

**ROOM TO BREATHE:
A RETREAT FOR EDUCATORS**

by

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Abstract

This written thesis presents reflections and analysis of my thesis performance, *Room to Breathe: A Retreat for Educators*. As both a contemporary theatre practitioner and an educator, my theoretical and practical cross-disciplinary research has culminated in the creation of this interdisciplinary theatre event. Simultaneously a workshop and a work of art, this three-hour evening experience takes place inside an immersive theatrical environment, an aesthetic context designed to facilitate embodied self-reflection. The interactive performance invites educators to consider how we can create more room to breathe within our bodies, within our schedules, and within our classrooms.

Inspired by the transformative potential of theatre as a ritual, I directed a four-week interdisciplinary collaboration between myself and three performing artists (Melisa Hernandez, Lolu Oyedele, and Keith Wyatt), using fabric, lighting, sound, text, projections, dance, and music to generate a series of metaphors for educators to observe, and to participate in co-creating. Fueled by what the rhythm of the breath continues to teach me about teaching and learning, this aesthetic experience was designed to engage educators in a subtle praxis of attunement to the rhythm of the breath within the framework of the body and within the learning process. Each educator contributed her unique presence, perspective and way of making meaning to the collective. I facilitated a dialogical exploration of how the embodied experiences that unfolded throughout the evening might be translated into personal and professional practice.

In conclusion, I propose that providing educators with an aesthetic experience of liminal space/time can transform body-based practices, metaphors, and conversations into gateways for experiencing mindfulness as an integrated lifestyle: an embodied way of seeing and being. Within this embodied experience, participants can access shifts in perspective, lines of inquiry, and poetic insight that would not be available in an educational context that focuses purely on cultivating intellectual understanding. Attunement to the rhythm of the breath can engender curiosity about, trust in, and surrender to intrinsic rhythm in curricular enactment, inviting educators to engage their whole being (body, mind and spirit) in the dynamic reciprocity of relationships, and in learning and teaching as ongoing spirals of transformation.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

At the age of fourteen, my body shut down completely. I was diagnosed with Viral Meningitis, Bronchitis, Strep Throat, Mono and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome; I was bedridden for six months. Up until that point in time, I had been a high-achiever in performing arts and academics with a voracious appetite for learning, striving for excellence in my many extra-curricular activities (piano, singing, dance, theatre, costume design, visual art, writing...). My extremely productive rhythm ignored my body's gentle requests for attention. Because I was self-motivated, genuinely enjoyed all of the activities that I was engaged in and appreciated the extremely privileged position that I found myself in, I did not understand why my body was betraying me.

Though I couldn't see it at the time, I now realize that it was *I* who had been betraying my body. I did not understand how to listen to the subtle signals that my body was sending, gently asking me to slow down and give my cells, my lungs, my mind and even my soul more room to breathe. Looking back over twenty years later, I consider the total collapse of my health as my body's way of demanding my undivided attention. Having never experienced a practice of mindfulness, I had no idea how to attune my attention to the subtle and steady rhythm of guidance that my body was offering. Being temporarily incapacitated gave me no other choice but to slow down, close my eyes and look inside. This six-month winter-like season of stillness, silence and solitude caused a total shift in orientation. I began to slow down... to attune my attention toward the intuitive intelligence that lies *within* the framework of the body. I experienced, first-hand, the profound learning that can emerge out of stillness and silence, and the cost of *not* giving myself the time and space necessary to rest, reflect and integrate.

Over the past seventeen years, I have explored the nature of the mind/body connection through my performance training in the Bachelor of Fine Arts Acting Conservatory Program at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, my Clown training with Jan Henderson, Francine Côté and Soizick Hébert, and my professional work as a performer in concert with a daily practice of yoga and meditation. Though I am continually tempted to avoid or resist the less comfortable, darker, downtimes in my learning processes... they persist! While I am sometimes tempted to rush students through the emptying that is

required to make room for inspiration, my experience teaches me that *the exhale* is essential to the learning process.

Falling ill was the first of several humbling life-experiences that have taught me how to practice creating more room to breathe in my body and in my schedule. Now I am exploring creative ways to bring this subtle praxis of attunement into the classroom. Six years ago, a respected yoga instructor Christine Price-Clark advised me to focus my research and teaching on a single Sanskrit word: *spanda*. She continued to explain that while *spanda* refers to both the expansion and contraction that occurs in the breathing rhythm within the human body, it also refers to this same breathing rhythm as it unfolds in the microcosm, the macrocosm and everywhere in between. I took her counsel seriously and have placed *spanda* at the centre of my research. While my research focuses on observing the rhythm of the breath within the human body, I see this rhythm enacted in classroom dynamics, in the teacher/student relationship, and within the learning process itself. I experience this breathing rhythm as a metaphor: a multi-dimensional poetic form that becomes a generative source of meaning when I am willing to look at it long enough. I position my research as being heuristic and recursive in nature, springing from personal subjective experience, stimulating ongoing lines of inquiry and inspiring me to create contexts for embodied self-reflection and contemplation. It is out of embodied self-reflection and contemplation that my research was born, and it is embodied self-reflection and contemplation that my research intends to birth. In the *Room to Breathe Retreat*, the structure and essence of the process that I went through to create the event was reflected in the form of the final product.

While most scholars are familiar with the ancient axiom “know thyself”, it is rare that academic research focuses on the subjective, intuitive, experiential, embodied practice of looking inward. It is precisely because I see this gap in scholarly research that I am speaking to these intrinsic layers of experience that I deem vital to learning processes. I choose to speak to these layers by focusing on a singular process: observation of the rhythm of the breath. I have chosen to focus on the rhythm of the breath because it is “universally accessible” within the framework of the body of all living human beings: “we all breathe from the time of birth until the time of death” (Hart 72). Observing the rhythm of the breath within the framework of the body for extended periods of time has given me experiential knowledge of the breath as a meeting place of the conscious and the sub-conscious mind.

My embodied research has also taught me that experiential understanding of the relationship of mind and body is central to self-knowledge.

In educational circles, this subtle praxis of attunement often falls under the catchword: mindfulness. If you type the word “mindfulness” into Google Search, the second online dictionary definition is surprisingly true to the word’s Buddhist roots: “a mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations” (“mindfulness”). The capacity to embody mindfulness can be cultivated using meditation techniques that originate from Buddhist spiritual practices (Nhat Hahn 7). While mindfulness is often seen as a series of awareness techniques that educators can implement to maximize student performance, I see mindfulness practices as gateways to an embodied and compassionate way of life: an integrated way of seeing and being that can teach students and teachers to listen to, trust, and dance with the innate breathing rhythm of curriculum. The *Room to Breathe Retreat* is an artistic addition to the growing movement toward mindfulness in education. While there are many scholars who expose the benefits of mindfulness practices, and there are an abundance of programs for implementing mindfulness in the classroom, *Room to Breathe: A Retreat for Educators* is unique in that it utilizes the metaphorical and transformative potential of theatre to create an immersive aesthetic experience that has the heightened and embodied nature of a ritual event.

While my research focuses on embodied practice, my two years of academic research have inspired an integrated transformation of my thinking and my approach. In addition to teaching me how to see my research within a wider historical-socio-political context, my exposure to both Indigenous Theory and Cultural Theory has transformed my perspective, my language, and my purpose. Cultural theorist bell hooks’ approach to theory is warm, accessible, inclusive and practically applicable, setting an excellent example for scholars interested in reaching a wider audience. Similarly, I aim to communicate the theoretical underpinnings of my work in a way that can be understood and translated into practice by an audience that exists both within and without the walls of academic institutions. hooks’ revelation that theory could be “a location for healing” (59) gives theory legs, hands, heart and relevance at a time when most of us are suffering the consequences of the mind/body disconnect, and the subsequent disconnections within and between the communities that we

comprise. The capacity for theory to be “a social practice that can be liberatory” (hooks 67) resides in a location where mind and body, theory and practice are united in an intimate conversation. This leaves scholars and educators with the immense responsibility to put theories into practice: to embody them. My methodology could be described as, incarnating theory.

In my experience, theory that is not embodied lacks integrity. While theory in isolation may follow logic that fits together tightly in the mind, when translated into practice, the theory often falls apart. Like cultural theorist bell hooks’ “lived experience of theorizing” (61), embodied theory demonstrates that theory shaped by real life experience applies to real life experience. When I grow theory out of what I learn on the ground, each moment of personal and professional life becomes a fertile research site that holds the potential to season and ripen my theoretical approach. Discovering patterns, living through cyclical processes and opening to new perspectives continually nourish, refine, decompose, and transform my theories. As the shape of my theoretical framework changes, the practices that inhabit this framework shift and respond in a dynamic conversation. Given the non-linear, recursive nature of my research and my thesis performance, my written thesis includes the theoretical underpinnings of my work in a breathing rhythm, interspersed with anecdotes that demonstrate my method, stories that relay how the curriculum/script was co-created with participants, and my reflections on and analysis of the experience (which inevitably transform my theory and methodology).

The entire creative process, including the workshops, conversations, and relationships that led to and followed the performance, are considered to be as essential to the integrity of my research as the live performance itself. The conclusions that my research has birthed will mature as they are applied to my ongoing practice... and they will eventually die as new experiences, challenges, questions and conclusions emerge. Rather than offering conclusive evidence that bolsters my current theories, this thesis provides perspectives and practices that invite the reader to enter into an ongoing process of inquiry and contemplation, focusing on how attunement to the rhythm of the breath can assist educators as they embody and facilitate the ebb and flow of the learning process.

Chapter 2. WHY

Why Intrinsic Rhythm

Written over seventy years ago, educational reformer John Dewey's soulful book, *Art as Experience*, still pulses with resonant understanding of the order that permeates every layer of the human creature and her interplay with her environment. Dewey argued that "[i]n every integral experience there is form because there is dynamic organization" (*Art* 57), and that both science and the arts share the understanding that "rhythm is a universal scheme of existence, underlying all realization of order in change" (Dewey, *Art* 156). Dewey described this rhythm of experience as an intrinsic order that the human creature has the capacity to be sensitive to and guided by. While a musician's ear or painter's eyes may be expected to perceive change in nature as being measured rhythmically, Dewey extends the call out to all human beings, to observe the nature of change itself as governed by innate rhythms. "When external control is rejected, the problem becomes that of finding the factors of control that are inherent within experience" (*Experience* 21). As educators, perhaps weary of externally imposed structures, schedules, and objectives, how can we attune our attention to these intrinsic rhythms, and yield to the wisdom that they hold as we enact curriculum in the classroom? I describe this innate rhythm as a breathing rhythm that has similar qualities and dynamics to the rhythm of the breath... contraction and expansion, receiving and giving, looking out and looking in... Dewey is clear that learning takes place within this rhythmic movement, explaining that construction and criticism "cannot be separated because they are the rhythm of output and intake, of expiration and inspiration, in our mental breath and spirit" (*John* 139). My research explores creative ways of facilitating educators' attunement to this omnipresent dynamic order of transformation.

