

Diane Conrad  
University of Alberta

## Drama as Arts-Based Pedagogy and Research: Media Advertising and Inner-City Youth

*This reflective practice case study involved creating and delivering a unit for inner-city high school students that integrated drama and media literacy/production with a focus on advertising. It used socially critical or issues-based drama to examine the relationship between youth and media: to draw out and question and have them question their meanings or understandings of advertising. Interpretation of students' responses to the work and the ad messages they created saw these young people as sophisticated readers of advertisements who made meanings that spoke to their needs, desires, and life experiences. The study used drama in all stages as an arts-based approach to generating, interpreting, and representing research. Significant teaching-learning moments that occurred during the work with students are depicted through a set of scripted vignettes.*

### *Introduction*

My reflective practice (Schön, 1983) case study involved the creation and delivery of a unit for a group of inner-city high school students that integrated a socially critical approach to drama with media studies (media literacy and production) with a focus on advertising. It took a qualitative, participatory, arts-based approach to examining the lived experiences that emerged from the teaching-learning situation I designed. Drama was used at all stages of the study to address the question: *What is the relationship between youth and media advertising, and how can I use drama to draw out and question students' meanings or understandings toward finding appropriate ways of teaching media studies?*

In an arts-based method of inquiry one assumes that there are ways of knowing and making meaning beyond the traditional *word* and *number* (McLeod, 1987). Arts-based ways of knowing include poetry, narrative, music, dance, visual arts, and theatre (Norris, 1997). Such forms of inquiry increase the variety of the questions we can ask about the situations we study, stimulate our capacity to wonder, and allow us to see or understand the world in other ways (Eisner, 1997). As a form that involves the whole person and multiple ways of knowing including word, number, sound, image, and gesture (Norris, 2000), drama encourages understanding that is subjective, embodied, and experiential.

Furthermore, alternative arts-based methods, which challenge empirical forms of research that reduce human experience to knowledge claims of certainty and truth are appropriate to our postmodern age (Diamond & Mullen, 1999). From a postmodern perspective, I see truth and knowledge as individual, contextual, contingent, and always in process. My arts-based inquiry, in making use of drama as both pedagogy and research, encouraged the ex-

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Diane Conrad is a doctoral student. In her research she uses drama as a teaching-learning medium and as a research tool to explore social issues with youth.

pression of multiple truths and the interaction of these truths to make new individual and communal meanings. Moreover, from a socially critical perspective, I see the relationship between knowledge and power in our society as problematic; as knowledge is also socially constructed, it is ideological and political. My socially critical drama work (Boal, 1979; Errington, 1993) strives to give voice to those most often silenced by our society, in this case, inner-city youth.

Eisner (1997) raises the question of how to judge the quality of alternative/arts-based inquiry. In judging the aesthetic quality of a work of art, we look for a unity in form and content. In my arts-based study, form and content merged. I engaged students in drama to explore, articulate, and critique their experiences with and understandings of media advertising and as a research tool to help me find out and articulate how my students understood media advertising and how drama could help them re-search their understanding. Drama as an arts-based methodology was used in all stages of my research, in generating data by creating drama with students that explored their experiences or understandings of advertising; in interpretation through the process of writing a series of scripted scenes depicting the work with students; and in representation in the form of dramatic text.

Using alternative arts-based forms to represent research is the most common or familiar way of using arts-based methods in the field of educational research (Denzin, 1997; Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995; Eisner, 1997; Mienczakowski, 1995; Norris, 1997, 2000; Saldaña 1999). In moving from familiar to less familiar, I begin my discussion at the end of the process with the representation of my research. I then draw back to examine the more innovative, but less recognized use of arts-based methods as means of interpreting and generating research data. I draw on Norris's (2000) argument that in improvised drama the stages of collection, analysis, and dissemination of research overlap as participants/researchers articulate what they know, frame it in the improvisation, and present it to others.

