

Song as a Catalyst for Change: Teaching for Equity and Social Justice

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Abstract

As participants in the Lincoln Center Institute (LCI) Teacher Education Collaborative (TEC) in aesthetic education, based on the work of philosopher Maxine Greene, we use inquiry-driven engagement with works of art to open our minds and hearts to imagining the world as if it could be otherwise. LCI teaching artist and teacher educator plan the experiential class that precedes engagement with the performance (or exhibit) and develop an overriding question to guide the experience. Additional questions grow out of our shared inquiry, comments, discussion, reflections, and research during or after engagement with the work of art. Mind, body, and imagination are involved during the experiential class to prepare students for the inquiry-driven engagement.

In this paper I share my experience, as a teacher-educator, and that of my teacher education students as participants in inquiry-driven engagement with a number of works of art. In particular, I focus on inquiry-driven engagement with a performance featuring internationally known storyteller and singer, David Gonzalez, whose work grows out of his Puerto Rican heritage. The overriding questions in my inquiry into this experience ask if and how song, when viewed through the eyes of a participant in aesthetic education, can lead to discoveries about ourselves, others, our teaching and learning, and the world. Can song be a catalyst for change, for teaching for equity and social justice?

Contextual Background

The context of my teaching and participation in the aesthetic education collaborative

The demography of North America is changing as immigrant populations continue to come to Canada and the US. Moves within cultures can be difficult; moves across cultures can be even more challenging. Such moves often position people as the *other* in society and deny them equality of opportunity. Even within mainstream society, some members are subjected to biases and prejudices.

As teacher educators, our responsibility is to work towards remedying such injustices, "educating to change the meaning of human experience (Gowin in Greene, 1988, p. x)." In "educating in freedom" we engage in a "learning, and learning how to learn" that "give us freedom from oppression (p. x)." We recognize that in our knowing "the knower and the known are co-present, each modifying and shaping the other (p. x)." It is necessary, therefore, to raise our own consciousness and that of our teacher education students to the unfairness that exists in our society and to create a classroom environment in which we can imagine new ways of being with each other in the world. We can begin this process by creating classroom places and spaces in which we do not accept the given as the only way, but question, dialogue, and imagine. In such a milieu we can teach for equity and social justice.

According to Greene (1988) "...a *teacher* who teaches for equity and social justice is one who is in search of his/her own freedom (p. 14)." She contends that "[such a teacher] may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own." Furthermore, "children who have been provoked to reach beyond themselves, to wonder, to imagine, to pose their own questions are the ones most likely to learn to learn."

A reflective and socially conscious teacher can create a comfortable, safe, and democratic milieu for his/her students, one in which students and teacher share ownership, create a climate of inquiry (Wolf, 1987), and treat each other with dignity and respect. The teacher/facilitator (Dewey, 1938) is one who acknowledges the experience of students, encourages their creativity and imagination, instils within them the desire to go on learning, and creates the types of experiences that prepare them to become participating members of a democracy.

Aesthetic education: one possible pathway to teaching for equity and social justice

As a participant for the past four years in the LCI TEC, I have integrated an aesthetic education component into each of my graduate and undergraduate courses. Greene (2001), LCI philosopher-in-residence, defines aesthetic education as an "approach to teaching and learning in the arts which is carried out in partnership with educators and students.... [and which] deepens an understanding of oneself and the world through active engagement with specific works of art (p. 3)." She sees education, in the context of aesthetic education, as:

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[A] process of enabling persons to become different, to enter the multiple provinces of meaning that create perspectives on the work. To enter these provinces (be they those identified with the arts, the social sciences, the natural sciences), the learner must break away from the taken-for-granted... and look through the lenses of various ways of knowing, seeing, and feeling in a conscious endeavor to impose different orders on experience (p. 5).

Greene (1988) emphasizes the "focal role of the arts and art experience in releasing human imagination and enabling the young to reach toward their vision of the possible (back cover)." She believes that the possibilities for aesthetic education are limitless, for "... the arts are almost always inexhaustible. There is no using up of a painting, or concerto, or poem. If they have any richness, any density at all, they are inexhaustible; there is always more (Greene, 2001, pp. 206-207)."

Greene's (1988) work "arises out of a lifetime's preoccupation with quest, with pursuit. On the one hand, the quest has been deeply personal: ... while reaching, always reaching, beyond the limits imposed by the obligations of a woman's life." She contends that on the other hand, "[I]t has been in some sense deeply public as well: that of a person struggling to connect the undertaking of education...to the making and remaking of a public space, a space of dialogue and possibility (p. xi)."

Her hope is "to remind people of what it means to be alive among others, to achieve freedom in dialogue with others for the sake of personal fulfillment and the emergence of a democracy dedicated to life and decency (p. xii)." This implies a context of equity and social justice.

Inquiry-driven engagement with works of art: the aesthetic education experience

The LCI, in its unique approach to education of actively engaging students in ongoing inquiry and reflection,

supports learning across the curriculum, builds critical thinking skills, and stimulates the perceptual abilities of young [and older] learners. In the process, unexpected connections are made, alternative points of view considered, complexities explored, and

doors to new and imagined worlds are opened (Lincoln Center Institute, n.d.).

The aesthetic education experience has several components. It usually consists of one or two experiential classes that are facilitated by an LCI teaching artist in preparation for an inquiry-driven engagement with a particular work of art. Discussions, debriefings, reflections, and inquiry are critical to the experience, as are the making of connections between the experiential class and engagement with the work of art and with the goals of the particular education course under study and our teaching practices. The LCI annual repertoire of works of art is extensive and diverse. To assist in the study of each, LCI staff members compile an invaluable resource binder, formerly in print but now online, entitled *Window on the Work*. Additional resources are available at the Heckscher Foundation Centre (and online) and from the libraries of the LCI TEC participating colleges and universities.