Why Educators

Like learning, teaching is often challenging, stressful and exhausting. Watching my professors and I struggle to carve out the time and space necessary to rest, to reflect, and to recover from the demanding schedule and hectic climate within the academic culture, prompted me to choose educators as my audience. John Dewey's dynamic approach to education as aesthetic experience, alongside my professional experience and personal

practice of yoga, meditation, and the performing arts, has sculpted my thesis into an aesthetic, embodied experience for educators. Educators Margaret Macintyre Latta and Gayle Buck's article "Enfleshing Embodiment: 'Falling Into Trust' with the Body's Role in Teaching and Learning", clearly describes the disconnect that often limits education to the intellectual realm, leaving teachers and students burnt out:

The sustained preoccupation with disconnect gives rise to disembodied curricula, impoverishing learners, teachers, and teaching contexts. Many participating educators that we work with in our roles as teacher educators, acknowledge this preoccupation with disconnect, but struggle to imagine their practices in any other ways. Falling into trust with the body as the medium for sense-making is met with skepticism by some, dismissed as romanticism and idealism by others, and experienced as estranged, but somehow resonant, with a few... Increasingly, we are cognizant of embodied understandings as the ground of all sense-making and teacher education's disastrous disconnect with the body's role in educating teachers. (316)

In response to this disturbing disconnect, *Room to Breathe: A Retreat for Educators* is an aesthetic context where teachers can come together to explore the mind-body connection experientially.

Why Embodied Experience

The ten wisest teachers that I have met in my life have all offered the same counsel: the teacher must first live through her own creative/educational/healing process before she can wisely facilitate the creative/educational/healing process of a student. I find teaching to be most effective when *what* is being taught is *embodied* by the teacher and reflected in *how* it is being taught. My first-hand experiences of my own creative/education/healing process continue to be a sound source of guidance for how I facilitate students as they navigate their own creative/education/healing process, one breath at a time. Rather than trying to demonstrate a perfect performance, I meet students on the common ground of practice, accompanying them through the ups and downs along the way, exploring uncharted terrain and contemplating insights as they are revealed. Curriculum theorist William F. Pinar articulates the profound and integrated nature of the educator's responsibility: "In teaching, then, we are not implementing objectives or preparing students for tests but testifying every

day in every way to the human capacity to understand the world and its personification in our subjectivity” (*Character* 21). My first-hand experiences of what it takes to navigate the uneven terrain of the learning process, informs how I facilitate students as they navigate similar terrain. The learning process itself is a frame for students and teachers alike, to cultivate patience and compassion, and to embrace moments of tension, conflict and ‘failure’ as opportunities for shared learning.

Buddhist teachings often describe learning as occurring at three depths. The first is the borrowed understanding that one gains from reading books and hearing spoken wisdom (Hart 88). The second is intellectual understanding: “after reading or hearing a teaching, one considers it and examines whether it is really rational, beneficial, and practical” (Hart 89). The third is embodied knowledge: “that which arises out of one’s own experience” (Hart 89). The first is like reading the description of a savory item in a menu at a restaurant. The second is like watching someone else eat the savory item while understanding how the taste buds and digestive system function. And the third is like tasting and digesting the savory item within the framework of your own body. While all three depths of learning are included in the *Room to Breathe Retreat*, it is primarily the third form of embodied, experiential knowledge that the performance focuses on generating.

Why the Inward Journey

For the last four nights of May 2015, *Room to Breathe: A Retreat for Educators* was held at the French Cultural Centre in Kelowna, British Columbia. Each evening, twelve to fourteen educators joined three performing artists and myself, for an event designed to provide participants with multiple opportunities to attune their attention to the rhythm of the breath. Why did I choose to unite theatre, education and mindfulness in this interdisciplinary performance/workshop that focused on how we can create more room to breathe in our bodies, in our schedules and in our classrooms? Teacher and storyteller Stan Chung points to the root cause of my inspiration: “[T]he world is in deep trouble, not just economically, not just environmentally, but psychologically” (213). From my perspective, humanity is in the midst of a total global crisis that threatens not only the survival of all living beings on the planet, but also threatens to disconnect us from the spiritual understanding and purpose that give life meaning. Humanity’s current obsession with materialistic definitions of value and

success leaves many of us enslaved to “a system of rising expectations that never satisfy” (Schmidt). Though I intellectually understand how important it is to create ‘breathing room’ within the educational process, the internal and external pressures and expectations, limited timelines and endless to-do lists tend to crowd the fertile space that my experience teaches me is the birthplace of new knowledge. Seeing the effects of the fast-paced, competitive, material obsessed culture of capitalism in North America, especially on the children that are growing up within it, has motivated me to search for some way to contribute to the transformation of the educational system.

While I am not of Indigenous heritage, nor am I a scholar of Indigenous Studies, my experiences of Indigenous practices and ceremonies and my brief exposure to the Indigenous Paradigm in a graduate seminar course with educator, artist and activist Jeannette Armstrong has brought me to respect the foundational principles of Indigeneity as foundational to all of existence, including my research. The Indigenous Paradigm conceives of materiality from the perspective of the spiritual rather than conceiving of spirituality from the perspective of the material (Armstrong, *Indigenous*). Rather than prescribing to the duality of colonialization/de-colonialization, Armstrong presents the Indigenous Paradigm as a way of seeing and being that by nature benefits all members of the community of the Earth, when embodied with integrity. I position myself (and my current research) as in the infancy of a lifelong process of learning how to embody the Indigenous Paradigm with integrity.

Jeannette Armstrong describes the Indigenous Paradigm as holding human beings responsible for participating in compassionate relationships with all the diverse living creatures and elements that contribute to the dynamic unity of the Earth (Armstrong *Indigenous*). Our identity becomes misplaced when we forget that “all living things and natural entities have a role to play in maintaining the web of life” (Cajete 10). Renowned academic Leroy Little Bear’s “6 Tenets of the Foundational Paradigm of Indigeneity” describe a perspective that sees everything in existence as interrelated and animate, in a constant flux, with an eye for the regular pattern that sustains us (Little Bear). Perspectives, practices and events that respect the foundational principles of Indigeneity and aim to restore humanity’s ability to embody these principles may play a vital role in the healing of our local and global community.

While I will be delighted if my life’s work ultimately contributes to social

transformation through educational reform, my research focuses on personal transformation as a realistic place to start. Anthropologist Margaret Mead “concluded that we carry intense emotions and impulses in our personality structure that, if they are not dealt with internally, are projected into our everyday life” (Grof 7). Writer, social activist and Trappist monk Thomas Merton concurs: “We hate others because we can not stand the disorder and intolerable division in ourselves. We are violent to others because we are already divided by the inner violence of our own infidelity to our own truth. Hatred projects this division outside ourselves into society.” (Merton 80) Rather than seeing education as the accumulation of knowledge, I see education as an ongoing process of healing and liberation. Learning becomes healing when students and teachers look inward to heal the division, inner violence and infidelity within ourselves. Learning becomes liberating when students and teachers become aware of habitual mental/emotional/physical/behavioral patterns, and practice ways of freeing themselves from those habitual patterns to create new neural pathways in the brain and new ways of making meaning. Philosopher and teacher Simone Weil proposes that “[w]e participate in the creation of the world by decreasing ourselves” (33). To truly learn something, we must allow it to reinvent us.

Yet, for both teachers and students, yielding to transformation is easier said than done. There are so many ways to resist the unknown and to defend whatever the new knowledge threatens to change. The retreat gives educators embodied experiences of practical tools that can assist in facilitating the changes that occur in these vulnerable liminal spaces, tools that we can give to students to assist them as they navigate the unfamiliar and often challenging territory of learning. *Room to Breathe* points toward a way of seeing and being that can engage students and teachers alike in a dynamic understanding of interconnectedness (Armstrong *Indigenous*) that includes a profound respect and care for all of the diverse and delicate relationships that hold the larger web in integrity.

One of the body-based practices that we introduced in the retreat was a simple meditation practice of observing the subtle sensation of the breath going in and out of the nostrils. I placed this simple practice in the centre of the retreat experience, because, more than anything else that I have experienced, the practice of meditation creates more room to breathe within my body, within my schedule, and within my classroom. In the words of educational reformer John Dewey: “The crucial educational problem is that of procuring the

postponement of immediate action upon desire until observation and judgment have intervened” (*Experience* 69). Meditation practices can teach students and teacher how to open up this space for discernment to enter.

Educational theorist William F. Pinar, discusses the subconscious baggage that that can cloud discernment and dictates the human being’s capacity to learn. Pinar clearly articulates that “[k]nowing oneself... requires retrieving what has happened already and remains only as residue and sometimes not readily accessible” (*The Character* 8). This residue lives within us, in the tissue of our bodies, and is perpetuated by our habitual patterns of reaction to the sensations that our body volunteers as we encounter stimuli in each moment. Are we aware of the sensations that our body volunteers as we encounter stimuli in each moment? What influence do the subconscious mind and the residue of emotion that our past experiences have left within the tissues of our body have on our current perspective, actions and reactions? How can creating more room to breathe between the stimulus and the response change how teachers/students respond to and make meaning out of educational experiences? Dewey clearly states that “in order to perceive esthetically, [each individual] must remake his past experiences so that they can enter integrally into a new pattern” (*Art* 144).

Educator Stephen R. Covey cites a quote that is often credited to neurologist, psychiatrist and holocaust survivor Victor E. Frankl: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom” (Covey 59). Practicing observation of the breath can focus attention on this very specific space where learning occurs. The retreat offered educators multiple opportunities to practice observing the breath and the subtle sensations within the framework of the body, giving them a chance to begin to experience the practice themselves. “Neither the therapeutic nor the cosmological realizations of Dhamma [the laws of nature or the truth in action] can be experienced merely through the mode of intellectual description” (Spretnak 53). Meditation practitioner, speaker and activist Charlene Spretnak explains that looking inward through a practice of meditation can yield experiential understanding and wisdom that can not be accessed by thinking or talking. The retreat introduces educators to this subtle praxis of attunement that deserves to be explored in depth beyond the limited timeline of the retreat.