#### *Drama as Research: Ethnodramatic Re-presentations*

Alternative methods of representing research include various dramatic styles (Banks & Banks, 1998; Denzin, 1997; Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995; Mienczakowski, 1995; Norris, 1997, 2000; Saldaña, 1999). One such dramatic or theatrical form of representation is the ethnographic performance text or "ethnodrama." According to Saldaña, ethnodrama is a researcher's report in which "significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, and/or researcher journal entries or memoranda, are carefully arranged, scripted, and dramatized for an audience to enhance their understanding of the participants' lives through aural and visual enactment" (p. 60). Denzin calls ethnodrama "the single most powerful way for ethnography to recover yet interrogate the meanings of lived experience" (p. 94). In portraying my research, I present a series of scripted scenes, or ethnodramatic vignettes, which describe actual teaching-learning moments, student responses to our work during the study.

As a way of showing rather than just telling about the scripted scenes I wrote, I provide a brief excerpt from one of my scripts. In this excerpt from the beginning of a scene entitled *The Perfect Girl*, the students are sitting in a circle

on the gym floor looking through my collection of mainstream ads as the class begins.

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Candita: (*shuffling through the ads*) I love this one.

*She has chosen a fragrance ad for men. The image is a black and white close-up of a father tenderly carrying his son on his shoulders. There are ocean waves in the background.*

Mojo: It's nice. (*busy shuffling through the ads*)

Cathy: I like this one. (*Cathy has chosen a fashion ad with a beautiful model wearing chic clothes.*) I love her clothes.

Teacher: Yesterday some people told stories about their experiences with advertising. They chose one of the ads that reminded them of a story from their lives. I told a story about hair colour—Why do I colour my hair even though I don't like the idea of hair colour?

Candita: Were you here yesterday James? (*Candita is still holding the ad.*)

James nods.

Teacher: James told a story about a girl.

Candita: Tell your story J.

Cathy: It's romantic.

Candita: Come on. Tell it.

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The script explores the implications of James's story about a missed opportunity with a girl. Along with two others this entire script is included as an example below.

When I first began the interpretation of my research, I found the need to describe teaching moments in order to comment on them. The descriptions I wrote initially were long, awkward, not at all to my satisfaction. I was unable to articulate the significance of the moments in a scholarly, explanatory form of writing. This was when I came upon the idea of describing the teaching moments in the form of dramatic text.

Saldaña (1999) states that the researcher needs to "discern the most appropriate mode of presentation" (p. 61) for the research. Norris (1997) suggests that in considering alternative forms of representation, form should emerge from and be integral to the work. For me it seemed natural to describe aspects of our drama work through the medium of drama—to talk about a creative process through an arts-based form of representation. I found this the most appropriate way to represent what had emerged. Furthermore, my background in playwriting gave me confidence that I could use the form effectively. My intent was for the scripts to be exemplars in the chosen form (Norris, 2000).

In discussing his use of ethnodramatic performance text, Saldaña (1999) quotes a theatre saying that states: "A play is life—with all the boring parts taken out," and suggests that "An ethnographic performance text is the data corpus—with all the boring parts taken out" (p. 61). As Saldaña says, my ethnodramatic vignettes depict a journey not "from everyday moment to everyday moment, but from significant epiphany to significant epiphany" (p. 61). The scripts show moments that I found significant, highlights of the study,

moments that represent the teaching-learning issues that emerged for my students and me.

Before even considering the writing of scripts, I did an analysis of my raw data. I began by rereading my participant observations in my field notes and journals. I sought out recurrent issues with three overarching questions in mind: *What did I learn about media and youth? What did I learn about using drama as a learning medium? What were the dynamics between teacher, student, and curricular expectations?* The issues that emerged included: *coming to terms with student attitudes and at-risk behaviors, the need for trust, the need for flexibility, my teacher's values or my critical perspective, struggles with time, struggles to satisfy curricular requirements, students' prior knowledge or experience, and emergent learning through drama.* In this phase I also drew on comments students made, their journals, the stories they shared, the scenes and media messages they created.

After this initial analysis, I explored the issues further through a process of recursive writing (McCammom, Miller, & Norris, 2000) in which I used my experience to make sense of theory and theory to understand my experience. This recursive writing was eventually edited and included in my report. It was during this recursive writing stage that I came upon the idea of writing scripts as a way of evoking my memory or imagination of the events. In this sense the writing process was also an interpretive tool. I searched for moments during the work that best embodied what my analysis revealed.

The process of selecting moments to script involved analysis. From the work we did together I selected moments to script that focused on students' responses, including moments that displayed various stages of the work and expressed a range of viewpoints.

