# 8.  RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR
## Conclusion

*And now the girl was a poor cripple, and had to find her own way in the world as a servant to others, and she never, ever again wished for red shoes.  And mothers who saw the old cripple would clutch the hands of their children tight and warn them never to allow anyone to pry, threaten, rob or seduce them away from the thing they love.*

- *Women Who Run With the Wolves*  (Estes, 1992: 216-219)

This study explored the creation and development of characterisation in improvised drama, as tools for self-understanding and personal growth, through values clarification. It illustrated how one can create and develop a dramatic character by clarifying the values that form part of its belief system and consequently influence its actions, and then use that character as a framework for understanding how one's own value system influences one's actions. In the process, a pattern was identified that elucidates the stages of growth a person undergoes as s/he journeys through life, be that person fictional or not. This pattern was named 'The Hero's Journey,' a concept borrowed from the work of Joseph Campbell (1988a, 1988b) and Christopher Vogler (1998). This pattern reiterates and permutates, but maintains a certain shape permeating much of the theoretical research that formed the basis of the argument in this study. The same pattern was then used to devise a drama workshop series that was designed to create a double journey where participants would grow as result of their involvement in the growth of a character they create and develop themselves in the context of an imaginary setting. In retrospect, the same pattern describes my journey as the researcher in the process of writing this thesis and testing its results. This journey is reflected in the titles assigned to the chapters of the thesis.

The Call to embark on this study came as result of a perceived need in Education to create dialogue about values in South Africa coupled with an understanding that drama may provide a powerful vehicle for learning about values. The need for dialogue was highlighted by two factors: on the one hand there is the perceived complexity of value systems and the fact that they are deeply embedded in the context of a person's life, making it difficult to step back from them in order that they may be critically interrogated (Macintyre, 1981). Yet, on the other hand, it was shown that this interrogation of values is an important and necessary life skill, particularly for young people in a post-colonial multicultural South Africa where social and cultural constructs need re-evaluation (Dalrymple, 1992; Van Zyl Slabbert, 1994).

The study suggested that a carefully crafted Educational Drama process, which follows the pattern of the Hero's Journey, may be a useful tool for teachers to aid young people in this evaluation process and in forging the values promoted by the South African constitution. The suitability of drama for this task was based on the unique relationship between the fictional frame of drama, and the frame of perceived reality. These two

frames became the Ordinary World (perceived reality) and the Special World (drama) of the research. The theme of the journey was the paradoxical relationship between the two where distance and closeness, engagement and detachment occur at once.

In preparation for the journey, the work of Boal and Landy was studied. The research focus was how improvised drama can be a vehicle for making the value system of an individual apparent by creating distance between a participant and her actions. Boal politicises the relationship between theatre and everyday life by contesting Aristotle's claim that art imitates nature. He (Boal) writes that in fact, theatre imitates the theatre practitioner's interpretation of nature, hence exposing that practitioner's belief system. If a person's beliefs and values are exposed through the theatre she makes, it is possible to use drama to teach the skill of stepping back from the belief system in order to interrogate it. However, Boal's own theatre exposes a particular belief about how he sees the 'self', namely as an absolute thinking subject. This renders Boal's theory incomplete for our purposes, since he does not provide many perspectives for dialogue, leaving the final choice of action up to the absolute subject. His work also proves to be impractical for the needs of a multicultural group of adolescents when it comes to the specific subject matter of this proposed programme i.e. the personal values of participants. This is because he uses the real stories of the participants and not fictional stories which provide more distance from the personal nature of the subject matter.

Landy's concept of self as a many sided, complex system of roles, provides a more satisfying theory. His use of fictional characters and stories also provides the necessary distance for learning and self reflection needed. His concepts of role and distancing underline the idea that someone's dramatic interpretation of everyday life exposes her beliefs. Drama can therefore be used to externalise such beliefs so they can be critically evaluated. Role becomes the frame through which everyday life is interpreted by the individual, therefore understanding the role equals understanding the belief system. However, Landy's taxonomy of archetypal roles proves to be somewhat reductionist and does not provide enough of a theory on dramatic character, and the use of values clarification in the creation of character, to make it completely applicable.

Gary Izzo, on the other hand, uses archetypes as the basis for creating fully functioning characters and Vogler uses them to suggest a process for devising a story or

plot.  The work of these two writers was used to cross the first threshold into the wonder world of drama as art form.  Further distance was now created between the role and the participant by developing that role into a complete character.  To ensure the potential for learning, however, enough similarity between the fictional characters and the 'real' selves had to be maintained.  This was done by using models that establish clarification of values, the research focus for this chapter, as a basis of character creation (Izzo) and character development in the context of a story (Vogler).

