on personal and group achievement of objectives, personal and group motivation or momentum, up to this point in the process.

Same:

- amazing collaboration on different ideas.
- a great deal accomplished in not much time.
- Everyone is so into their own part that they aren't looking at the big picture right now. Reflects most other plays I've been in.
- We haven't joined forces yet to push each other along.
- I have never had a production where I haven't felt out of my element at some point (you can't learn without trying new things).
- I am still working on lines and characterization.
- Much like all other rehearsal processes. We are on track. You have a couple weeks of playing before you set things, and even then things are often changed. There is always an energy slump, but then we bound out of it, and the remainder of the play goes smoothly.
- uncertainties about my abilities. Personal conflicts.
- I can't think of anything because I don't usually pay much attention to the process as it goes by, which is probably bad. I can't remember other shows.
- When you are two weeks into a show, people are still confused and not everything is going to run completely smoothly and I think that goes for all shows.

- People at this point lose track of the big picture that we're telling a whole big interesting story, and instead just see each little scene they have to do over and over.

Different:

- We all support each other stronger than last year.
- not much tension as in fall performance.
- We as a group have a great deal of common knowledge, which helps us to work together.
- We are closer than ever and that helps the process to move along more smoothly.
- We are more motivated because we have a lot of respect for the work (text)--and feel an obligation of true dignity and thought.
- We all feel very involved integrated into the process of creation.
- I would have expected to know all my blocking by now. Exploratory movement would have morphed into a set routine.
- attitude and group dynamic is better.
- We got more done in the first week than we usually do.

5. Are there any obstacles you can see to personal and group achievement and motivation at this time?

- surviving the movement exercises--they are motivating, but I'm sore.
- mopey people tired, distracted with personal lives, annoyed with each other--hasn't happened yet, but might.
- People feel that they are doing the same thing over and over and nothing changes, but that's just cause I don't think they are having fun with their parts--they aren't playing with them, seeing how far they can expend these little creature-people they are creating.
- Slump due to change to daylight savings time. Poor amounts of sleep.
- Energy slump--because we came out of the gate so fast, and no one wants to slow down for the detail work.
- Energy slump because it is nice outside, and we are inside.
- Senioritis (4).
- Teen angst?

- Variances from the posted schedule. (4) *(Director's note: This was an exaggeration that gained considerable momentum among the concrete sequentials in the group, and caused some interpersonal conflict. Two or three times we went over the agreed time slot for 5 minutes. Once for 30 minutes--Only one person there was not called for something else in the next time slot, and he said he didn't care. The gist of this was--they don't like to wait for their scene to come up--even if they're called. We cleared it up by explaining that they build rooms in theaters for actors to wait in, because that is what they do about 80% of the time, and I basically told them that I didn't feel the least bit sorry about this--and I didn't. And they stopped moping about it--immediately--which was interesting.)*
- The wish to see instant results.
- People being absent, unmemorized lines--these make it difficult to really listen and communicate.
- We talk too much. Our discovery process is going on far too long. Hardly anything has been agreed upon to be part of the final product.
- We abandon much that we have worked so hard on. (3) *(Director's note: This is an exaggeration that seemed to gain some momentum as an issue in the group. One dance was changed significantly, and they had been told that it would probably be changed, as the choreographer had not yet arrived when we made this stuff up, but student ideas were used throughout the change--just maybe somebody else's--not yours--a few people didn't catch that).*
- Juggling my time with History Day.
- Some people have to discuss every mistake they make or why they can't do some thing at length, and it's a waste of time--just get on with it.
- I know if I have an obstacle it is in my head, and it's a personal thing which I can overcome quite easily. If others can't see that they are putting up their own mental blocks, then I don't know what can be done.

Do you have any ideas about how they could be removed? Please note them, if you do.

- Get more sleep.
- Take things at a faster pace and only concentrate on the general.
- Realize that things take time.
- A dorm-organized line-party.
- Tell people with senioritis that they haven't graduated yet, and they won't if they don't get in gear.