Why A Retreat

Education becomes transformational when students and teachers let go of ‘who we thought we were’ and ‘what we thought we knew’... making room for new ways of seeing, being, and knowing to emerge. These shifts often occur when there is a break from the usual schedule and context:

It is essential sometimes to go into retreat,
to stop everything that you have been doing,
to stop your experiences completely
and look at them anew,
not keep on repeating them like machines.

You would then let fresh air into your mind. Wouldn't you?

This place must be of great beauty... (Krishnamurti 252)

Speaker and writer Jiddu Krishnamurti describes the spacious and aesthetic quality of the liminal space that facilitates transformational learning. *The Room to Breathe Retreat* is an aesthetic context where educators can take a break from their usual activities to reflect on their current ways of seeing and being, and to look at themselves, and at teaching and learning anew.

As an educator I have often described the space that I intend to facilitate as a *safe space*... a place where participants are willing to unveil the deeper layers of themselves, practice self-reflection, and open themselves to learning from the diverse individuals that surround them. Clearly framing educational contexts early on in the process can “help create a learning environment that allows students [and teachers] to engage with one another over controversial issues with honesty, sensitivity, and respect” (Arao 135). Educators Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens have made a small, but significant shift from describing learning environments as *safe spaces*, to describing them as *brave spaces* (135). Addressing the potentially uncomfortable nature of shared learning at the outset can help prepare participants to call on the qualities of courage and humility that are often required to navigate the more challenging moments in the process. *The Room to Breathe Retreat* is a brave space, where participants are invited to be compassionate with themselves as they look humbly at their own responses to the educational experience. All participants are asked to be compassionate with the diverse responses that they see enacted around them, as all participants are in a

potentially vulnerable state. This common vulnerability can contribute to a receptive state where participants become curious about what they have to learn from each participating co-creator. Co-created 'brave space' can bring assumptions, illusions and incongruencies to light, triggering processes of contemplation and inquiry that have the potential to carry learning far beyond the limited timeline of the retreat.

Why Theatre as Ritual

While I understand that a single evening is not enough time to facilitate a significant transformation of personal or professional practice, I do believe that the *Room to Breathe Retreat* acted as a catalyst for some, offered questions to contemplate for others, introduced a meditation practice to a few, and provided a context for self-reflection for all. Teacher Stan Chung explains his approach to entering transformational processes: "One view of transformational learning is that it's about critically reflecting on one's previously hidden assumptions, beliefs, and biases... It's about shaking your foundations (and mine)" (96). As we come together to explore how we can create more room to breathe in our bodies, schedules and classrooms, we benefit from questioning and exposing the unconscious assumptions and expectations that may be impeding our capacity to translate theory into practice. Listening to someone else's story can allow us to look at our personal and professional lives from a different perspective. Sitting with a metaphor long enough can make room for epiphany and revelation. Attuning our collective awareness to the rhythm of the breath can open up a space where deep listening and vulnerability are welcome.

The *Room to Breathe Retreat* implements the metaphorical and transformative potential of theatre to create an immersive aesthetic experience that has the heightened and embodied nature of a ritual event. While the concept of ritual is somewhat ethereal and illusive, the transformative power of an embodied experience of a ritual event is undeniable. Charlene Spretnak explains: "ritual has the potential to bring forth the experience of grace in the consciousness of participants" (26). In a spiritual transformation, or in a shift from one season of life to another, ritual events can assist in the disintegration of old paradigms and behavioral patterns, and the integration of new perspectives and conscious practices (Lertzman 7). Our conversations throughout the evening emphasized the liminal nature of the literal and figurative space that we generated collectively. Anthropologist Victor Turner

defines both theatre and ritual as public liminality (465). He describes “the role of collective innovatory behavior, of crowds generating new ways of framing and modeling the social reality which presses on them in their daily lives...the folk act on the folk and transform itself through becoming aware of its situation and predicament” (486). A mindful ritual experience has the potential to expose what has been hidden, to give substance to that which is normally ephemeral, to physicalize that which often remains conceptual. In the words of Jeannette Armstrong: “materializing the spiritual” (Armstrong, *Indigenous*).

Why Ebb and Flow

I call the underbelly of the learning cycle *the exhale*: winter-like seasons, dark night’s of the soul, barren desert times and empty spaces... not something we can control, rather, they are realities, rhythms that we can practice observing, surrendering to and facilitating. Being able to reside in the realm of the unknown requires educators to be willing to sit with our own pain and discomfort, and the pain and discomfort of our students (perhaps this is the greatest gift that we can offer to them). Looking down into the precipice of the unknown often exposes the sensations and emotions that we have choreographed our whole lives around avoiding. To inspire myself (or my students) to leap out into the unknown, often requires me to be able to sit with, observe and remain equanimous with uncomfortable emotions and with deeply engrained patterns of reaction. Experience has taught me that all profound transformations and integrated learning passes through this dark and powerful liminal space where we must lose ourselves to find ourselves. How can we as educators learn to respect and steward these liminal spaces? How can we make room for the ebb that leads to and from the flow? The *Room to Breathe Retreat* aims to help teachers steward the receptive ebb that leads to and from the flow... engendering trust that valuable learning can unfold in what appear to be the less-productive moments of the educational process.

As educators (and students), so much of our lives are spent rushing around from one meeting to the next, fulfilling a schedule full of commitments that leave little room for tuning in to this intrinsic rhythm. While many of us know that we need more time to rest, reflect, and integrate, what stops us from putting this knowledge into practice?

In ordinary life, much of our pressing forward is impelled by outside necessities, instead of an onward motion like that of waves of the sea. Similarly, much of our

resting is recuperation from exhaustion; it, too, is compelled by something external. In rhythmic ordering, every close and pause, like the rest in music, connects as well as delimits and individualizes. A pause in music is not a blank, but is a rhythmic silence that punctuates what is done while at the same time, it conveys a compulsion forward, instead of arresting at the point which it defines. (Dewey, *Art* 179)

While in past workshops and retreats, I have been tempted to guide participants toward a more cathartic and climactic experience, I have found the euphoric nature of the state that follows to be short lived. Instead of manipulating participants into a specific state, the *Room to Breathe* experience was designed to give educators time and space to attune their attention to the rhythm of the breath. Dewey suggests that “escape from convention to perception” under any name must “emphasize sensitivity to natural rhythm... if it is to be true to refreshment of esthetic form” (*Art* 160). Cultivating this “sensitivity to natural rhythm” is the foundational focus of the retreat, because of its potential to provide visceral understanding of the nature of learning processes and educational relationships.

The ebb and flow of learning often expresses itself in what I describe as cycles of death and rebirth:

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it—either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. (Dewey, *Art* 12)

These death-like experiences can act as surprisingly clear mirrors for students and teachers who are willing to look honestly at their reaction to the uncomfortable situation and to use it as a diagnostic, an invitation to be humbled, and a call to practice faith in the rhythm of the process. These crises can prompt us to look more closely at what is happening inside and outside, to mine all elements of the experience for inherent meaning. Professor of education and curriculum theorist, William E. Doll Jr. states it plainly: “In order for students and teachers to transform and be transformed, a curriculum needs to have the “right amount” of *indeterminacy, anomaly, inefficiency, chaos, disequilibrium, dissipation, lived experience*” (254). He explains that the problems and disturbances inherent in a curriculum are what provide its richness and sense of being. What stops students and educators from embracing

the underbelly of the cycle? As an artistic director and performing artist, while I am tempted to resist the problems and disturbances that color the creative process, it is out of these often tense, dark, and chaotic times that the work of art comes to life, taking dynamic, vibrant and arresting shapes that hold profound meaning and transformative learning.

Chapter 3. ROOM TO BREATHE: A RETREAT FOR EDUCATORS

The *Room to Breathe Retreat* employs the metaphorical and transformative potential of theatre to create an immersive aesthetic context where educators who are interested in bringing mindfulness into education can look at how *they* might embody what they would like to teach *students* to embody. Rather than having a specific learning outcome for the retreat, the event contains multiple opportunities for teachers to self-reflect, and to cultivate sensitivity to intrinsic rhythm. The participatory event introduces a school of metaphors, a handful of body-based practices, and a series of questions that teachers can continue contemplating and exploring at home and in their classrooms.



Image 1: the immersive theatrical environment (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

Exhaling: Crossing Thresholds

Upon entering the retreat space, participants passed through a series of thresholds.

Hanging fabric divided the space into four distinct rooms. Opening the front door of the French Cultural Centre, participants entered what used to be the entryway to the old church. In this first space educators were greeted by one of the performers, Keith Wyatt, who welcomed them into the space and took care of logistics such as nametags, waiver forms, turning off cell phones, and collecting wallets and purses for safe-keeping. While this first stage of the process was practical, it marked the first of a series of symbolic actions, designed to assist participants in leaving behind conventional perceptions and habitual patterns of reaction. I relate the actions present in this first passageway, to *the exhale* within the rhythm of the breath... a form of *emptying*, a *letting go* of familiar identifications to make room for the new experience.

Relieved of some of their possessions, participants enter the second room to breathe. Dimly lit with lanterns, the arrival zone was lined with chairs for participants to hang their coats on, and to sit down in to remove their shoes. They were encouraged to give themselves a moment to arrive. The question, "*How can we create more room to breathe within our bodies, within our schedules, and within our classrooms?*" was written on the wall, to give participants a clear touchstone or anchor, a focus for their contemplation within the mysterious and open-ended field of experience and inquiry that they were about to enter. When they were ready, I invited them to join me at the threshold of entering the belly of the space where the majority of the retreat would occur. Before entering, educators gathered in small groups to hear the following message that I delivered to them, to clearly frame the experience at the outset:

The Room to Breathe Retreat was inspired by my own experience of what the rhythm of the breath continues to teach me about teaching and learning. While our experience this evening will naturally stimulate some analytical thinking, rather than focusing on the intellectual level, I encourage you to enjoy discovering your own answers on an experiential level. If you find yourself drawn to or repelled by an element of your experience, simply take note of your response and reflect on it.

Before crossing the threshold where each participant was invited to practice silence, I offered to wash their hands. The precise action of pouring a wooden pitcher full of water over their hands, was a symbolic action of emptying and cleansing that gave them another visceral

experience of *the exhale*, serving to establish the heightened metaphorical nature of the ritual experience, and placing me, the facilitator, in a role of service.

