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THE FICTIONAL FAMILY in Actor Training: A Technique to Develop Characterization

Muriel Nora Gold

A Thesis

in

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ABSTRACT

The Fictional Family in Actor Training: A Technique to Develop Characterization

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Concordia University, 1994

This study describes an actor-training technique developed in my introductory university acting classes over a six-year period with over 300 students. This technique could serve as a transitional step in actor training in Strasberg's methodology, between his stages three and four, i.e. between emotion memory exercises and scene work from written scripts. The study identifies this step as the creation of fictional characters (from students' imaginations) with whom students live and whom they enact for an extended period of time within a fictional family structure. It points out that Michael Chekhov anticipated this step in his seven exercises to develop the imagination, the sixth of which is developing a character from one's own imagination. Through a separate series of related projects, the study describes how the fictional family technique can be used with textual characters in a variety of styles.

The fictional family technique is based on the idea that the family forms a common basis of experience, a unit

to which everyone can relate. It connects this group process to family dynamics concepts and to ensemble methodology based on such performance theorists as Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba, David Latham and Cynthia Phaneuf.

The study demonstrates both through literature review and through work process how the fictional family incorporates well-documented actor-training techniques from a variety of methodologies and performance theories. It also describes how this character-development technique can be applied to both naturalistic and non-Stanislavkian styles.

The study asks the following questions:

1. What theoretical relationships are there between the fictional family approach and other characterization techniques? 2. Within a Theatre as a Liberal Art (TLA) context, how does the fictional family approach seek to enhance established actor-training methodologies in regard to the twinned processes of self-exploration and character creation? 3. What indications are there of its effectiveness?

The study reports and interprets the subjects' development through their responses to questionnaires and their journal writings. Evaluation includes the teacher's observations of classroom process.

RÉSUMÉ

Famille fictive et formation de l'acteur : une technique de développement de la caractérisation

Muriel N. Gold
Université Concordia, 1994

La présente étude décrit une technique de formation de l'acteur mise au point à l'Université, dans le cadre des cours d'introduction à l'art dramatique que j'ai donnés pendant six ans à quelque 300 étudiants. Cette technique pourrait servir d'étape transitoire dans la formation de l'acteur, où elle interviendrait entre les étapes trois et quatre de la méthodologie de Strasberg, c'est-à-dire entre les exercices de «physicalisation» et le travail sur des scènes écrites. Dans l'étude, cette étape est identifiée comme la création de personnages fictifs tirés de l'imagination de l'étudiant, personnages avec qui l'étudiant vit et qu'il joue pendant de longues périodes, à l'intérieur d'une structure familiale fictive. L'étude précise que Michael Chekhov avait prévu cette étape dans ses sept exercices visant à développer l'imagination, dont le sixième avait pour but de développer un personnage imaginé par l'acteur. À l'aide d'une série distincte de projets connexes, l'étude décrit comment la technique de la famille fictive peut être appliquée à des personnages d'oeuvres écrites, dans divers styles.

La technique de la famille fictive est fondée sur le principe que la famille constitue un fonds commun d'expériences, une unité à laquelle chacun peut se rapporter. Cette technique permet de relier ce processus de groupe à des notions de dynamique familiale et à une méthodologie d'ensemble fondée sur les travaux de théoriciens du jeu dramatique tels que Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba, David Latham et Cynthia Phaneuf.

S'appuyant à la fois sur le survol bibliographique et sur le processus de travail, l'étude démontre comment la technique de la famille fictive intègre certaines techniques bien documentées de formation de l'acteur tirées de diverses méthodologies et théories du jeu dramatique.

Elle montre également comment cette technique de développement des personnages peut être appliquée à la fois au style naturaliste et au style «non stanislavskien».

L'étude soulève les questions suivantes :
1. Quels liens théoriques y a-t-il entre l'approche de la famille fictive et d'autres techniques de caractérisation? 2. Dans un contexte où le théâtre est considéré comme un art libéral, comment l'approche de la famille fictive cherche-t-elle à améliorer les méthodes établies de formation de l'acteur en ce qui a trait au double processus d'auto-exploration et de caractérisation? 3. Quelles indications a-t-on de l'efficacité de cette technique?

L'étude décrit et interprète le développement des sujets à partir de leurs réponses à des questionnaires et des entrées de leur journal. L'évaluation tient notamment compte des observations sur le processus faites en classe par le professeur.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Actor-training theorists concur that the characterization process is key to effective acting (Russell-Parks, 1989; Shurtleff, 1978; Stanislavski, 1961; Yakim, 1990). Most theorists also believe that to discover and understand the complex characteristics of scripted characters, actors must commence the process with self-exploration. They maintain that the tapping of actors' own inner resources, and the discoveries which inevitably follow, will be helpful material for actors to draw upon when they approach playwrights' texts. These theorists claim that processes which assist actors to reach their fictional characters' inner lives will facilitate creation of credible, multidimensional characters.

This study explores a character creation technique which offers actors the opportunity to create their own fictional characters from their imaginations and to live with and enact these characters for an extended period of time within a fictional family structure. The process of developing a character within the context of the fictional family is presented as a prototype for future character development in scripted works.

Originality of the Study and Contribution to the Field

The fictional family was initiated and developed in my university acting classes over a six-year period. It was

used in an introductory Theatre as a Liberal Art (TLA) acting class which included drama majors as well as students from a variety of disciplines. The classes were comprised of students who had widely varying acting backgrounds.

One of the greatest challenges to a TLA university acting teacher is the large class, comprised of individuals with widely varying degrees of theatre experience and relatively short periods in which to work. To provide ample opportunity for maximum individual participation, tapping of inner resources and acquisition of technical skills under such circumstances taxes the teacher's ingenuity to the utmost (Gold, 1988).

A number of researchers have pointed to the need for new and innovative techniques in university actor training (Holder, 1988; Phaneuf, 1981; Russell-Parks, 1989). Several theorist/practitioners believe that actor training is most beneficial when it takes place in an ensemble structure (Barba, 1982; Benedetti, 1981; Phaneuf, 1981; Schechner, 1982; Shurtleff, 1978). Phaneuf's ensemble model calls for focus on the individual within the group and on training within a classroom situation.

This study explores the potential of a process which places the acting student in the ensemble of a family unit. It seeks to discover how a variety of well-documented actor-training techniques used within this setting might facilitate actors' processes of self-exploration and character interaction. These techniques are intended to

provide the actor with access to a mine of rich source material for the ultimate development of multidimensional characters in scripted situations. The idea of family was inspired by Robert Landy's model of extended dramatization with graduate drama therapy students (Landy, 1986).

Family dynamics researchers have been studying family systems in relation to people's attitudes toward a variety of topics, such as ethnicity (McGoldrick, 1982), cross-cultural perspectives (Schwartzman, 1982) and death (Paul and Paul, 1982). Similarly, theatre practitioners stress the importance of attitude, points of view and behavioral patterns in building character. For example, Syd Field (1982), playwright, suggests:

> "What separates us from everyone else is our POINT OF VIEW -- how we view the world... CHARACTER IS A POINT OF VIEW...Character is also an ATTITUDE -- a context -- a way of acting or feeling that reveals a person's opinion...Character is also BEHAVIOR. The essence of character is action -- what a person does is what he is" (32).

Since attitudes and perceptions are largely formed in families, the family may be an appropriate and dynamic structure within which to explore character creation.

The study is based on the concept that the family forms a common basis of experience, a unit to which everyone can

relate. Even the most sheltered and naive individuals have been exposed all their lives to the depth and intricacy of family relationships of one sort or another. Their perceptions, their communication styles and their modes of interacting have been shaped initially and significantly within the processes of their own family dynamics.

Limitations of the Fictional Family Technique

Confined to the use of the fictional family as a characterization technique in an undergraduate university acting class within a Theatre as a Liberal Art (TLA) context, this study focuses on the theoretical and methodological relationships between this technique and other characterization approaches. It describes the fictional family work process which is designed to enhance self-exploration and character creation.

The study does not deal with the fictional family technique in other settings, such as professional actor-training programs either within universities or within theatre schools. Although elements of the technique are borrowed from other fields such as psychodrama and sociodrama, the study does not address therapeutic applications of the technique nor does it address the use of the fictional family with special populations. However, some of these fields of study are included in the applications for future research.

Since this thesis is a study of a specific group using

a specific actor-training concept led by one particular acting teacher, the literature review is limited to acting pedagogy. There is no attempt to present a comprehensive theatre history. For example, British actor training is not included in the review because it "has not been dominated by individual personalities" (Mekler, 1989, x). Actors traditionally studied their craft in three-year programs at established drama schools where programs emphasized voice and movement, and rehearsal and performance in classical plays.

Unlike the U.S. where individuals, such as Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner and Uta Hagen, founded their own studios which stressed their individual approaches to actor training, the leading actors in British theatre, such as Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Edith Evans and Peggy Ashcroft, developed their reputations and their craft in repertory companies. The emphasis was on learning by performing for audiences. Books written by some of these actors (Gielgud, 1991; Olivier, 1982) centre on their life experiences in the theatre, rather than on any acting methodologies.

In 1991, concurrently with my thesis research, my book, THE FICTIONAL FAMILY: In Drama, Education and Groupwork, was published. The book expands on some of the ideas presented here. Excerpts from the book have been included in this thesis, principally in Appendix A.

This thesis is a descriptive study which describes how

the fictional family seeks to enhance the actor's process of character development. Since the study is primarily exploratory, it investigates a number of questions rather than putting forth hypotheses to be tested.

Thesis Questions

1. What theoretical relationships are there between the fictional family approach and other characterization techniques?

2. Within a Theatre as a Liberal Art (TLA) university context, how does the fictional family approach seek to enhance established actor-training methodologies in regard to the twinned processes of self-exploration and character creation?

3. What indications are there of its effectiveness?

Thesis Outline

The dissertation is divided into six chapters. This chapter introduces the fictional family concept, explains why the fictional family is seen to be an original contribution to the field of actor training, sets research questions and offers an outline of the study.

Chapter Two addresses the first research question by critically reviewing the actor-training literature and providing a rationale for conducting the study. Chapter Three addresses the second research question by describing the fictional family project with acting students in a TLA

university setting. Chapter Four describes the research methodology employed in determining its effectiveness. Chapter Five reports and analyzes the results of the research to determine its effectiveness. Chapter Six presents my conclusions, indicates the limitations of the study and offers suggestions for future research.

Appendix A details the fictional family work process supported by actor-training theorists and excerpts from students' journals. Appendix B offers further corroboration of findings from three fictional family pilot projects with written texts. Appendix C provides course materials used in the study.

Definition of the Terms: Characterization and Technique

For the purposes of this thesis the term "characterization" is interchangeable with the terminologies character creation, character building and developing a role. It does not confine itself to, for example, Michael Chekhov's (1953) definition of characterization as "a small, peculiar feature of the character" (91). "Technique" is defined as "a way of achieving a purpose" (Webster, 1988).

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter compares characterization approaches by established theoreticians and practitioners in the field with the fictional family technique, and suggests a rationale for the present study. In the field of actor training there exist two basic approaches -- the psychological approach which begins with actors' self-exploration and the examinination of scripted characters' inner lives, then moves to physical embodiment of a role; and the external approach where actors commence with rigorous physical training to make their bodies more expressive, then incorporates the psychological component. Both approaches have similar goals -- to create rich and credible characters on stage. Stanislavski advocated the first system, while his pupils, Meyerhold and Vakhtangov, followed the second system. They trained actors to create sculptural or plastic forms. However, these forms existed to express the characters' internal lives.

> "I make plastic movement express inner feelings" (Meyerhold in Phaneuf, 1981, 15).

There is no question that actor training in the twentieth century has been overwhelmingly influenced by Constantin Stanislavski (Adler, 1990; Cohen, 1978; Mekler, 1988). In his book, A Dream of Passion (1978), Strasberg states:

> "The teachings of Constantin Stanislavsky and his disciples changed not only my life, but that of the entire twentieth-century theatre. Just as our understanding of human behavior and modern physics is still turning on the revelations of Freud and Einstein, so our contemporary knowledge of the actor's craft is till heavily indebted to Stansislavsky's one-hundred-year-old discoveries."

Stanislavski's concentration on inner technique coincided with the development of psychological theories which sought to uncover repressed thoughts and emotions in the unconscious mind.

Whether or not Stanislavski was influenced by the early psychologists such as Freud and Jung is open to debate. However, it is obvious that there was, at the least, parallel evolution. Conversely, as psychological theories became popularized in later years, theatre artists became fascinated with the whole area of psychology and psychoanalysis and experimented with its techniques in acting methodologies.

Psychological probing into characters' personalities revolutionized acting theories and caused actors to concentrate on inner technique. This is particularly evident in the U.S. where some of Stanislavski's disciples, both Russian emigrés and Americans, taught The Method initiated by Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio.

Whether contemporary acting teachers commence with inner or outer technique, the process of inventing a fictional character's life is measured by Stanislavkian theory. Stanislavski's principal aim was to develop in his actors sincere emotions which, he believed, led to truthful and dynamic theatre performances. To achieve this aim, he developed a system designed to help actors create truthful characters on stage.

Stanislavski believed that life, both on stage and off, consisted of an uninterrupted series of objectives, both conscious and unconscious, and the individual's desire for their attainment. To enter into the inner life of their characters, actors should aim to discover creative goals that will motivate the feelings of the characters they are portraying. They should also establish the correct physical actions that will stimulate their characters' emotions.

To experience the inner content of their roles, actors should apply the "magic if"; they should imagine how they would react and what they would do - IF they were actually the characters in the play faced with the obstacles placed in their characters' paths. This does not mean that they should forget that they are actors on the stage; it means that they should allow themselves through their characters to enter into, and believe in, the imaginary world of the play.

The imaginary world of the play is rooted in its "given circumstances" which include the story, the environment in

which the characters are placed - in terms of time, place, epoch, life conditions - as well as the actors' and director's interpretations and visions of the total production. Since people's psychological and physical behaviors are principally influenced by their psychological, sociological and physical environments, the actions actors choose for their characters to perform must be motivated by these external factors. For example, the manners in which characters move in their clothing, handle their props such as lorgnettes, swords, capes and hats, or in the way they greet each other are dictated by the world for which the play was written.

Actors should also delve into their characters' psyches in order to discover the inner content or subtext of the lines they deliver. People often say one thing and mean another. By probing their characters' needs and desires, actors will come to understand the subtext of their characters' behavior on stage. This knowledge of their characters' inner state will create a confrontation between text and subtext which will result in dynamic and powerful stage performances.

> "Spectators come to the theatre to hear the subtext. They can read the text at home" (Stanislavski in Moore, 1984, 28).

To further enter into the psychological state of the character, Stanislavski advocated the use of "emotion

memory". This technique encourages actors to recall those personal, emotional life experiences which they consider analagous to the emotions required to "live" their characters fully and truthfully on stage.

Today his terminology -- objectives, super-objectives, magic if, given circumstances, subtext of behavior, concentration of attention, emotional memory -- have become household phrases for acting students and theatre professionals throughout the world.

Stanislavski's three principal acting texts indicate that he used imagery techniques in which he stressed connections between mind and body. Halperin (1988) notes that while Stanislavski discusses the connection between body and mind/soul in his first two books, An Actor Prepares (1936) and Building a Character (1949) he does not place primary importance on physical actions until his third book, Creating a Role (1961), in which he explains that it is the physical actions which evoke the emotions.[1]

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[1]Since Halperin's thesis appeared, researcher Burnet M. Hobgood (1991) has translated Stanislavski's preface to the three texts hitherto untranslated into English. It is not known why it had not been included in Hapgood's translations. Through his preface, it becomes clear that Stanislavski was writing a series of books to explain his methodology and that his first book, An Actor Prepares (titled in Russia, "The Actor's Work on the Self") was only the first in a series. Unfortunately, there were considerable lapses between books (12 years until the second book, Building a Character, and 25 years between the first and third). Creating a Role did not reach the American public until 1961. It is not surprising, therefore, that theatre practitioners initially construed the first book to be the complete, definitive text of his "system". By the time the third book appeared, American theatre practitioners had been teaching their version of the "system" for a quarter of a century.

Stanislavski's concept of the reciprocal relationship between mind and body and his subsequent work with physical actions to provoke spontaneous and analagous emotions was carried out in a variety of ways by three of his Russian disciples, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Eugene Vakhtangov and Michael Chekhov. In France, Antonin Artaud heightened physical and sensory imagery to create a "metaphysical" theatre (Artaud, 1958).

Meyerhold

Stanislavski's student, Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), reversed Stanislavski's "inside-out" technique. Meyerhold initiated a technique which he called bio-mechanics in which actors began their training with specific kinetic movements in the body. Emphasis in performance was on exaggerated character physicalization and symbolic textual interpretations. This style of using physical metaphors to express the essential action of scenes became known as grotesque. His methodology belongs to the theatricalized tradition, as opposed to the naturalistic style which focused on personal emotions. Meyerhold was more interested in appealing to the audience's imagination rather than its emotions (Cohen and Harrop, 1984). Michael Chekhov, nephew of playwright Anton Chekhov, worked with the Moscow Art Theatre for 16 years; he states in To the Director and Playwright (1977) that Meyerhold "destroyed reality" in his quest for the "imagined feeling of truth". This concept of

truth was different from Stanislavski's view of a "photographic sense of truth" (39). Chekhov says:

> "If something was actually true to life, it didn't interest Meyerhold. His criterion was: Is it true to my imagination?" (39)

To achieve his truth, Meyerhold created "devilish" archetypes which portray composites of human beings' most malevolent natures. His productions were spectacularly effective and powerful in communicating to audiences some possibly hidden facets of their personalities.

Meyerhold also stressed actor/audience involvement in which the audience ceased to be a passive spectator but contributed to the action of the play. Avant-garde practitioners of the sixties such as Richard Schechner and Joseph Chaikin were influenced by this concept.

Vakhtangov

It is Eugene Vakhtangov (1883-1922), who is credited with synthesizing the physicality and sculptural approach of Meyerhold with Stanislavski's approach of inner truth. He believed that Stanislavski's naturalistic approach sacrificed some of the theatricality essential to theatre art, and he called his own approach "fantastic realism" (Phaneuf, 1981, 18). Chekhov (1977) describes Vakhtangov's position:

> "Now, between these two fascinating artists,

> just in the middle, as it were, was Eugene Vachtangov, whose way of creating was influenced by both of them at the same time. One must marvel at the manner in which he was able to take these two techniques, which seemed to pull us in different directions, and reconcile them and combine them and put them to work harmoniously. He took Stanislavsky's reality and Meyerhold's fantasy, and welded them with his own theatricality, his own eclectic sense of artistic showmanship, so that his own stage creations became as distinctive a trade-mark as theirs" (43).