Izzo's emphasis on play provides clear directions for beginners to create characters and to use them as the basis for story making.  In addition he argues that the playability of the characters can be enhanced by basing them on responses to a predetermined value system, albeit a simplified one.  Izzo's model is, however, poor in dramatic theory and therefore the ideas of Bertolt Brecht as well as those of practitioners in Educational Drama were used to enrich the theory.  Brecht's concept of *Gestus* more specifically eliminated the relationship between a character's actions and his belief system.  In addition, the simplification of role in educational drama by focussing on attitude and action, further emphasised this relationship between actions and beliefs also indicating how it can be used for learning and meaning-making.  The main short coming of Izzo's characters was that, although they had the potential for growth, they were not required to change and reach attainment of their passions.

Vogler, on the other hand, provided a model particularly for the purpose of growing the main character of a story, the hero.  Personal growth was to be the main dramatic function of the hero as he journeys through his story.  The mythic structure of the Hero's Journey becomes the link between the growth of 'real' people in the frame of perceived reality as well as for fictional characters in the frame of the drama.  This relationship was illustrated by a comparison between Vogler's fictional journey of a hero and Victor Turner's description of social drama, i.e. the phases of transformation a community undergoes during times of change.  The face-to-face meeting of the hero with his deepest desires in the Ordeal, was to be a parallel for the clarification of his values and his own evaluation of them as they are manifested by his archenemy.  This confrontation with values is paralleled by Turner's understanding of the liminal characteristics of the redressive phase of social drama where communities must interrogate their values.  The

journey was now to be interpreted for use in an educational drama series that would lead participants to the same point of the clarification and interrogation of their own values.

The journey to the Inmost Cave in terms of the research started as a study of educational Drama and its focus on engagement as the prerequisite for learning. The research focus was the relationship between the actor/participant and character and how it can be mediated in such a way that learning takes place. The first objective was to ensure that the content of the proposed workshop series would be suited to the proposed target group. It was argued that South African adolescents were in a situation comparable to that of a hero searching for his own identity, rendering the content ideal for the group. Secondly, the methodology of using drama as medium was evaluated in terms of its suitability and again, it was deemed ideal. The suitability of drama was shown to hinge on the interrelated relationship between drama and everyday life. This embedded nature of drama in everyday life opened the door to an understanding of how complete immersion in the drama, can lead a participant to new insight about herself as she reflects on the experience. Indeed, it was shown that the deeper the engagement, the more spontaneously the reflection would follow. This was especially true for young people whose cognitive, social and emotional development makes them prone to play dramatic characters to a level where reflection becomes possible. It was concluded that the engagement of a participant with a drama is also comparable with the journey of a hero into the Inmost Cave. The only questions remaining were practical ones.

As theory was put to practice, I had to face my deepest fear: what if the process does not really work, or what if it could work, but I was unable to make it do so? At the same time my deepest desire was, not just that it should work once for specific participants, but that it would produce a practical programme that can be used by others as well. Myself as practical educator had to come face to face with myself as theoretical researcher. As I prepared the sessions and executed them one by one, I realised that, while the potential of the programme was immense, it would take many more trials before a final programme could be produced. I had to face my own weaknesses one by one, overcome them and then use my strengths to make the journey work for the particular group of 19 learners. The first of these weaknesses was my own safety within the role of analytic researcher. It took me a while to take the risk and immerse myself in the drama

as I expected the group to. Once inside, I was able to employ the theoretical research I had done very successfully in building belief and engaging the group in the drama. The second weakness I had to face was my own inexperience with the process. While this was a logical effect of the fact that the process was as yet untested, it was my own desire to remain in control that nearly capsized the process. I was brought to a new appreciation for the complexity of value systems and their influence, not just on the actions of participants, but also on my own. It is with a feeling of gratefulness that I remember how I had removed my value system from the already messy conflict during the participants and their characters' Ordeal. Had I forced control, the presence of my value system may have interfered with the participants' process of discovery in identification with their characters.

With this identification in mind, I was able to observe how the complexity extended to the relationship between people's characters and themselves, and between the frames of drama and perceived reality. I had to marvel at the messiness of the relationship and the apparent absurdity of my attempt to gain insight into it and then lead others to gain such insight as well.