Clearly establishing the framework of the experience early on appeared to put many of the participants at ease, effectively providing a feeling of containment, of being held as they courageously entered the unknown. Educator Parker Palmer's perspective on facilitating the exploration of metaphors in what he calls 'circles of trust' prompted me to clearly articulate how participants could actively engage in the self-reflective nature of the experience right from the beginning: "whether you find yourself drawn to or repelled by the story or someone else's interpretation of it, simply take note of your response and reflect on it" (100). Framing the experience in this way transformed the charged environment into a context for cultivating awareness of patterns of reaction that might otherwise have kept participants stuck in habitual ways of thinking, seeing, and being.

Inhaling: Aesthetic Context

Silently, one by one, the educators crossed the threshold into the belly of the space. The allegorical environment surrounded participants with sheer and opaque white sheets of fabric, carving out multiple spaces for individuals to explore in their own time and way. The arching peak of the old church gave an uplifted, spacious quality to this chapter of the experience. White chairs were placed throughout the space that provided unique vantage points within the larger installation. At a time when most teachers (and students) are busy, being rushed around from one activity to the next, one of the easiest ways to create more room to breathe, is to simply *slow down*. The performance space was designed to give participants time and space to slow down. Lighting, sound, and projections of images aligned with the breathing rhythm, were carefully chosen to create a warm and relaxing environment, guiding everyone into a liminal, transitional state. Aesthetic experiences have the capacity to challenge conventional perceptions (Kester 3), increasing receptivity, and asking participants to look a little closer, and a little longer at what they might normally overlook.



Image 2: participants inside the aesthetic experience (Photographs by Denise Kenney, 2015)



Image 3: the aesthetic context: the belly of the space (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

After ten to twenty minutes in the belly of the space (depending on arrival times), the lights faded, making room for an audio track that used poetic language to introduce the breath as a metaphor. Many participants spontaneously closed their eyes to listen to the following pre-recorded monologue:

*Can you hear me? Can you feel me? Can you see me?
I am here. I'm right here! I'm over here!
Waiting patiently for you to look inside
To slow down enough to hear my voice.
Do you know who I am?
I AM your forgotten friend
I was with you in the beginning
and I will be with you in the end.
I exist to serve Humanity, the Earth, and All.
And though you may resent me when I take,
I long to give you rest, each time you fall.
I am here (I'm right here! I'm over here.)
Moving silently within you, I am counting down, to the end of your life,
But it is also me who sustains you, through all of your joys and strife.
I am expansion, and contraction.
The beginning, and the end.
I am all taking and giving,
The enemy, and friend.
I am the rhythm of all life.
Of death...
And rebirth.
The source of all growth, change, and movement,
Both, in the Heavens, and on Earth.
If you listen to me you will come to see, the nature of yourself,
And if you listen long enough, you will hear the unfolding mystery of all else.
For each inhale opens the door to new knowledge and ways of being
While each exhale empties the mind of what it knows, to allow for deeper seeing.
Though I am so often constrained, and bound by your resistance,
If you wish to free me, look within,
And there you'll find
Some room... to breathe.*

(This breath monologue was collaboratively written over the course of a year, with contributions from Keith Wyatt, Karlito Notargiovanni, Melisa Hernandez, Lolu Oyedele and Rachel Martens, performed by Keith Wyatt.)

As the monologue ended, red and blue lights slowly faded up casting shadows on the hanging fabric. Two performers (Melisa and Lolu) entered, running through the space in a breathing rhythm, holding a large white sheet that caught the wind as they ran. The hanging fabric responded to the breathing rhythm... the lights and shadows followed the pulse: ... exhale... inhale... exhale... inhale... exhale... leaving the whole room breathing as the performers exited. Theatre director Anne Bogart describes the arresting potential of an aesthetic experience: “you are stopped in your tracks. You cannot easily walk by it and go on with your life. You find yourself in relation to something that you cannot readily dismiss” (*A Director Prepares* 63). This opening sequence aimed to give participants some room to breathe, to awaken the senses, and to begin to open up the breath as a metaphor that can be observed from multiple perspectives, ultimately leaving us all in a room that was gently contracting and expanding.



Image 4: breathing fabric with performers Melisa Hernandez and Lolu Oyedele (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

Attention to detail and continuity in the immersive theatrical environment helped facilitate the transition from a more ‘ordinary’ state of mind, and mode of intellectual analysis into a more heightened, sensual, embodied state. “[P]erhaps through participating in theater experiences the muted mind becomes embodied and sometimes the body finds voice,

or perhaps the separate mind finally becomes the audience to the embodied intelligence” (Butterwick 64). Like theatre practitioners/educators Shauna Butterwick and Jan Selman depict, the immersive theatrical environment offered each audience member a visceral experience of the mind/body connection. Anne Bogart goes further to describe aesthetic experience as “an invitation to an evanescent journey, to a new way of experiencing life or perceiving reality” (Bogart, *A Director Prepares* 62). The feeling of magic in the room at the close of the opening sequence was palpable... I liken these more expanded moments of inspiration to *the inhale* within the breathing rhythm: receiving, rising to the culminating peak of an experience.

Exhaling: The Voice of Third Things

I invited the participants to enter a smaller raised area that lay behind a large sheer curtain; cushions placed in a circle welcomed the twelve educators to sit down surrounding twenty small objects displayed in the center of the circle. I invited everyone to explore the objects with their eyes and their hands, choosing one object to hold and to use as a metaphor to introduce themselves. The decision to place metaphors at the center of the retreat crystalized during the second week of rehearsal. At that time, I had attempted to articulate the nature of the rhythm of the breath and the purpose of the retreat clearly and succinctly to my collaborators. Each time I tried to address the core topics head-on, the words fell flat and sounded like moralistic and didactic instructions! My attention was brought to educator and activist Parker Palmer’s explanation of why metaphors are so effective when addressing intense subjects that can rouse charged emotions: “soul truth is so powerful that we must allow ourselves to approach it, and it to approach us, indirectly” (92). Palmer describes this indirect approach as exploring the topic metaphorically via a “third thing”: a poem, story or work of art that embodies it. Palmer describes these “third things” as having a voice of their own, rather than representing the voice of the facilitator or of the participant (92-93). Given the intimate, charged, and personal nature of my research, I found it especially helpful to focus on “third things” that allow each participant to look at the metaphor as a mirror, an invitation for self-reflection that can be approached from many different vantage points. I implemented Palmer’s approach to focusing dialogue about “third things” by asking participant to share with the group, “how this [object] intersects [y]our own lives and evokes

[y]our own experience” (94). The conversation that unfolded (on each of the four nights of the retreat) was fascinating, diverse, complex and profound.



Image 5: educators exploring objects as metaphors in the first circle (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

These small ‘third things’ gave permission for each person to confess something about themselves... stories, images and emotions rose to the surface as we all listened carefully to the words that were conceived by the meeting of each individual with their chosen object. These little mirrors opened a window into each participant’s inner world. These surprisingly vulnerable and beautiful introductions were often met with nods and grunts of understanding, as very personal metaphors struck universal chords of resonance. This first circle of conversation asked educators to perform their object duet for the rest of us, transforming passive spectators into “spect-actors”. The term “spect-actors” was introduced by Brazilian theatre director, Augusto Boal, to “democratize the stage space... rendering the relationship between actor and spectator transitive, creating dialogue, activating the spectator and allowing him or her to be transformed into the ‘spect-actor’” (67). Boal’s “Theatre of the

Oppressed” provides spect-actors with opportunities to observe, reflect on, demonstrate and transform their reality (67). Multiple moments throughout the evening called on the spect-actors to actively contribute to the performance, not only through words and actions, but also through each educator’s unique presence, way of listening, and way of making meaning out of the experience.

Looking Out: Moving Metaphor



Image 6: rehearsal of elastic dance with Melisa Hernandez and Lolu Oyedele (Photograph by Rachel Martens, 2015)

Following the breathing rhythm of the workshop (now inhaling), I then accompanied the circle of educators as we crossed through the large curtain, expanding the circle into the belly of the space: the stage for inspiration. We spread out, surrounding the open central channel of the larger installation. Standing amidst the sheer fabric, we watched as Melisa and Lolu performed the expanding and contracting rhythm of the breath with elastics connecting their limbs. A red light and a blue light cast dancing shadows on the sheets that hung all round us. The play of light and dark, of tension and release, of coming together and stretching apart enacted between two breathing bodies gave observers an opportunity to look at the rhythm of the breath as a three-dimensional moving metaphor, and a generative source of meaning. Before looking at the breath *within* the framework of the body, onlookers could maintain a more detached perspective as observers, watching the performance of this familiar

and so often neglected rhythm. Observing the theatrical embodiment of the breathing rhythm gave participants an opportunity to feel the kinesthetic resonance of the elastic dance with similar feelings of contraction and expansion that they have experienced in the past. As they surrounded the performers, the audience members were visible to each other in the space. A kind of “entreveillance” occurred: a dynamic in which there is “observation from between or within the audience during the performance” (O’Donnell 61). While slightly awkward, this dynamic of being observed while observing other’s observing, can bring awareness to the act of observation, and to the bodies of the observed/observers.

On one of the evenings, my verbal guidance into the experience was less precise: all twelve spectators sat down on the ground lining two sides of the space to watch the performance. This more passive stance significantly changed the tone and impact of the elastic dance. The following night, I adapted my languaging and clearly guided the new audience to stand, surrounding the central channel. I encouraged them to remain alert and responsive to the movements of the performers. This simple shift enlivened the field significantly, changing the tone and potency of the performance. Throughout the performance process I was continually reminded of the delicate nature of the collaborative dynamic. My role as facilitator asked me to perpetually refine my choice of words, tone, timing and body language so as to perpetually invite participants to actively engage in co-creating the theatrical event.