Chekhov

Michael Chekhov's (1891-1955) own point of view of character creation differed from Stanislavski's in that Chekhov believed in the "supremacy of the character's ego", whereas Stanislavski stressed the actor's ego (51). Halperin's research (1988) indicates that Chekhov's approach has much in common with the holistic Eastern Philosophies of the New Age. She sees a physically-based continuum of actor training beginning with Chekhov through to the present, noting that his emphasis on physicality is more aligned with the physical awareness of the 1980s not present in the introspective, analytical 50s.

Artaud

Discovery of character through the body is also the focus of Antonin Artaud (1896-1948). However, his approach was to train actors to remove all inherent barriers to their expression of feeling. His emphasis on self-revelation through physical metaphors is aligned with Meyerhold but contains a more "apocalyptic sensibility" (Cohen and Harrop, 1984, 185). Also aligned with Meyerhold is Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" which demanded that actors and spectators confront the cruelty in themselves. He believed that this discovery would ultimately have a purifying and spiritual effect which would enhance creativity. His emphasis on ensemble where the group communicated non-verbally through the senses laid the groundwork for subsequent artists who experimented in this context. Although Artaud outlined theory, he did not leave a written actor-training methodology; therefore explorations of techniques to support his theory were carried out by mid- and late twentieth century disciples such as Charles Marowitz, Peter Brook, Joseph Chaikin, Richard Schechner and, in particular, Jerzy Grotowski.

Strasberg

Two of Stanislavski's actors, Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya taught the Stanislavski system in North America between 1923 and 1930. Their school, The American Laboratory Theatre, emphasized the first two stages of the

system, affective memory and stimulating the actor's imagination. One of their students, Lee Strasberg (1901-1982), eventually became a major force in American theatre. The Actors Studio, founded in 1947, became the basis for "Method Acting" which adhered to the "concept of acting as the creation of real experience in response to imaginary stimuli" (Garfield, 1984, 175). It also stressed the importance of training within an ensemble:

> "In every collective work, the important feature is that you must have a leader, but everything should be done by the group. Boleslavsky used the example of a rowing crew. They are directed by the coxswain, but all begin and work together" (Strasberg, 1987, 66).

Strasberg's stated objective was to help the actor to "use, control, shape and apply whatever he possesses to the task of acting" (104). His approach centred on assisting actors to discover their own individual potential and to develop that potential to its fullest (Strasberg in Gassner, 1941). Strasberg's Actors Studio has influenced, and continues to influence, generations of acting students who themselves have had powerful impact on actor-training methodology.

Most acting teachers now support this concept of self-exploration as a path to character creation. Michael Shurtleff (1978) also states that actors should know

themselves better than the average person since their craft requires the immediate use of themselves.

> "I am constantly surprised at how little actors know themselves...their own image of themselves is usually standing in the way of their acting, since it provides both limitations... and prejudices...both of which hamper freedom and expanded expression (57).

John Hodgson and Ernest Richards (1966) reinforce the view that the actor's self-knowledge is mandatory to characterization.

> "The actor, unlike every other artist, ultimately creates only from himself. The musician has an instrument, the sculptor his material, but the actor is his own instrument and material. In creating a character, one has to draw upon mental, physical and emotional aspects of oneself, and as these are expressed within oneself so we convey a character...the actor is being trained to discover his emotional resources and to learn how to express them as he wishes" (74).

Lee Strasberg uses similar metaphors to reinforce this view:

> "It should be noted that in all the performing arts except acting, the artist has an instrument

outside of himself which he learns to control. The instrument that the musician works with - the piano, the violin, does not create mental or emotional responses of its own. Regardless of the emotional state of the performer, the instrument remains objectively calm and capable.

The actor's instrument, however, is himself; he works with the same emotional areas which he actually uses in real life. The self that the actor presents to the imaginary Juliet is the same as the self he uses in his most private and intimate experiences. The actor is both the artist and the instrument - in other words, the violinist and the violin. One can imagine what would happen if the violin or piano did not like to be struck in a particular way, that it did not respond to certain notes, that it was embarrassed at being touched sensually by a performer. This interaction between the artist and his instrument is precisely what transpires when the actor performs. His body, his mind, his thoughts, his sensations, his emotions are separated from the objective intentions. The Method, therefore, is the procedure by which the actor can open control of his instrument, that is, the procedure by which the actor can use his affective memory to create a reality on stage" (122).

This concern with characterization reality is further endorsed when Strasberg describes Eleanora Duse's performance in Ibsen's The Lady from the Sea on Broadway, as "a moment-to-moment awareness of the life of the character" (17). He states that even though he was seeing an unfamiliar play in a foreign language, the actress' living of the part communicated to him the meaning of each scene and the theme of the entire play.

Strasberg believes that even actors of varying talents can be trained to achieve dynamic and believable characters on stage:

> "In the Moscow Art Theatre, we saw for the first time the possibility of that greatness being shared by talents that were not necessarily on the same level, yet were capable of the same intensity, reality, belief, and truth (40).

Strasberg identifies the actor's problem when he states:

> "To some, my training appears too inwardly directed. These critics, however, do not understand the fundamental nature of the actor's problem: the actor's ability to create organically and convincingly, mentally, physically and emotionally, the given reality demanded by the character in the play; and to express this in the most vivid and dynamic way possible. While all

> art is for the creator a means of self-expression, it is only the extent to which it reveals what is experienced that it becomes art" (105).

Improvisation

Strasberg contended that the Actors Studio's most important work was contained in the areas of improvisation and "affective memory". Stanislavski borrowed the term, "affective memory" from The Psychology of the Emotions by French psychologist Theodule Ribot who maintained that the topic of emotional memory was unresearched. Eventually both Stanislavski and Strasberg replaced the term "affective memory" with the term "emotion memory" which included both memory and sense recall (Moore, 1985; Strasberg, 1987).

Unlike many contemporary theatre teachers who use improvisational games to foster physical and verbal spontaneity, Strasberg maintained that improvisation should be used in the context of exploring actors' and their textual characters' emotions. As he explained to Al Pacino subsequent to Pacino's improvisation of a scene from A Hairy Ape by Eugene O'Neill:

> "The value of improvisation is to see how much the actor knows about the character's past...the character comes onstage from a set of circumstances" (qtd in Hirsch, 1984, 145).

Strasberg believed that this exploration through

improvisation would enable actors "to express the appropriate emotions demanded of the character", thus creating truthful and believable people on stage (Strasberg, 1987, 106).

In the Method, the first stages of the actor's training focus on self-exploration i.e "the actor's work on himself" (159); the second stage assists the actor "to carry out actions truthfully and logically" (160) through: a) improvisational work and b) physical characterization which is approached through "animal exercises" designed to help the actor "isolate and comprehend the creation of physical behavior different from his own" (160); the third stage involves emotion memory training to learn "to discover the experiences which stimulate his most vivid emotional responses" (160); and the fourth stage focuses on scenework from written scripts.

The Method moves from self-exploration through to emotion memory and then directly to scripts. Other techniques which work in different order (outside in) also seem to move somewhat abruptly from improvisational and imaging techniques to scripted work. This methodology traditionally leaves acting students with insufficient character-development preparation to make the leap from one stage to the other.

This study therefore proposes the fictional family approach as a transitional step in the characterization process which acts as a bridge between Strasberg's third and

fourth stages. It describes the methodology of this transitional step. This step is a potentially profound character creation technique born from students' own imaginations, experiences and observations and enacted over an extended period of time.

Michael Chekhov, in his book To the Actor (1953), anticipates such a step when he suggests seven exercises to develop the imagination, the sixth of which is developing a fictional character from one's own imagination.

> "Next create a character entirely by yourself. Start developing it, elaborating it in detail; work upon it through many days or perhaps weeks by asking questions and getting visible answers. Put it in different situations, different environments, and watch its reactions; develop its characteristic features and peculiarities. Then ask it to speak, and follow its emotions, desires, feelings, thoughts; open yourself to it so that its inner life will influence your own inner life. Co-operate with it by accepting its "suggestions" if you like them. Create dramatic as well as humorous characters" (32).

Ensemble

A number of primary contemporary actor-training theorists/practitioners, such as Eugenio Barba, director of the Odin Theatre in Denmark, David Latham, former director

of the Vancouver Playhouse Acting School and Richard Schechner, founder of The Performance Group in New York, favor teaching through ensemble work. While the methodologies advocated by these and other contemporary ensemble theorists differ somewhat, Phaneuf in her doctoral dissertation, Ensemble: A Process of Actor Training (1981), identifies the following common denominators.

> "All are striving for quality performances; all share a desire to make theatre happen in the 'here-and-now'; all call for a disciplined actor training process; and all contribute something to an ensemble instructional model. Most of these acting teacher/artists are connected with a performing group, and their theories grow directly from playwright and performance demands. They all recognize the need to train actors to perform the kind of theatre they envision" (8).

Ensemble methodology is a performance theory which has as its priority the establishment of close actor rapport, support, commitment and spiritual bonding. It aims to create harmonious, unified presentations. The fictional family is a group process; it places the students into an ensemble situation.

As noted above, while Phaneuf focuses on the individual in actor training, she places the individual within a group situation and her methodology is aligned with the concept of

ensemble.

Ensemble methodology accentuates human relations and communication. There is emphasis on individual self-discovery within a group structure (Barba, 1982; Latham, 1982; Phaneuf, 1981; Schechner, 1982)). Some acting teachers/directors such as Grotowski, Copeau, Artaud and Barba go so far as to advocate retreats where actors can learn to communicate in varying ways. Sometimes actors begin with silence, then communication of emotions through the senses, sounds, movement and rhythmns. Barba has his students commence with rigid repetition exercises which he believes will eventually enable actors to infuse their work with their own individuality. Others like Copeau introduce game playing, poetry reading, discussion of art topics to help actors become comfortable with each other while studying their texts (Cohen and Harrop, 183).

Many practitioners consider personal development and creativity within the context of a "true ensemble" to be the principal goals in actor training (Barba, 1982; Holder, 1989; Russell-Parks, 1989; Schechner, 1982). Schechner sees ensemble as a means to stimulate unity and creativity during actual performance. He views acting programs as being too disparate and the courses superficial. These proponents of ensemble methodology believe that this type of training fosters dynamic performances, passionate delivery of texts and the creation of new forms of theatre.

David Latham's vision of actor training calls for a

group of participants and leaders "doing theatre" with commitment, dedication and intensity. This "true ensemble" not only promotes individual self-discovery and expression of each member, but also is committed to developing heightened forms of theatre. Latham maintains that this approach will result in texts performed "with passion", as opposed to the all-too-common productions which are composed of a "mixture of competent blandness" (19). Other theorists, such as Russell-Parks, agree that product-oriented methodologies result in "lustreless" performance (173).

Phaneuf (ibid) offers an ensemble model to integrate the "whole performer" which includes the person, the actor, and the character. She believes that this process will promote dynamic, interpersonal relationships, expand actor possibilities, and facilitate rich, human, multi-dimensional characterizations which culminate in the performer's "celebration of self - a celebration of the differences in individuals that, once accounted for and accepted, can be a positive force for growth on all levels" (66). Steps in Phaneuf's process are:

1. an ensemble of persons
2. an ensemble of person/actors
3. an ensemble of person/actor/characters
4. an ensemble of actualizing person/actor/characters, with a choice/action motif providing a bridge between the levels.

Participants move at their own speed of development.

This freedom of choice places the needs of the individual above the group. The actors achieve awareness of their own process, and this awareness should allow them to continue their process in further ensemble situations and finally to integrate their lives with their art (81). Phaneuf states that her model can be applied to text in classroom work or during rehearsal of a production. Although the demands of script and audience must be considered, the emphasis remains on process of growth rather than product.

Many of these artists and others believe that to accomplish this variety of goals, actors must live, or at least train with each other for lengthy periods of time. Actor training as it presently exists does not allow for long stretches of group training. Similarly, rehearsal situations are generally short term, so that the majority of acting students are not being exposed to ensemble training, either in the classroom or during rehearsal. Those groups that do exist are considered to be outside the mainstream. Schechner (1982), in his advocation of group formation in actor training, points out the dissimilarity between Euro-American and Asian cultures. In Asian cultures the group is the mainstream.

Rationale for Conducting the Study

At the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference in Seattle, Washington, August 1991,

acting teachers and theatre practitioners expressed the view that university acting teachers need to discover new and more powerful teaching techniques to meet the demands and challenges of postmodern playwrights, and to offer to theatre students characterization techniques that can be applied to a variety of styles. This view is corroborated by the actor-training and performance theory literature. Linda Lee Holder (1988) in her doctoral study of undergraduate university actor-training methodologies, concludes:

> "...the teaching of acting in this country is generally quite narrow in its focus. If we believe that we have incorporated the best of what has been discovered about the nature of acting in the last thirty years, we may be mistaken. We are, in the main, using the approaches discovered by Stanislavski to prepare students to perform in realistic plays, and little else. If that approach meets the needs of our programs, our actors and our theatre, then so be it. If we value broadening that range, then we have work to do" (154).

As has been noted, contemporary theatre theorists concur that character development is the central goal in actor training. There is lack of consensus, however, on the most effective methodologies to approach the characterization process. Most university acting teachers use Stanislavski-based techniques (Halperin, 1988; Holder,

1989; Mekler, 1988; Schechner, 1993). Although acting students are constantly advised to approach characters from their own inner experiences, few processes allow time for self-exploration and personal development (Barba, 1982; Holder, 1988, Phaneuf, 1981; Schechner, 1982). There appears to be a discrepancy between theoretical objectives and actual practice.

There are theorists who view effective actor training as taking place within the framework of an ensemble in which human relationships, sensitivity awareness and bonding/communion can be developed (Barba, 1982; Latham, 1982; Phaneuf, 1981; Schechner, 1982). While many of these leading proponents of ensemble methodology advocate isolating actors and exposing them to long-term intensive training, this concept seems impractical for most acting students, especially those situated in university settings, and particularly those enrolled in TLA programs.

One might also question whether intense, isolated, self-revelatory purging under the possibly undue influence of a forceful, high-profile teacher/director lends itself to cult formations. Some of these formations have been known to break down. For example, in her doctoral thesis on The Performance Group led by Richard Schechner, Esther Sundell Lichti (1986) describes the "strained relationships within the company", rebellion of group members, and eventual disintegration of the company (134).

Also, the actor/audience approaches under such teachers

as Grotowski and Artaud remain controversial issues in actor training. On the other hand, basic principals of ensemble philosophy, such as self-exploration within groups, are more readily accepted by theatre practitioners. It would seem, therefore, that the idea of placing students in fictional family groups might be an appropriate methodology for the classroom situation. The instructional ensemble model proposed by Phaneuf, which can take place in either classroom or rehearsal setting, supports the fictional family as a potentially viable alternative to intensive training which occurs in isolation.

Phaneuf applies her ensemble process to playwrights' texts. In script work, actors study fictional characters which have been created by authors. They are allowed to interpret, to add their own creative details, and to discover additional dimensions of their roles, but ultimately they must articulate the playwrights' dialogue, remain within the story line and adhere to the general framework of authors' work. In addition, these roles may not have been of their own choosing.

Stanislavski, in his teaching and directing, dealt with character creation in the context of textual roles. His books deal with the actor's approach to a variety of famous authors' texts - such as Chekhov, Shakespeare, Ibsen and Molière. Strasberg, in his method of training actors in their second stage of work, focused on four basic steps which have been outlined above.

From the emphasis on character creation in the literature reviewed above, and from the needs expressed by theatre professionals for newer and more dynamic actor-training techniques, it appears that there could be more extensive character preparation work before introducing scripted scene study. The exposure to a technique which offers the potential for profound knowledge and understanding of, and immersion in a fictional character could ultimately offer actors the ability to recognize the complexity of fictional characters in written texts. Furthermore, the experience could offer them a methodology or prototype for future character development with scripted characters. The fictional family technique might thereby act as a bridge between the unscripted characterization techniques commonly used in acting classes and the written script.

Chapter Three will describe the development and components of the fictional family project with students in a TLA university acting class. Techniques used are linked to actor-training theory and supported by references to actor-training theorists. The chapter refers to Appendix A which details the exercises used in the study; Appendix A also contains excerpts from the student/participants' journals which describe their personal responses to the fictional family process.

Chapter Three

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As described in the previous chapter, the fictional family process seeks to provide a transitional step between Strasberg's first three stages of actor training - a) self-exploration b) physicalization c) emotion memory techniques; and his fourth stage - d) scenework from written scripts. This chapter describes the fictional family methodology in my university classes, with references to other actor-training theories and theatre practices.

Course Components

1. Self-Exploration

In alignment with actor-training theorists (Stanislavski, 1961; Strasberg, 1987), students were first given exercises in self-exploration, improvisation, physicalization and emotion memory (see Gold, 1991). These preparation exercises aimed to stimulate participants to explore their own inner resources in order to build experiences from which they could develop believable characters. This self-exploration continued within the context of the fictional family. Following 16 sessions of these preparation exercises, the fictional family project was initiated.

At the start of the 17th session (there were 52 sessions) the class was subdivided into groups of four to six students (for details, see below). Each group invented

a fictional family and the members of this group gave their family a name, historical background, geographical location, and identified the various family members' ages and positions within the family. Students then developed their own fictional family characters by defining the character's birthplace, personal history, profession, income, religion, likes and dislikes, personal relationships with and attitudes toward the other family members.

Throughout the course, students created and performed a sequence of scenes designed to achieve particular character-development objectives (see Appendix A). These objectives included building concentration skills, vocal and physical expression, communication ability, and character believability. All scenes contained objectives intended to externalize the relationships initially created on paper and to develop the ongoing relationships between fictional family members in ever-increasing complexity with other members of the larger group.

Scenes were also designed to initiate and pursue particularly conflicting objectives between fictional family members in order to illustrate the building of dramatic tension. To give fictional families a feeling of experienced reality, students performed past events in their fictional family characters' lives; to help them envision new sets of possibilites for their characters, they performed scenes that might take place in the future.