After initial reflection, I was able, as educator, to use the 'mess' to guide the learners to a limited insight into themselves and their values and how they influence their behaviour. I was also able to link it to some of the most important values highlighted by the South African constitution: democracy, tolerance, and respect.

As researcher, I was able to reflect further on the process in writing, as I embarked on The Road Back from the Special World of practice to the Ordinary World, so to speak, of theory. The evidence of this reflective analysis can be found in Chapter 6 of this thesis. In my writing, I was able to articulate my deepest desires, take control of them and in doing so, Seize my Reward. I used the experience to suggest adjustments to the proposed programme. This thesis, therefore becomes the tangible evidence of that ability to reflect on my own actions and articulate what can be learned from them.

Yet, I had still to prove my own learning. While I was putting the final touches on my work, I received another chance to reflect on the process with some of the original participants in a longitudinal study. They experienced a Resurrection of the process and feelings associated with it, but I was about to face a Death. Again my need for control

and neat endings came and stood in  front of me like an old friend/fiend.  This time, I not only relinquished my need to control the outcome of the reflections, but also my desire to use dramatic means.  This act would signify my final sacrifice.

This final chapter relates my own resurrection, after having sacrificed my ideals of bringing order to the chaos, and I was able to learn from it.  In this way the principles of the research that precluded the practical application are reaffirmed, but I have a renewed reverence for the complexities of the relationship between drama and living.

So, while the Rewards of this study may be varied, among them the beginnings of a powerful process that could add to the education of the youth of South Africa, the Elixir is more lasting.  It represents a new appreciation for the beauty and complexity of life and the ability of drama to frame a small section of it for just long enough so that a little insight may be gained.  It opens the door to the question of whether other dramatic principles, apart from dramatic characterisation and development, may also be used in similar ways.  One such study may involve a comparison between the creation and management of dramatic tension in the course of plot development, on  the one hand, and the causes and possible management of the tension people experience in everyday life, on the other.  Further study, that was suggested earlier, involves testing the applicability of the Hero's Journey across cultures in South Africa.  This would shed more light on the relationship between the individual, her values and her community with their values.  I would like to conduct such a study by focussing not so much on the individual but on the differences between cultures and their values to draw attention to difference in a way that would illuminate and celebrate our pluralistic society.  I hope to learn more about and challenge my own Western whiteness in the process.  Perhaps the next step would be, however, just to test a revised version of the programme to see if it can refine its ability to dance on the margins between order and complexity in a way that is practical.

The exploration of the relationship between drama and everyday life in this thesis has brought me to an understanding of the interwoven character of the two.  The idea that theatre exists in a liminal space between what was, and what is still to come, makes it a powerful tool for transformation.  Drama exists where people grapple with change, just as Boal (1979, 1992, 1995); Landy (1993, 1994, 1996); Vogler (1998), Turner (1968, 1982, 1990) and practitioners of educational drama all grapple with it in their respective

writings (Bolton, 1979, 1983, 1986, 1998; Bowell & Heap, 2001; Grady, 2000; Heathcote, 1971, 1980, 1984, 1990; Hornbrook, 1998; Morgan & Saxton, 1987; Neelands, 1990, 1995; O'Neill 1988, 1995; O'Toole, 1992; Somers, 1994; Taylor, 2000; Way, 1967; Winston, 1998)[1]. It is small wonder, then, that drama should be an ideal tool to guide the dialogue on values that is so necessary in effecting the transformation needed in South Africa from domination to equity and *ubuntu*.

The process I have devised is not possible unless it is recognised that the road to transformation is as messy as the relationship between self and context, life and drama, character and creator. As all the theorists cited in this thesis, and certainly many more beyond, try to use drama to order the chaos, perhaps this programme may be of similar use.

However, as Neelands and Goode (1995) suggest, creating order is not the only function of theatre, it also provides playful celebration and entertainment. May this programme be supplemental to the process of moving through transformation with intense concentration and in earnest, while not neglecting the need to play and enjoy the journey. In conclusion:

> We are looking for a culture which may well be less materially based but where more people will actively participate and gain the power to celebrate moments that are wonderful and significant in their lives. Be this building their own houses, naming their children, burying their dead, announcing new partnerships, marking anniversaries, creating new sacred spaces and producing whatever drama, stories, songs, rituals, ceremonies, pageants and jokes that are relevant to new values and new iconography. (John Fox, 1991: 1)

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[1] This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does mention the practitioners most referred to in this study. Others can be found in the Bibliography.