The teaching artist and the teacher educator plan the experiential class that precedes the performance (or exhibit) and develop the overriding questions to guide the experience. Additional questions grow out of our shared inquiry, discussions, reflections, and research, before, during or after engagement with the work of art. Mind, body, and imagination are connected (Samson, 2005) during the experiential class to prepare students for the inquiry-driven engagement.

An aesthetic education component can be integrated into most teacher education curriculum courses and subject areas. However, some modification of the syllabus and curriculum is usually necessary. Critical to the integration on the part of the teacher are interest, a commitment of time and energy, and an "openness and a sense of exploration: there must be breaks from ordinariness and stock response (Greene, 2001, p. 28)." Risk-taking is required of both teacher and students.

Inquiry-driven engagement with works of art moves us from the insularity of our own perspectives of the world to the perspectives of others. In the sharing of our imaginings, experiences, and knowledge, we develop empathy for and understanding of each other; together we build a sense of community. In the process we come to understand, see, and imagine things in new ways. Sometimes it is the songs, included in these works of art, that are catalysts to this process of change.

My Experiences of Song as a Component of a Work of Art: A Catalyst for Change

The initial step in bringing about change is the creation of an awareness or consciousness of a need for change. According to Greene (1988),

Consciousness is the capacity to pose questions to the world, to reflect on what is presented in experience.... Human consciousness, moreover, is always situated; and the situated person, inevitably engaged with others, reaches out and grasps the phenomena surrounding him/her from a particular vantage point and against a particular background consciousness (p. 21).

Concerts have been performed and songs have been written to protest injustices and to highlight the need for change. As teacher educators we can raise the consciousness of our students about social injustices; we can motivate them to teach for change; they, in turn, will motivate their students to "come awake, and find new visions, new ways of living in the fragile human world (Greene, 2001, p. 207)."

As a participant in the LCI TEC and accompanied by several different groups of students, I have looked through a lens of song at four very different works of art: *Shadow's Child*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Secret History: Journey Abroad, Journey Within*, and *As if the Past Were Listening*. In each, song played an important but slightly different role in helping us see the world from another perspective. Each song became a catalyst to change in our thinking, beliefs, attitudes, and practices. In the remainder of this paper, I provide a brief description of my experiences with the first three works of art, an in-depth discussion of the fourth work of art, *As if the Past Were Listening*, and my perception of the role of song within each.

Shadow's Child

Shadow's Child, inspired by a passage in the book, *Blanche on the Lamb* by Barbara Needy, is a collaboration between the National Song and Dance Company of Mozambique and the Urban Bush Women Company, New York. The former was created in 1979, just four years after Mozambique won its freedom from Portugal. Its mandate is to collect, preserve, and value through public performance, the major expressive art forms of Mozambique. The latter was created as "a performance

ensemble that explores the use of cultural expression as a catalyst for social change (LCI, 2002b)."

This production, which was six years in the making, told the story of a Mozambican family—father, mother, and young daughter, Xiomara—and their immigration to Florida. In their oral and written responses to this work of art, some students shared deeply buried memories of immigration and experiences of exclusion. They wrote also about their empathy for North American Indian, Blue, and Mozambican, Xiomara, the 11/12-year old girls in *Shadow's Child*. In addition, students connected the work of art to their individual personal and professional goals and our course objective of becoming teachers who are responsive to diversity, teachers who treat all with dignity and respect.

It was the use of song within *Shadow's Child* that allowed us to feel, to such an intense degree, Blue's pain at being excluded, unable to play with other children during the daytime, due to her allergy to sunlight. Song helped us feel the extent of Xiomara's pain as an immigrant child, who initially was taunted by members of the Mozambican community who had immigrated to Florida earlier. Song also was used to highlight, among other things, a loving relationship between Xiomara and her mother, the feeling of acceptance that accompanies initiation into puberty in the context of her Mozambican community, the feelings evoked by being insider and outsider, and the cruelty of children towards each other.

Sometimes the aesthetic education component of a teacher education course may require inquiry-driven engagement with two different works of art. In preparation for the aesthetic education experience with *Shadow's Child*, students participated in an inquiry-driven engagement with the *Facing the Mask* exhibit at the Museum for African Art. During the experiential class that prepared them for this engagement, students took part in a mask-making session. Students' diversity of cultures and experiences with masks provided an opportunity for them to connect with each other while creating sharing and later to engage with the mask exhibit at an experiential and therefore more meaningful level. It provided a connection to African culture in general and an entry point for engagement with *Shadow's Child*. Through participation in these activities and subsequent engagement with *Shadow's Child*, students gained new understandings about themselves and others and were motivated to research topics such as immigration, collaboration, matriarchal societies, and the continent, countries, cultures, and art of Africa.

Fire on the Mountain: Bob Greene's bluegrass music

In the experiential class that prepared them for *Fire on the Mountain*, the Bob Greene performance of bluegrass music, students became cognizant of the power and origins of song and the connections of a song to the songwriter's experiences. At the beginning of the class, the teaching artist invited us to share stories of music and song in our lives. Tomika, an undergraduate student, shared her story of the gift of song and its significance in her relationship with her grandmother in life and at her death. Others shared stories of the meaning of song and music in their lives. Later in this class, in groups of five, the students composed the lyrics and music for their own songs. In their sharing of these songs they were surprised to find that each group had written about the experience of coping with student teaching and life.

My students and I watched *Fire on the Mountain* with several groups of primary grade children from a nearby school. This provided an opportunity for the student teachers not only to view the performance, but also to observe these young children respond to it. This proved to be an interesting and enlightening learning experience and a topic of much discussion.