All scenes were preceded by visualization and

physicalization techniques to assist actors in their character-development process. Visualization techniques involved stimulating actors through sense memory to recall or create mental images. Whereas these visualization exercises were aimed to assist actors to develop their characters' emotional lives, physicalization techniques were aimed to create characters' physical lives. Since voice and body are an integral unit, physicalization techniques included freeing vocal expression.

In the fictional family process, I first stimulated their sense memory of situations analogous to scenes they were asked to create. In his Method, Strasberg (1987) reinforces the use of emotion memory as a means to character development.

While the fictional family technique was framed in the Stanislavski System, it also lends itself to experimentation in non-Stanislavskian styles. Applications of the fictional family to Epic Theatre and Theatre of the Absurd are discussed later in this chapter. (For applications of the fictional family to performance styles other than Epic and Absurdist, see Appendix B which discusses a project which applied the fictional family technique to three texts in different acting styles - Comedy of Manners, Greek Theatre and Classical Naturalism.)

Stanislavski actors strived to live their roles through imagining themselves in analogous sets of circumstances and relationships as their textual characters. With the aim of

helping students to develop multidimensional family characters, I provided them with the appropriate creative stimuli to evoke memories of past events, and guided them through visualizations of the future designed to lead them to a deeper understanding of their fictional family characters' lives in the present (see Appendix A). Selected themes, such as their fictional family character's secret or their fictional family characte 's interaction with a character from an outside fictional family, were intended to help students explore the many aspects of their fictional family characters' lives.

The sequence of fictional family scenes was developed over a period of time, partly based on what seemed to be a logical progression of goals, and partly in response to the students' needs. For example, at first students had problems expressing their characters' emotions. Therefore scenes were framed with the kinds of goals such as - a) concentration b) focusing on character objectives and c) confrontation - in order to provoke emotion.

There were five basic fictional family performance contexts. 1. 'Spontaneous' Improvisations in which students were given little or no time to prepare presentations; my goal here was to assist actors to let their characters speak without preparation so that unexpected characters' emotions and/or thoughts might spontaneously emerge; 2. 'Prepared' Improvisations for which they were given ten or more minutes to prepare and rehearse; here the goal was to foster team

collaboration in a limited time frame; 3. 'Polished' Improvisations which they prepared and rehearsed out of class, but there was no written script or outline; the objective of these types of improvisations was to allow students to experience the process of collective creation and to obtain additional input about their character development from their peers; 4. Scenes which were developed out of class from students' original script outlines; this work was designed to start them on collaborative writing, a component which is considered to be a valid element in the actor's process (Field, 1982); and 5. Scripted scenes which they wrote and rehearsed out of class to provide them with an additional method of analyzing their characters. They put words into their characters' mouths and then were forced to deliver these particular lines.

2. Fictional Family Grouping

When I first initiated the fictional family technique, the class was arbitrarily subdivided into groups of five which were asked to form fictional families. Later on, I came across a technique used with family therapy trainees called the Family Systems Exercise (Skynner and Cleese, 1983) which I adapted for my own use with the fictional families.

In the Family Systems Exercise participants select one or more people who either remind them of, or would have filled a gap in their families of origin. They then discuss

the qualities inherent in their own families which influenced their choices.

In the fictional family approach I encouraged them to also discuss their families' roots, cultural backgrounds and structures. This procedure was intended to offer students a method of getting to know each other quickly and to provide them with a starting point for organization of their fictional families. Some students based their fictional families on roots in their own group; others decided to create families which they perceived to be very different from their own group's backgrounds.

3. Scene Development

Each scene was developed to achieve particular teaching goals. For example, the first scene was initiated to: a) lift the fictional family from the printed page; b) present each fictional family and each fictional family character to the larger group; c) provide fictional family members with an opportunity to experience how they initially communicate with one another; and d) introduce the concept of character objectives (For a complete description of each individual scene's objectives, see Appendix A). A common goal of all scenes, whether initiated by me, or by the students themselves, was to encourage the exploration and presentation of additional dimensions of their fictional family characters' personalities.

4. Character Objectives, Obstacles and Dramatic Conflict

Once the idea of character objectives was introduced, students were asked to prepare scenes in which their character's objectives conflicted with the objectives of other members of their fictional family. These scenes were designed to help the students discover that obstacles, conflicting events and characters striving against each others' objectives generate the dramatic situation. Most acting teachers agree with this idea; Stanislavski (1961) explains it best:

> "No movement, striving, action is carried out on the stage, any more than in real life, without obstacles. One runs inevitably into the counter-movements and strivings of other people, or into conflicting events, or into obstacles caused by the elements, or other hindrances. Life is an unremitting struggle, one overcomes or one is defeated. Likewise on the stage...The collision and conflict of these opposing 'through actions' constitute the dramatic situation" (80).

It became evident from the students' performances, that most of them had difficulty concentrating and focusing on objectives when surrounded with four or five other actors on stage. To accomodate their needs, some subsequent fictional family scenes were framed to take place between two fictional family characters and were centred around the

playing of a competitive game. This idea was based on Robert Cohen's (1978) suggestion of game playing to reinforce the concept of objectives:

> "The concentration on the game situation, and the intention of winning, lends a depth to the interaction and distracts the actor-player from contextual awareness, bringing out greater and greater personal energies. The combination of game-playing and situation-playing is, as a result, an intense theatrical mechanism" (27).

The games were played before the performances of the fictional family scenes and were also used, when required, as interventions during or after performances. Sometimes the students themselves incorporated games in their scenes. However, the games they selected were not always effective in creating dramatic conflict. In those cases, more dynamic games intended to generate the energy required to make their scenes more dramatically effective, were suggested (For examples, see Appendix A.)

Game playing is one of several techniques I used in this project to assist actors to create dramatic tension. A second technique recently incorporated was based on Meisner's (1987) repetition exercises, which have as their intent the provoking of repetitive theatrical responses. Because students do not have to occupy themselves with creating dialogue, they are able to respond instinctively,

opening themselves up to "real emotion" (107).

In the fictional family study, students from different fictional families were asked to pair up and to each work with a short phrase which expressed one of their character's needs. They then incorporated this repetitive phrase into an improvised scene.

Often actors needed coaching to help them improve the intensity of a scene. Many of these techiques which involved the redirecting of stage positions and/or physical actions were based on psychodramatic, as well as theatre techniques, where use of objects to intensify the expression of emotion are used. Also, psychodrama directors vary the placement of 'actors' to alter perceptions and develop insights into behavior. For example, Blatner (1973) suggests that in dealing with authority conflicts, the director might request the parent figure to stand on a chair in order to cause the protagonist to feel at a disadvantage; or conversely, the protagonist might be placed on a chair "to equalize the status and encourage self-assertion" (62).

In the fictional family scenes, students playing teen-agers were sometimes asked to incorporate an activity - such as skipping, jumping or playing with a ball. This activity was aimed to liven up the performance of the actor engaged in the activity, and also to create tension and energy on the part of the fellow actor who had to either chase after this character to secure attention, or try to prevent the character from continuing the action.

Spolin (1963) suggests the placing of a number of objects on a table which the actors can select spontaneously on stage at the moment they need it. She cites the example of two older sisters dressing to go out for an evening's fun in the presence of a younger sister who wishes she could join them. The two older sisters, while dressing, project their anticipation of the evening by throwing balloons, blowing feathers, and jumping rope, while the younger sister moves around the room dragging a sandbag along, which she sometimes places on her shoulders.

5. Scenes in Other Time Frames

a) Scenes in the Past

As mentioned earlier, students enacted scenes that took place in the past. These scenes were presented in a variety of ways. For example, each fictional family character enacted a significant event which had taken place in his or her past. This scene was presented either as monologue or with other actors as needed for the scenario (see Appendix A, scene 3). A subsequent scene (see Appendix A, scene 7) was presented ten years ago with the whole fictional family.

In still another scene (see Appendix A, scene 8) students enacted their fictional family characters at ten years of age in conflict with another ten-year old from a different fictional family. This cross-family scene continued work on the past, on conflicting objectives, on performance as children and was designed to encourage

interaction with other fictional family actor/characters. These scenes were inspired by Stanislavskian theory (1961):

> "There can be no present, however, without a past. The present flows naturally out of the past. The past is the roots from which the present grew; the present without any past wilts like a plant with its roots cut off" (16).

The reliving of significant events in their characters' lives was often centred around a fictional family experience. Topics included loss of a parent due to death or divorce, misdemeanors and family responses, accidents and family support, interactions with siblings and a variety of other events. Since many of the fictional families had been created by the participants as stepfamilies, some members did not know their present families ten years ago. In these cases, it was suggested that they select other class members to represent the characters they required for their scenes. These improvisations allowed them to interact with the characters they had created in their imaginations. And it gave the selected class members opportunities to play an assortment of fresh roles.

As noted above, students were also encouraged to initiate their own scenes when they felt there may be issues in their fictional family characters' lives which remained unresolved, or when they wished to share an important past family event with the audience, or with outside fictional

families. Some decided to perform these self-initiated past scenes as a family group. More often, their presentations included just one or two other fictional family members. Often they included members from outside fictional families.

Shurtleff (1978) stresses the importance of actors' knowledge of their characters' past experiences in order to help actors make "specific choices" which affect what he calls "the moment before" each scene begins (48). Klein (1975) advocates actors' experiencing of their characters' childhood. She says:

> "Become the child of your character
> the child of yourself" (163).

b) Scenes in the Future

As discussed previously, scenes for the fictional families were designed to take place not only in the present, but also in the past and the future. Future scenes were developed in line with Stanislavski's (1961) premise that actors must have visions of their characters' future lives in order to clarify their characters' present lives:

> "An actor should always have before him thoughts about the future which excite his ardor and which are at the same time compatible with the dreams of the character he is portraying. These dreams about the future should beckon to the actor, should lead him on through all his actions on the stage" (16).

The future scene was also developed with the idea that imagining and enacting situations in their fictional family characters' future lives would promote further levels of understanding of themselves, their characters and of the intricate, real and fictional family relationships. It was conjectured that this understanding could lead to the envisaging of a whole new set of possibilities and ideas for overcoming obstacles which would encourage change within the situation. The development of an unrestrained imagination, in other words, the ability to fantasize, can motivate actors to break new ground artistically, and to be innovative and creative in their theatre work (Courtney, 1970; Hagen, 1991; Shurtleff, 1975; Stanislavski, 1961).

In the the fictional family approach, students were requested to constantly enact their past, present and future lives in an attempt to fill in what Stanislavski refers to as the "missing pieces" of their characters' lives. In a textual context, these are the pieces of the characters' lives which comprise the total person, but are not written into the actual dialogue of the play.

c) Scriptwriting

The value of inventing biographical scenarios to develop character is supported not only by actor-training theorists, but also by writing teachers. For example, Syd Field (1982) advises screenwriters to establish a character and then divide its life into two components - "interior"

and "exterior". He states:

> "The interior life of your character takes place from birth until the moment your film begins. It is a process that forms character. The exterior life of your character takes place from the moment your film begins to the conclusion of the story. It is a process that reveals character" (23).

In the fictional family process, students invented past incidents in their characters' lives in order to become familiar with additional aspects of their characters. However, they were also given the opportunity to create performance pieces from their original scripts. Field suggests ways for writers to make fictional characters "real, multidimensional people". He advises writers to first know their characters well in terms of their "professional", "personal" and "private" lives, and then to create dialogue which will develop the plot.

> "Dialogue must communicate information or the facts of your story to the audience. It must move the story forward. It must reveal character. Dialogue must reveal conflicts between and within characters, and emotional states and personality quirks of character; dialogue comes out of character;
>
> KNOW YOUR CHARACTER! (28)

In the fictional family technique, scriptwriting was used as a device to facilitate character creation, to introduce and familiarize students with another theatre discipline, and to extend their experience in artistic team collaboration.

6. Subtext

Students were given exercises designed to assist them to search for their characters' conscious and/or subconcious motivations. According to Stanislavki, understanding character motivation illuminates, for the actors, the underlying meanings of their characters' words. He believed that this perception of subtext would facilitate the creation of rich, multifaceted characters. Stanislavski said, "The value of words is not in the words themselves but in the subtext contained in them." (qtd in Moore, 1984, 70).

Ball (1984) suggests that directors ask their actors what they are trying to GET the other character(s) to do or give, what they want to MAKE the other character(s) do or give. He calls the verbs GET and MAKE "crowbars" for directors to use as "rescue tactics" when they are stuck (91). The actor's answer will contain "1. a verb 2. a receiver 3. a desired response" (92). His terminology was used in the fictional family study.

Klein (1975) suggests a variety of imaging and physicalizing "designs" for actors to improvise textual characters at different ages. She recommends that students

carry out the activities they do every day "but do them in character" (172). Adaptations of her designs were incorporated in the fictional family project.

7. Exploring Characters' Opposites

To provoke actors to play the extremes of their fictional family characters, students were asked to play a scene (4) in which the family faces a crisis, and all members behave at their worst. This scene was inspired by Stanislavskian theory (1961) of character extremes:

> "Extremes extend the gamut of human passions and enlarge the pallette of the actor. Therefore when he is playing a good man, he should seek out what there is of evil in him; if he is playing an intelligent character, find his mentally weak spot; if he is playing a jolly person, find his serious side. That is one of the ways to enlarge a human passion: If you do not at once find the color you want, you must look for it" (69).

Some students resisted performing actions or uttering dialogue that exhibited the negative side of their characters. When any particular action was suggested, they stated that their character is a "nice" or "timid" or "friendly" person and would never behave in such a way. In these cases I decided to convince these students that all characters, no matter how "mild-tempered" or "sweet", have

their limitations, and that in an extreme situation, could be provoked into atypical behavior.

Shurtleff (1978) emphasizes the need for actors to explore their own psychodynamics in order to discover those conflicting feelings which, if undiscovered, will impede or limit their ability to create dynamic characters. My students needed to understand that characters who behave "nicely" at all times do not spark interest or create dramatic tension and that as actors they must not impose limitations on their fictional family characters by constantly saying, "Oh, but my character wouldn't do that."

Shurtleff goes on to say:

> "Consistency is the heart of dull acting. What fascinates us about other human beings, and particularly about splendid actors, is their inconsistency, their use of opposites. Yet for all its vital importance, I find opposites one of the most difficult guideposts to explain to actors...
>
> Think about a human being: in all of us there exists love and there exists hate, there exist creativity and an equal tendency toward self-destructiveness, there exist sleeping and waking, there exists night and there exists day, sunny moods and foul moods, a desire to love and a desire to kill. Since these extremities do exist in all of us, then they must also exist in each character in each scene...It is the actor's

creation of opposites that develops conflict, and therefore drama, and therefore interest" (55).

8. Inner Monolgues

In the fictional family technique, inner monologues were initially employed immediately following the crisis scene (see Appendix A, scene 4). However, when I observed that this device served not only to facilitate actors to probe more deeply their fictional family characters' needs, but also that their delivery helped their fictional family members to gain understanding of those needs, and that this understanding generally resulted in more profound group interaction, gradually I began to use the monologues as interventions during enactment of scenes in which actors seemed unable to express their characters' inner thoughts and/or feelings. Some theatre practitioners use the inner monologue as a rehearsal technique. Moore (1985) directs her actors to write their inner monologues before coming to scene study class and to articulate them before saying their characters' lines from the play. In this study I asked students to include their fictional family characters' inner monologues (both preceding scenes and subsequent to presentation) in their journals.

Benedetti (1981) suggests actors perform their scenes twice, first speaking the inner monologue as though it were the actual text; second, thinking it while articulating the text:

> "The interior monologue device is a useful way of checking yourself to insure that you have traced the continual line of your character's thought throughout a scene and of being sure that you relive this thinking every time you perform the scene" (87).

Sternberg and Garcia (1989) remind us that soliloquy is a theatre technique which was adapted for sociodrama by Jacob Moreno. Sociodrama directors use it as an intervention technique when a participant is viewed as "stuck", "not in touch with his feelings" or not totally absorbed in the action. The action is stopped and the participant is asked to "soliloquize about what he thinks and feels about the situation" (63).

In drama therapy, therapists often encourage their clients to compose imagined or 'spoken letters' to significant others. This technique aims to assist clients develop insight which will help them to deal with personal relationship issues. Since actors in the fictional families use their own experiential resources to develop their characters, any insight/discoveries acquired in the process can become important to both characters and actors. Shurtleff (1978) stresses the importance of actors' discoveries:

> "Acting is a whole series of discoveries. The discoveries may be about the other character, or

> about oneself, or about someone who is offstage, or about the situation now or the situation as it existed ten years ago and how that affects the now. The more discoveries you make in a scene...- the more interesting your scene will be" (58).

In place of words like objective or motivation, Shurtleff uses the acting term, "What are you fighting for?" He states that he prefers this terminology because he believes that the word fight inspires actors to "find the strongest, most positive goal possible". And he argues that this focus need not impede the scene's balance if the emphasis is on relationships:

> "How, then, do you achieve balance if everyone is in there pitching hard for what he's fighting for? Through relationship. Through the give and take of relationship, through consideration of the other characters in the scene, through your sensitivity to their reaction to what you fight for, through an increased awareness of the others and how you affect them and how they affect you: a heightening of the awarenesses you have in life toward other people" (30).

Bandler, Grinder and Satir (1976) apply similar techniques to family therapy. According to these authors, family therapists should continually assist clients to

identify their wants in an effort to initiate effective communication between family members. When individual family members come to understand what, specifically, they want for themselves and for their families, change can occur within the family dynamic.

To encourage change in the characters' attitudes toward one another, actors in the fictional families were asked to replay conflict scenes, this time showing the more accomodating sides of their characters. This experience was designed to help students understand the extreme importance of attitude both as actors on stage and as individuals coping with real-life situations. Playing a happy scene was also intended to reveal to actors the difficulty of making scenes where conflicts are quickly resolved as interesting and dynamic as unresolved conflict scenes.

9. Stage Surroundings

To further establish the fictional family reality, solidify family relationships and help the actors to understand their families' economic and social situations, the students were asked to design their fictional family homes. This exercise was inspired by Stanislavski's (1961) descriptions of the importance of actors visualizing their characters' surroundings:

> "The world of things often reflects the soul of those who created this world - the inhabitants of the house." (22).

The introductory scenes had been designed to assist students to explore the psychodynamics of their characters and the interpersonal relationships within their fictional families. The writing of their characters' historical backgrounds, the drawings of the fictional family trees and the descriptions of their present socioeconomic positions had initiated some thought in those directions.