As my socially critical orientation also applies to the critique of my own beliefs and practices, I particularly looked for moments during the work in which I was surprised, confused, or caught off guard. I knew that moments like these, by disrupting my established beliefs, held the potential for learning. In an incident depicted in a script entitled *Blood is Thicker than Principles*, for example, a young woman who code-named herself Baby Girl told a story about the dilemma she faced when her sister gave her a Hilfiger watch for her birthday, although she was boycotting Hilfiger products because of an alleged racist comment Tommy Hilfiger made on *Oprah*. Although from a critical perspective I was not completely satisfied with the students' solution to the dilemma: "Wear the logo, not the attitude," I sympathized with the sentiments they displayed. They thought that in this case Baby Girl's relationship with her sister should take precedence over her commitment to anti-racism. I struggled in vain to find a way to reconcile my conflicted response, yet the students seemed comfortable with the ambiguities it presented. For me this was a moment that called for further exploration; becoming more comfortable with ambiguity was a lesson I needed to learn.

As my approach to qualitative research accepts that all knowledge is constructed in any case (Denzin, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Norris, 1997), I self-consciously admit that my scripts are constructions. They do not claim to be, nor ever could be, 100% accurate representations of what took place. As Banks and Banks (1998) argue, "no text is free of self-conscious constructions; no text can act as a mirror to the actual" (p. 13). In writing my scripts, although

I cannot claim that they represent reality, they do try to portray the spirit of the moments they depict based on my interpretation.

The script entitled *Media Blitz* is the most fictionalized of those I wrote. It incorporates comments made by two groups of students during two brainstorming sessions where they were asked to articulate their preconceptions of media, plus excerpts from students' journals. I drew on these sources to construct a dialogue. Although this dialogue did not occur exactly as described, the script embodies the context and intent of the students' remarks.

The scripted scenes are meant to be expressive or evocative rather than just explanatory re-presentations. Norris (2000) describes the ability of dramatic forms of representation to *show* rather than *tell* and "to provide some of the 'lived-experience' of the people involved" (p. 42). Saldaña (1999) talks of ethnodrama as enhancing an audience's or reader's understanding of participants' lives. This was the goal of my scripts.

Although they are not direct transcriptions of what happened, neither are they fiction or made up, but something in between. To write the scripts I drew on my previous playwriting experience, where I learned to observe human behavior and consider how underlying emotions and motivation for behavior are revealed through dialogue. The dialogue in the scripted scenes I wrote examines ideas voiced by students that I considered significant in relation to the study. The dialogue alludes to the characters' underlying motivations. Through the arrangement of words and accompanying action, the dialogue attempts to capture much more than just the words: to evoke the individual and contextual understandings given to the words, the emotions behind them, and their interactions with the words of others. My dramatic form wants to acknowledge that the act of speaking is more than just the meanings of words. In the excerpt provided above, for example, Candita's desires are revealed through her admiration of the ad showing a tender relationship between a father and his young son and her wish to hear James's romantic story. My interpretation of students' motivations that underlie their comments is among the issues I explore in the commentary I provide after each script.

In writing the scripts I used my field notes and journals to recall details of the work with students. I then conjured up voices of the characters I was writing. In many cases I used students' actual expressions recorded in my field notes. I also used quotes from students' journals. Often, however, I paraphrased what students had said in a language as close to theirs as I could recreate. In this sense the scripts are constructed or fictionalized representations of reality. I also had to consider character development, events or actions, settings, mood, and sequence. As in all forms of research, the act of scripting was a reduction of data.

The characters in the scripts are based on real individuals. They have the code names students gave themselves for the purposes of the research. The words spoken by the characters, the voices, attitudes, and behaviors that emerge through the dialogue, to the best of my playwriting ability, are accurate (based on what was actually said), although not necessarily precise representations. Thus the dialogue allows multiple individual meanings or interpretations to emerge. The characters are sometimes composites. At times I condensed similar ideas expressed by two or more individuals into one voice.

This was problematic in that it privileged my interpretation and discounted the subtle idiosyncrasies of individuals' ideas, but it was necessary for practical (space, time) considerations.