During this aesthetic education process, the student teachers developed a newfound appreciation for song and its role in our lives. They also gained an appreciation for bluegrass music, the people of the Appalachian area, and the contribution that these people make to the way of life in larger cities. The experience, however, presented some challenges, one of which was the breaking down of stereotypes related to bluegrass music and those people who enjoy it. The movie, *Songcatcher*, proved to be beneficial in this process. It also helped us to understand the role that music plays in a culture and history and depth of a people's relationship with music and song. As teachers we came to realize the importance of opening spaces in our classrooms in which to dialogue, confront our biases, and work towards teaching for equity and social justice.

Secret History: Journey Abroad, Journey Within

Ping Chong's docudrama, *Secret History: Journey Abroad, Journey Within*, featured three recent refugees from Iran, Kosovo, and Liberia. In preparation for engagement with this work of art, we participated, during the experiential class, in activities that highlighted exclusion and inclusion. The activities centered on our experiences with circles and secrets, both of which can include or exclude. Exclusion and inclusion took on new meaning.

During the performance two American narrators supported the refugees as they shared their stories of political persecution and the atrocities that they had endured prior to coming to the US. At some point in the performance, the refugees sang songs from their homelands.

Although we did not know for certain what the words of the songs were saying, they connected us with the refugees, allowed us to sense their meaning, and recognize their longing and love for their homelands. This heightened our understanding of the difficulty, tensions, and dilemma that the refugees were experiencing in seeking political asylum in a country where the language, customs, and attitudes are so very different. During the performance the refugees told of the challenges, and sometimes the obstacles, that they were encountering in trying to make a life and a living in NYC.

As a result of inquiry-driven engagement with this work of art, many mainstream American students gained a deeper understanding of the word "refugee." Again, as with *Shadow's Child*, the word "immigrant" took on a whole new meaning, as did the experience and process of immigration. This work of art challenged our thinking and left us with many unanswered questions; as a result many of us were motivated us to research the political situations in the refugees' countries and to critique the immigration process in our own.

As if the Past Were Listening

In preparation for engaging with *As if the Past Were Listening* featuring David Gonzales, each group of students participated in one or more classes. During the first of two pre-performance experiential classes for one group of students, teaching artist Paul Bernstein initially engaged students in activities such as gesturing while sitting safely in their seats. Gradually he moved them to more advanced storytelling activities that invited them to move around the room and to interact in new ways.

During the second experiential class, students shared stories about an artifact that they had been invited to bring from home and which, in some way, was significant in their family's history. After working together in pairs, students embellished their stories with gestures, music, songs, and props and retold them. These activities prepared participants for an inquiry-driven engagement with *As if the Past Were Listening*. They also provided opportunity for students to gain an increased awareness of themselves and others, the work of art, and the possible experience and context of the artist who created it. In addition, they were able to make connections between the experiential class activities and their teaching.

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Students' written responses to the engagement with the work of art indicated that the degree of engagement with David's storytelling and singing was increased by participation in the experiential class.

David Gonzales and As If the Past Were Listening—an introduction

As if the Past Were Listening features David Gonzalez (2002a), "master storyteller, poet, writer, singer, and astute observer of our complex culture," whose work is grounded in his heritage and his love of creation myths (LCI, p. 9). According to Campbell and Moyers (1988), mythology "is the song of the imagination, inspired by the energies of the body (in LCI, 2002a, p. 39)." It has the power to lead one to greater consciousness and greater sensitivity (2002a, p. 39). David's use of myth confirms this.

In the telling of creation myths, David shares the complexity of that heritage. He is drawn to myth because whereas "evolution of science is magic...the scientific answers don't bring us closer to our humanity and to the natural world; the myths do. Creation myths have both cosmic and human dimensions. So we see ourselves in the natural world (Interview with Masters in *Window on the Work*, 2002, p. 11)."

David considers his Muse, or divine inspiration, as not exclusively Latino but a complicated mix. His "inspiration as an artist" is complicated also and "comes from many sources, partly from [his] heritage but mostly from being in the modern world, in modern relationships, and in the moment. All the challenges of what it means to be a human being, a living being (Interview with Cheryl Berretta *et al*, 2002, p. 15)."

Mythology, like David's heritage, is not simple. According to Campbell (1988), "Every mythology has grown up in a certain society in a bounded field. Then they come into collision and relationship, and they amalgamate, and you get a more complex mythology (Campbell & Moyers, 2002, p. 39)." He suggests that "If you want to find your own mythology, the key is with what society do you associate?"

David and storytelling

David, who is of Puerto Rican and Cuban heritage, says that he grew up in the "Republica" of the Bronx where his "group was Jewish, Irish, black, Italian, Dominican, [and] Chinese." He recalls that his "neighborhood was a crossroads: lower-middle class, working class—everything was there. It was a privileged place to be (p. 15)." He began storytelling at the age of seven when his uncle built a puppet theatre for him. David made the puppets and created the stories.

Stories and storytelling play a very important role in our lives. "We tell stories about ourselves that are historical, explanatory, and foretelling of the future. 'Man,' says the moral philosopher McIntyre, is 'essentially a story-telling animal' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 24)." Stories "have been told as long as speech has existed, and *sans* stories the human race would have perished, as it would have perished *sans* water (Dinesen, *Window on the Work*, 2002, p. 22)."

Storytelling serves many purposes; "it entertains, informs, and instructs and is the most complete way of communicating (Acheba in interview with Baker & Draper, p. 27)." From the beginning, music has been associated with storytelling for the first professional storytellers were bards or singer-performers; they were of two types: praise-singers and chronicler-historians. In actuality, storytellers became the genealogists, historians, and keepers of the cultures, as well as entertainers (Greene, p. 22). David continues the tradition of keeper of his culture and entertainer.