Creating a house for the fictional family, however, required concentrated and co-operative group work. It necessitated further clarification of roles within the fictional family, and it was designed to force the students to concretize the many details of their fictional family's environment.

Hagen (1960) states that she makes every article on stage "particular" by endowing it with qualities and/or by finding "psychological endowments or substitutions" (45). She gives the example of a simple stage property - an ashtray. She decides that it is made of "real copper", was bought at Tiffany's, and was a gift from her character's husband for a special occasion. This knowledge, she says, will affect the way she looks at it, touches it, and flicks her ashes into it on stage. Hagen calls this technique "particularization", and she uses it in relation, not only to objects and place, but also to her character's relationships to the other characters, and to her character's needs and obstacles.

Spolin (1963) refers to stage surroundings as "WHERE",

the immediate, general and larger environments. She believes that visualizing the space and defining the perimeters of each playing area will enhance the actor's awareness of detail, and that this awareness of space and of detail will enhance stage business and blocking.

Out of class the actors each completed the drawing of furniture and accessories in their particular rooms. This exercise necessitated further search into their characters' visual, tactile and visceral needs and tastes. In class the fictional family members presented their pictures and drawings and described their houses. It became evident that they felt that the fictional families had become real. They had built a house together. They had agonized over their collective and individual needs and wants, and had adapted those needs and wants to the socioeconomic reality of the family situation. They had established, in spite of whatever familial conflicts exist 'at home', a feeling of outward family solidarity.

10. Spontaneity and Plot Advancement

Students were asked to invent secrets for their fictional family characters, to write these secrets in their character diaries and withhold them from their fellow actors. To facilitate spontaneous responses from actor/characters, the secrets were exposed during a scene on stage (10). Stanislavski (1936) advocated promotion of the surprise element in acting:

"The unexpectedness of the incident will excite you and your nature will rush forward" (278).

Through these new revelations fictional family story plots were advanced, allowing students to experience, both through enactment and observation, the myriad of situational possibilities that can occur in families. Seeking secrets for their fictional family characters was also aimed to stimulate the actors to delve further into their characters' past lives so that unexpected aspects of their fictional family characters could emerge.

Exposing secrets added a whole new series of circumstances to each fictional family's story line. These circumstances provided fresh ideas for future scenes, and created new interest for both the families involved, as well as for the audience. Characters often formed new alliances either within their own fictional families or with members of outside families. These alliances often revealed unsuspected aspects of their personalities.

Actor-training theorists from Stanislavski to contemporary acting teachers stress the importance of spontaneity. Johnstone (1983) advocates spontaneity training in education through improvisation and theatre games. Jacob L. Moreno, the father of Psychodrama, also links creativity with spontaneity. His definition of spontaneity as interpreted by Courtney (1970) is as follows:

"Spontaneity is the ability of a subject to

> meet each new situation with adequacy. The spontaneous individual is creative in moment-to-moment adjustments, is flexible, evaluates, is aware of alternatives, and he plays his role of response resourcefully" (92).

Moreno believes that spontaneity is valuable not only for living but also for the professional actor in that it helps the actor:

> "...to add a newness, vivacity, and dramatic quality to the faithful literal rendering of the playwright's script, which makes his performance appear undiluted even after repeating the same performance a thousand times..." (qtd in Courtney, 1970, 93).

In his book Creating a Character (1990), Moni Yakim offers a self-exploration process which he calls "Looking In". He divides the personality into six selves which he labels "the vulnerable self, the instinctive self, the social self, the trusting self, the unresolved self and the decisive self". He believes that the exploration of each fragmented self will lead to "self-knowledge [which is] intended to enrich "characterization onstage" with the "goal...being the complete, sensitive physicalization of a character" (12).

The secret scene described above was aimed to provoke

actors to respond instinctively to an unexpected event or stimulus. Yakim describes the instinctive self as follows:

> "The instinctive self is that part of you which is the alert, unconscious energy that reacts to a stimulus, without the mind's interference...As an actor, you want to merge your physical and emotional reactions - you want to avoid the analytic process of distinguishing between the instinctive and the emotional. To act instinctively is to act spontaneously. To act spontaneously is to act truthfully. The mind has planned no deceptive strategies. You reveal your state of being at the moment" (37).

Revealing of secrets also had as its purpose the allowance of fictional family characters' vulnerable selves to open up and reveal what they had been hiding. According to Yakim, this opening up of emotions can help actors to develop a sense of their characters' social selves. They can come to realize the control they have been exerting over their characters' instincts and emotions.

> "The social self is the part of you that controls your instinct and emotions. It is as if you are two persons at the same time, the repressed instinctive self and the social self who watches the outside world and behaves according to its rules. You create an image to fulfill demands

made upon you by society" (49).

11. Socialization

The behavior of individuals outside their families is often markedly different from their communication styles at home. Likewise with the characters in the fictional families. Therefore actors were encouraged to interact with characters from outside fictional families. These scenes were designed to provide actors with opportunities to further explore the possibly suppressed or stifled dimensions of their characters' personalities. Benedetti (1981) emphasizes the importance of social interaction for the actor when he states:

> "Other people are the most important part of our environment. The way they act upon us, the way we act upon them, and the way in which we react with each other make up the dynamic social process that largely shapes us and determines our personalities. This social process is of special importance to the actor, since the form of drama is an artistically heightened version of this social interaction. Just as we are influenced greatly by those around us in everyday life, so a dramatic character is formed largely by the way he relates to the other characters in his play.
>
> As we watch a character on the stage, we get a great deal of information about him not only from

> what he does, but also from how all the other characters relate to him. In fact, the common idea that the actor's job is to create his character is somewhat erroneous; it would be truer to say that all the actors must create all the characters in the play, because personality on the stage, as in life, is rooted in dynamic interaction with other personalities within a given situation" (117).

The interaction of fictional family characters with new characters was partly designed to generate additional interest for future performance work because it was assumed that most scenes would take place outside the fictional family surroundings, that new locations would allow the characters to interact in unexpected ways, and this unexpected interaction would spark intriquing future subplots to the scenarios.

The cross-family scenes were approached in a variety of ways. Sometimes I asked two volunteers, each from a different fictional family, to enter the playing area. Then I asked the audience to suggest a situation. They were expected to present an on-the-spot improvisation in the given situation. Suggestions included - train station, hospital, on the moon. Then other fictional family characters jumped in and out of the scenes as they wished. This approach was designed to not only kindle spontaneity and energy, but also to generate new scenarios for the

fictional families.

A second example of cross-family scenes was the fictional family group encounter which grew out of Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls' (1981) descriptions of encounter groups. He believes that participants benefit from these groups whether or not they are verbally involved.

> "Sometimes I have people who don't say a single word through the whole five-week workshop and they go away and say that they have changed tremendously" (77).

The encounter (see Appendix A, scene 12) was designed to offer the fictional family characters an opportunity to listen to, and interact with, other fictional families who also have communication problems; to enable the actors to develop new choices in communication style for their characters in future fictional family scenes; and to give actors the opportunity to maintain their fictional family roles throughout an entire session.

12. Dream Enactment/The Subconscious

Perls states that his preferred therapy work is working with clients' dreams. He believes that:

> "In a dream, we have a clear existential message of what's missing in our lives, what we avoid doing and living, and we have plenty of material to re-assimilate and re-own the alienated

parts of ourselves" (80).

Perls further states that every aspect of a dream (every item and mood) is an integral part of the person who dreams it. In Gestalt therapy, therefore, patients are required to enact every character and object in their dream. Perls believes that this role playing is the only way they can achieve "full identification" which he considers to be "the counteraction to the alienation" (130).

He equates alienation with resistance to acknowledging parts of oneself, parts which one should reclaim in order to become integrated. He gives his favorite example of "full identification". A patient dreams he is walking across the bridle path into Central Park. Perls asks him to play the role of the bridle path. "What? And let everyone shit and crap on me?", he replies (130).

In psychodrama, others enact roles in the protagonist's dream or story; in Gestalt the patients alone play all the roles so that they are not surrounded by other people's interpretations or fantasies.

Based on Perls' concept of dream enactment a scene was included in which students enacted their fictional family character's dream or nightmare. In the fictional family study, the goal was theatrical; enactment was designed to provoke, from the students, imaginative, innovative, even surrealistic depictions of their fictional family character's inner life through theatrical imagery. The

dreams in the fictional families were acted in either style (i.e students played characters in other people's dreams; and/or, they could play characters or objects in their own dreams). The character-development goals in these enactments were to help students to delve into their characters' various levels of consciousness, so that they might become aware of their characters' preoccupations, fantasies, fears and obsessions.

Drama therapist Robert Landy (1986) endorses the idea of dream enactment as an aesthetic experience:

> "The notion of the unconsious is at the heart of the experience. The maker of art...is one who gives form to a feeling state. That form, expressed through movement, sound, or visual imagery, embodies a symbolic representation of the unconscious" (19).

Stanislavski (1961) says that the fundamental objective of his psycho-technique was to put actors in a creative state in which their subconscious will function naturally. He argues:

> "The essence of art and the main source of creativeness are hidden deep in man's soul; there, in the center of our spiritual being, in the realm of our inaccessible superconsciousness, our mysterious 'I' has its being, and inspiration itself. That is the storehouse of our most

important spiritual material" (81).

He views the yogis of India as models who:

> "...work miracles in the realm of the subconcious... They also proceed toward the unconscious through conscious preparatory means, from the physical to the spiritual, from the real to the unreal, from naturalism to the abstract. Take a handful of thoughts, they suggest, and throw them into your subconscious sack, saying: I have no time to bother with them so you (my subconscious) attend to them" (82).

With this concept in mind, students were given relaxation warm-ups preceding the dream scenes designed to foster the creative state and assist them in forming the kinds of images which fit their fictional family characters.

Klein (1975) reinforces the importance of dream enactment for actors.

> "When you awaken in the morning
> immediately jot down all you remember of your nighttime dream.
> Make every detail specific -
> as specific as it was in your dream.
>
> Put yourself in the center of your dream experiences and

use other actors or your own imagination for the remaining
dream elements.

Now relive that dream
as totally as your subconscious lived it when you were sleeping.

Prepare this scene outside of class.
Bring it in.
Enact it for the teacher-guide and the class...

Keep a diary of your dreams. Come to grips with your creative subconscious
so you can make use of it" (269).

Klein suggests that actors also record their "fantasies and daydreams" and store them for future enactments. And she outlines exercises for groups of five or six to create group fantasies for subsequent enactment.

13. Non-Stanislavskian Styles

In this study a shift of emphasis from psychological awareness to sociopolitical awareness to existential awareness was designed to force the actors to approach their fictional family characters through self-probing in relation to universal themes.

In the Stanislavskian approach to acting, actors search for subtext - the underlying meaning, the psychological implications of the character's words. Brecht's actors are concerned with the actual text - the sociopolitical message that underscores the entire work. Beckett's actors works with "supratext" - where the actor responds on the surface to a particular question, but the delivery communicates a broader, existential meaning (Harrop and Epstein, 1982, 208).

A. Epic Theatre/Brecht

Having exposed the students to Stanislavski's naturalistic style where character-identification is all important, I subsequently introduced the students to Brecht's alienation techniques where actors must learn to distance themselves from the role, to separate the character from the self. They must attempt to reach the rational, analytic part of the spectator, to alienate emotional empathy and create a critically-engaged audience (Esslin, 1965; Willett, 1964). I conjectured that the representative and reflective aspects of Brecht's theatre would help students to discover additional dimensions to their characters.

Because Brecht's theatre involves character 'gestus', i.e. precise physical representation of the character's attitude and point of view, I believed it would be an

effective style to stress the concept of physical embodiment of a role. In Brechtian style, they would focus on the external characteristics of their characters' sociopolitical function in a specific time, place and class structure.

Since many of the fictional families presented conflicts which were potential social issues, Brecht's theme-centred style, his emphasis on social and political realities and his didactic approach facilitated thought and reflection about the problems presented in the families in particular, and with social issues in general.

Other important components of Brechtian theatre, such as scenic gestus, where the spatial environment reinforces the action of the play and demonstrates its theme; simple, selective and functional costumes and properties; masks to indicate character attitude, were intended to offer students an opportunity to create and utilize masks and symbolic props. The spatial, episodic structure of Brecht's style was aimed to produce an awareness of how to utilize space in more innovative ways. Music and song, which Brecht incorporated in his plays to further his alienation technique, allowed music students in the class to contribute an added quality to the scenes.

Sessions to introduce Brechtian style were based on the kinds of exercises, games and improvisations suggested by directors John Harrop and Sabin Epstein (see Gold, 1991) to help the actor approach epic acting, to develop physical characterization and create gestus. The warm-ups centered

on physical activity which explored the rhythms and energies of a modern political structure. Improvisation revolved around situations featuring socioeconomic themes.

An exercise in which the students cloned another fictional family character was designed to reinforce the concept of character gestus, through emphasis on their characters' physical qualities and expressions. It also had as its objective the assisting of actors to distance themselves from their fictional family characters by critically observing the external manifestation of their characters by other

A continuation of the cloning exercise was created to help students to represent their fictional family dynamic emotionally and spatially; to reveal fictional family members' attitudes toward one another through use of character and scenic gestus; and to represent the fictional families' social issues.

Each fictional family member was asked to form two sculptures, the first representing the family dynamic as seen by him or her in the present (actual), the second representing his or her vision of the ideal dynamic. Each fictional family was also asked to create a sculpture which symbolized a socioeconomic theme relevant to its particular family. The audience was asked to observe each sculpture and give its impresssions of the representations.

I borrowed this technique from sociodrama where it is used as a group-learning procedure to provide practice in

solving human-relations problems and to heighten awareness of real-life family relationships. In the fictional family it was used to serve the same purpose - to enhance awareness of the fictional family characters' often unexpressed and/or subconscious feelings towards one another. This awareness can promote articulation of these emotions and communication (Jennings, 1990; Landy, 1986; Papp, Carter and Silverstein, 1973; Sternberg and Garcia, 1990).

In the Brechtian context, fictional family sculpting experience was aimed to reinforce the idea of scenic and character gestus. The total fictional family sculpture formation was comprised of individual fictional family members; each fictional family character represented its own particular perspective and attitude to each other and to their particular social and sociopolitical issues through physical expression.

As mentioned earlier, I borrowed this technique from sociodrama. I was also influenced by its use in other modalities, such as family therapy and visual arts therapy. Blatner (1973) describes the use of an "action sociogram" in psychodrama. The "protagonist" presents his or her family members (or significant others) "as if they were a group of sculptures in a diorama, or a three-dimensional painting." The "auxiliary egos" subsequently portray these characters in an effort to "symbolically represent the quality of the relationship" (46). Richard Lee (Fryrear and Fleshman, 1980) outlines his approach to sculpturing in videotherapy.

Through video recording and playback, he explores with his clients their differences in terms of personal emotional space and their individual views of the family.

Subsequent to the work on Brecht (i.e. improvisations, playing scenes from his plays and presenting the family sculptures), students were asked to write and perform a fictional family script in Brechtian style. In this exercise they were requested to attempt to separate their fictional family character from their 'self'.

As mentioned earlier, Brecht's actors were required to distance themselves from their roles so that they could present their characters' sociopolitical points of view. This separation of thought and emotion is seen to influence character communication behavior (Willett, 1964).

Landy (1986) states that Brecht's epic theatre provides a "significant model" for drama therapy. In drama therapy, clients often need to distance themselves from their personal issues so that they can view these problems from an objective perspective. The drama therapist assists these clients to distance themselves from emotions that may become too overwhelming by introducing a variety of distancing techniques. These techniques include enactment of social types rather than psychological characters, and the use of projective devices such as puppets, masks, props and dolls.

The fictional family Brechtian scene was also designed to help the actors discover additional physical manifestations of their fictional family characters'

attitudes; to encourage reflection on their fictional families' social issues in particular, and social issues in general; to encourage use of symbolic masks and props; to identify and perform for a specific target audience; and to break down the 'fourth wall' of the stage.

B. Theatre of the Absurd/Beckett

At this stage, students had been exposed to Stanislavski's naturalistic drama where they worked on the inner, psychological content of selected characters, as well as their fictional family roles. They had explored Brecht's epic theatre of alienation, of distancing themselves from the character. They had experimented with his didactic approach. They had employed his techniques both with his scripted characters and with their own fictional family roles.

Beckett's plays, with their emphasis on the intuitive effect of words (as opposed to Brecht's emphasis on intellectual meaning of language, and Stanislavski's stress on psychological implications of language) offer actors an imagistic, intuitive dimension to the perception of their characters.

To Stanislavski, 'truthful' performance referred to actors' development of psychological awareness. their precise self-knowledge of the characters they set out to portray.

For Brecht, 'truthful' performance referred to the

actor's sociopolitical awareness of the character. "What am I?" as opposed to "Who am I?" It referred to knowledge of the character's function in society in a specific time, place and class structure. This approach required the actor to adopt a character gestus - a precise physical attitude and point of view.

For Beckett, 'truthful' performance means that actors must give, through communication of an immediate action, an indication of a universal theme. They express an experience rather than make a statement. He deals with the problem of existence from a universal perspective (Harrop and Epstein, 1982).

Beckett is mainly interested in self-referential notions. Hence, the Beckett actor relates the text to himself in the most biographically accurate way possible. "Who am I?" here refers to Beckett's search for the self; in other words "What does it mean when I say - I?" Actors are expected to determine what the questions are, rather than to seek answers and offer solutions (Esslin, 1969, 23).

Beckett's characters are often depicted in the last moment of their lives and consciousness, unaware of the presence of others. This state of limbo necessitates, on the part of the actor, a kind of split awareness. Furthermore, Beckett's emphasis on circular activity, repetition, alternation of movement and stillness, and his poetic images offer the actor experience with vocal and physical rhythms and silences to "magnify the meaning of the poetic images"

(Harrop and Epstein, 1982, 200). Experimenting with these various elements extends the actors' work on physical representation of their characters.

When exposed to Stanislavski's naturalistic style, students were working with realistic sets, properties and costumes. In Brechtian style, they used 'real' or 'authentic' objects and articles of clothing. The sets were sparse, with lighting and visual effects visible to the audience. There was no illusion; often lecture-demonstration style was implemented.