I also occasionally took artistic license in developing characters in order to maintain consistency in the text. The character of James, based on his insightful story depicted in *The Perfect Girl*, for example, became the sensitive, thoughtful young man throughout. Cowboy, who was a reluctant participant in *Nobody's Puppet* depicting his journey, took on characteristics of the reluctant student in other scripts too, and Adrian's outspokenness in *A Matter of Perspective* also carried over into other scripts. Although all three young men displayed aspects of all these characteristics, I developed the characters with an emphasis on one. The characters, therefore, represent distilled images of the research participants that are more contrived, but ironically more consistent (for the sake of clarity) than in life. Occasionally I put in comments that I remembered, but that were disembodied, into the mouth of the character that best suited them.

The events too are based in reality, but partly fictionalized. At times I took circumstances from one occasion and blended them into another. Elements from different sessions were sometimes merged, and comments made on one day were sometimes added to conversations that took place on another day. For example, in *Media Blitz*, I included a comment made by a young man who joined the class late to the comments made earlier during our brainstorming sessions. When I told him what our work was about, he said, "Media is good because it expands our minds in a lot of different ways." This revealed his preunderstanding of media, and as a point of view not previously expressed demanded this inclusion.

Also embedded in the scripts are details that represent what I considered common or recurring attitudes, behaviors, and actions on the part of students and myself. I included such details throughout the scripts although they may not have occurred exactly as I depicted them. I included particulars such as students' vocabulary and habits to help evoke the milieu in which the work took place and raise pedagogical issues related to that milieu. I tried to represent the authenticity of the situations as best I could.

Although fictionalized, the scripts do justice to our learning process. Although they are intended to be read rather than performed, even reading the scripts brings the experiences to life and allows students' voices to emerge in a more authentic way than they would through explanatory text. I intend readers' encounters with the scripts to provide an experiential, embodied understanding of the teaching-learning situations. I followed each scripted scene with commentary to make aspects of my meaning more explicit and to add insights that I gained from exploring the issues and writing the scenes, but I want the scripts to leave room for multiple interpretations. I expect that the reader will find meaning even beyond the commentary I provided.

#### *Interpretation through Dramatic Text*

I discuss my scripted scenes as alternative arts-based methods of representing my research, but the writing of dramatic text was not only a way of representation: it was also a method of interpretation (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995; Norris, 2000; Saldaña, 1999).

Analysis is embedded in the process of writing and in the written text. For Saldaña (1999) the writing of his ethnodramatic text was an analytic process. He describes the reduction of data for the examination of core content, the use of codes for category development, the structuring of the ethnodrama around the arrangement of language, the framing of action, and the fashioning of the plot. Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer (1995) describe their work creating Readers' Theatre from research data, including student quotes, as a form of analysis. Norris (2000) too suggests that creating a dramatic text is an analytic act.

The ethnographic vignettes I wrote involved analysis. I wrote them, after all, from my perspective. I interpreted the raw data and transformed them into scripted scenes. I chose what to include and what to exclude. I chose the moments to depict that were significant for me based on my analysis of the emerging issues. I considered the pedagogical implications of the specific events the scripts depict. *A Matter of Perspective*, for example, depicts a moment when my perspective clashed with the perspectives of some of my students and searches for an appropriate pedagogical response. *Blood Is Thicker Than Principles* questions the appropriateness of the drama techniques we were using in the given context, and *Did Somebody Say McDonald's?* raises the issue of students' desires, calling for a pedagogy that acknowledges these desires.

In writing the scripts I considered the settings, the characters, and the sequence of events. Although the analysis presents a single perspective, at least it does so self-consciously. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), research in any case is a matter of interpretation. As the researcher selects and fashions details of the research data, all field texts are interpretive. If field texts are subjective, so is the analysis of them. In this sense all understanding is a matter of interpretation.

The stories students told were their personal interpretations of experiences with advertising from their lives, such as Baby Girl's story about Hilfiger products or James's story about his missed opportunity for romance in *The Perfect Girl*. The scenes that were created based on these stories were reconstructions, the groups' interpretations. The drama work we did as a class to explore the issues raised by the scenes added yet another layer of interpretation. It was through this stage of interpretation that the slogan "Wear the logo, not the attitude," which Baby Girl's group used for their ad, emerged. To this I added a layer of interpretation by distilling the episodes in the form of a scripted scene. The levels of interpretation involved in this process do not diminish the value, but enrich the insights gained from the experience. Although every interpretation has its biases, our interpretations are valid because they were constructed in relation to each other and are recognizable attempts to understand experience (Denzin, 1997). Furthermore, in the scripts meaning is not fixed, but open to further interpretation by the reader.