- Positive reinforcement.
- No sitting passively on the ground.
- People will catch up on sleep over the weekend.
- History Day will pass.
- The group needs to realize that we are making progress and not to need everything exact right away; in short they must learn to "trust the process."
- I don't mind going over time because that is what happens at rehearsal. Having any kind of rough schedule at all is a plus for me. I've had rehearsals in the past that were not at all scheduled before and you have to sit for 5 hours and may only rehearse for 20 minutes.

6. Do you recognize any objectives or active aspects of the process—either personal choices for performance development, or things found in the organized group activity—that are clearly at work right now, that motivate you or the group to stay the course?

- For me it's that every day brings something new.
- The most motivating thing is the excitement of the group.
- Watching the parts that I'm not in helps me to figure out how I fit into the big picture.
- Learning all of the new cool movement.
- Get lines memorized, because after that you have more opportunity for experimentation and I think that is a really enjoyable part of the process.
- Making sure we are off book, so we can release a certain physical and mental boundary that limits the ability to discover new meaning in the piece.
- When someone else in the scene has really good energy, you want to match it.
- We all want to know how things will turn out.
- The group always has fun together.
- The movement forces me constantly to think of new and strong ways to physicalize and vocalize all these famous people. Heavy thinking.
- I get in a rut by myself. Working with other people gives me new ideas.
- The show has so much depth to it, one really needs to be focused if one is going to walk away with any new knowledge or insight. Purgatory is an interesting topic.

- This is our last show together and we want it to be a significant piece of art.
- Reading things about my character as she really lived (Flannery O'Connor). I am in love with that woman.
- I have been entrusted with a lead role, and that means the director sees that I am able to handle this responsibility--I must work toward the betterment of the show, and I can't let myself down, and I can't let the other people in the show down.
- I'm not very introspective--I'm just enjoying it.
- We are all set on learning lines and focussing. We are all trying to understand what we are doing, and once something specific is decided, the group seems relieved.
- The warm up focuses us quite well.
- We are all creative in coming up with movement.
- Run-throughs at the end of the week help us set and remember everything we did in the week.
- The group seems focussed and with encouragement will pick up and continue to work well.
- Once we get to performing, things will be a blast. (*Director's note: This attitude is a real drag to have around in rehearsal.*)
- It's weird, but I feel much more motivated after having done this assignment. I knew where we were, but perhaps I had not delved into it as much as you were asking us to, or better yet, taking time to acknowledge it. Seeing where we are, and where I'd like to see us go, makes me want to get out there and try much harder than I have been. Good choice on the assignment.

C. Process Survey--After the process is complete:

1. Describe where we are as a group at this point in the process (after performance). What have we accomplished?

- We have begun finally to work as a company, acting, striking, getting the work done.
- The ensemble worked really well together and that was the main reason we were able to create such a great piece of work. (4)
- We have a collective understanding of a story with many messages.

- We have grown together and changed so much over the course of the last two years. (3)
- We have matured as individuals, on top of our increased experience, and this has made us an efficient and cooperative ensemble.
- I think we have worked better together than we ever have before, or than I have with anyone.
- We felt we owed something to our last performance, to pay homage to all that we have learned. (5)
- Listening, consistency in incorporating notes, showing our goals and objectives, balancing energy and placing focus where it is needed.
- I have never been as proud of a show as I was about this production.
- No person took anything away from what the group as a whole was producing.
- There were no conflicts that weren't resolved or worked out.
- The trend of group dedication seemed to override and pettiness. (2)
- We became funny.
- We reached toward the stars.
- We have done our best that we have ever done in our time together.
- We learned about the history and characters in the original text, and the cast felt an obligation to stay true to and be honest with the material, and relate it to our contemporary lives. (7)
- Studying Dante and Purgatory along with other things really helped our understanding, therefore resulting in very good character development. (3)
- We remade entire scenes through improvisations and writing. (2)
- We took it beyond "straight" theater with the movement we added.
- Everyone played an important role in the play.
- We set the goal to understand Dante's Purgatory and in turn to convey that knowledge to an audience. We pulled together a very polished, concise performance. We truly achieved a work of art. (6)

2. Describe any transitions or changes in the "feel" of the group and in group momentum from the middle of the process through performance (you already wrote about the first 1/3 of the process).