In Beckett's plays, the sparse stage set concept is extended to a theatrical image of a void, of an infinite space or wasteland; or else his characters are subjected to substantial physical inconvenience by their physical surroundings. They are buried up to their necks in such objects as coffins, urns or sand. I conjectured that technical effects, such as spotlight and music as characters in his plays, would give actors ideas for innovative settings and imaginative technical effects which they could incorporate into future work. I also believed that working with Beckett's radio or television plays would stimulate student actors to incorporate other media into their stage work.

In naturalistic plays, there is a linear plot, a story line with a beginning, middle and end. In Brechtian theatre, the story line exists but it is broken by subplots, plays within plays, alienation techniques. In Beckett's plays

there is no plot, no linear development. The plays present Beckett's intuition of the human condition by a method that is essentially polyphonic, i.e. there is a simultaneous vocal interaction. Actors, therefore, examine his plays to isolate sets of images and themes, and study the structural framework in order to convey Beckett's sense of mystery, bewilderment and anxiety when confronted with the human condition. The continual cycle of hope leading to disappointment and despair is a predominant element in his work.

Beckett thinks that one of a human being's most difficult problems is his/her state of 'being' - like that of a child or an animal. The actor, therefore, must learn to do nothing, while still being actively involved in the situation on stage. This feature develops in actors the quality of understatement, which will be a valuable skill for moments when it is required of them in varied forms of theatrical styles.

Harrop and Epstein (1982) suggest a variety of exercises and games to help students to explore the experience of time and waiting. In my classes I used and/or adapted these types of techniques for similar purposes. Additionally, I incorporated warm-ups with masks, some of which were based on Libby Appel's (1982) mask characterization exercises.

Subsequent to the improvisations and the work with Beckett's short plays, the students in each fictional family

were asked to write and perform a fictional family short play in Absurdist style. My objectives for this exercise were to help them: approach their fictional family texts through imagistic, poetic language, universal themes and existential meanings; to incorporate circular activity, vaudeville techniques, alternation of movement stillness, repetition, physical rhythms and silences and imaginative technical effects; to integrate cycles of hope leading to disappointment and despair; and to project characters and ideas through periods of understatement.

C. Students' Selected Performance Style

At the end of the course students performed final scenes in any performance style they wished. These scenes were intended to offer them the opportunity of resolving their fictional family character's personal and/or social issues; to share an "ending" with the larger group; and to further their research of performance style (For sample scripts, see Gold, 1991).

The approach to closure and presentation of the fictional family final scenes varied with each group. Some fictional families focused on resolving their characters' personal issues. They wished to leave their characters and their families on a positive note. Others opted for what they considered to be a more "realistic" approach. They allowed their characters to go off in different directions.

Summary

In addressing the second research question, namely, within a TLA undergraduate university acting class context, how does the fictional family approach seek to enhance established actor-training methodologies, this chapter has described the fictional family process. This process seeks to provide a transitional step between Strasberg's first three stages of actor training -- 1) self-exploration 2) improvisation and physicalization 3) emotion memory techniques -- and his fourth stage which deals with scenework from written scripts. It has explored a methodology in which students created characters from their own imaginations, observations and experiences together with a group which comprised their fictional family. They enacted this fictional family character over an extended period of time in a variety of situations. Enactments took various forms such as improvisation, monologues, script outlines and written dialogue. Content for these dramatic forms was created by the actors themselves.

Chapter Four will describe the descriptive research methodology used to determine the effectiveness of the fictional family as an approach to character development.

Chapter Four

RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines the means employed to determine the effectiveness of the fictional family as an approach to character development. This goal is best met utilizing descriptive research methods. Descriptive methods are used extensively in arts education research for exploratory studies which describe, explore and interpret topics rather than test hypotheses, with the objective of drawing conclusions from which future studies can be recommended (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Cook and Lafleur, 1975; Courtney, 1987; Culler, 1987; Jent, 1989). Descriptive methods in the present project include survey, content analysis (Krippendorf, 1980) and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The data collection examines two processes in actor training: self-exploration and character development. The responses to questions dealing with these processes are extracted from students' questionnaires and their journals. Subjects' quotations are an accepted methodology of descriptive research. As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) quotes are integrated into the text using a variety of techniques:

> a) "A good qualitative paper is well-documented with description taken from the data to illustrate and substantiate the assertions made...Quoting your subjects...helps your reader get closer to

the people you have studied...The quotations and the author's interpretations intertwine to form a flowing paragraph which nicely modulates the particular with the general..." (177).

b) "Another way to present data is to incorporate it directly into the text, so that it almost becomes part of a story you are telling. In this technique... you are less distanced from the material you are presenting...clearly many different ways to incorporate examples from your data can be used. Relying on more than one means will provide variety to your writing...In writing up qualitative research, you present your point of view, your analysis, your explanation, your rendering of what the data reveals" (179).

Appendix A includes the presentation of data in the above manner. It incorporates students' responses to the class exercises, sometimes as quotes and at other times, paraphrased and intertwined with my own observations. The data for this study have been collected and interpreted by the author as observer and acting teacher during the experiential process. Teachers are trained professionals, skilled in observing and interpreting student behavior. For this reason they are appropriate individuals to conduct research. When researchers who do not belong to the regular group observe subjects, the behavior of the subjects is

affected. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) call this change in behavior "observer effect" (43).

Furthermore, they state that teachers who use this type of clinical research observe not only the students, but also themselves. By objectifying their own style and mannerisms, they can alter their attitudes toward their students and improve their teaching effectiveness.

The study was conducted in a series of introductory undergraduate university TLA acting courses over a six-year period. The sample comprised 302 students from 15 acting classes divided into 60 fictional families. The participants majored in a wide variety of disciplines. They had varying degrees of acting background. Approximately 25 per cent were drama majors. The average class size was 20 students. There was an approximate ratio of eleven females to nine males. Roughly 80 per cent of students were age 19 to 25; 10 per cent were in the 30-50 year-old range (these were mainly in summer sessions) and five per cent were under 19 years of age.

Students were accepted by interview rather than audition. In the interviews they were advised of course requirements and given a verbal description of the course. Since this course is very much in demand and cannot accommodate the numbers of students who wish to enter, students generally entered with a positive attitude.

In her doctoral thesis, Acting and Psychotherapy (1988), Ellen Irene Halperin states that:

> "In order to assess the effectiveness of any actor training technique, it is necessary to determine whether or not the actor has improved. Due to the highly subjective nature of acting, this is a very formidable task. Generally speaking, researchers have assumed that it is impossible to operationalize, or find objective behavioral criteria, for "good" acting or "improved" acting. What constitutes quality in acting varies with the values of the judge and the many variables of the production situation. Since we cannot establish universally accepted definitions of "goodness" of a performance, it is impossible to apply the behavioral technology of psychological testing to judgments of acting (e.g. we cannot measure how close a student is to getting "there" if we do not agree on where "there" is). Since acting does not produce a product that can be counted or weighed, researcher [sic] can only try to find ways of judging acting which are consistent with each other" (153).

Given this "formidable task" of assessing the effectiveness of any actor-training technique, and given the lack of established and reliable measurement scales, I chose to approach the question using descriptive methods as well as

analysis of the results of a course questionnaire that I developed for the purpose of evaluation, with corroboration from the students' journals.

Thus, indications of the fictional family technique's effectiveness are addressed in the following ways. First, my own observations and interpretations as an acting teacher during the time I guided them through the classroom process and observed their performances and behavior are discussed. Second, documentation from 302 students' journals which represent 60 fictional families developed during a six-year period (from 1986-1992) are studied. Third, examination of data extracted from students' responses to questionnaires over the same period of time are recorded and analyzed.

I. Classroom Process

During the six years of carrying out the fictional family technique in my undergraduate introductory acting classes, I observed over 300 student participants. There were no rating scales to measure specific aspects of performances, nor were there any outside observers whose presence may have altered student behavior. In my role of acting teacher, I observed the developmental process of the students' fictional family characters from their performances in each class. To chart or code behavior, I made notes relating to students' actions, performances, responses and comments after every session. These notes were filed and periodically examined in order to alter and/or

adapt techniques and approaches in subsequent classes. The purpose was to develop and refine techniques with the ultimate aim of perfecting the fictional family approach.

For indications of the effectiveness of the technique, I monitored students' progress in the areas of character development. I looked for: a) the projection of their characters' thoughts and feelings through vocal and body expression; c) character communication fostered by the development of listening and responding skills; and c) ability to display the various facets of their characters' personalities.

I also noted the development of their theatre skills, such as: a) spatial awareness, i.e. the variety of ways in which they used the space as a group, such as, proscenium style, theatre in the round and environmental theatre, and of their individual spacing in relation to the other characters on stage and to the audience; and b) plot development i.e. their ability to create an unfolding story with a beginning, middle and end or what Field (1982) refers to as "a unit, or block, of dramatic action" (191). The acquisition of these skills generally leads to the achievement of tight, cohesive and dramatically effective presentations.

Other in-class contexts from which I observed students included their evaluation of classmates' performances and their general comments about the class and the fictional family technique.

As mentioned above, the design was constructed to look for development in various areas of theatre; I was primarily looking for the ways in which the characters were developing. Since the primary goal of the fictional family technique is to assist actors to create multidimensional characters, I was looking for manifestations of additional aspects of their characters in each scene presented. For example, if particular actors consistently played their characters' generous/sensitive/ emotional sides, I looked for, and encouraged them to exhibit their characters' selfish/callous/indifferent sides.

II. Journals

Students were required to keep journals to record their experiential process during the period of the acting course. They were requested to express their personal thoughts about, and emotional responses to all class activities, to connect them to acting and performance theory, to evaluate their own and their peers' work, and to include all written assignments such as poems, stories, scripts and research material. The journals were handed in to me after every eighth session. The intent was for the students to write the journals the day or evening that the class took place. Students were advised that they could write these journals in any style they wished.

Some students supplemented their journals with poems, scripts, drawings and other diary material not directly

related to course material. A number of students also kept diaries written in first person by their fictional family characters.

In this study, I was particularly interested in journal comments relating to the actor's process of fictional family character development and sought indications of the technique's effectiveness.

Journal writing was a course requirement to meet the following objectives:

a) to encourage students to reflect on their classroom experiences in order to discourage superficial approaches to their work,

b) to develop an additional means of communication and mutual feedback between me and my students,

c) to provide students with ample opportunity to analyze and evaluate their peers' performances and participation,

d) to validate journal writing as a developmental component of the actor's process.

Each of the above objectives is supported by its own rationale:

a) Journal writing to express personal reflections toward academic or practical work is an accepted practice in a variety of disciplines. For example, Pamela Barrager Dunne (1990), drama therapist, states that:

"Writing helps to focus thoughts and to explore

feelings. The journal serves as a valuable resource..." (31).

Similarly, Toby Fulwiler (1980), writing professor, states that:

"The journal is a natural format for self-examination...Journals are interdisciplinary and developmental by nature" (19).

b) In a class of more than 20 students and a limited time slot (under 90 minutes), individual feedback and class discussion were often cut short. Also, students who may have been inhibited in group exchange were unexpectedly forthcoming in personal writing. Their candidness helped me to get to know them more quickly and to give feedback in a private, personal way. Students came for personal interviews intermittently throughout the course. These interviews often served to continue the reflections which they had begun to express in their journals, or to express verbally attitudes or perceptions they were either unable or reluctant to put in writing. Most often students commenced interviews with the comment, "As I wrote in my journal...." Interviews were not mandatory, but were encouraged.

c) An important aspect of journal writing is peer evaluation. Peer evaluation is an important component in actor training. Many educators and actor-training theorists

stress the value of peer evaluation. For example, Viola Spolin (1963) states that:

> "...it is most essential that the teacher-director does not make the evaluation himself but, rather, asks the questions which all answer-including the teacher...Thus audience responsibility for the actors becomes part of the organic growth of the student" (27).

The journals allowed for augmentation of class discussions. Although some time was allotted for peer evaluation in class, there was not always sufficient time to hear every student's comments. Second, some students were inhibited in groups. Third, many students were reluctant to evaluate others because they were concerned that their comments may have been perceived to be negative. In journal writing, students could openly evaluate their peers because they knew that the journal was confidential. I was the only one who read their comments.

d) The students were given a course requirement handout at the beginning of the course which included description of journal requirements. It also defined course grading. The journal was worth 20% of their final grade. They were informed that the monthly journals would be returned without a recorded grade, but that if they wished to obtain their grades each month, they could do so by request. Many

students stated that they did not wish to obtain grades till the end of the course because they wanted to feel free of "writing for marks" (even if this was not the case).

I did not correct syntax in the journals, but I offered comments which I considered to be helpful for their acting development. Sometimes, a student simply recorded class activities without reflection or analysis. In such a case, I suggested in writing to the student that we meet. In these meetings, I aimed to discover where the problems/writing blocks lay, and collaborated with the student to find a solution.

Grading journals is a controversial issue in academic courses. Some teachers feel that journals are personal and should not even be read by teachers. Fulwiler disagrees, and offers the following argument.

> "...First,...a reading by a teacher can help them expand their journals and make them more useful... Second, some students believe that if an academic production is not looked at by teachers it has no worth...Third, students feel that journals must 'count for something'- as must every requirement in an academic setting" (18).

Fulwiler describes a variety of criteria that teachers use to grade journals. These criteria include: length (counting pages); "quality of insight or evidence of personal growth; or a credit/no credit arrangement" (18). Some teachers

simply make sure the journals have been written without reading them. When teachers do not read journals, however, they do not gain the advantage of learning through their students' perceptions. Also this method eliminates the value of the journals as a mutual means of communication.

Fulwiler has his students write journals in loose-leaf books so that they can decide to withhold personal entries if they wish. Since my students generally typed their journals on computers, they were at liberty to erase any sections with which they may have felt uncomfortable. However, they were advised at the outset that journals were confidential.

Fulwiler further endorses student journal writing for the benefit of teachers' learning. He states:

> "Reading students' journals keeps teachers in touch with student frustrations, anxieties, problems, joys, excitements. Teachers, regardless of discipline, who understand the everyday realities of student life may be better teachers when they tailor assignments more precisely toward student needs. Reading student journals humanizes teachers" (18).

III. Questionnaires

On the last day of class, students were asked to complete questionnaires (see Table I). They were told in writing that the purpose of the questionnaires was to help

the teacher to assess the fictional family technique, that they were not obliged to answer any questions with which they felt uncomfortable, that the responses were in no way connected to class grades, and that all information would be kept strictly confidential.

The questions were designed to discover whether the fictional family experience enhanced the process of character creation. Since interest facilitates learning and creativity (Johnstone, 1983, Way, 1969), a number of questions attempted to discover students' interest in the process, from the time they first heard about it, during mid-term, and at the end of the term. To detect whether students perceived this character creation technique to be effective during the process, and/or in retrospect, some questions were framed to elicit their personal responses to playing their fictional family roles both during the experience and at the end of the course and how they viewed the fictional family process.

Several questions sought to examine what students learned about themselves in playing their fictional family roles (self-discovery). Other questions sought to find out what they felt they learned about acting and theatre from the experience.

In line with educational research theory (Cook and LaFleur, 1975), the questionnaires were pilot tested for two years. Based on the responses I was receiving, I added and

Table I

Questionnaires

Forced-Choice Questions

What aspects of theatre did you learn most about from the fictional family experience? - Voice and Speech; Improvisation; Creative Writing; Developing a Character; Artistic Team Collaboration

1=not very much; 2=some; 3=adequate; 4=much; 5=very much

Open-Ended Questions

1. In your fictional family, how did you feel about playing the role of _____?
2. How do you feel now about playing this role?
3. What did you learn about yourself in playing the role?
4. What did you learn about theatre in playing the role?
5. What do you think you achieved personally through the fictional family experience?
6. What do you think you achieved as an actor through the fictional family experience?

(Question 5 was designed to validate question 3. Question 6 was designed to validate question 4.)

refined the questions to obtain more of the information I needed. For example, the first set of questionnaires contained open-ended questions only. To obtain more specific responses about aspects of theatre learned, I added the forced-choice ratings which divided theatre learned into five specific categories. I also deleted certain questions which were related to techniques I had discarded, such as the replaying of scenes on video. Although the primary goals of the study were to examine self-exploration and character development, character development involves the acquisition of a number of acting skills. Therefore students were asked to rate their learning of other skills.

Before compiling results of the students' open-ended questions, I developed certain criteria by which to detect indications of the effectiveness of the fictional family technique. Criteria:

1. Students' attitudes and responses toward the concept of creating their own characters and playing these roles for an extended period of time. For example, expressions and demonstrations of eagerness and excitement toward the idea of participating in the fictional family experience.

2. Change in level of interest in their fictional family characters in particular, and in the fictional family technique in general throughout the experience, and which particular components may have influenced their responses. Isolation of components are intended to indicate which areas of the technique are seen to be effective and which areas

need improvement.

3. Whether the fictional family approach fostered self-exploration and self-discovery such as: learning about one's personal resources, one's strengths and weaknesses, and how one relates to others, both inside and outside one's own family structure.

4. Whether the students perceived that the fictional family technique taught and enhanced theatre skills such as: improvisation - the ability to play unscripted scenes; spontaneity - listening and responding to others on stage; voice and speech skills such as vocal projection and articulation; physicalization - movement in character; and the ability to identify and enact the components of several performance styles.

5. Whether, according to the students, the fictional family fostered self-discovery and encouraged desire to retain and support personal qualities and/or behavior perceived to be positive; and to discard personal qualities and/or behavior perceived to be negative. This learning would indicate that students recognized their ability to change aspects of their personality; and that this ability could be transposed to fictional characters.

6. Whether the students reported that the fictional family fostered specific acting/theatre skills.

Coding Categories

In order to evaluate the responses to determine whether

they met the set criteria (Krippendorff, 1980), it was necessary to formulate coding categories. Grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was utilized. In this approach, the researcher allows the categories to emerge from the subjects' responses. Utilizing this approach, thirteen coding categories emerged:

1. Group collaboration/relationship to others

This category deals with students' group collaboration within the fictional family structure; their learning about group dynamics in general, and their relationship to others outside the group -- e.g. I gained understanding of other people.

2. Personal characteristics

This category refers to what students learned about themselves -- e.g. I discovered I am angrier (less patient, more shy, more creative) than I had thought.

3. Families of origin/family dynamics

This category deals with how students related their own fictional family characters to their families of origin -- e.g. I think I understand my father better now; I realize how difficult it is to be a parent.