Looking In: Entering the Body



Image 7: yoga (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

Following the elastics dance, I included a series of basic, yoga-like exercises. After activating participants' faculties of observation and contemplation toward the breathing rhythm in the theatrical surroundings, *outside* of their bodies, we then turned the same faculties of observation and contemplation toward the rhythm of the breath *within* the framework of the body. The inner landscape of the body then became the stage. Observing the rhythm of the breath within the body, and allowing the rhythm of the breath to guide the physical movements of the body, created an opportunity to experience the unity of mind and body that unfolds, when *both* the body and the mind *follow* the rhythm of the breath. The human body is a community of cells, organ systems, nerves, muscles and bones that collaborate in a dynamic whole that includes our physical, psychological and philosophical dimensions of being (Armstrong, *Indigeneity* 80). Wisdom traditions around the world teach us that the rhythm of the breath is a powerful currency that resides inside every human being that has ever walked the earth. Attuning our attention to this constantly present rhythm has the capacity to shift consciousness, transform perspective and reunite the disconnected parts of ourselves in an embodied experience of dynamic unity. Charlene Spretnak positions embodied experiences that facilitate a growing understanding of interconnectedness as vital to healing the relationships that hold our local and global communities together. Spretnak asserts that a practice of observing the rhythm of the breath can access embodied experiences of interconnectedness: "Through the agency of human breath the apparent multiplicity and separateness of phenomena yield ultimate unity" (100). While this experience of dynamic unity was likely not experienced by all of the participants, conversations afterward confirmed that many of the educators were able to feel a tangible mind-body connection during the various body-based practices that we explored. A handful of individuals described that this activation of the physical body near the beginning of the retreat allowed them to cultivate the mind-body connection throughout the remaining experiences the evening.

Expanding: Creating Room To Breathe

A complex system of fishing line threaded through the bottom of the sheer hanging fabric allowed the performers to open up the central space by tying the strings to six different anchor points around the circumference of the belly of the space. Many participants mentioned afterward that they delighted in the beauty of the sail-like fabric being hoisted up,

to literally create more room to breathe. Into the expanded central space, the performers delivered materials for each spect-actor to use in the task of constructing a tent or fort: their very own room to breathe. I framed the tent-making process with the following words:

Inspired by my childhood love of forts, and the distinct feeling that I get when I meditate, that my body is a tent... (it's as if meditation allows me to climb inside the tent of my body to rest) ...you are welcome to use the supplies available to design and build a tent, hovel, cave or fort... an interior space to climb inside and rest within. You will have fifteen minutes to complete the creation of your room to breathe, and then, you will have fifteen minutes to explore the interior of your creation, and perhaps, the interior landscape of your body. You're welcome to observe the rhythm of your breath throughout the creative process and during the quiet time inside your tent.

The following materials and resources were available for participants to use in the construction of their tent: queen-size white bed sheets, bamboo sticks, string, masking tape, scissors, clothespins, yoga mats, cushions, and wooded chairs. Performers were available to assist in the playful act of construction. The carefully chosen music swelled through the arch of the creative process and faded as the lights slowly dimmed, accompanying the tent-makers as they worked through the challenges of their unique process.



Image 8: tent making (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)



**Image 9: multiple tents, interior spaces, rooms to breathe created by participants
(Photographs by Rachel Martens, 2015)**

The process of making the tent became a metaphor for the learning process. The experience became a mirror for participants to look at themselves in, and to reflect on their reactions to the various stages of creating their room to breathe. Envisioning, choosing materials from limited supplies, constructing, and problem-solving were all included in the early stages. Many educators confessed their anxiety and insecurity as attempts failed. Some reported that jealousy took over as they watched others craft spaces that they considered to be much more beautiful or successful than their own, while others felt competitive and urgently rushed to create the most... the best... Still others found themselves in a focused and silent state, totally absorbed in the act of creating. All educators were engaged in the playful and child-like act of building a fort, an interior space for them to inhabit. One participant commented afterward that she had previously seen creating more breathing room as being passive and receptive... she was surprised by how active and rigorous a process it was to literally construct room to breathe.



Image 10: participants entering and inhabiting their interior spaces (Photographs by Denise Kenney, 2015)

Contracting: Climbing Inside

The challenges encountered in the creative process and in the fifteen minutes of quiet time that followed were welcomed by some and struggled with by others. I delighted in watching each educator climb inside her work of art... courageously entering the interior space of the tent... seeing toes peeking out of the humble abodes, signaling that someone was indeed inhabiting the body of the tent. At moments, the stillness and silence in the space felt tense, at times peaceful... often potent and pregnant with possibility.

In reflecting on the experience afterward, some participants counseled that they would have preferred a more guided breath meditation during their tent-time, while others wanted the freedom to explore their *room to breathe* in their own way. Some sat silently in their tent, enjoying the peacefulness of their resting place and observing the rhythm of the breath as they journeyed through their tent-time. Others found it uncomfortable to sit unguided within their tent and sought some way to cope with the emotions that threatened to take over... a few found childhood memories flooding in as they played freely within their private space. In earlier incarnations of the work, I had presented a guided meditation at the opening and closing of the tent-time. This too was met resistance as some participants wanted to explore their tent in ways that were familiar to them. Resistance to discomfort, to the unknown and the unfamiliar is a recurring obstacle to embodied learning.

By the fourth night, I offered a choose-your-own-adventure-style framework, presenting multiple possible approaches, giving each individual the permission to choose *how* they wanted to engage meaningfully with their personal experience within the tent. In future incarnations of the work, I imagine that I will keep the framing of each chapter of the experience as simple as possible, reminding spect-actors to use each reaction that they observe within themselves, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant, as a call to self-reflection. If observation of the breath (see Anapana Meditation on page 42) is given as a practice to explore within the tent experience, I must clarify, that meditation is not a breathing exercise: ‘one more thing on the to do list’ that can be used to distract from simply observing and being with what emerges from within. Anapana Meditation must clearly be framed as “awareness of respiration”: one way to reveal the many forms of mental occupation and emotional reaction that keep us from simply observing and being with whatever sensations arise and pass away in each moment (Hart 73). These same mental occupations and

emotional reactions often prevent us from fully engaging (body, mind and spirit) in learning and meaning making. Bringing attention to this internal layer of experience can assist educators in becoming more self-aware and compassionate toward students as they walk the path toward self-awareness.

More Than Words: The Art of Conversation

Throughout the evening, opportunities for more introverted moments were interspersed in a breathing rhythm with more extroverted moments shared in a circle of conversation. After the introverted ‘tent-time’, we all gathered in the smaller circle behind the large curtain for tea and fruit. The silences and conversation that unfolded following the tent-time were refreshingly different each night of the retreat. Depending on the dynamics of the group, some individuals were eager to share the events that transpired in their alone time, while others continued to reside quietly within the more sensitive and intimate space that the experience had unveiled. Giving participants permission to reflect on the process silently or verbally was vital to the facilitation process. Each educator actively participated in making meaning out of the experience in their own way, and every evening, the collective co-created meaning through the art of conversation. The retreat moved in a breathing rhythm between the individual’s process of making meaning and the collective process of making meaning.

From time to time, when the conversation drifted away from the core practice of observing the rhythm of the breath within our bodies and within the process, I gently re-focused the conversation with a question... Following the dynamics of each collective and individual process was a delicate and intuitive art, sometimes messy, sometimes magical. I practiced keeping my attention with the sensation of the breath within my own body throughout the three-hour experience, at the same time, remaining aware of the breathing dynamics within each individual and within the collective. I attempted to leave room for the tone to shift in a breathing rhythm, between tension and release, discomfort and comfort, contraction and expansion.

Facilitating the conversations that unfolded during the last half of the evening was the most complex challenge that I faced in successfully performing the retreat. Sometimes the dialogue felt like an unruly mess of tensions and tangents. Sometimes, a collective

masterpiece. Professor and author Grant Kester presents conversation as a dialogical art practice:

While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue among viewers, this typically occurs in response to a finished object. In these projects, on the other hand, conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is reframed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict. (8)



Image 11: tea, fruit, and conversation (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

The dialogue that unfolded over the course of each evening revealed that attuning participants' attention to the rhythm of the breath had indeed created a space where embodied self-reflection could occur. For some, the experience brought out a profound compassion for the rushed pace and overloaded schedules that their students suffered, while others questioned why they *hadn't* been able to create more room in their lives for meditation and rest, even though they had access to all the resources necessary to create the room to breathe that they longed for. Some teachers expressed their desire to provide students with practical tools to help them navigate the more challenging moments in the learning process, while others focused on how breath awareness could empower students to observe their thoughts

and emotions rather than being enslaved by them. Struggles with external and internal pressures that distract teachers and students alike were addressed, and stories of meaningful pedagogical practices emerged.

At times, the dialogue felt rushed and cut short. Though I could tell that there were participants who had something significant to contribute to the conversation, ironically, there simply wasn't enough time for everyone to speak and to be heard. In the future, I will create more breathing room after each chapter of the experience, to give participants ample time to sit with, contemplate and share reflections. To give each experience the time and space to be integrated, I imagine stretching the retreat out into two two-hour segments, or even into four two-hour segments taking place over the course of a weekend (or weekly for a month).

Invisible Actors

For the most part, throughout the retreat, myself and the three other performers inhabited the performance as observers, facilitators, participants or servants of the spect-actors. We brought out supplies for tent making, served tea and fruit, asked questions, and animated a handful of theatrical moments. The choice *not* to place the performers under the spotlight was deliberate. To substantiate this choice, I jump back to June of 2014 when I facilitated a four-week collaborative workshop between four interdisciplinary performing artists (Asa Sokol-Kubiak, Karlito Notargiovanni, Lolu Oyedele, Keith Wyatt) and myself. In this early stage of preparation for my thesis performance, I explored how interdisciplinary collaboration could translate the theories that I studied in the first year of my research into theatre practice. Our collaboration aimed to generate a performance that unpacked the themes of Death, Rebirth, and Transformation through a combination of dance, music, theatre, circus and live media. Our process-oriented work together revealed my tendency as a director, to default toward the illustrative, toward placing the performer at the focal point of a linear, narrative performance. Though I prize myself on being innovative and unconventional in theory and practice, I was delightfully humbled by the revelation that my default approach often produced two-dimensional, cartoon-like, moralistic stories!

A riveting conversation with one of the performers, Lolu Oyedele, in September of 2014, inspired me to explore the capacity of the performer to be invisible. In Yoshi Oida's book *The Invisible Actor*, the ultimate aim of the actor is to disappear; the work of the

performer, is to allow the audience to forget about the performer completely, and instead, see something else: what the actor is pointing to (xvii). Many hours of contemplation and experimentation led me to design the performance as a context where audience members' attention was directed toward the action unfolding *within* themselves. Our stage: the inner landscapes of the body/mind. The performers, including myself, are positioned as facilitators that are perpetually *pointing* to the rhythm of the breath by giving our attention to the breathing rhythm within the framework of our own bodies throughout the performance, and by *pointing* to the rhythm of the breath in theatrical metaphors, and on the inner stage of our audience members. In her book *And Then You Act*, Anne Bogart breaks down the art of *pointing*:

The pointing, the signaling, is what matters. If you cannot find the words to describe what you are attempting, point at it. When you can point articulately in a specific direction, others will know where you are headed. They will help you in the journey... You point to something by finding metaphors for it. The metaphor carries the meaning. The metaphor allows the receiver to fill in with their imagination. (21-22)

In the end, I was delighted by how invisible we all felt throughout the evening retreat... one educator even commented that she hardly noticed the performers. We followed the fingers of Bogart and Oida toward the invisible... toward designing a context where the actor can disappear, allowing the invisible that she points to, to become visible. This shift in orientation seemed to give the audience more authorship, more room to breathe, and more space to see their own reflections in the work.