- This process as a whole was remarkably productive. There were days when I felt frustrated and tired, but these moments were outweighed by the moments that I felt very proud to be a part of such a talented and dedicated cast.
- I felt as though we were always on track.

- Things could be uptight or relaxed. Neither meant no progress was being made. The atmosphere depended on whether "baggage" was left at the door. The more intense the scene, the more people needed to scatter afterward--the harder it was to refocus.
- Toward the middle, we wanted to keep moving forward at the same momentum that we had earlier in the process, but what we really needed was to start focussing more on the small things. This transition took some time, but we got through it.
- We quickly rebounded after we had the discussion, and it was made clear where you were taking us. (2)
- Toward the middle, energy slackened, but about three weeks before the performance, it picked up again as comfort with parts, lines, and movement rose, although tension increased parallel to this. (3)
- We woke up and threw all our body and mind into the rehearsals. We knew that playing around was not going to help any of us or the outcome of the play. We respected each other more during this period, and I think we felt like a troupe, which was pretty cool.
- I like everybody, but being in a windowless room for five hours a day proved difficult to say the least.
- We tended to lose focus at times, partially because it is such a large group. A subtle reminder to get focussed seemed to get us back on track.
- By the week of the performance we really needed an audience. We wanted to share. (2)
- Toward performance everyone seemed to focus more easily. (2)
- There was a change in our cohesiveness from the middle of the process to the performance weekend. It felt like we finally saw the story as a whole, rather than a collection of scenes.
- The level of dedication to the process seemed to be the best of any of the productions I was in since I have been at arts high. There never seemed to be any doubt that everything would work out well and one time, and I think we carried our energy through our last rehearsals and all of our performances.
- The only instance when there was any real tension in the group and lack of motivation was when we did not exactly stay on schedule and people felt that they were waiting around a lot. I think this quickly passed when people realized that they were lucky to have any break and that it was in our best interest to just stay positive regardless and not let it affect the production.

- The only change I saw in group momentum was the rush of energy we all had on opening night. Right after the "hell dance" the green room felt like a locker room because of all the energy we had.

3. Describe your personal responses to the entire process at this point—how you are feeling right now about what we did and how we did it.

- I am very proud. (3) I feel like we all treated the material with great respect.
- I felt very happy. I had a very responsible role (a lead) and it was very empowering, because I knew what I had to do to make things go smoothly. I feel good about myself because I was able to live up to the responsibility.
- It ran very smoothly and the success was achieved at a highly professional level. I wouldn't change anything. (2)
- I remember walking off stage in the Indolent scene and seeing Patsy across in the other wing jumping up and down and cheering. This is exactly how I feel about the performance, it couldn't have gone any better.
- This entire experience has made me a stronger ensemble actor and helped me to realize the importance of a text. In the beginning I was scared that this would be deeply rooted in drama and not have any spunk to it. My fears were fed even more when we started to read Dante's actual work; all of the text and thinking didn't seem like it would be a fun experience. Once we actually started playing with pieces of the show and transforming it into our own, all of my fears were gone.
- This was one of the smoothest and most enjoyable rehearsal experiences I have ever taken a part in. There was very little in the stupid drama department--I felt like part of a group.
- I felt a little uneasy because the audience didn't get every single thing.
- I felt that my personal choices made the experience.
- Because we learned so much about the book before we began rehearsal, we all felt attached to the script.
- As a group we were able to who a whole and we-developed piece about Purgatory.
- I am pleased we had so much to say in what movements we did.
- These last two years have allowed me to know that ensemble work is something I like and would be more than willing to do again in my future. Now that the play is over, I feel a little lonely, or just like something is missing. (2)
- The time has flown by, and now I feel myself regretting that I wished for some things to be over.