Despite my single perspective in writing the scripts, the form I chose allowed multiple voices to emerge. Ethnodrama attempts to depict or re-present authentic experiences. As I wrote the scripts, the characters spoke to me as they spoke through me. As I wrote the dialogue I analyzed the experiences, the motivations (values, needs, drives, desires), and the feelings or emotions, behind the words and actions to make meaning. "The task of research is to make

sense out of what we know ... striving to find new ways of looking at the world" (Walker, 1991, p. 107). I searched for and found meaning through the process of selecting the moments to depict and through writing the dialogue. The issues examined in the scripts led to further exploration and theorizing.

#### *Doing Drama as Research*

The creation of dramatic text involves a process of interpretation and representation, but the potential for drama as a research medium goes beyond this. Some drama practitioners (Bolton, 1996; Norris, 2000) see the act of doing drama (role play, improvisation, collective creation) as a research act. Bolton explores the "possibility of seeing drama itself as an investigatory tool" (p. 187), and explores the notion that "process drama, almost by definition [is] a form of research" (p. 191). He describes the use of role-play as part of orthodox research design to reproduce and examine the conditions of real-life situations. He describes the use of process drama by teachers or researchers in which the "reflection-in-action" involved was akin to the kind of reflection in some action research designs. He cites studies that saw students doing research through drama by investigating aspects of the real world. Although Bolton is not convinced that every instance of process drama can qualify as research, he does admit the possibility if students are framed in the role of researchers.

Norris (2000) believes that "much of what we do in process drama helps us to re-look at content to draw insights and make new meanings; this act can be considered a research tool" (p. 44). Drama activities fulfill the role of research in that they help "the cast and the audience find new ways of looking at the world" (p. 44). Norris believes that drama, particularly improvised drama, simultaneously collects, analyzes, and disseminates data. He gives examples from his own practice where "researchers/actors articulated what they knew (collection); framed it in the improvisation (analysis); and presented it to others (dissemination)" (p. 44). The process of research through drama "is not linear, but a spiral in which the stages of collection, analysis and dissemination overlap as each influences one another" (p. 46).

I discuss above how I used drama as a means of interpreting and representing my research through the writing of scripted scenes, but the use of drama in my study went beyond this. The drama activities used during my work with students had a twofold function in this research context. Through drama, students became participants in the research and through drama, my research data emerged. We used drama activities (storytelling, role-play, improvisation, collective creation, popular theatre) to explore students' experiences and understandings of media advertising. They disseminated their knowledge through dramatic presentations to each other. Through popular theatre and group discussion, we analyzed this knowledge: insights and new meanings were revealed. The drama activities, students were told, were the means by which they would discover what they had to say as producers of media messages. In this sense they were framed as researchers from the outset.

Through the drama activities students re-searched their experiences and explored the meanings they gave to or created from these experiences. Through drama activities the data emerged. In this way drama became the means by which research data were generated. By participating in or observing their drama work I caught glimpses of how they saw the world, specifically the



meanings they gave to their experiences with advertising. I kept records of my observations of their drama (storytelling, role-play, collective creation, popular theatre) and their responses to the work in my field notes. In my journal I reflected on my own practice as drama practitioner. I asked students to write reflections on the work in their journals, and referred to the student-created media messages (photographs, print-ads, video-commercials) that were the final products of the dramatic process. Drama was a way of generating understanding about their experiences with advertising and about the teaching-learning process. These data were used to address my research questions, analyzed, and transformed into the scripted scenes that are part of my research text.

### *Drama as Pedagogy: Students' Responses*

Following are three examples of scripted scenes I wrote. They are distillations of what occurred during the study with a focus on students' responses to the work. The scripts synthesize the processes that led to the creation of students' media messages, the final products of the unit. They depict significant moments of learning for my students and me. Although not all the scripts show actual drama activities, they are influenced by a dramatic process. Drama is embedded in the learning that the scripts describe.

The first script, *Media Blitz*, depicts a brainstorming session that took place early on in our work, to draw out students' preunderstandings of media.