4. Gained confidence

This category refers to the students' gaining of

personal confidence in general; and in particular, confidence on stage, in public speaking and in auditioning for acting roles.

5. Acting process/basic acting skills

This category contains students' learning about the whole acting/theatre/creative process; individual specific skills are not always delineated.

6. Staging/directing

This category pertains to students' learning about the use of space, visual aspects of production, blocking, theatre production in general and directing in particular, and to the audience/actor relationship or audience awareness.

7. Character development

This category refers to students' learning of the character-development process, and concern with the importance of building multidimensional characters.

8. Improvisation

This category represents unscripted scenes which include: a) on-the-spot scenarios, b) scenes which are given a few moments of preparation, and c) scenes which are out-of-class assignments.

9. Voice and speech

This category deals with students' learning to project their voices and to speak more clearly on stage.

10. Creative writing

This category includes students' learning about script writing, journal writing and the creation of individual textual material for performance.

11. Movement

Movement category includes students' learning of how to physicalize their characters and to incorporate character gestures and mannerisms.

12. Acting/performance styles

This category includes learning about Stanislavski and Naturalistic theatre, Brecht and Epic theatre, Absurdist theatre and other styles such as Theatre of Cruelty and Theatre for Children.

13. Other responses

This category pertains to a variety of topics about students' learning which emerged from their responses. Since there are few in each category, the responses have been incorporated into one category with the intent of detecting additional components of learning which may be inherent in the fictional family technique. Other responses include such

topics as: learning about what the acting profession involves; developing an appreciation of theatre in general; a developed interest in becoming actors; learning research and/or analytical skills and about social issues; how to work with scripts and also about the wide variety of possibilities, choices, interpretations of scenes; about how it felt to be - e.g. a teen-age rebel, or an older person.

Reliability and Validity

Since the questionnaires were not developed quantitatively, no quantitative measures of reliability and validity were obtained.

Chapter Five will present the results obtained from the data collected from the three sources described above: 1) Classroom process, which I as their acting teacher guided the students through, and during which I observed their performance and behavior; 2) journals written by the student participants; and 3) questionnaires administered to the student/participants.

Chapter Five

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter deals with question three of the present study. The question was designed to seek indications of the effectiveness of the fictional family character-creation technique. To accomplish this task, data have been collected from three sources: 1. student/participants' behavior and performance during classroom process as observed by their acting teacher; 2.student/participants' journals; and 3. responses from questionnaires administered to the student/participants.

As in any sample population, the information gathered from the data will be generalizable only to the population described above. The information discovered through this research is meant to assist those in that population - the undergraduate university TLA acting class - as well as those who deal with that population - acting teachers. While this study may not be generalizable to all acting students, it will be applicable to many.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected and interpreted by the author as observer and acting teacher during the experiential process. The data collection examined two particular issues in actor training, self-exploration and character development. The responses to questions dealing with these issues were extracted from students'

questionnaires and their journals. Also included are my observations based on their performances, behavior, class discussion and personal interviews.

Effectiveness of the Fictional Family Technique

To evaluate the research, predetermined objective and subjective criteria were used to determine student growth and development over the course of an undergraduate university level acting class within the TLA tradition.

One criterion was whether the fictional family approach fostered self-exploration and self-discovery such as: developing and recognizing one's personal resources, one's strengths and weaknesses, and how one relates to others, both inside and outside one's own family structure. Results (classroom process, journals and open-ended questions) indicate that it was this aspect of theatre that student/participants learned the most. However, since this category was not listed in the forced-choice ratings, there is no corroborating data from that source.

Some students reported that they had selected roles which they perceived to be "very different" from their own personalities. Their expressed reasons for their choices were to explore what it may have been like, for example, to be a "rebellious teen-ager", or to be a parent, so that they could envision or try out possibilities for their own futures. Others wished to play the role of a parent or sibling similar to one of their own family members of origin

with whom they may have had difficulties in order "to understand [that family member] better". Still others chose characters perceived to be somewhat similar to themselves.

Generally students who had chosen characters whom they considered to be very different from themselves stated that they gradually discovered that they and their characters had, in fact, a great deal in common; similarly students who had chosen characters similar to themselves discovered some marked differences between self and role. These differences were manifested in their characters' often unexpected behavior on stage in response to other characters' communication style exhibited not only through verbal choice but also through body language and vocal delivery.

Many students expressed the view that the fictional family experience helped them to realize what they perceived to be their own "shortcomings" (e.g. being quick to anger and/or not listening enough to others). Subsequent to these realizations they were able to decide which characteristics of their fictional family characters' personalities they wished to retain in their own personalities, and which personality traits they wished to discard. However, having expressed the various facets of their fictional family characters, they said that they recognized that the discarded traits could be available to them for future roles.

Almost all students stated that they had gained self-confidence in social interaction, courage to articulate

their emotions in their personal lives and general confidence in their ability to perform 'on stage'. These statements corroborated my own observations of their behavior with their peers in class, both 'on stage' and off. These statements were expressed in class discussion, in journal writing, during personal interviews and were clearly exhibited in their performances. Since students were coached to find additional dimensions of their characters in each scene, they said that they were forced to search for these dimensions or emotions in themselves and then find a way to incorporate and express them in their fictional family characters.

A second criterion was whether the fictional family technique enhanced acting/theatre skills, such as improvisation, physicalization/movement and performance styles. In the open-ended questions students were asked what they learned about theatre in playing their fictional family role. To validate that question they were also asked what they thought they achieved as actors through the fictional family experience. Results indicate that students learned more about character development than any of the other skills.

The forced-choice questions limited the respondents' order ranking to five categories. However, the students had an opportunity to report other categories in the open-ended questions. Nonetheless, a number of students may not have reported every area in which they perceived development for

a number of reasons: a) because they felt they had already written about this in their journals, (in fact, some said "see journal"); b) others reported two or three skills and then wrote "etc., etc.", which may or may not have included some or all of the skills in the categories which emerged"; others were rushed for time, i.e. they needed to get to their next class; and still others may not have felt like taking the time to list more categories. These reasons may explain why some particular skills received lower ratings.

My observations of their character-development process began with the first fictional family scene (The Fictional Family at Breakfast - see Appendix A, page 126) and continued throughout the course up until their final performances (The Fictional Family Final Scene - see Appendix A, page 216).

During the first scene many students had difficulties in a variety of acting areas. For example, they were often unable to adequately express their characters' emotions. While I had exposed all of them to Stanislavski's concept of character objectives, they found this concept difficult to execute on stage. When coached to establish strong objectives for their characters, they were still unable to focus on and sustain these objectives throughout the scene. In addition, physical behavior of characters on stage was often not very different from students' own movement and behavior off stage, and some students had not yet established their characters' characteristic features and/or

mannerisms.

Although they had created a history for their characters, it was incomplete and there were still many questions about that character to be learned. Students were coached to continually search for more dimensions to their characters, in fact they were asked to attempt to explore a different aspect of their fictional family characters with each scene they performed. In addition to the inability to present credible characters different from themselves, the fictional families had not yet established close actor rapport or bonding. Actors were not always sensitive to the needs of the group. This lack of group awareness lent itself to insufficient communication among each other. Scenes were often devoid of a sense of rhythm. There was a need for intensity and energy to spark dramatic content.

Gradually throughout the sequence of scenes, I observed the students beginning to acquire the acting skills to help them in their character development. These skills (vocal delivery, body movement, communication, spatial awareness) enabled them to express their characters' emotions and to incorporate their characters' physical actions, behaviors and mannerisms. Learning more about their characters' psyches helped them to understand and play the subtext of their characters' dialogue.

As bonding within the fictional families took place, learning about their characters and the fictional family relationships was accelerated. Thus students were able to

interact more effectively with their fellow actors on stage and thereby to create more dynamic performances. For example, through the enactment of incidents in their characters' past and future lives, I observed how their choices of incidents and the performances thereof, developed into an understanding of their characters' present behavior. Deeper understanding and insight into their characters' psyches was manifested in the effectiveness of their performances.

A third criterion was whether the fictional family approach fostered group dynamics/artistic team collaboration. While this category was rated second in the open-ended questions and ranked third in the forced-choice questions after improvisation, the reason for the discrepancy may be that improvisation was a much-used component of the fictional family technique. Since improvisations were presented within the fictional family groupings, the high response in this area strengthens the idea that the fictional family is an effective framework for improvisation. Actor-training theorists concur that improvisation is a powerful technique for actors to explore their characters' emotions in order to create multidimensional characters (Stanislavski, 1961; Strasberg, 1987). The high ratings that students gave to improvisation support the fact that they learned most about character development by this means.

The fostering of character development placed stress on

such aspects of actor training as self-exploration, improvisation, spontaneity, listening and responding, communication and emotion memory. A significant number of students also mentioned other skills such as voice and speech and body movement.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, students were required to keep journals to record their experiential process during the period of the acting course. Throughout the work process described in Appendix A representative excerpts from students' journals have been used to exemplify and support the concept of the fictional family technique.

In this study, I was particularly interested in journal comments relating to the actor's process of fictional family character development and sought indications of the technique's effectiveness. For example, following a particular scene, students often reported in their journals that they "learned a lot" about their characters from the performance. They made comments such as, he/she is not as happy/sad/callous/ as I thought. Or they may have reported feelings of stagnation, stating that their characters, for example, were still only showing their angry sides or their pleasant sides, and that this area was one on which they wished to work. In later journals when they felt they had accomplished this goal they would express their satisfaction with their performances.

Questionnaires

a) Forced-choice Ratings (for results, see Table II, and Figure 1.)

b) Open-Ended Questions (for results, see Table III.)

How the Responses were Extracted

The coding categories represent topics which students reported when they answered the questions. Sometimes a topic may not have been included in their responses to the direct question such as: What did you learn about theatre in playing the role? If they did not respond explicitly to the question, I looked to see whether the response might be contained or explicit in their responses to other questions.

In these cases, I looked at the questions "How did you feel about playing the role of _____?" "How do you feel now about playing this role? For example, if students did not specifically include character development in their list of theatre skills learned, but under either of the two questions above, they responded, e.g. " _____ developed into a multidimensional, credible character", I included character development as one of the acting/theatre skills learned.

To allow students to further express their opinions, all questions included space for students' comments. A number of questions were repeated to validate other questions. Some students filled out the questionnaires in

Table II

Results of Questionnaires: Number of Students Making Each Choice

Category	Forced-Choice Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
learned:	not	v.much some	adequate	much	v. much
Character Development	1	2	24	50.5	89.5*
Improvisation	3	4.5	27	70	50.5
Artistic Team Collaboration	3	9.5	21.5	47.5	50.5
Creative Writing	6.5	20.5	56	45	30
Voice and Speech	15	37	57	30	7

(*Some students circled two numbers. In these cases, I gave half the weight to each number)

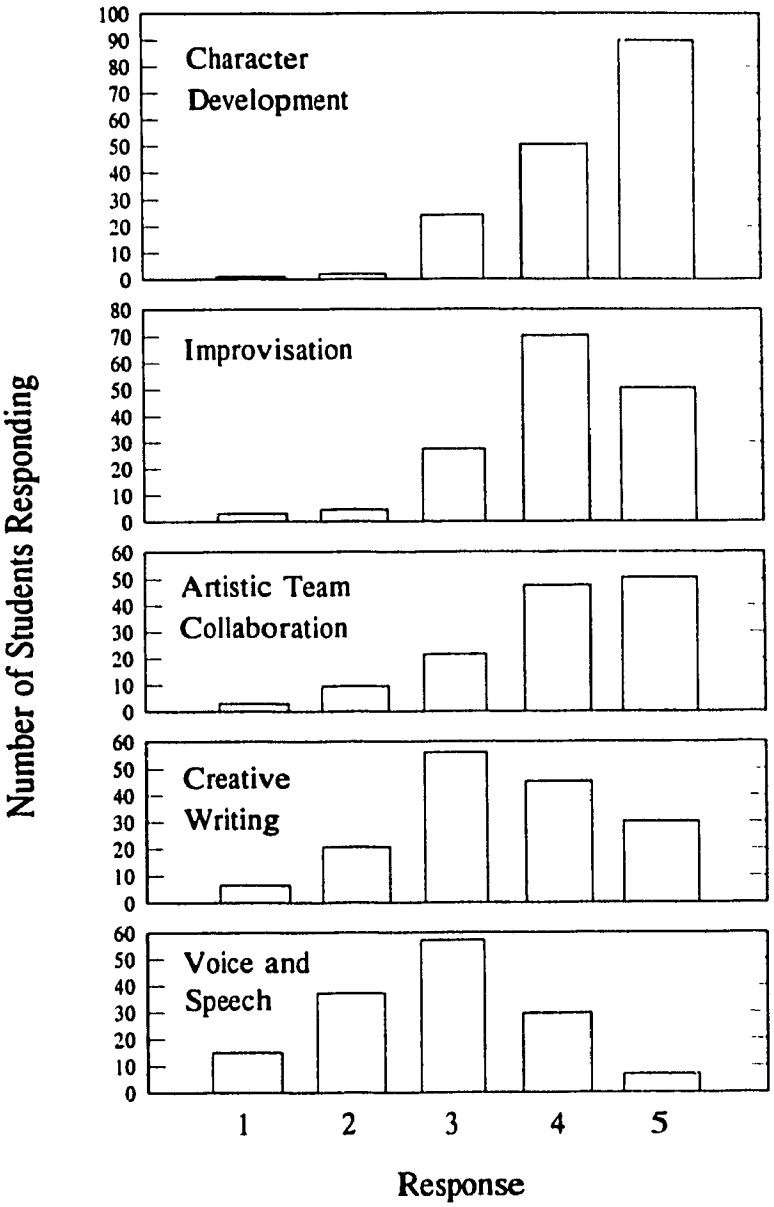

Figure 1. Graphical Representation of the Data in Table II. Results of Questionnaires: Number of Students Making Each Choice in the Forced-Choice Questions: What aspects of theatre did you learn most about from the fictional family experience?

1=not very much; 2=some; 3=adequate; 4=much; 5=very much

Table III

Coding Categories Number of Student Responses in Each Category

1. Group Collaboration/relationship to others	182
2. Personal Characteristics	221
3. Families of Origin/Family Dynamics	43
4. Gained Confidence	33
5. Acting Process/Basic Acting Skills	82
6. Staging/Directing	37
7. Character Development	211
8. Improvisation	50
9. Voice and Speech	22
10. Creative Writing	21
11. Movement	23
12. Acting/Performance Styles	74
13. Other Responses	27

class; others completed them out of class. Eighty-five per cent of students returned their questionnaires.

Both the data from the forced-choice ratings and the open-ended questions indicate that character development was perceived to be highest of the acting skills learned. The highest scores from students' responses to the forced-choice questions which asked them to rate acting/theatre skills was given to character development (see Table II and graph). This score was supported by the open-ended questions (see Table III). However, the open-ended section also included questions about self-exploration. This category received the highest score (221 responses out of a total of 256) with character development second (211 responses).

Group collaboration received the second highest rating in the responses to the open-ended questions compared to the third highest rank in the forced-choice ratings. In forced-choice ratings, students ranked improvisational skills second (out of five). There is a discrepancy with this ranking as improvisation was eighth (out of thirteen) in the open-ended questions. As discussed earlier, the explanation of this discrepancy may be that improvisation was used constantly within the fictional family structure as a stimulus for character development.

Another discrepancy was in the areas of voice and speech where students ranked them fifth in the forced-choice questions; but ninth out of thirteen in the open-ended questions. The creative writing component was ranked fourth

out of five in the forced-choice ratings; and tenth out of thirteen in the open-ended questions. However, development of these skills was not the focus of the present study; nevertheless students reported acquisition of these skills through the fictional family experience.

Conclusion

The perception by the majority of students that self-exploration and character development were highest of their learning experiences, as indicated by their performance, behavior and classroom discussion and corroborated by their responses to questionnaires and their journal writings, are clear indication of effectiveness in those areas. It would have been valuable to include self-exploration as one of the categories in the forced-choice questions. However, the results from the other data are so strong, one can conclude that self-exploration was perceived to be highest.

Since learning took place within a fictional family structure, the high ratings that students gave to group collaboration suggest that they perceived working in fictional family groupings to be an effective technique for self-exploration and character development.

Students ranked character development highest in the forced-choice ratings; in the open-ended questions they rated it second after self-exploration. From these results of the questionnaires and from my own observations of classroom process, it appears that the character-building process used

in this study has been effective.

This study has also explored the idea of placing the fictional characters in a fictional family. In the open-ended questions students rated team /group collaboration (fictional family) second of the acting skills learned. This rating indicates that the experience of working in fictional family units has been perceived to facilitate learning. Since attitudes and points of view are generally considered to be highly influenced by family experience, this score might suggest that the groupings facilitated character creation. Students' perceptions, therefore, are in line with the goals of the course which sought to emphasize character development in a fictional family structure. These findings are corroborated by my own observations of students' performances, behavior, class discussion, personal interviews and writings in their journals over the duration of the six-year study.

From the rankings students gave to learning about theatre, it would seem that they did acquire knowledge of a variety of other skills such as creative writing, voice and speech and staging/directing. However, the development of these skills was not the focus of the present study. The learning of these skills can be considered to be a beneficial by-product of the technique which has applications which are addressed in the final chapter.

Further corroboration of the study's findings are described in Appendix B which outlines three pilot projects

which used the fictional family technique with written texts and with a variety of styles.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether the fictional family actor-training approach enhanced the actor's process of character creation in a university undergraduate TLA acting class.

A descriptive study was used to explore the following questions:

1. What theoretical relationships are there between the fictional family approach and other characterization techniques?

2. Within a Theatre as a Liberal Art (TLA) context, how does the fictional family approach seek to enhance established actor-training methodologies in regard to the twinned processes of self-exploration and character creation?

3. What indications are there of its effectiveness?

Fictional Family Approach and Character Creation Techniques

Question one was dealt with through literature review which presented a background of actor-training techniques beginning with Stanislavski's psychological approach to develop actors' inner techniques. His disciples such as Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Chekhov continued and adapted his techniques in the U.S. Although some of these acting teachers reversed his inner approach and exposed their students first to external techniques, all were striving to

help actors develop truthful, complex characters. Some of Stanislavski's disciples taught at Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio where emphasis was on The Method which stressed Stanislavski's concepts of the actor's self-exploration and self-knowledge. Strasberg's Method consisted of four stages: a) self-exploration b) physical actions through improvisation and animal exercises c) emotion memory and d) scenework from written scripts.