- I was so focussed on making the show that I never really saw the great production we were creating. Someone else had to tell me before I took a step back and said, "Hey, I think you're right."

4. Describe any similarities you see between how this process progressed, and the progress of other theatrical processes you have experienced. Focus your comments on personal and group achievement of objectives, personal and group motivation or momentum.

Same:

- We have created a play before with our own writing.
- We have created a play with abstracted movement.
- The lead actors played a significant role in motivating the company.
- When people don't know their lines it throws the focus from the story onto not making mistakes.
- Once you get over the hump, it all seems to click.
- The balance you must achieve between carrying your own responsibility and depending on others.
- It helped to remember and keep in touch with my goals and objectives one stage.
- Themes and messages are given greater conscious emphasis in the last few days before performance.

Different:

- This is the first time in a production that I did not have doubts that we would finish on time.
- I have not always felt this confident and ready to be on stage.
- The motivation was high and the achievement of objectives was quick. With some other rehearsal processes, the momentum and motivation were nonexistent until the performance date.
- It seems in other theater I've done the ensemble loses momentum for a good two weeks before tech. The *Purgatorio* ensemble worked consistently every day, even during tech week. It was refreshing to see actors giving their all through the entire process.
- This was the last piece we were to do with a group we have come to know very well.

- Last year we were intimidated by the seniors, or we just hadn't learned as much, so the productions weren't as tight as they might have been. When we came to do this show, everyone was on the same page. (*Note: because they are all seniors*).
- There was lots of drama from a few people last year--almost like people went out of their way to stir things up. So I will say that last year it was a difficult group to completely enjoy and be myself in. This year is much different, luckily.
- It has been my experience that blocking is to be set in the first and second weeks of rehearsal, and then polished and perfected until showtime--there was much frustration and worry over the continual changes in the blocking and dancing. (*Director's note: This only happened in one piece, which was quite clearly used as a workshop/technique piece. The fervency of this cracks me up.*)

5. Were there any obstacles to personal and group achievement and motivation from the middle of the process through the performances? If you saw some, do you have any ideas about how they could be removed? Please note them, if you do.

- Only thing I can think of was people's response to how the hell dance changed and morphed during the rehearsals. Some people got quite annoyed that it changed so much! Which is very odd to me. Weren't we trying something new in the first place? There was nothing set at the start of rehearsals. I think it's a simple problem that if you experience again, just remind your students that it IS a process and nothing is ever set in blood.
- Senior slack was a problem, but eventually gave way to the fact that this would be our last show at PCAE, which pushed us forward, added the extra boost to make us care about our final product.
- Energy was lost in routine. Our class was not careful to approach the show with fresh eyes and new energy each day.
- My biggest obstacle was learning lines--I stayed to watch scenes I wasn't in to see how my scenes fit into the whole. Then I was able to tap into the flow.
- Letting go of my ideas was really hard, but seeing the final product I know that the entirety of the piece was enhanced by others' ideas. When an idea was thrown out, it propelled me forward into new ideas--to search and dig deeper into the play for more answers.

- The only obstacle I noticed was the occasional confusion about movement aspects, and I think that could be resolved with better communication between everyone.
- Direction from too many people. I would get confused, between the director and the movement coach, and the other actors all telling me what we are doing, and then everything being changed all the time, and I couldn't remember which thing we finally decided. I guess something that would help that is to make notes and look them over before rehearsal.
- I had difficulty getting used to the movement work, but I got over whatever was restricting me and tried my best.
- Poor attendance takes away from progress. Make good choices.
- It is difficult to attain commitment from everyone at the same time.
- It was very motivating that we understood the concepts in the play--it makes it easier to make choices. Taking the time beforehand to analyze it allowed us to make choices about what is the best way to show a concept or theme--it engaged our thoughts and lives with the themes.
- There are some people I would prefer not to work with--it would be nice if they were not so proud, but could all have respect for each other in working toward the same goal.
- Sometimes we do not remember that we are in rehearsal because we want to be, and then we are just lying to ourselves.