Dying and Being Reborn

Near the end of the evening, Lolu Oyedele performed a clown number, a comedic animation of the cycle of death and rebirth. As a student and as a teacher, I have noticed that before a student is birthed into a new way of seeing and being, they often face the death of an old way of seeing and being. It is tempting to resist the discomfort and amount of time that this death-like season may take to unfold. Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration presents the season of learning where 'everything falls apart' as the inevitable prerequisite to reintegration on higher levels of consciousness (Daniels 6). Dewey agrees:

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it—either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. (*Art* 12-13)



Image 12: clown animation of death and rebirth with Lulo Oyedele (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

Death is an abstract concept that is often avoided because it brings up stories, memories and emotions that many of us would prefer to leave buried. The clown metaphor turned out to be an effective means of addressing the cycle of death and rebirth that I see enacted through learning processes, without falling into the drama and intensity of the topic that can overwhelm when it is addressed directly. As American mythologist, writer and lecturer Joseph Campbell reveals, ritual events respect and celebrate transitions, or death/rebirth experiences as vital to the wellbeing and evolution of each individual in the community and of the community as a whole: “The tribal ceremonies... serve to translate the individual’s life-crises and life-deeds into classic, impersonal forms... rehearsing for the rest of the community the old lesson of the archetypal stages... The whole society becomes visible to

itself as an imperishable living unit” (331). Lolu’s clown interpretation of the death and rebirth experience gave the audience an archetypal depiction of the seasons of the learning process. At the same time intimate and transcendental, a practice of reenacting our stories through allegorical lines can bring the very details of our subjective experience together to weave a growing understanding of our common humanity. We come to the theatre to patch together the shared meaning that our subjective experiences yield when carefully contemplated in relationship to the whole. The *Room to Breathe Retreat* embodied this transformative essence.

Meditation: A Subtle Praxis of Attunement



Within the *Room to Breathe Retreat* participants were introduced to Anapana Meditation: observing the sensation of the breath moving in and out through the nostrils. This simple meditation practice is one way to begin learning how to create more room to breathe between the stimulus and the response (see page 42 for Anapana Meditation instructions). Though the limited timeline of the retreat did not allow us to explore Meditation in depth, exposure to the practice of Anapana did slow participants down, and facilitated a collective shift in perspective, from looking out, to looking in... from the apparent to the subtle.

Image 13: participant practicing Ana Pana Meditation
(Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

Breathing Web

At the end of the evening, all performers and spect-actors gathered in the belly of the space for a closing circle. We passed a big ball of white elastic from one person to the next until everyone in the circle held on to a piece of the elastic; white lines bridged the space between us, again and again. By the end, each of us held a piece of the giant web that connected us. Together, we inhaled as we stretched the elastics to expand the circle... then exhaled as we released the tension to allow the circle to contract... Holding their piece of the elastic web, individuals explored variations in height and position in the space while we collectively exaggerated this breathing rhythm. The resulting moving sculpture was an exquisite reflection of the previously invisible web of relationships that breathed and danced as the night unfolded.

This final metaphor aimed to give participants an embodied experience of how the rhythm of the breath, when enacted in a collective, can reveal the beautiful, dynamic, and reciprocal nature of interconnectedness. Professor of Education Gert Biesta claims that education literally “takes place in the gap between the teacher and the learner” (13). He argues that a theory of education, rather than being about the teacher and the learner, is actually about the “relationality” of the educational relationship (13). Cherokee feminist scholar Andrea Smith also invokes this concept of “radical relationality” pointing to the interconnectedness of all beings, and the potential for unlikely alliances and forms of community (271). The breathing elastic web animated this dynamic relationality that extends beyond the relationship of teacher and student, to include the breathing relationships between all members of a given community. To take it one step further, in my mind’s eye, each participant in the circle represents the communities that she is connected to; the elastic web then enacts the breathing rhythm of interaction between all of the diverse communities that co-exist within the global community.



Image 14: expanding and contracting elastic web (Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

Chapter 4. CONCLUSION

Paradox

As an artist, a student, and an educator, my research continues to reveal the untapped potential that lies in the embodied practice of looking inward. Parker Palmer aptly describes how looking inward can assist an artist or educator to effectively prepare for her work: “[s]he turns away from these externals toward inner truth—not to escape the world but to return to it in a way that will allow [her] to co-create something of worth and beauty” (98). The entire research process and performance have confirmed how useful these periods of retreat, introversion and self-reflection are in preparing for the more extroverted work of teaching and performing. Looking in leads to looking out... Taking time to slow down, close my eyes and observe the nature of experience within the framework of the body eventually leads me toward more effective time management, increased quality of work, more intimate, meaningful and healthy relationships, and a profound commitment to be of service. This responsibility arises from an embodied experience of interconnectedness that rouses compassion and a palpable sense of unity within, and in all of my diverse relationships. That unity embraces challenges, tensions, discomfort, and difference as an invitation to observe, to welcome whoever or whatever is present, and to patiently watch the nature of transformation unfold in its own time and way. Ironically, rather than producing navel-gazing narcissists, perhaps tending to inner life connects educators to inner resources, awareness, and equanimity that translate directly into an ability to be useful (and peaceful) in each moment of interaction, in all of our relationships.

The *Room to Breathe Retreat* revealed how embodied experiences in an immersive theatrical environment can assist educators in translating intellectual understanding into integrated practice. Several teachers approached me after the retreat, inviting me into their classrooms and their Pro-Development days to assist them as they integrate mindfulness into their classrooms. One educator contacted me recently to let me know that she has converted a whole room in her house into a room to breathe! She invited me to join her and other educators as they meet weekly in the space to rest and reflect. I went to see the space: hanging sheer fabric, cushions, gentle colors and open spaces carve out an aesthetic context for embodied self-reflection. The responses of many of the participants revealed that the

Room to Breathe Retreat successfully highlighted the value and relevance of creating more room to breathe in our bodies, schedules and classrooms, effectively assisting educators as they work to translate their theoretical understanding into personal and professional practice.

Body-Based Practices

While I introduced multiple body-based practices throughout the retreat, the usefulness of these simple practices is most tangibly felt when they are explored consistently over a longer period of time. As educators left the aesthetic experience, I wanted to give them something tangible to take home with them, to explore in their personal and professional practice. The following five practices were including in a handout that each educator was given upon leaving the retreat:

Room To Breathe Practices to Explore At Home and In Your Classroom

1. Whole Body Breathing

This simple exercise is a powerful way to align mind and body when you only have one minute to create some room to breathe! This easy practice is also a fast way to synchronize a group of students of any age who are about to work together:

“Stand with your feet hip-width and parallel. As you exhale pour your attention down into your feet. Then breathing in, slowly lift your arms up toward the sky as you draw your attention up through your legs, through your hips, through the core of your body right up to the top of your head. As you breathe out, allow your arms to float slowly down toward your sides as you track your attention from your head all the way down to your toes. Repeat at least three times slowly. Feel your whole body breathing from the tips of your toes to the top of your head... and from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. Then try the same thing while keeping your arms resting by your sides.”

2. Balancing with Eyes Closed

When you find yourself or your students becoming distracted, take two minutes to call the attention back to the body and the breath. This exercise is often funny because it's so challenging:

“Stand with your feet hip-width and parallel. Close your eyes. Give your attention to your breath. Slowly... begin to transfer your weight to your left leg. Lift up your right heel, then maybe lift the ball of your right foot... and then, very slowly, see if you can lift your big toe one millimeter off the ground. Practice balancing on one leg with your eyes closed. Press your big toe and your pinky toe down on your supporting leg. Is it possible to keep your attention with your breath through the slow transition from two feet to one and back to two? Explore both sides.”

3. Holiday

When you feel like you need a break, or your students are asking for a break... give yourselves a Holiday! This playful practice is popular among students of all ages.

Shout the word “HOLIDAY!” Invite the students to spread out in the space and lie down on their back. “Cross your left ankle over your right ankle and cradle your head in your hands (Elbows out to the side, like you’re lying on the beach, on holiday!) Be still and silent. Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breath. Is there more breath coming in the left nostril or the right nostril? Is the breath in warmer or cooler than the breath out? Is the inhale longer or shorter than the exhale?” Celebrate any effort!

4. Anapana

Anapana is a Buddhist Meditation Technique discovered by Siddhartha Gautama to quiet the agitated mind. This practice is extremely challenging because it is so simple! It is the most effective practice that I have found for creating room to breathe between the stimulus and the response:

“Sit in a comfortable upright position. Close your eyes, and bring your awareness to your breath. Observe the sensations caused by your breath in the small triangular area at the entrance of the nostrils, in the nostrils, and above the upper lip. Focus your attention on whatever sensation is caused in this area, by the breath coming in, and the breath going out. Whatever you notice... don't try to change it. Just be aware. Just be aware of the breath, natural normal breath, as it comes in, as it goes out. Free from visualization, no pictures in your mind. Free from verbalization, no words or mantras. Just be aware of the sensation

caused by the breath. Try to hold your awareness for one minute. If you find your mind wanders after a just few moments, don't worry. It's perfectly natural. When you remember, simply bring your attention back to your breath."

5. Room To Breathe

Create a place within your home, yard, or classroom that is your Room to Breathe. A place designed just for you: for contemplation, meditation, and rest. Perhaps it is a tent, a comfy chair, or maybe a cushion in just the right place. Be creative with the resources that you have available to design a place where you go to unwind.

More Breathing Room

In future incarnations of the work, I would integrate more time in the schedule for participants to reflect on their experiences, more time to converse in dyads or in a larger circle, and more time between each complete experience. My desire to include many dynamic elements in the retreat sometimes led to a feeling that there were too many things happening at once. As I continue to offer these retreats, I will continue to practice slowing down and creating even more room to breathe in the schedule to hold space for everyone present to tend to one thing at a time.