The major findings of the present study demonstrated a need for extensive character development work before approaching scripted scene study. It was argued that this transitional step could offer students profound experience in, and understanding of, the multidimensional aspect of fictional characters. I proposed that this background work in character development could be subsequently applied to fictional characters in written texts. During the period of the study, in separate projects, I applied the fictional family technique to a variety of written scripts (for details, see Appendix B.)

A second focus of the literature review examined the concept of actor training through ensemble methodology described by its practitioners such as Schechner, Barba, Latham and Phaneuf as the emphasis on the individual within a group structure. The present study has advocated a character development technique within a fictional family group.

Character Creation Process

To answer question two the study presented a description of the fictional family project and described 13 course components. Each component was supported by excerpts from writings by actor-training theorists. Also included were representative excerpts from students' journals which supported the work process (see Appendix A). While the fictional family approach was framed in Stanislavskian theory, it was also conducted in non-Stanislavskian styles such as Epic Theatre and Theatre of the Absurd.

The thirteen course components described were 1. self-exploration, 2) fictional family grouping, 3. scene development, 4.character objectives, 5) scenes in other time frames, 6) subtext, 7) exploring characters' opposites, 8) inner monologues, 9) stage surroundings, 10) spontaneity and plot advancement, 11) socialization, 12) dream enactment/the subconscious, and 13) non-Stanislavskian styles.

The fictional family was outlined as a process in which students created characters from their own imaginations, observations and experiences together with a group which comprised their fictional family. They enacted their fictional family character over an extended period of time through improvisation, monologue, script outline and written dialogue. Content for these dramatic forms was created by the actors themselves. The fictional family technique aimed to help students create multidimensional characters. It borrowed and adapted a number of techniques from actor-

training theorists and from theorists in related disciplines such as creative drama, drama therapy, psychodrama, sociodrama and family dynamics.

Limitations of the Study

This descriptive study has been designed to explore and describe how the fictional family approach seeks to enhance the actor's process of character creation in an introductory TLA acting class. The study has reported and interpreted the subjects' development through their responses to questionnaires and their journal writings. Evaluation has included my observations as their acting teacher of their classroom process and their discussion with me during personal interviews. The results of this study appear to provide strong support for use of the fictional family actor-training technique in a TLA setting. However, certain limitations of the design should be recognized.

Although subjective measures were an integral part of the data collected, I recognize that these measures may be considered unreliable for a number of reasons. Students' reports may have been biased or inaccurate because they wished to please me. Some actors may have evaluated themselves too highly, others were possibly very critical of their abilities. As for peer evaluation in class discussion and journal writing, the same factors apply. Some may have nit-picked, others were possibly reluctant to evaluate their peers. They may have equated evaluation with criticism which

they perceived to be negative. In addition, the fact that all work was graded may have colored their responses and evaluations.

The questionnaires clearly stated that responses were not in any way connected to class grades, that students were not obliged to fill out all the questions, or to respond to the questionnaire at all. However, for convenience sake, questionnaires were filled out prior to grading. Therefore, there might have been apprehension on the part of some students that responses might influence grading. The questionnaires might have inadvertently included leading questions which could have caused bias in the students. The journals, however, contain undirected comments.

While teachers have several advantages over researchers who are not part of the participant group, researchers have other advantages. For example, their priorities are to the research. They are not distracted by planning and leading classes. They are trained to take copious notes, and skilled in procedures to collect and analyze data. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) point out, they may not be as likely to have "a personal stake" in the results (40). Another limitation may be the difficulty in separating the teacher as a person from the technique itself. How would the technique be affected when taught by a different instructor? Also, the self-exploration component in the forced-choice questions was not included. This exclusion may have impeded some validation of the responses.

A further limitation of the study relates to the transitory nature of drama activities. It is acknowledged that video was not used to record performance progress. However, the use of video can change the nature of the presentations (Courtney, 1987). An additional limitation may be the absence of independent raters either in the classroom or as judges of video and/or live performances.

Nevertheless, the combination of undirected self-reports by students in journals, peer evaluation in their journals and in class discussion, personal interviews with me, responses to questionnaires, class discussion and my own notations, observations and interpretations as their acting teacher should provide some overview of the fictional family process and how it might serve actors' processes in character creation. The sample size (302) is ample for a study of this sort, as is the time period (six years). As Richard Courtney (1987) states:

> "Evaluation should be a continuous, progressive and ongoing process which follows the growth and learning of students over a significant period of time" (79).

Recommendations for Future Studies: Applications of the Fictional Family Technique

There are several other areas of related research which warrant further study.

A. Applications within Actor Training

1. It might be possible for a future study to research this technique using quantitative methods. A researcher trained in quantitative methodology might wish to pursue a study using objective criteria such as rating scales and other statistical techniques. For example, control groups could be used to determine whether students' character creation abilities are accelerated when experiencing the fictional family approach as compared with those in acting classes which do not utilize this approach. These studies could be repeated with more than one instructor to assess the effect of different instructors on the technique.

2. A second study might replicate the present descriptive study with the inclusion of other evaluation strategies such as case studies, video and/or independent raters. It might also explore the effects of the technique based on such variables as individual students' prior theatre training, experience and aptitude. And it might include pre- and mid-term questionnaires to more effectively determine the degree of students' improvement during the characterization process.

3. It might be of interest for future studies to explore the use of the fictional family technique in other actor-training settings such as professional actor-training university programs, professional training schools; and with students in various stages of actor training such as intermediate and/or advanced levels.

4. During the six-year period of the present study, three pilot projects were carried out which employed the fictional family with written scripts. The object of these projects was to explore the efficacy of the fictional family technique to accelerate and foster the characterization process, enhance character interaction and engender dynamic performances with written scripts. Since each of these studies was carried out over the duration of one course, or of rehearsal for one play, future studies might continue this research over longer periods of time. The pilot projects included:

a) The Fictional Family in Rehearsal of A Collective Creation based on the Spoon River Anthology text (for description of process, see Appendix B).

b) The Fictional Family in Rehearsal of George Ryga's "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe" (for description, see Appendix B).

c) The Fictional Family and Three Performance Styles: Comedy of Manners, Greek Theatre and Chekhov (for description, see Appendix B).

Just as Stanislavski's System "has become a creative technique for the truest portrayal of characters in any play, comedy or tragedy, whether by Chekhov or Ibsen, Shakespeare or O'Neill, Beckett or Genet" (Moore, 1984, 7), future studies might be conducted to ascertain the value

that the fictional family technique can potentially have in developing character with a broader variety of texts and styles.

B. Applications Beyond Actor Training

Although the focus of this study was actor training within an undergraduate university TLA setting, a number of students reported in their journals, open-ended questions and classroom discussion that they had been exposed to a variety of social issues through the fictional family technique, and that this exposure affected their perceptions.

For example, one student playing a native Canadian remarked that her character's exposure to racial prejudice led to an interest in her own ethnicity and her subsequent involvement in community groups. A second example was recorded in her journal by the student playing Zola, an African Canadian, where she described how her character first met with racism, and also how she herself wished to sensitize the predominantly white members of the acting class to this issue (see Appendix A).

A student playing a blind musician met with prejudice from the father of the non-disabled girl he wished to date. His attitude created angry and emotional reactions, not only from his daughter, but also from the other fictional family members.

Students who played the roles of grandparents often

reported that they modelled their characters on their own grandparents. They stated that the playing of these roles offered them insight not only into their own grandparents, but also into older people in general.

Other social issues such as death, divorce, stepfamilies, substance abuse, teen-age suicide and sexual assault appeared in the fictional family scenarios and were dealt with by the characters throughout the study.

Students also reported self-discovery through their fictional family characters. For example, a student reported in her journal:

> "The fictional family is one of the finest and sublest ways of looking at self that I have experienced. My extended years of search for my lost childhood have taken me through many cultures and methods of self discovery, but they were all about 'recall' rather than 'rebuild'."

Studies outside actor training might examine how the fictional family can be applied to a variety of populations. Some suggestions include:

1. One study might work with special populations (such as seniors, the physically and/or mentally challenged) to engender self-esteem, encourage self-exploration, enhance the creative process and introduce dramatic techniques.

2. A second study might explore the fictional family with professionals such as teachers and social workers who could then apply the technique to their own students/clients.

3. Other studies might examine the fictional family technique in relation to teaching a variety of subjects across the school/university curriculum such as creative writing and composition, literature, social studies, history, and second languages (see Gold, 1993)

4. Additional research projects could possibly explore the use of the technique to sensitize participants to social issues. These should include such areas as multiculturalism, gender issues and family systems (see Gold, 1993).

5. Therapeutic uses of the fictional family technique can be explored by mental health professionals such as family therapists with the primary goals of promoting healing.

This study has explored and described a transitional step in actor training occurring between stages three and four of Strasberg's methodology, i.e. between emotion memory and scene work from written scripts. It has identified this step as the creation of fictional characters from the students' imaginations with whom they live and who they enact for an extended period of time within a fictional

family structure. It has pointed out that Michael Chekhov anticipated this step in his seven exercises to develop the imagination, the sixth of which is developing a character from one's own imagination. Through a separate series of related projects, the study has described how the fictional family technique can be used with textual characters in a variety of styles.

The study has also clearly demonstrated both through literature review (see Chapter Two) amd work process (see Appendix A) how the fictional family technique incorporates well-documented actor-training techniques from a variety of methodologies and performance theories. In addition, it has described how the technique can be applied to both naturalistic and non-Stanislavkian styles.

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Appendix A
FICTIONAL FAMILY WORK PROCESS/SCENE SEQUENCE

This Appendix provides specific exercises to use within the fictional family process. These exercises incorporate widely accepted actor-training concepts and practices such as sense memory, emotional recall, character objectives, physicalization, concentration of attention, the creation of dramatic tension, and the stimulation of conflict. The appendix also discusses the value of social awareness in actor training, and it attempts to demonstrate through the student/participants' comments the effect the process had on their self-exploration and character development.

Scene 1. The Fictional Family Breakfast:

> "If communication between persons is important in real life, it is ten times more so on stage. This truth derives from the nature of the theatre, which is based on the inter-communication of the dramatis personae" (Stanislavski, 1936, 185).

Objectives: To lift the fictional family from the printed page; to present each family and each character to the larger group; to provide family members with an opportunity to experience how they initially communicate with one another.

Before appearing on stage, students had organized and

developed their fictional families through discussion and written work. They had begun to reflect on, and respond to, the character questionnaire they were given (see Appendix C), and they had written character autobiographies or profiles. As a result of these assignments, they seemed to believe that they had a reasonably clear image of the characters which they would be portraying on stage. But often they discovered that the characters had minds of their own. Erica playing the role of Molly Rosenberg wrote in her journal:

> "After all I have been the boss in my house too. Coming to live with my daughter-in-law is not that easy for me. I want to have some input in how my son's children are being brought up.
>
> My god, I'm becoming an interfering mother-in-law before my very eyes."

I. Basic Relaxation Exercise

Objectives: To help students relax mentally, physically and vocally.

Visualizing and focusing on an imaginary object (their spine suspended in air) is designed to help actors to develop concentration and force their minds into an imaginative mode (Klein, 1975).

Movement exercises aim to free and prepare the body to perform the various repertoire of roles required for the theatre. Movement and voice are linked with the act of

breathing. Therefore an awareness of breathing patterns allows students to change their physical rhythms and movements and to develop different voices (Pisk, 1975).

[Standing in a circle, shake out each part of your body until you begin to feel nice and loose.

Try to remove all the kinks caused from the hectic pace of your life outside this class.

Assume a solid stance with your feet comfortably apart. Now shut your eyes. Inhale and exhale deeply.

Keeping your eyes closed, visualize your spine. See it as though it were suspended in air in front of you. It has 24 vertebrae. Count them slowly; remember to continue breathing deeply from your diaphragm as you count.

When you have counted all 24 vertebrae, bend over from your waist letting your head, shoulders and spine drop forward. Let your knees bend slightly.

Imagine you are a rag doll. Your head is hanging loose. Your neck is loose and relaxed. It I touched you with a feather you would fall right over.

Don't forget to inhale and exhale, inhale and exhale. This time when you exhale, let out the sound - Haaa. Each time you exhale, let out the Haaa sound.

Begin to rise; keep inhaling and exhaling letting out the Haaa sound. When you reach an upright position, continue inhaling and exhaling the Haaa sound.

Now make a Yaaa sound. Then a Laaa sound. Next a Maaa

sound and end with Mmmm. Standing on your toes, stretch your arms and body to the ceiling. Try to touch it. Now let your body drop forward into 'rag doll' position. Repeat the exercise.]

II. Warm Up

[Lie down on the floor. Close your eyes. Inhale...exhale... As you exhale, let the sound come out. Haaaaa Yaaaa Laaaa Maaaa Mmmmm. This time hold each note as long as you comfortably can.
Remember to breathe through your diaphragm.]

III. Character Preparation A Visualization

According to Stanislavski (1936), the purpose of the senses was to influence emotion memory. He stated:

> "Although our senses of smell, taste, and touch are useful, and even sometimes important, in our art, their role is merely auxiliary and for the purpose of influencing our emotion memory..." (160).

In order to evoke the students' emotion memory, I first stimulated their sense memory of an environment analogous to the one they would be asked to create in their fictional family scene.

The exercise required intense concentration. Two months of such exercises, before starting work in fictional

families, had helped students to improve their concentration skills. The ability to concentrate is essential in psychological preparation for an extended role.

Students reported in their journals that the technique of first visualizing their "real" families, followed by visualizing their fictional families worked well as a preliminary step to the introduction of performance scenes. Some stated that it was not simply a matter of transformation of one real family to fictional family, but a suggestion of possibilities (sensory, environmental, or issues) that one might wish to incorporate in this "new" family.

[Your eyes are still closed. You are breathing deeply. Think about your real family. Think of the many family breakfasts you have had. Who was present? What were they wearing? Try to recall what the decor was like. Recall the tastes , smells, sounds, colors and textures of the immediate environment - the table, the dishes, the people in the room, the food.

Recall the general environment - the room, its size, shape, colors of the chairs, the curtains. What kind of floor carpet, vinyl, hardwood?

Recall the larger environment - outside the room, outside the house, what you may have been able to see, hear, smell - outside the windows.

Think about your relationship to the various family

members seated around the table. Recall certain events, discussions, dialogues.

Now begin to think about your fictional family - your relationship to the other fictional family members - and try to envision the room where your fictional family is having breakfast - what it looks like, smells like, what foods are on the table - also what is outside the room and - outside the house.]

IV. Character Preparation B Physicalization

In this exercise, actors began to explore their characters' external characteristics. These characteristics gradually emerged as they established their characters' inner qualities. Stanislavski (1961) advised actors to research the externals of their characters with the proviso that, in so doing, they must not lose sight of their characters' inner selves.

[When you feel ready, get up and begin to move as your fictional family character.]

How does you character move? With short, quick steps? With long strides? Energetically? Lethargically?

With what part of your body does your character lead? Breathe as your character; move as your character.

Now move as you normally move. How do you hold your head?

How do you move your arms? Swinging? With what part of your body do you lead?

Check your breathing, the rhythm of your walk. Adopt your character's walk. Note the differences and similarities between you and your character.

Decide WHERE your character is coming from, WHERE he or she is going, WHOM he or she will meet, WHY he or she is going there, HOW he or she is getting there, WHAT HE OR SHE WANTS. What time of day is it?

What day of the week? What time of year? What is the weather like?

Exaggerate the movements of your character. Move in quick speed. Change to regular speed. Change to slow motion. Back to regular speed.

Now act out the scene IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING the breakfast scene you are about to present. When you have completed your pre-breakfast activities, sit down, ready for the fictional family Breakfast scenes to begin.]

Students were asked to act out the scenes immediately preceding the scene they were about to perform. They did this simultaneously, sometimes interacting with one another, often moving through the scene individually. They played this scene in mime, or interacted verbally.

Generally, the first few moments on stage are the most difficult for actors. They are coming out cold from the wings of the playing area. Creating and acting out scenarios from their imaginations add continuity to their opening scenes which should facilitate spontaneous performances. The

actress, Uta Hagen says in her book, Respect for Acting (1960) that her three essential steps of preparation are:

> "What did I just do? What am I doing right now? What's the first thing I want"? (96).

Stanislavski (1961) stated that:

> "the objective is the whetter of creativeness, its motive force. The objective is the lure for our emotions. This objective engenders outburst of desires for the purpose of creative aspiration. It sends inner messages which naturally and logically are expressed in action. The objective gives a pulse to the living being of a role" (51).

Actors were constantly reminded to focus on their objectives in each scene.

[As you wait, think about what your character WANTS in the scene you are about to present. Say it to yourself silently. I want..... Keep thinking it and repeating it silently.]

V. Performances of Scene I. The Fictional Family Breakfast

The students presented an expository breakfast scene which introduced the family to the larger group. Like Molly Rosenberg in the opening quote of this scene, students often described how their characters took on a life of their own

when placed on stage in the middle of their new families. This new personality seemed to burst out in reaction to the other fictional family members. Sometimes this response revealed to actors previously unsuspected aspects of their own personalities or of others whom they knew. Not surprisingly, the students in the audience observed similarities between their classmates and the fictional family members these classmates portrayed on stage. An excerpt from a student's journal reads:

> "Everyone seemed to fit into their characters so well, perhaps because many of us have incorporated facets of ourselves or people we know well into our personalities, exploiting and exaggerating our own individualities. I saw a quietness that was typically Julie, an explosive non-conformity in Gary, and - in me, maybe a vestige of bossiness I no doubt inherited from my maternal grandmother, since much of "Granny" was patterned after her. She lived with my family for intermittent periods of years, until my own mother's death."

Self-exploration through fictional family role was ongoing throughout the process. A student's comments in her journal describe how, through her fictional family character, she was beginning to explore her own sense of identity through the unexpected identification with her

"real" mother:

> "I must admit I was surprised at the words that came out of my mouth during the improv. Molly Rosenberg used words that I wouldn't begin to use with my children. (However, I did sound like my 79-year-old mother.) Who was speaking? Erica? Molly? - or my mother?"

Hagen (1960) emphasizes the importance of self-discovery in actor training when she states:

> "First you must know who you are...to search within your own life experience to bring forth a new human being on stage" (22).