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#### *Media Blitz*

*It's early on the first day of the study. Teacher and students have already played a number of warm up and group interaction games. Now they are sitting on the floor of the school gym in a circle. Teacher has outlined the study and introduced the topic, media. In a brainstorming session she is checking to see what students already know. She is writing down key words and phrases that students come up with on chart paper. These words and phrases will be used immediately following the brainstorming session in a drama activity using sculpturing and tableaux to explore and share their ideas further.*

Teacher: So what do you think of when I say the word "media?"

Star: You mean like ... radio, movies, advertising?

James: ... and TV, magazines, newspapers.

Cathy: Internet too?

Teacher: Yup. Those are examples of media. Anything else?

Asia: It gives us information.

Cowboy: Media is good because it expands our minds in a lot of different ways.

Teacher: Okay. What do you think of when I say "advertising?"

Mojo: It's about getting you to buy.

Pooh Bear: Ya, getting you to buy their name brands.

Baby Girl: It's all about money.

James: And they use sex to sell products.

Teacher: Is it true that advertisers use sex to sell products?

Adrian: Oh ya, it's true.

Cathy: It's disgusting.

Adrian: In ads everything is always happy and cool.

Teacher: Where do you see advertisements most often?

Mojo: On TV.

Baby Girl: Ya, on TV.

Pooh Bear: Magazines.

James: Or just on the street.

Adrian: What do you mean?

James: You know, ads on signs on the street or even on people's bags and clothes.

Teacher: How many of you have ads on your clothes?

Guy: I do.

Asia: So do I.

Teacher: How do you feel about being a walking advertisement?

Guy: I don't care.

Asia: It's important for them to advertise products every way possible because if you don't watch TV, they wouldn't have many consumers to buy their products.

Teacher: How much influence does advertising have on your lives?

Pooh Bear: We all go through the name brands everyday from cars all the way down to chocolate bars.

Star: It's important to get the hottest, latest, newest fashion style out there or it's name-calling and shit kicking we deal with.

Teacher: Is that true? You get beat up if you don't wear the right clothes?

Star: It happens. I've seen it happen.

Teacher: ... What do you think of when I say "media manipulation?"

Adrian: What's manipulation?

James: You know, it tricks you into buying stuff.

Baby Girl: I think the media is only manipulative when people let themselves be manipulated. If you have low self-esteem, you're going to be manipulated into buying stuff.

Cowboy: Ya, not all ads are that bad. Some ads have the power to snag peoples' attention and use shock value ... like those drinking and driving commercials.

Mojo: I think the media is just as bad as the rest of the world for manipulation.

Asia: The media is manipulating and corrupting our society, but who really cares? People who have never been exposed to media still are manipulated and corrupted, so I'm thinking things could be worse.

Roach: Sure ads are deceitful, but they're not packed full of profanity or malicious violence or crack and prostitution. They have beautiful people and catchy words and little white lies.

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Students' responses indicated that they were already well informed about the media, about advertising, and how it worked. Many expressed a sophisticated understanding of the subtle means of manipulation used by advertisers;

some students indicated that advertisers' methods were quite transparent; yet their capacity or willingness to be critical of the messages ads sent was limited. At first I thought that they were buying into consumer culture and taking for granted the need for advertisers and consumers to operate the way they do. Later I came to see this attitude as pragmatic.

Buckingham (1993) suggests that although youth may be vulnerable to the kind of manipulation presented by the media because they have been exposed to media since birth, perhaps they are also the most sophisticated readers of media of any group in our society. He believes that the process by which individuals make meaning from cultural texts is an active process. Roach's comment that ads (unlike her experiences?) contained "beautiful people and catchy words and little white lies," was an indication that perhaps young people do read advertisements to search out their "utopian residue" (Kellner, 1995), expressions of their ideals, needs, and desires. I learned to accept students' readings of ads as legitimate.

The next script, entitled *The Perfect Girl*, was based on a story told by James. Through the process of telling the story James learned that the media influenced his ideal of a perfect girlfriend.

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### *The Perfect Girl*

*It's the second day. Students are sitting in a circle on the gym floor. Some are relaxing, leaning back. Others are huddled nearer the centre. The lesson is moving into the devising phase. This activity is a continuation/recap of the Story Circle from the previous day for students who were absent. The Story Circle is based on the premise that communicating through stories, even telling stories of our own experiences, is fundamentally a dramatic activity. The Story Circle format is a ritualized way of encouraging such storytelling. There is a pile of advertisements in the middle of the circle. The ads are trimmed, mounted on black construction paper, and laminated. They are intended as inspiration/motivation for students to tell stories about their experiences with advertising or advertised products. Students will use their stories to create scenes, which will eventually lead to the creation of their media messages. Some students are shuffling through the ads, picking out ones they like.*

Candita: I love this one.