David's storytelling and music, in keeping with his heritage, celebrate the Latin culture. He tells us that "Latino" is an...

extremely complex word. A Latino is a mestizo, "the mix," a person with Indian roots and heritage, who, however, speaks Spanish with his American family. Eight generations earlier, that person [person's ancestors] probably spoke Quechua, or some other Indian language (Gonzalez, p. 12).

David's parentage is European-Cuban and Afro-Indian Puerto-Rican. His purpose in creation myth storytelling is to educate while entertaining (Service, p. 77). His "stories have a moral, whether it's about having courage, trusting one's self, learning the benefits of hard work, or the mystery of creation. Kids [through participation in his storytelling] get the message while they're having a blast (p. 7)."

David and song

Although David is billed as a storyteller, his performance is one of continuous song. This is not surprising for he comes to storytelling through music. David says, "[Music] is my first art. The essential melody running through my head is a continuous line in jazz. But in storytelling, that becomes the emotional essence of a story, its meaning (p. 22)."

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David's performances are so rhythmic from beginning to end that it is hard to tell where the actual singing of a song begins and where it ends. I do not mean that David uses his voice to sing in the conventional sense throughout the performance, but that he maintains a sense of song and rhythm, even where there is no actual song. His singing extends beyond song as performed only by the human voice.

Throughout the performance, David sings with every part of his being—his voice and body and the way in which he uses them. This singing is song as in the rhythm and pace of the telling of the story and in speech made musical by phrasing, expression, metaphor and simile, rests and pauses, and crescendos and diminuendos. Then there are the non-human sounds, facial expressions, gestures, mime, body language, and the use of the space that surrounds him. His holding and playing of the guitar and his varied physical movements through and in space contribute to this sense of song. Sometimes David's body actually becomes the instrument or object about which he is speaking and his voice provides the accompanying sound effects. As one of my students wrote, "David understands that the audience should feel [the story] as well as comprehend it (Francine, 2004)." Song helps us to do this.

David is not content only to have us view the performance; he wants us to participate in it. Right from the beginning, he invites us in, draws us in naturally and we become participants in the storytelling and the singing. By inviting us to play a supportive role in the performance, he ensures that we are paying attention. His message, therefore, is heard at a deeper level and has an even greater impact upon us. This participatory role demands that we pay close attention to David and his storytelling for we have to know our cues: when to come in, what to sing or say, and how to sing or say it. This invited involvement increases our connection with not only the story and the song, but with the overall aesthetic experience and what we derive from it.

In addition, the content of David's performance and his use of languages are inclusive. His choice of material, the creation myths, appeals to us. His interweaving of the English and Spanish languages gives Spanish-as-first-language speakers affirmation and, at the same time, introduces English-only speakers to the musicality and singing qualities of Spanish, its sound, rhythm, and expressiveness. Because of the way in which David interweaves and integrates Spanish and English throughout his storytelling, we not only get the meaning of the story, but also enjoy it immensely. We do not feel like outsiders because of our unfamiliarity with either language but, instead, feel a sense of comfort with both; the usual frustrations and discomforts, relative to trying to understand an unknown language, are absent.

David's abilities as an accomplished poet contribute to the sense of song inherent in his performances as does the accompaniment of Daniel Kelly, accomplished and internationally known keyboard artist. Daniel's music heightens the sense of song that permeates David's storytelling and deepens our participation and engagement. The camaraderie that exists between David and Daniel contributes to the rapport between the performers and the audience and that, in turn, increases our involvement and engagement with this performance-work of art.

While introducing us to the creation myths of his heritage, David stories and sings us across cultural borders in a most enjoyable way; one that entertains yet, at the same time, provokes our curiosity, even sets seeds of inquiry, and enriches our everyday lives. We are left with a desire to know more of and about these creative myths and to discover the mythology of our own and other societies.

The relationship between David and his audience

David has a doctorate in music therapy from New York University and his many years as a music therapist have given him deep insight into relationship and relationship building. It is not surprising that in his storytelling a dynamically reciprocal relationship develops between the teller and the audience. David says that, when he reaches out his hands in storytelling, "they only complete half a circle." It is the audience, "reaching out with ... imagination... grabbing hold of [the] story, who complete [it]" (*Window on the Work*, 2002, p. 11).

To begin with, the story itself is meaningful to the storyteller. David gives each of his stories "an endorsement of the heart;" he explains,

When I tell a story, instead of reading from a book, it's clear to you that it's coming from within me. The unconscious message is that the story means something to the teller. I've taken the time to remember it and reshape it (Masters, p. 11).

The sharing of the story is important to David. He believes that "what's supreme in storytelling is rapport and engagement with the audience, so that what I call 'the essential architecture' of the story sings through me (*Ibid*)."¹ David, therefore, stresses the importance of knowing

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... your audience and the environment you're in. In one neighborhood, kids need to be physically engaged immediately, while in another it's the opposite; kids of the same age expect that through a sort of mental linguistic charm, the rest of me will follow. That's age and culture which is sometimes a hard thing to read (p. 14).

David's strategies for involving the audience

David uses many techniques to involve us in his singing and storytelling. His eye contact acknowledges the audience's presence and, at the same time, makes David aware of the audience's response. Based on this response, he shapes his performance in regard to how intensely he uses his voice, the kind and sophistication of the language he chooses, and the use of more or less rhythm, rhyme, or stress in his voice (personal communication: Interview with Cheryl Berretta *et al*, March 18, 2002 and *Window in the Work*, 2002, p. 14).