6. Do you recognize any objectives or active aspects of the process—either personal choices for performance development, or things found in the organized group activity—that were clearly at work throughout, and that motivated you or the group to stay the course?

- A big objective that lasted throughout the entire rehearsal period was to keep the enthusiasm up. The whole process was a success because the cast kept up the good attitude about the play.
- The biggest motivating drive came from being on the same page, ready to do our best.
- The fact that we were learning more about Purgatory and our different characters throughout the process helped us to all stay interested and focussed. As we learned more about the text we were motivated to add more to our performance, and even if we could not develop anything specific to apply our

knowledge to any one part of the play, just continuing to learn more about the text and stay interested had a positive impact on our performance. (2)

- The improv for the hell dance really got me motivated. I love that dance. The constant work we did on the dance helped me to further demonize myself and get really specific in my movements. (*Note: This is the infamous dance that got changed so much!*)
- Everyone in class wanted this to be a great show and that was all the incentive we needed to do our best and work for a great outcome. (*Note: This statement is not so simple as it may seem. Sometimes there are people who do not want it to be a great show, and they make a point of getting in everyone's way and generally poisoning the well. It will be interesting to see how this project of reflecting on attitude and motivation works when there is one of those in the group.*)
- The actual story helped us to accomplish the task--the sense of journey in Purgatory reflected that of us as an ensemble. We felt daunted by such a big play just as Dante was daunted by the mountain. When we finished, we were able to stand on top and look back at all the people we had met, and all the experiences we had created, each step of the way. Each part was necessary to the whole.

8. How do I interpret my data and/or what happened?

If you've read this far in the paper, you have probably gathered that the surveys allowed us to correct any misconceptions students had about the project and created a forum for formal expression of concern. We modified a few things as a result of these concerns. After the surveys were completed and I had read them, we had an open class discussion of ways to rectify (or live more comfortably with) the things that were going on that were bothering people, and to recognize the things that were working. Another thing that happened in the discussion (which I considered videotaping, but decided that the "big eye" might skew the result), is that some students were surprised to find out that people thought differently than they did about the matters that were coming up. Those who were living in "negative energy land" were very much surprised to learn that much of the group was not living there with them--that their thoughts were not universally understood to be fact and truth by all present. It seemed that the people who gained the most powerful voice from this project were the ones who were having a great time, and not the whiners--

whom one would naturally think to be most in need of such an ombudsman-type procedure. It did, however, help the whiners to get it off their chests in a forum where something could actually be done about their difficulties. Also--people found ways to clean up their own doldrums, to recognize where they were in the process, to recognize that, although things were not yet perfect, a great deal had been accomplished, and to move on.

9. Conclusions.

Some students are more conscious than others of how much power they have over the results that are achieved in a classroom. For those that are not conscious of their own influence--such a project can be empowering. They want to succeed. They want the success to be a result of their own efforts. If they understand that poor attitudes cause failure (bad art in this case), the students will make an effort to improve attitudes--if you can give them a tool that will help them to improve, and if you can get everybody's thoughts on the table. Finding conscious and pro-active way to get over the inevitable slump in the long process toward making a performance seemed to me to enhance the quality of the resulting performance. Less thinking about how annoyed so and so was last night when such and such said such and so to another such, in a sort of perpetual motion that never is resolved. More energy, more enthusiasm, more precision, and deeper thinking about the implications of the story we need to tell.

It is my informal assessment, after involvement in 35 years of theater productions, that the way the inevitable attitude slump halfway into the process is handled determines the artistic result at the end of the process. I was looking for a way to empower people to take charge of their doldrums--and I think I came up with a really good set of questions to ask, to push the right buttons, and get everybody, including me, in touch with the information we needed to move ahead. So--I hope it works again. Let's see.