*She has chosen a fragrance ad for men. The image is a black and white close-up of a father tenderly carrying his son on his shoulders, with ocean waves in the background.*

Mojo: It's nice. (*Still shuffling through the ads.*)

Cathy: I like this one.

*Cathy has chosen a fashion ad with a beautiful model wearing chic clothes.*

I love her clothes.

*Teacher: Yesterday some people told stories about their experiences with advertising. They chose one of the ads that reminded them of a story from their lives. I told a story about hair colour—Why do I colour my hair even though I don't like the idea of hair colour?*

Candita: Were you here yesterday James? (*Candita is still holding the ad.*)

*James nods.*

Teacher: James, told a story about a girl.

Candita: Tell your story J.

Cathy: It's romantic.

Candita: Come on. Tell it.

James: It was about a girl that I knew— but she moved away. We got along really well, had lots in common, did stuff together. We played hockey together.

Adrian: Was she any good?

James: She was a good player—better than me. We had fun together. But, you know, I never considered her more than a friend. Now that she's gone I'm wondering if there could have been more between us.

*Everyone is pensive.*

Candita: (*romantically*) Ahhh.

Teacher: Interesting ... It's a touching story James. What do you see as the connection to advertising?

James: Actually, it wasn't until after I told the story yesterday that I realized ... She never lived up to my image of the perfect woman, you know, the kind on TV, the models, long hair and beautiful eyes. She was just sort of a tomboy I guess. She didn't fit my standards for what a girlfriend should be. In fact, it was sort of a mind awakening experience for me. To realize that.

Teacher: Wow. That image of women—with long hair, beautiful eyes, slim body, great clothes, it is out there, isn't it? Your story makes a connection between that image and your personal relationship with this woman. It shows how the image helps you form values about what is beautiful—how you judge a woman to be suitable based on that image.

James: I feel shitty about it. I miss her.

Teacher: Hmm.

Cathy: Are you going to see her again? Maybe there's a chance you can get back together.

James: I think I missed my chance

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James told his story during a story-circle activity in which students were asked to share their experiences with advertisements, advertised products, or the ad industry in general. James' realization that emerged from the storytelling displayed a deep understanding of the effects of advertising on his life. The knowledge, probably latent in his thinking, through storytelling and reflection on the storytelling, became explicit. James's mind-awakening experience was a good example of how drama was used in this study as more than just a collection of activities or a set of skills to be mastered. Drama was a way of working and a way of thinking that opened up opportunities for learning. The dramatic process, in this case storytelling, encouraged a kind of learning that was embodied and experiential.

In the final script I present here, entitled *Image is Everything*, three young women create a stay-in-school message using the popular Sprite slogan "Image is nothing. Obey your thirst."

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### *Image Is Everything*

*It's late on the third day. The class has just completed the last round of presentations of their popular theatre scenes to get final input from their classmates in focusing the messages of their scenes and finding slogans for their media messages. Now, small groups of students are*

scattered around the school getting ready to take their photographs. Candita, Asia, and Pooh Bear are sitting around a table in the smoking area of the gym. Candita and Asia are taking a smoke break. They are "running behind" the other groups in the devising process because of absences and other disruptions within their group. Unfortunately, their group was not ready to show their scene to the class. They are only now putting their scene together before taking their photos. Asia and Candita tried the scene the day before; they are now explaining it to Pooh Bear who has just joined the group. Teacher is walking by, observing and providing input. Candita and Asia put out their cigarettes.

Candita: Okay, so let's do this scene then.

Pooh Bear: Well, what's it supposed to be about?

Asia: It's about staying in school.

Candita: And we're going to use the Sprite ad, "Image is nothing."

Pooh Bear: How are we gonna do that?

Asia: Okay. Two of us are sitting here with our books doing work. We're in school.

Candita: Two people are serious about doing their work. The other one is just slacking off.

Asia: She can be just coming back in from somewhere. From the washroom or something.