Questions to Contemplate

In the end, I am left with more questions than answers. I am learning to reside in the questions (Palmer 129), and in the states that their continued contemplation calls me toward. The following questions were on the second side of the handout that I gave to each educator as they left:

QUESTIONS TO CONTEMPLATE

A. How can we create more room to breathe within our bodies, our schedules and our classrooms?

B. Why is it important for you to create more room to breathe in your life? What happens when you don't give yourself that space?

C. How does intellectual understanding differ from the wisdom that comes from embodied experience?

D. Can you consider the possibility that you might learn something new from the breath, every moment that you give it your attention? Consider giving your attention to your breath for five minutes a day for one month to discover if it is a worthwhile practice for you. If it is difficult to find time given your busy schedule, try setting your alarm ten minutes early in the morning. Right after you wake up, find a comfortable place to sit and practice observing the breath for five minutes. It might help to set a timer, and to leave your cellphone on airport until your meditation time is complete.

E. If a seated meditation practice is not possible for you or of interest to you, what would be another simple way for you to create more room to breathe in your body?

F. What would happen if you brought your attention to your breath in an uncomfortable situation? How might it help you?

G. The learning process is full of ups and downs. What tools do your students currently have to help them navigate uncomfortable moments in the learning process? How could any of the above practices benefit them?

H. How does creating more room to breathe between a stimulus and the response open the door for experiential learning and self-reflection?

Breathing Schedule, Breathing Curriculum

Room to Breathe: A Retreat for Educators used aesthetic context, interdisciplinary exploration of metaphors, body-based practices and the art of conversation to highlight the value and relevance of the question: *How can we create more room to breathe within our bodies, within our schedules and within our classrooms?* Contemplating this question within an immersive theatrical environment allowed participants to access the body and the breath

as resources: sources of intuitive wisdom and poetic insight. While I aimed to create a performance that reflected the process that we underwent to create it, I had no idea how deeply this integration would reach. In the second week of the June 2014 interdisciplinary workshop, I became aware of an innate rhythm that threatened to take over my pre-ordained schedule. While we had been focusing our attention on the rhythm of the breath within our bodies, I hadn't considered how this rhythm might shape the structure of the creative process itself. All of a sudden, I noticed a breathing rhythm within many layers of the process and product of our work. Most striking was the realization that the first three days of our week were spent in an intense, yang-like productive state, riding inspiration and generating material. Then, the following three days seemed to slow down: our warm-ups were longer, our focus was softer and wider, our work felt more like play, and our action could have been described as 'emptying'. Into these empty spaces, into this *not*-knowing, this *not*-doing... into this *exhale*, a seed of inspiration would inevitably enter. Whenever we took the time it takes to create this breathing room, something substantial was born inside the fertile space. While this relaxed and receptive state appeared to be non-productive, it was the harbinger of inspiration. After a day off for rest and reflection, we would dive into the deep water of the work with renewed inspiration. Storyteller Stan Chung's words resurface: "[F]loating and sinking, floating and sinking... you didn't know that swimming was the rhythm of life, rising and falling, living and dying, smiling and crying, to and fro... like the music you hear when you are finally underwater" (22). In the final weeks of the 2014 workshop, and in the devising and rehearsal process for the *Room to Breathe Retreat* (May 2015), I aimed to align all aspects of our process and performance with this recursive breathing rhythm. While it often slowed us down, the practice of attuning to and aligning with intrinsic rhythm also increased the stamina, focus, sensitivity and ingenuity in the performers. Observing the breathing rhythm within a creative or educational process, and continually aligning rehearsalschedules/classroom schedules with this pulsation, is one way to consciously practice making room for the ebb and flow of learning.

William F. Pinar unpacks the etymology of the word *curriculum*. Curriculum is derived from the root verb *currere*... running or flowing (Pinar, *The Character* 1). Instead of seeing curriculum as a fixed set of content that we must pass on to our students, what if we enacted curriculum, like Melisa and Lolu performed the rhythm of the breath (holding the

white fabric like a giant sail)... *running with* the breathing rhythm? Like Kester's definition of dialogue as product, Spretnak's emphasis on experiences of interconnectedness, and Biesta's focus on the educational relationship, the dynamic and ephemeral relationship *is* the curriculum. Active engagement within this relationality requires educators to remain both aware and equanimous... conscious of how we respond, especially when we enter uncomfortable territory. The retreat positioned the uncomfortable moments in the learning and teaching process as calls to self-reflection and contemplation. Pinar presents the enactment of curriculum in a similar way: "The method of *currere* reconceptualized curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation with oneself (as a 'private' intellectual), an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action—as a private-and-public intellectual – with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere" (*What is* 37). By paying attention to our own bodies within the learning context, we are less likely to blame our dis-ease on external causes over which we have little control, and instead begin to practice a disciplined unwinding of the root causes of the dis-ease within. The wisdom that we are asking others to apply to the educational system and to the body of the Earth, we must first apply to our own human bodies, to reconstruct unity from the inside out. From this place of integrity, our personal and humbling experiences of healing/learning can guide us as we enter the long and challenging process of facilitating healing/learning in our classrooms, and in the larger communities in which we participate.

Future Incarnations

As I move out beyond the walls of the institution of the University, I take my embodied experiences of learning and transformation with me. As I continue my work as an educator, teaching performing arts and mindfulness practices, my increased sensitivity to intrinsic rhythm places me, the educator as the observer... the facilitator. Rather than indulging temptations to assert external control, I am practicing surrender to intrinsic rhythm as I co-create brave liminal spaces and enact curriculum in concert with my students.

Like all researchers and artists, my work and my approach is framed within unique givens and limitations of my perspective and life experience. While my social position as a middle-class educated white woman needs to be acknowledged, I practice relating to "others"

(people categorized as different from myself in culture, race, class, ability, perspective...) based on our common humanity, a unity that respects and embraces our differences, our suffering, our capacity for healing and our responsibility to participate in the healing process. While the educators that attended the *Room to Breathe Retreat* were similar to myself in social and cultural background, the students that they serve are diverse. As I question the accessibility of my research, I realize that future incarnations of the work will be designed and enacted in response to my unique relationships with individuals and communities that express interest in working together. Specific programs that I might create in the future will be designed to meet the specific needs and aptitudes of collaborators, educators and students based on the relationships, requests, orientation and dynamics of those relationships.

Because I believe that educators interested in understanding the habit pattern of the mind and the nature of learning can practice meditation to deepen and even transform their approach to teaching and learning, in the months following the retreat, I host follow-up gatherings where educators are invited to practice yoga and meditation followed by a circle of conversation discussing the relevance of these personal practices to teaching practice. Observing the subtle sensations within the framework of the body and practicing equanimity can bring awareness to habitual patterns of reaction, create new neural pathways in the brain, and teach educators about the nature of learning itself. As educators, when we look inward to address the subconscious layers of psychosomatic trauma that reside in the tissues of our bodies, and observe the habit pattern of the mind that governs the majority of behavior, our embodied experiences yield first-hand knowledge of what stops us and our students from creating new neural pathways in the brain. While critics who have not experienced the spiritual dimensions and transformative potential of meditation will naturally dismiss them, at least, the retreat positions meditation as a practical tool that students and educators can use to navigate the more uncomfortable moments in the learning process.

Ebb and Flow

There is an ebb and flow, a rhythmic quality to time that is not determined by external timetables. Such a dialogue of faith embraces uncertainties, thriving on unforeseen possibilities. (Latta, "Letting" 50)

I see the majority of curriculum valuing and rewarding the product, the test-results, or the attainment of the learning objective, often neglecting the time and space necessary to

honor the value of decomposition, unwinding, and opening to the unknown (processes essential to integrated learning and sustainable growth). I look around the University context and see the weariness that Dewey characterized as the consequence for “the overweighing of certain values at the expense of others” (*Art* 188). The *Room to Breathe Retreat* is designed to bring educators attention to the value of *the exhale*, within the breathing cycles of our bodies, our schedules and our classrooms. Like autumn and winter in the seasonal cycles, these periods of moving downward and inward to rest and reflect are imperative to integrated learning and full-bodied inspiration.

The multi-disciplinary components that came together to shape the *Room to Breathe Retreat* were carefully chosen to create multiple opportunities for educators to connect with this ebb and flow that characterizes both the rhythm of the breath and the rhythm of learning: “There is no rhythm of any kind, no matter how delicate and no matter how extensive, where variation of pulse and rest do not occur” (Dewey, *Art* 161). Dewey articulates this truth again and again, exposing the natural order that is intrinsic to experience. If we as educators can tap into this current and remain attentive to its subtle and overarching guidance throughout learning processes, I believe that our efforts to teach students how to cultivate this same sensitivity and to align with these rhythms will be more effective.

This deep and continuous movement of listening and responding manifests itself differently in each moment as teachers and students interact within the diverse inner and outer climate and terrain that the learning process resides within. “Experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings. Their succession is punctuated and made a rhythm by the existence of intervals, periods in which one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing” (Dewey, *Art* 58). Making time and space in our schedules and our classrooms, for periods of productivity and rest, contemplation and action, disintegration and re-integration are vital to this underlying rhythm. Liberating processes... healing, creative or educational processes are all subject to this innate breathing rhythm. While we as students and as teachers often try to resist or control this dynamic pulse within educational processes, attunement to, alignment with, and surrender to intrinsic rhythm within the framework of our bodies, and within our learning experiences, engenders experiential knowledge.

Education as Communion

Attuning attention to the rhythm of the breath within the body, within our relationships with students, and within the learning process, can turn the practice of teaching and learning into a way of life: a humbling and ongoing process of transformation and service. That service is aimed not just as benefitting some individuals and communities at the expense of others, rather this “radical relationality” (Smith 271) asks each individual to practice respecting all diverse participants and caring for all relationships that reside within the dynamic unity every step along the way. “[A]ll which can be expressed in some aspect of the relation of man and his [sic] environment... this subject matter attains its most perfect wedding with form when the basic rhythms that characterize the interaction of the two are depended upon and trusted with abandon” (Dewey, *Art* 157-158). Dewey relates experiences of aesthetic surrender with “what religionists term ecstatic communion” (*Art* 29). Perpetual attunement and surrender to intrinsic rhythm, cultivates faith in process itself, and allows students and teachers to relate intimately with a vast and dynamic order that includes discomfort, ease, chaos, peace, death and rebirth in an infinite and pulsing embrace.