David admits to using surprise and mystery to keep the audience involved. He calls this interplay with the audience a "beautiful dance." He involves members of the audience and keeps their attention to an even greater degree through his guitar music and the use of his body. His facial gestures and pauses add to the drama. David is not satisfied with only having us hear him, he wants to engage and release the imaginations of members of the audience (p. 14); he does this and more.

His ability to embody dramatic action similar to mime gives David a greater physical presence, a sense of *la comédie des muscles* (the drama of the muscles) and flexibility. It heightens the level of communication and human connection between David and the audience for mime transcends language barriers. Decroux refers to mime as "not just an alternative to words" for in mime "[w]e take action, we represent things that move, we show moving things which remind us of the human condition, the primary condition. ... [mime artists] can put spiritual things into their representations of material things (p. 32)."

It is not surprising that Andrea Masters (2002) has described David's unique style of storytelling

as not unlike a shamanistic incantation...a call to go beyond our preconceived, rational sense of things and to move closer to a sense of awe, of poetry, of fun, of magic that is all around us.... He

asks the audience to consider the myth's primitive wisdom... to meditate on the dazzling complexity and interconnectedness of all living things (p. iii).

David, storytelling, and identity

Storytelling, for David, is "an inward journey (p. 39)." He admits that "being alone and afraid is a sad but normal part of life" and suggests that "an antidote to this fear is to belong to each other, and we begin doing that by listening to each other's stories. We identify. We see our lives in each other (p. 11)."

David believes that in his work with creation myths, he is searching for his own identity and that "[o]nce we know who we are, we are better equipped to move on." In preparing for *As if the Past Were Listening*, David explored the pre-Columbian, Indian roots of the Latino identity and admits that this project was a quest for that missing piece in [his] own identity (p. 125)."

As if the Past Were Listening: myths included in the program

The creation myths included in *As if the Past Were Listening* are *Colours*, *Milky Way*, *OvenBird*, *Milomaki*, and *the Man Who Could Make Trees Sing*. The first three are from Eduardo Galeano's best-known work *Memory of Fires*, "a literary collage recreating many pre-Columbian myths which conjure other myths, historical events, and people up through the 1980s (p. 3)." Galeano "bemoan[ed] the conquest of the Americas in a magical and poetic voice" and wrote to rescue the history of Latin America from oblivion for he believed that

Latin America has been despoiled of [its natural resources].... its memory has been usurped. From the outset it has been condemned to amnesia by those who prevented it from being.... I am a writer who would like to contribute to that kidnapped memory of all America, but above all Latin America: I would like to talk to her, share her secrets, ask her of what difficult clays she was born, from what acts of love and violation she comes.
(Galeano, translated by Belfrage, p. 3)

David, in his telling of the creation myths, is contributing to Galeano's cause.

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It may have been David's love of heritage, music, song, poetry, and creation myths, and his search for his own identity that led him to compose his own creation myth, the fifth selection on the program. *The Man Who Could Make Trees Sing* is based on the real-life relationship which David enjoyed with his Uncle Tio Jose, the guitar maker. David, in creating his contemporary myth in what appears to be a very different world, is driven by needs similar to those that motivated the creators of the original creation myths thousands of years before. Hamilton (1988) describes these creators as having

a sense of wonder and glory of the universe. Lonely as they were by themselves, early people looked inside themselves and expressed a longing to discover, to explain who they were, why they were, and from what and where they came (p. 39).

This longing to discover and explain seems to be part of the human condition, something that we have in common as humans and which crosses the borders of culture and language. David's telling of the creation myths allows us to cross these borders. The creation myth, *Milomaki*, accomplishes this in such an enjoyable way.

The creation myth, Milomaki

Milomaki, the fourth selection that David shared, is a creation myth based on the mythological figure of the same name. According to David, this "story represents our imagination, [our] healing imagination." *Milomaki* is the story of a healer who lives high in the mountain, El Yunque. Down below in the village live the fishermen who work hard and long hours. When hurt, tired, or angry, they climb the mountain to Milomaki, who with his singing and his "blessing" can heal and restore them and make their hearts full of love. They can then return to their families and their work.

On the particular day about which David sings, Milomaki worked for a very long time to heal the tired fisherman. Since they were extra ordinarily tired, it took much longer than usual. When revitalized, the fishermen travelled down the mountain, went home, and cooked and ate their fish. Within hours they and their families became very ill for the fish that they had eaten had been left in the heat and the sun for many hours while they were visiting with Milomaki. The fisherman became very angry. The events which followed resulted in the creation of the royal palm tree that is native to David's Puerto Rico and Cuba.

The musicality of David's performances spills over into his conversation to such a degree that Andrea Masters, when interviewing him about his storytelling, remarked, "When you talk about it [your storytelling], it sounds a lot like music (p. 11)." David explained:

Yes, [it does]. Because I come to it through music. It's my first art. The essential melody running through my head in a continuous line is a jazz line. But in storytelling, that becomes the emotional essence of a story, its meaning (p. 11).

It is that "emotional essence" that pulls the audience in and keeps us engaged not only as participants but as listeners also in David's storytelling process.

In this particular telling, David draws us in, has us participate even more actively than in the telling of the previous three myths. We sing and act and therefore have to know "our parts" and "our cues;" this ensures that David's message is heard at a deeper level and has an even greater impact upon us for we become participants in the telling.

David's invitation to us

I have attended *As if the Past Were Listening* at least four times and have watched a video of the performance even more often. Whether watching the video in the library or the live performance in the small Clarke Theater at the Lincoln Center or in large Lecture Theater in Kiely Hall, my students and I have been drawn into the performance. There are many reasons for this.