Pooh Bear: I'll be one sitting at the table.

Candita: I'll be the one coming in. That's my style.

Asia: So you've got to be carrying a Pepsi.

Pooh Bear: What does Pepsi have to do with it?

Asia: You know how the ad goes: "Image is nothing. Obey your thirst."

Candita: I think I'm the shit because I drink Pepsi.

Asia: She comes strutting in and then falls on her ass right here in front of the table.

Pooh Bear: How is she supposed to do that? You have to fall on your ass?

Asia: Just pretend you slipped or something.

Candita: I can do this. I know how to do it. Let me try.

*Candita gets up, grabbing her Pepsi can. She walks off to one side.*

Candita: You guys are working.

Teacher: *(to Candita who is about to try the trip and fall)* Don't hurt yourself.

Candita: No problem.

*They improvise part of the scene. Asia and Pooh Bear are writing in their notebooks. Candita struts in holding her Pepsi can high. Just in front of the table, she pretends to twist her ankle. She bends at the knees and drops backwards to the floor—still holding her Pepsi can in the air. The other characters stop working and look down at her.*

Pooh Bear: So what do we do? Just stare at her?

Asia: I don't know. *(holding up the Sprite can)* I hold up the Sprite can and say: "Image is nothing. Obey your thirst."

Pooh Bear: Perfect.

Candita: *(to Teacher)* What do you think?

Teacher: I think it's a great scene. I like your stay-in-school message. And that was an excellent stage fall, Candita. But, with the slogan, aren't you just replacing one image with another—replacing Pepsi with Sprite?

Asia: That's how the ad goes. You told us to talk about advertising.

Teacher: What about your stay-in-school message? How does your slogan get that idea across.

Candita: Because they are saying it and they are the cool ones, the serious students.

Teacher: Ya, I get that but ... well, I guess it makes sense but ... I still think the Sprite slogan is more about loyalty to a product rather than about staying-in-school. How about "Image is nothing. Stay in school."

Asia: How lame.

Pooh Bear: Hey, I just thought of something. Where are we going to get Sprite cans?

Teacher: You guys don't even drink the stuff? (*to Candita*) You're drinking Pepsi. (*to Asia and Pooh Bear*) What are you drinking?

Asia: 7up.

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The young women's stay-in-school message was based on their shared experience of dropping out and returning to school. Their message was not exactly what the assignment asked for, a comment on their experiences with advertising. Rather they borrowed the slogan from the world of mainstream advertising without adapting it to fit the context of their message. For me the stay-in-school message was still obscured by the message about product loyalty. I wondered if they had fallen victim to Sprite's clever advertising campaign, which appears to reject image, but really only substitutes one image for another. Ironically, for them product loyalty was not even an issue. Whatever meaning they made of or pleasure they got from the advertisement, it obviously was not transferred to the product being advertised (Fiske, 1987). Yet the work had value for them. It gave them the opportunity to talk about their feelings of being back at school, collectively to validate their decisions to return. The experience offered me a lesson in being responsive to the needs of my students. When I adapted the parameters of the assignment to accommodate their idea, it made room for them to say what they had to say.

The examples of scripted scenes and brief commentary I include here provide both description and analysis of some of the data that emerged from the work with students. These were some of the highlights of the study. The scripts explore the lived experiences of the teaching and learning that occurred. The experiences were significant for me in that they pushed me to reexamine my perspectives toward the issues we explored: myself as teacher, my teaching methods, my perceptions of the students, and the role of drama as a teaching or research tool. My research also examined a number of pedagogical, methodological, and theoretical issues that arose from the scripted scenes and commentary. I drew on examples from the scripts to address questions, draw conclusions, and present suggestions for further inquiry.

### *Conclusion*

The full potential of drama as research is realized when "dramatic activities shape the presentation in the same way as quantitative research uses numerical

data through all stages" (Norris, 2000, p. 44). Both the form and content of my study involved drama. Drama was the medium through which the learning and the research (generation, interpretation, representation) occurred. Moreover, the learning/research process was a dramatic process. The epiphanies depicted my scripted scenes were products of this dramatic process. The scripted scenes are an arts-based way of representing my data. Embedded in the process of writing these scripts, and in the scripts themselves, are the interpretation and generation of data. In this study, I believe, the potential of using drama as an arts-based research tool was realized.

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