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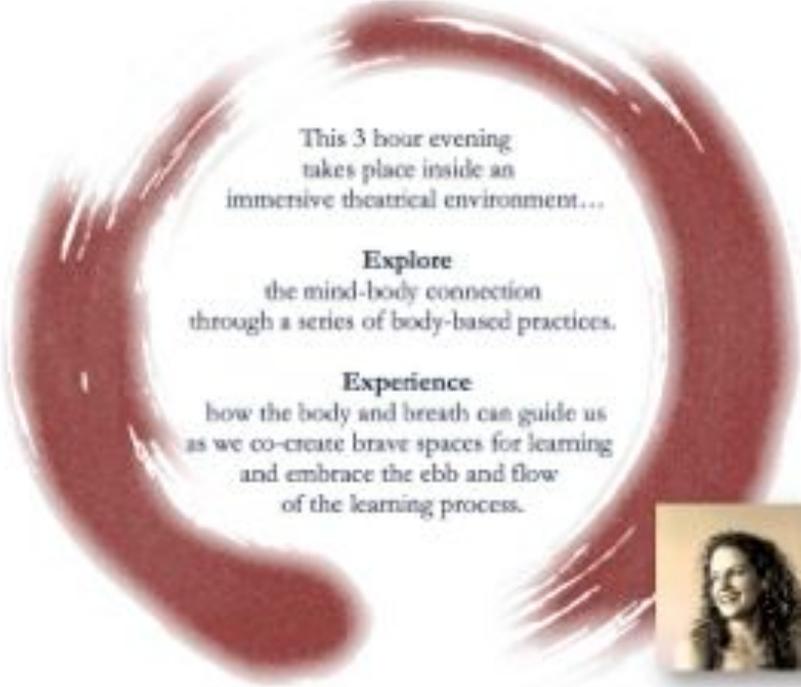
Appendices

Appendix A: Room To Breathe Poster

How can we create more room to breathe
in our bodies, schedules and classrooms?

ROOM TO BREATHE

A RETREAT FOR EDUCATORS*



This 3 hour evening
takes place inside an
immersive theatrical environment...

Explore
the mind-body connection
through a series of body-based practices.

Experience
how the body and breath can guide us
as we co-create brave spaces for learning
and embrace the ebb and flow
of the learning process.



FACILITATOR:

Rachel Martens BFA, MFA Candidate
Certified Yoga Instructor and Performing Artist
Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies, UBC Okanagan
Created in collaboration with

Melisa Hernandez, Lolu Oyedele, Lorna Turenski & Keith Wyam
ROOM TO BREATHE is Rachel's Final Thesis Project. Supervisor: Denise Kenney

TAKE A BREAK & JOIN US FOR 1 OF THE FOLLOWING EVENINGS

at the French Cultural Centre, 702 Bernard Ave. Kelowna

May 28 @ 6pm, May 29 @ 6pm, May 30 @ 6pm, or May 31 @ 4pm 2015

* All Teachers or students of all ages are welcome to join us

TO REGISTER FOR THIS FREE RETREAT OR FOR MORE INFO

CONTACT: rachelmartens100@hotmail.com or **778.212.9642**

Appendix B: Room to Breathe: Retreat for Educators Film/ Photograph Release

Date:	Producer: Rachel Martens Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies UBC Okanagan
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I, the undersigned, do hereby authorize the Producer (s) and the Producer's successors, agents or anyone authorized by the Producer (s), to:

- 1) a) photograph or film me in connection with Rachel Martens' thesis performance;
b) use, in any manner or in any media currently existing or which may be developed in the future, all Released Subject Matter which you may make of the Project , my image or my voice, and the right to use my name or likeness and images, in or in connection with any exhibition, publication, advertising, poster, research presentation, or any other use of such recording in relation to the Project;
c) store all Released Subject Matter in digital format, or using any other photographic storage and retrieval technology.
- 2) a perpetual, worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty free license to:
 - a) make copies of all Released Subject Matter using any photographic technology, and
 - b) manipulate the Released Subject Matter using any photographic technology, and
 - c) publish, exhibit, or otherwise use or cause to be used the Released Subject Matter in any manner whatsoever that the Producer(s) deems appropriate, including (but not limited to) publication on and in UBC websites and publications, film festivals, gallery exhibitions, book and research publications, and other venues, without any payment to me.

I do hereby acknowledge and agree:

- a) to waive any moral rights I may have in the Released Subject Matter, and
- b) that this Release sets forth the entire agreement between the Producer(s) and myself regarding the Released Subject Matter, and no amendment to this Release shall be effective unless signed by both one of the Producers and myself,
- c) that this Release shall be governed by the laws of the Province of British Columbia and any dispute resulting from this Release shall be brought before a Court of competent jurisdiction in the Province of British Columbia.
- d) that I will not seek compensation from the creators/producers for my involvement in this project.

I confirm that my decision to sign this document is completely voluntary and that I understand that I am under no obligation to sign this document.

Name (please print clearly):

Contact phone #:

Email:

Signature:

Any questions about the videotaping, photographing and audiotaping should be directed to:

Rachel Martens: rachelmartens100@hotmail.com



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Appendix C: My Roles and Responsibilities as the Artistic Director of the Room to Breathe Retreat for Educators

Design:

- promotional material: seven drafts of the poster incorporating feedback from advisory committee
- lighting, sound, set, prop, and costume design

Publicity:

- publicity on line and on the street: email campaign, facebook, posters, handbills, word of mouth...

Administration:

- responding to all phone calls and emails from interested educators, organizing registration for all workshops, retreats and waiting lists, sending emails to all registered participants to confirm registration and provide helpful information to prepare them for the retreat, coordinating last minute cancellations with potential participants on waiting list.
- finding and booking space for the retreat. Working with the individuals who run the retreat space to practice effective communicate and maintain compassionate reciprocal relationships.

Tech and Stage Management:

- transportation: moving all materials to and from the retreat location
- organizing, updating and communicating rehearsal schedule to collaborators, managing all to-do lists and timelines, keeping track of shifts in the script/order of the retreat and communicating them to all collaborators
- organizing and confirming all set-up, pre-show, post-show, and take-down responsibilities
- locating and/or purchasing all materials for construction of set, props and costume
- selecting, booking, picking up and returning all tech equipment (lighting, sound, projections, video)

Director:

- embody what the performance/workshop is about: in this case, maintaining a daily practice of meditation on the rhythm of the breath, and consciously practicing creating room to breathe everyday
- prepare for and guide rehearsals, facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration
- find creative ways to remain true to intentions, objectives, practices and deadlines while remaining attentive and responsive to the skills, needs, learning style and potential of each collaborator
- facilitate the Room to Breathe: Retreat for Educators, remaining true to the script and at the same time agile and willing to improvise and co-creation with each participating educator.
- design and create handout for participants to take home: practices and questions to contemplation
- schedule and host a follow-up gathering six weeks after the original retreat to continue exploring practices that attune attention to the rhythm of the breath and to provide a context where interested educators can gather to reflect on how we can create more room to breathe within our bodies, our schedules and our classrooms.
- remain available for continued dialogue after the retreat, via email, phone call or personal meeting

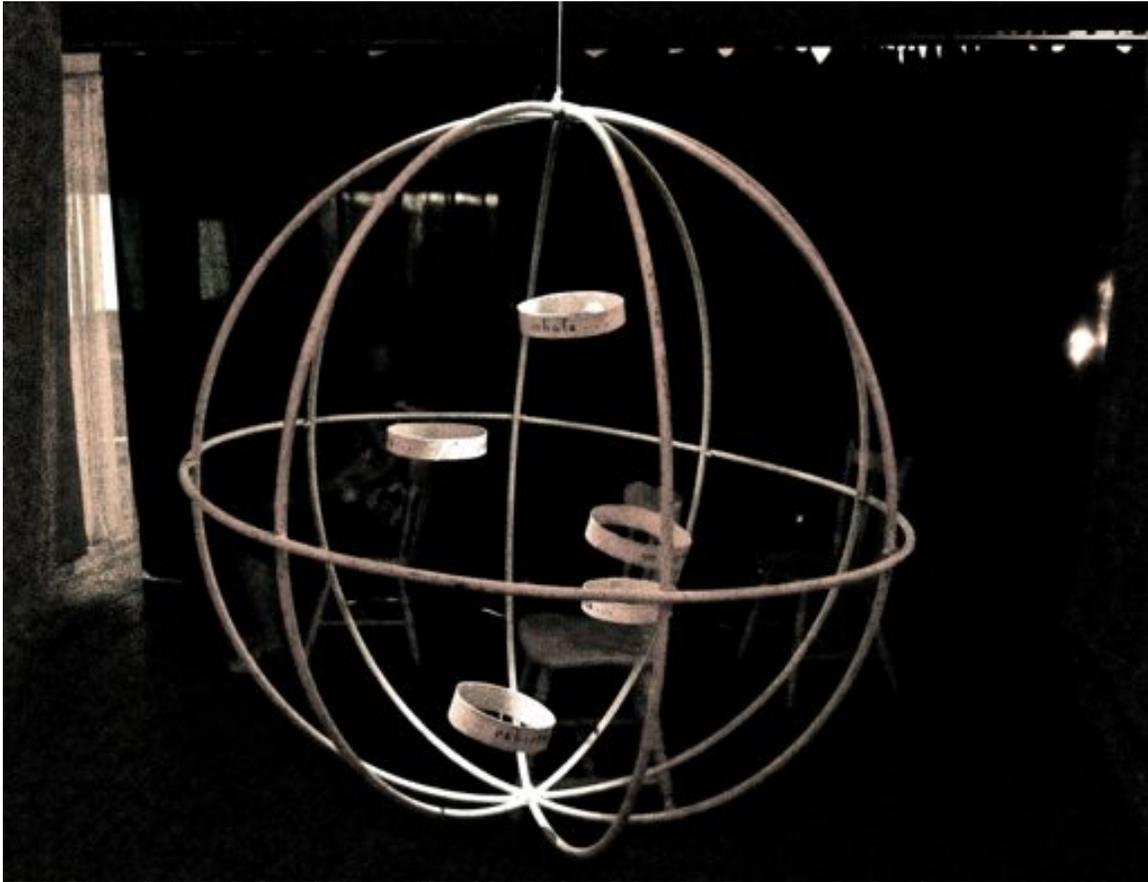


Image 15: sphere embracing circles that reunite

(Photograph by Denise Kenney, 2015)

exhale... and inhale...

contraction... and expansion...

receiving... and giving...

expiring... and inspiring...

death... and rebirth...