As stated previously, David contributes to the musicality of his performance through the use of both English and Spanish. His speech, the sheer music of his pronunciation of each word (the Spanish had such a musical sound), the phrasing, repetition of phrases, the tone, the crescendo and diminuendo of his voice, and the unusual vocal sounds also contributed. The musicality was increased and accentuated by David's movements, rhythmic gestures, and his use of space. Together, these provided extensions of the words and meanings; each contributed to the overall song-like and musical qualities of his performance.

David had us repeat after him certain lines from the story, "1, 2, 3...Repeat after me...." In addition, there were actions to go with the words. We became the fishermen enmeshed in the story and our roles as we sang, "Cast your line and reel it in, Cast your

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line, and reel it in, Cast your line and reel it in, Cast your line and reel it in." Later we acted and sang, "Throw your net and haul it in, Throw your net and haul it in." Our voices and bodies were singing, as we became participants in the musicality of David's storytelling. We understood how the fishermen could be tired after a long day's work and how they could be injured.

When David sang Milomaki's song, the song of the healer who lived in the rainforest, his voice took on that quality.

My song is like the rain of this heavenly wood,
Gives life, light, and strength,
Makes you feel so good.
Ah-haaaa!

David's rendition of this song is therapeutic to such a degree that you actually believe that the fishermen can be healed of their tiredness, anger, and hurt. Milomaki's soothing song and his "Ah-haaaa" give the myth an authenticity that keeps the listener engaged and believing. When describing Milomaki's appearance, David's words and sounds brought vivid images to my mind. His description released my imagination; I could visualize Milomaki and his amazing hair!

In this creation myth, David not only pulled us into the performance but also connected us to his heritage. He ignited our interest in things "Latino" and provided incentive for us to research Latino culture and creation myths; he planted seeds of curiosity about our own creation myths and those of other cultures. David built on the broadening of our perspectives that had begun in the experiential class; he also moved us from the everyday to the imagined.

Responses to "As if the Past Were Listening"

A variety of responses: stages of responses

As noted earlier, students are required to respond in writing to both the experiential class and the inquiry-driven engagement with the work of art. From my reading of these, I have concluded that the aesthetic education experience brings about a variety of responses which appear to lie along a continuum ranging from a stage of "initial awareness" to a more advanced stage of "the joy of shared inquiry and transformation" that recognizes our common humanity and our ability to change. A student's written

reflection may show the student responding on a variety of levels or stages. Student response is not linear but recursive and can indicate personal and professional change. These stages of response were explored in a previous paper (Samson, 2005).

At stage one (initial awareness) a student responds to the interactive nature of the experiential class and the activities included. In a stage two (listening) response, a student notes the resonances (similarities) and dissonances (differences) in the stories and information shared by participants during the experiential class activities. In a stage three (discovery) response, a student notes discoveries made about self and others. Responses at this stage might be similar to those in stage two, but would be much more in depth.

In stage four (imagining), students make connections between the experiential class and engagement with the work of art. They might note the excellent teaching strategies and practices that the LCI teaching artists use and take the risk of trying these new strategies in their own classroom practice. They might find meaning in the aesthetic education experience and imagine the possibilities inherent in it.

At a stage five (understanding art) level, a student responds to the work of art, its creation, its context, and the artist. Students find new meaning in the aesthetic education experience and recognize and articulate the philosophy the aesthetic education experience.

A stage six (joy of shared inquiry and transformation) response would indicate a student's discovery of multiple perspectives, our shared humanity, and the need to question, dialogue, and research as we learn to teach for equity and social justice.

Transformation of student and teacher beliefs, attitudes, and practices

As in any course, a critical objective in aesthetic education is to bring about transformation in the thinking, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of those participating. The experiential class provided an initial opportunity for transformation. The subsequent engagement with the work of art built on the experiential class thereby providing further opportunity for transformation. The overall context of inquiry that permeates aesthetic education or inquiry-driven engagement with a work of art fosters the opportunity for transformation throughout the experience. However, the degree to which transformation occurs in an aesthetic education experience is determined by many variables.

The pre performance experiential classes for *As if the Past Were Listening* affected students in various ways. For Maria this new way of interacting in the classroom

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context presented its own challenges and at the same time affirmed her perception of what a good instructor does in such a situation. She wrote,

Having to face each other and sit huddled together around [in a circle] [I] felt vulnerable and a bit odd initially.... Like any good instructor, [Paul, the teaching artist] used warm-up activities to gauge our reaction and willingness, and to put us at ease (personal communication).

Some students wrote about the connections that they had made during the experimental class, what they learned about themselves and others, and about the art of storytelling. Suzanne reflected,

...I thought that giving us a chance to share a piece of our stories [narrative] with the class was great because it helped me realize how different each one [of our stories] was and how every imagination takes a different path. You can learn a lot about people by listening to the stories they create.... I never knew that I could do so much with stories such as acting them out, making accompanying songs, changing endings, sound effects, and most of all, movement. Paul opened my mind [to the idea] that stories are more than written activities.... I am very excited [about] seeing...the actual unveiling of the actual story [of Milomaki] [as told] by David Gonzalez (personal communication).

Other students were able to make connections between what the teaching artist was doing as a professional artist and the best practice that he was modeling as a teacher. Robin concluded that,

Paul [the teaching artist] was giving us a lesson in how to make our lessons more interesting. [He] showed us [that] we must get up, we must use our hands, and we must use tone and pitch in our voice if we want to capture the attention of the audience [our students] (personal communication).

Christine was so excited by the experiential class and so motivated by her connection-making that she took the risk of implementing some of the teaching artist's ideas in her own classroom and was excited by her new found enjoyment and success. She wrote,

After participating in these classes with Paul, I was eager to try out some different techniques in my own kindergarten classroom. During [my next] story time, I just didn't read a story aloud; I actually acted out the parts. I used different voices, exaggerated my gestures and emphasized different syllables among other things. My new way of storytelling was a huge success. Although the children in my class had always liked story time, they now absolutely love it. The children ask [for story time] frequently throughout the day.... I have noticed also that some of the children are using some of the techniques... I can't believe what a difference a few changes in my storytelling techniques have made ... I am very excited about it. In fact, I look forward to story time myself each day (personal communication).

The experiential class was critical in preparing students for engagement with the work of art. Some students quickly recognized the reciprocal relationship that exists between the two. This led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the roles of teaching artist, the artist, and the work of art in the aesthetic experience. Jennifer H. wrote, "I was able to appreciate what David [the performer] was doing on stage because I had experienced it also. It is not an easy task to stand up in front of people and make a story come alive." She continued, "It looks easy, but having [had] the opportunity to experiment with storytelling, I can tell you it is not as easy as it looks (personal communication)."

Maria H. noted that the musical component of the performance was a very important element. She wrote,

When we were storytelling and role-playing in [the experiential] class, we learned just how much can be conveyed through words and actions. When music was added to the storytelling, a whole new feeling or tone was set. It added a completely different dimension. It was a way to draw in the audience and make them a

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part of the performance. The music made you want to move and kept you wondering what would happen next. ...his performance was a mixture of old traditional lingo and customs and very modern components such as rap. ...he portrayed young and old characters and made them come to life.... [This performance] reminded me just how important it is for teachers to use their own passions and experience to enhance their teaching (personal communication).

Debbie connected David's performance to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and Jinny explored social freedom. She wrote,

I think it is important that we show students to value and open up our minds to the understanding of different cultures, experiences, and languages. Maxine Greene (1988) stresses the importance of social freedom. This can only occur if we expand our minds to see things in new and different ways. ...Learning about each other's personal stories or experiences...allowed me to see another person in a new light or perspective. Greene mentions that recognizing multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points allows us to see that there is always possibility and this is where space opens up for the pursuit of freedom (p. 128). She emphasizes the importance of the arts and imagination in uncovering new possibilities.

The performance showed me how to make learning exciting, fun, and memorable for children. We can allow children to express themselves and learn through music and the arts. David got everyone involved in participating in the stories and really motivated us to sing along, clap, and feel as if we were part of the story, too. The stories...really opened our imagination and creativity since they were magical and mystical in nature...made us think and ask questions about where the stories came from.... I will definitely [check out] *Memory of Fires* by Galeano.

We must set free our imaginations in order to be able to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. The more we open up in

sharing perspectives or personal stories, the more we can understand one another and feel a sense of community and freedom. In doing so we enter what David calls "the culture of humanity (personal communication)."

My own response to the aesthetic education experience

The integration of an aesthetic education component into each of my courses has impacted not only upon my students' learning and teaching; it has impacted upon my own. The transformations that I have experienced include my increasing ability to view things from multiple perspectives, an ever-expanding repertoire of teaching strategies, and a definite willingness to give more control to students in the learning process. I feel more comfortable in moving away from the either/ors that bind us to the status quo and in using my ability to imagine and create. I have an increased consciousness of the need and ability to teach for equity and social justice and an increasing desire and ability to do so. I am at ease in using works of art as a focal point for meaningful dialogue and am enthusiastic about aesthetic education and the possibilities it offers me in teaching for social change.

Song and Some Factors Affecting Its Potential as a Catalyst for Social Change

Based on my experience with song as a component of each of the four works of art discussed, I believe that numerous factors determine whether or not, and to what degree, songs can become catalyst for change. Many of these factors are alterable or adaptable to various degrees and according to our needs and purposes. These factors include, but are not limited to, context, content, modality, the lens or perspective through which a work of art is viewed, prior experience, relationship, and engagement and inquiry.

We teach and learn to bring about change, whether it is in knowledge, perspective, attitude, belief, or practice and action. Basic to this process are the planning and creation of an environment and educational experiences that facilitate the learning that we intend which would include creating within the individual the most important of attitudes, that of the desire to go on learning (Dewey, 1938). In the context of the aesthetic education experience—inquiry-driven engagement with a work of art—we share our experience through questioning, imagining, reflecting, and inquiring. In the process of sharing we become aware of our own perspectives and those of others. We also

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become conscious of the context in which we live and are moved to examine the relationship between what we believe and what we do. We also come to the realization of the need for social change, imagine new ways of interacting with each other, and make changes in our everyday actions. Within the context of aesthetic education, song, as a component of a work of art, can reach out and involve us more fully in this process; it can become a catalyst for social justice.

Context, purpose, and preparation

Context includes not only the circumstances in which we hear or learn a particular song, the purpose for listening, and the preparation we have for the experience. It also includes the songwriter's context and purpose at the time of composition and the intended message of the song. Each of these contributes to the impact that the song has upon us.

Our participation in the LCI TEC defines our context, purposes, and the nature of the experience. The line of inquiry chosen by the teaching artist and teacher to guide students through the aesthetic experience helps us work towards our particular goals. The preparation of our minds, bodies, and imaginations during the experiential class, prior to our inquiry-driven engagement with the work of art in which the songs were included, readied us for a certain kind of learning. Both separately and in combination, the experiential class and engagement with the work of art provided opportunity for shared and individual inquiry, discussion, conjecture, imagining, and reflection within and on the experiential class. Engagement with the work of art often led to further research into the work of art, its context and the meaning derived from it in the everyday world. As we participated in this process and came to know others' experiences, what they know, think, feel, imagine, and hope for, we moved and were moved from our stories and limited perspectives of the world to acknowledge and respect the stories and perspectives of others. In doing so, we imagined new possibilities of being and interacting with each other; we imagine the world as if indeed it could be otherwise (Greene, 1988).

The substance or content, modality or form, and lens or perspective

The substance or content of a work of art and the modality or form through which it is presented influences its impact of upon participants in the aesthetic education experience. The lens or perspective through which participants have been guided by the

teaching artist and teacher to view or approach the work also affects the experience. Substance/content, modality/form, and lens/perspective can affirm and challenge an audience's beliefs, provoke their curiosity, and extend their knowledge. Engagement with the work of art can invite further inquiry relative to the art form, the artist, content, purpose, and modality. The content or message expressed in a song and the artist's style of delivery contribute to the quality of the engagement that occurs between the audience and the song as a component of the work of art and even between the audience and the work of art.

Prior experiences of the artist and participants in the aesthetic education experience

The prior experiences of the artist, the teacher educator, teaching artist, and students also influence how and at what level we, individually and collectively, participate in the experiential class and engage with a particular work of art. They also determine the direction and subject of any inquiry that we might undertake as a result of the aesthetic education experience. What we bring to and share during the experience determines where we go with it. To begin with, the line of inquiry, which guides the aesthetic education experience, grows out of the shared experience of the teaching artist and the teacher educator. Our prior experiences also determine the impact upon us of song or any work of art containing song.

Relationship between the audience and the performer: becoming aware of the human condition

Relationship is critical in teaching and learning. In our engagement with *As if the Past Were Listening*, the relationship between the singer and the song was critical and contributed to the effect of the total experience. In this storytelling experience, the absence of the fourth wall of the stage encouraged a reciprocal relationship or rapport between the singer and the audience. David's appealing invitation to us to participate increased the degree of the audience's active involvement and the depth of our involvement in the performance. His abilities as singer, poet, musician, storyteller, and advocate for his cultural heritage and the culture of humanity contribute to the relationship building between performer and audience. It also raised our consciousness about and appreciation for David, his abilities, language, culture, and heritage. This, in turn, led us to an understanding of what David refers to as "the culture of humanity." It

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is this recognition of our common humanity that awakens us to social injustice and to the need to work towards work towards social justice and change.

In inquiry-driven engagement with *Shadow's Child*, we learned about the immigration experience and its effects on a young girl and her family; we are left with a new appreciation for the immigrant and a desire to change some of the circumstances surrounding it. We also learned how isolation as a result of a medical condition can impact upon a child's life. In *Fire on the Mountain* we gained a new understanding of bluegrass music, the critical role of song and music in the life of a people. At the same time we confronted some of our own stereotypes and biases. In the context of aesthetic education, our engagement with *Secret History: Journey Abroad, Journey Within* brought us an awareness and new understandings of what it means to be a refugee. It caused us to question the plight of the refugee in learning to survive in his/her new country. That, in turn, caused some students to research and share their information about past and current immigration laws and their impact upon the lives of the refugees. Once again it was song that brought us to the essence of the experience. In a most enjoyable way, *As if the Past Were Listening* introduced to another culture and the very complex heritage of David Gonzales in a most enjoyable way. It sent many of us to search for the creation myths of our own cultures and that, in turn, allowed us to see the "culture of humanity (Gonzales, 2002)."

In each of these four works of art, song made a critical contribution to creating an awareness of the human condition—our common humanity—for it allowed us to share in the inner most feelings of the individuals. Song invited us to connect and become aware with another human being at an emotional level; we could not turn away. Song created an awareness of others and the conditions of their lives. Song set the seeds of inquiry; it nudged us to want to know more and to imagine things as if they could be otherwise. Our newfound awareness created a desire for change that pushed us to further inquiry and subsequent action to bring about change.

The Quality and Depth of Engagement: Connections, Consciousness, and Seeds of Inquiry

The quality and depth of our engagement with song was a factor in our response and total engagement. The why and the how of audience participation played an important role also. The overarching line of inquiry or questions presented by the teacher educator and teaching artist at the beginning of the experiential class, were intended to help students connect the various pieces of the total experience. As a result

of having participated in the activities included in the experiential class and facilitated by the teaching artist, we reached a new level of knowing about and with our classmates. This provided opportunity for engagement with each other and with the work of art at a deeper level.

As we connected with each other in the experiential class through our interactions and our stories, we became conscious of our differing perspectives. In the process the seeds of inquiry were set, our imaginations were released, and our hearts and minds were opened to new possibilities. During the performance, the ability of the performer and the work of art awakened us further to the perspectives of others, confirmed our own humanity, and motivated us to continuing dialogue and inquiry and working towards change. The discussions and reflections that followed the experiential class and engagement with the work of art contributed to this also.

Conclusions

Within the context of the aesthetic education experience, learning takes on new meaning. The experiential class, our introduction to the particular art form, engages not only the mind but also the imagination, the body, and senses. This carries over into engagement with the work of art and our subsequent reflections and inquiry. The line of inquiry (overriding questions) directs the experience towards its purpose.

In the climate of shared inquiry, there is no competition, there are no correct or incorrect answers, and each person contributes. Our imaginations come into play as we inquire into the work of art. We can be ourselves without fear of judgement as the work of art is our focus, the catalyst to our sharing, imagining, and learning. We come to know how others see the world and how we, ourselves, view the world and why. We question our own ideas, assumptions, actions, and perspectives. In the process we become aware of our biases and social inequities and injustices. We see the need for change; we imagine and work toward new ways of being.

In a climate of openness we connect as human beings; a consciousness evolves and encourages our further inquiry into who we are, what we know, and how we act and interact with one another. We imagine not only changes in ourselves and others but the world as if it could be otherwise. We become receptive to change, to thinking about what we are doing and why we are doing it. Aesthetic education provides a context in which song, or song as a component of a work of art, can contribute to realization of our common humanity. As such, it is and can continue to be a catalyst for change—one that motivates us to teach for equity and social justice.

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