The variety of fictional families created interest. Types of fictional families which students created included: traditional nuclear families, stepfamilies, and intergenerational family units. There were many ethnic and religious variations. Sometimes parent figures were alluded to, but never seen, either because they were deceased or because they were absent from home for various reasons such as travel or work commitments. These decisions seemed to originate in cases where students prefered not to assume parental roles. Often the individual members of these fictional families without parents initiated scenes in which they had the opportunity to express their characters' "loneliness" for the absent parent or parents. Frequently,

fictional family characters blamed their present lack of success or negative behavior on these parental absences.

A variation of socioeconomic conditions surrounded these fictional families. Families who lived in 'Dynasty' type mansions contrasted with families who were struggling to make ends meet. During the course of the term, some families chose to alter their families' economic situations. For example, in one scenario, a 1920s wealthy family lost all their money in the stock market crash. The Grandmother, who had been an unwelcome inhabitant of the household, now possessed the wealth. This situation created a shift in power within the family, and became the basis for future conflict scenes.

Conversely, a poor immigrant family survived its earlier hardships, found ways to maintain close and loving relationships, and eventually, individual members achieved successful careers. One sister, in fact, realized her life-long dream of becoming a "Broadway star".

VI. Monologue

Objectives: To reinforce each individual character, both for actors and audience; to encourage actors to articulate and define character objectives.

The Breakfast scene was concluded by a monologue of introduction, delivered by each fictional family member. After each monologue, the audience asked the character for

clarification or additional information. The monologue and the audience participation were designed to reinforce the character which the actor created on paper. Actors learned from the audience's reactions and questions whether their characters were believable on stage, which characteristics were well defined and which needed further definition. The actors (fictional family members as a whole) discovered whether the relationships which they built in theory projected across the footlights.

[Stay seated on stage. Each in turn introduce yourself (in character) to the audience. Tell us what your character wanted to accomplish in the scene you just played (your character's objective).

Use an active verb. Tell us who or what is standing in your way (obstacle). Tell us what you will do to accomplish your objective. The audience will then ask you questions about your background, your life and your relationships to the other members of your fictional family.]

Identifying their characters' objectives helps actors to focus on what they want to accomplish in the scene. This focus aids their concentration, weeds out distractions, and keeps the interaction flowing. If actors had difficulty achieving concentration, they were asked to 'freeze', restate their objectives, then continue the action.

Director William Ball (1984) considers the actors'

identification of their characters' "wants" to be "the golden key" to character creation because all the characters' behaviors are dictated by their wants. He states that when actors want completely what their characters want, they "will have entered" their characters' inner lives. He likens the actor to "a detective hunting down those wants" (78).

Stanislavski advised his actors to select "creative" character objectives, ones which kindled their imaginations, and to state them using verbs. Ball lists a number of what he calls "actable" verbs as examples to actors of the kinds of choices they should make in selecting their characters' objectives (87).

From my experience, this concept of character objectives is one which actors find difficult both to internalize and to articulate.

VII. Replay

Subsequent to the side coaching or intervention, students were asked to replay the scene. This replay was designed to assist actors to explore the variety of emotions which made up the personalities of the characters they were portraying. This exploration should facilitate the creation of multidimensional characters.

Because they generally had redirected their focus, interaction between characters often altered, responses varied, and students often discovered additional aspects of

their characters' personalities. This discovery created renewed interest in their fictional family roles.

It was not generally possible in large classes to replay every scene. But it was important, after discussion and feedback, to have at least one group replay its scene. This re-enactment allowed both actors and audience to see how various factors - such as clarifying objectives, identifying obstacles to those objectives, altering the given circumstances, changing the blocking, adding sensual stimuli - influence the effectiveness of a scene.

Appropriate input improved particular problems. For example, if the pace was too slow - advising the actors that their characters have to be out of the house in five minutes or they will miss their train/bus/lift to school/work - altered the rhythm of the scene. Actors and audience thereby learned how given circumstances affect a scene's rhythm.

Scene 2. The Fictional Family in Conflict: in pairs

> "No movement, striving, action is carried out on the stage, any more than in real life, without obstacles. One runs inevitably into the counter-movements and strivings of other people, or into conflicting events, or into obstacles caused by the elements, or other hindrances. Life is an

> unremitting struggle, one overcomes or one is defeated. Likewise on the stage...The collision and conflict of these opposing 'through actions' constitute the dramatic situation" (Stanislavski, 1961, 80).

Objectives: To help the actor discover that obstacles, conflicting events and characters striving against each other's objectives generate the dramatic situation; to explore the conflicts between two members of the same fictional family; to explore the ways in which fictional family members handle conflict in order to learn the various facets of their own fictional family characters and more about the other fictional family members; to aid concentration by focusing on one's objective with one other person to win the 'argument' or 'game'; to transfer the energy generated in competitive games to their fictional family scenes; to explore the relationship between inner tension and its physical representation.

I. Warm up

[Play a physical game in random pairs.]

II. Character Preparation A - Visualization

[Create your own private circle around you. Now no one can see you or hear you. If you hear others, feed off the energy of their experience, but do not allow that energy to

interfere with yours. Concentrate on your own images, and your own experience. Close your eyes.

I will give you a word or phrase. Recall a time when you said that word or phrase to someone, or else wished you had said it. Recall the experience in every detail. Visualize the person as vividly as you can. See what the person looked like - the expression on his or her face, the sound of his or her voice, the attitude of his or her body.

Recall WHEN, WHERE, WHEN, WHY the event took place. Recall the setting in every detail - the colors, sounds, textures, tastes and smells. Then say the phrase. Keep repeating it over and over until you have finished with the situation. 'Leave me alone.'

Each time a new phrase is given, repeat the visualization process with a new situation. Or create your own phrase.

'You're so mean, I hate you.']

Maxine Klein (1975) tells actors:

> "Words demand total emotional investments from both the one who says them and the one who hears them...Only if they grow out of and are supported by real feeling will they matter. Without this support any emotional display on stage or off is mere bomast. Where do you get the necessary emotional support? From YOURSELF!" (202).

[Think about your real families; think about your relationship on a one-to-one basis with individual family members. Recall particular incidents, events, arguments you may have had with another family member. Recall WHY it happened, WHEN, and WHERE it took place, WHO was there, WHAT the place looked like, felt like, what you were wearing, what the other person was wearing, what you were doing at the time it took place.

Gradually focus on your fictional family. Think of a conflict you may have with a particular fictional family member. Think about WHAT YOU WANT from that person. Think about WHAT OBSTACLE OR OBSTACLES may prevent you from obtaining your wish. Think about WHAT YOU WILL DO to overcome that obstacle or obstacles in order to ACHIEVE YOUR OBJECTIVE. How do you wish to make that person feel?

Think of a phrase you wish you could say to that person. The phrase should start with "I want -" followed by an active verb. Form an image of that person. See him or her in every detail. Now say the phrase. Repeat it several times.]

III. Character Preparation B - Physicalization

[When you are ready, get up and move around the room as your fictional family character. How does your character hold the various parts of her or his body? Head? Shoulders? Arms? Exaggerate these movements. Discover your character's walk. Decide WHERE you are coming from,

WHERE you are going, WHY you are going there. WHO will be there, WHEN this is happening, WHAT you will do.

Keep in mind the conflict situation you are about to perform. What does your character want? To what lengths will your character go to achieve his or her desires? Say your phrase. Repeat it several times.

How is your fictional family character's body changing when he or she focuses on this conflict and his or her goal? Call out the phrase you will use in your scene with your fictional family mother, brother, sister, grandmother, daughter or other relation with whom you will interact in your conflict scene.

How did your fictional family character's voice change when that phrase was vocalized?

Keep moving to your destination. When you arrive, perform your activity; when you have completed it, get together with your fictional family and pair up with one member of your fictional family for your conflict scene.]

A student poetically described his physicalization process:

"walk around the room as me
stride around as Snake
which one is the real me?
which one is the fake?
shifting into one walk
and glide out of a trance
when Snake he walks it's lazy struts

when me, I walk, I dance."

When students paired up or divided into groups to develop their improvisations, I would briefly join each group in order to answer questions, or to offer suggestions if they were 'stuck' for an idea. Mainly I moved around the room so that I was constantly accessible to them.

I always gave them a time limit for this preparation, and I went to each group to let them know how much time they had left. Generally, they were given five to ten minutes. However, I was not rigid about the time; if they required an additional two or three minutes, I allowed it. But I did insist after the extra time allotment that their time was up. Otherwise, some groups might have taken the whole session to plan! I wished them to learn to express their ideas, listen to each other's suggestions, make choices of situations to present, synthesize their ideas, and work co-operatively toward a presentation.

They were not expected to achieve polished performances. This was a venue for them to try out ideas, develop scenarios, to learn what will work theatrically and what will not and why. The end result or product at this point was less important than the process.

In a class of over 20 students, it was inevitable that some students developed their scenarios much more quickly than others. If they had been expected to sit for several minutes waiting for those who worked more slowly to complete

their performance preparation, they may have become bored or disinterested and may have talked among themselves about other topics.

Generally, when I noticed that a group had ended its discussions, I suggested that its members go off in a corner and rehearse. Rehearsal offered students an opportunity to formalize their ideas in terms of blocking and dialogue, and to maintain their energy and enthusiasm. Often I allowed time for all the groups to rehearse their scenes.

Some students had a tendency to continue discussion with their partners or groups up to the moment their turn on stage arrived. That is why I sometimes asked them to sit in the audience with anyone they wished except with the members of their own performance group. This cut down extraneous whispering which could be distracting to performers and spectators.

IV. Performances of Scene 2. The Fictional Family Conflict: in pairs

If concentration in the performances was inadequate, I added an appropriate physical game to help students focus on their objectives i.e. to win both the argument and the game. For example, a father, who had built a successful business, wanted his son to join the company. The son wished to continue his law studies. In this case, they had chosen to situate the argument on a golf course. The pace of their scene reflected the nature of the slow game. They were

therefore asked to replay the scene while playing squash. The fast and furious pace of the squash game translated itself to the scene.

In these conflict scenes, students were given an opportunity to observe the variety of ways in which both their own characters and others behaved when provoked. In one fictional family, for example, a student playing an adopted native child, observed in her journal how her character tended to accuse the other fictional family members of racism toward her. Her brother, on the other hand, she noted, avoided the conflict completely by storming out of the room leaving the situation unresolved. In another fictional family, students observed how the otherwise mild teen-age daughter, Chloe came close to slapping her sister Angel when ashes were flicked on her writing.

The varieties of responses to conflict situations were discussed immediate'y following the presentations in class, and in students' journals upon reflection. Caroline, a student playing the role of stepmother, Claudia Telford wrote:

> "Today I had an argument with Annabel. It's not the first one. Each time I want to talk to her she gets mad! Fortunately her sister, Jessica, is much nicer! Otherwise I think I would have to pack my things and leave!...
>
> Last night when Annabel came home I was in the livingroom...I politely asked her if she had a

good time and where did she and her date go, what did they do. I think I asked her too many questions!

But it was only a pretext to begin a conversation! Annabel didn't want to answer my questions because she said that what she does, where she goes and with whom she goes out, wasn't my business. I didn't like this answer at all! But she didn't care.

But the worst was when she honestly said to me that she didn't want a second mother in her life. Oh, that was a big shock for me!

For a few weeks I try to be the best mother in the world and in a few seconds this child destroyed all my hopes of being accepted as a mother! I felt so humiliated. Who am I going to be? Her friend? Maybe her sister?!! No. I want to be a wife and mother. I don't want to be a wife and a friend. I want the kids to call me "mother" and to kiss me on the cheeks before going to bed! I want them to need me. I want them to love me! I want them to be my children, my daughters.

Why don't they understand? Children are too selfish to understand that parents need to be loved by their children, even if we aren't their real parents! Please Annabel, let me be your

mother. That's all I want. That's all I need."

Kim/her stepdaughter, Annabel:

"Annabel said all the things I wanted to say and couldn't - and didn't. After class I felt so relieved. Drama really is therapy. I am very glad that I have this kind of outlet, because it is more valuable to me than any kind of dramatic training, though I enjoy that part of it too. I am learning about my own life, about relating to others and about what's going on in my own head. I love that."

Subsequent to this explosive scene between Caroline/Claudia and her stepdaughter, Kim/Annabel, Kim analyzed the performance in terms of its theatrical effectiveness. Kim/Annabel Telford:

"Caroline's concentration is amazing. Acting with her, I felt I was being pushed back against the wall by the intensity of her anger. Her outburst was so sudden I didn't expect it at all, and because it took me by surprise my "flusteredness" was totally authentic. A month ago I would have cracked up out of sheer discomfort, but I'm beginning to learn how to concentrate. My backing up, which was instinctive, would have looked very good on stage.

> I found myself being conscious of things like staging and when would be the best time to finish the improv (I ended up carrying it on a little too long, I think) - both things that never would have occurred to me before."

Not every scene was as stirring and as powerful as the one between 'Claudia' and 'Annabel'. Often students needed coaching to help them improve the intensity of a scene. Earlier I described how introducing athletic games influenced the energy and dramatic content of scenes. There were other techniques which were employed to achieve similar results.

For example, students who played characters who did not stand up for their rights often impeded the sense of dramatic conflict. In such cases, I changed the dynamic of the scene by altering the characters' stage positions and/or physical actions. I sometimes asked 'timid' actor/characters to lie on the floor. Then I asked their fellow actor/characters (fictional family member) to place a foot on top of the prostrate body. During the re-enactment the prostrate character had to struggle to get up, while the other character had to keep that foot firmly planted on the body.

Or, in other scenarios, there were sometimes actor/characters who were unable to express anger. Scenes were thereby deprived of dramatic impact. In these cases,

such a student was placed behind a sofa and directed to pound that sofa throughout the scene. This physical or external action often helped to release a corresponding inner emotion.

Sometimes, students who were playing teen-agers were asked to incorporate an activity - such as skipping, jumping or playing with a ball. This activity not only livened up the performance of the actor engaged in the activity, but it also created tension and energy on the part of the fellow actor who may have had to either chase after this character to secure attention, or try to
prevent the character from continuing the action.

Scene 3. Your Fictional Family Character: A Past Incident. Creating the Text

> "There can be no present, however, without a past. The present flows naturally out of the past. The past is the roots from which the present grew; the present without any past wilts like a plant with its roots cut off" (Stanislavski, 1961, 16).

Objectives: To inspire actors to 'live' significant events in their characters' past; to use drama as a stimulus for creative writing. The student's writing becomes the original script for a performance piece.

The reliving of a significant event in a character's life was often centred around a fictional family experience. Topics often included loss of a parent due to death or divorce, misdemeanors and family responses, accidents and family support, interactions with siblings and a variety of other events. These family dramas were used as stimuli for creative writing. The value of inventing biographical scenarios to develop character is supported not only by actor-training theorists, but also by writing teachers such as Syd Fields (1984).

In the fictional family process, students invented past incidents in their characters' lives in order to become familiar with additional aspects of their characters. However, they were also given the opportunity to create performance pieces from their original scripts.

Actor-training theorists concur that in order to develop rich, multidimensional characters, actors must learn everything they can about that character's life - past, present and future (Benedetti, 1981; Cohen, 1978; Shurtleff, 1978; Stanislavski, 1961). Enacting past events in their fictional family characters' lives appeared to help actors gain additional insights into their characters' present behaviors, attitudes, prejudices and particular communication styles (see Gold, 1991).

The enactment of a past event also allowed actors to share with the audience the event or events which they considered responsible for their characters' negative

behavior. For example, a student who was playing a mercenary character (and whose fictional family character was receiving negative feedback from the audience), wished to show his peers the legitimate reasons for his character's unpopular attitudes. He therefore wrote and subsequently played a childhood scene in which it was his ninth birthday. He waited all day for his father to arrive with his present. When his father did arrive, the man explained to his son that this year he was unable to afford a present, and he hoped the boy would understand.

Later on, the son discovered that his father had "squandered" money on some luxury item for himself. The child concluded with a comment such as - "from now on, I won't trust anyone; I'll look out for myself".

There was the additional aspect of audience participation. Students in the audience stated that they were in fact wearing two hats when they observed their own fictional family members performing past incidents. Like Connie's aunt, Shoshanna, in the quote below, their characters were involved in the action even though they were not physically on the stage.

> "It's a pleasure to see the bond that is developing between Connie and her aunt, Shoshanna. On Monday I heard Randee say to Lynda, "I feel so connected to you" and today it was Lynda who cried during Randee's improv. (I must say I [Molly Rosenberg] was moved by her performance and I'm

not even her aunt).

Although students stated that they enjoyed gaining new insights into their fictional family relatives' lives, sometimes they expressed their characters' dismay after seeing a particular scene. For example, one fictional family teen-age character refused to believe that her fictional family father, at 17 years of age would, in an inebriated state, steal a car, go for a joy ride and, as a result, be involved in a car crash.

In drama therapy, enactment of past events or "autobiographical performance pieces" are employed to assist clients to come to terms with personal issues. Landy (1986) states that these performance pieces or "psychodramas" are very powerful when the client achieves "a balance of distance between self and other, and self and role" (133). He cites the example of a woman who based her performance piece on her divorce. The combination of the performance with subsequent reflection and discussion within the therapeutic setting assisted her to recognize how particular aspects of her past relationships were interfering with her ability to assert her independence.

The fictional family safely distances participants from their emotional issues because they are enacting scenarios as fictional characters. However, the issues selected may be those which the actors share with the characters. Whatever the basis, both origin of issues and

possible personal insights gained from enactments remain private to the participants during the session. Aspects of self-discovery are often voluntarily revealed in students' journals. Klein (1975) constantly advises actors:

> "Discover yourself in the character and the character in you" (154).

The following exercise is based on Klein's actor preparation for textual characters.

I. Warm Up

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Lie down. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply through your diaphragm. Inhale and exhale. Listen to the sounds of your own breathing. Listen to the sounds of other people's breathing. Listen to the sounds inside the room. And to the sounds outside the room.

Think back to when you were young. And you played outside on sunny days - and on rainy days. Imagine you are a child playing in a warm rainshower. Feel the rain on your face and on your body. It is washing away all the tension. Let the water run down on your head, your face, shoulders, neck, chest, back, legs, feet. Enjoy the sensation. When you feel ready, get up and have fun splashing in the puddles.]

Relaxation exercises lead into sensory experiences including listening, recalling of images and sensations, and

active imagining. Movement in character, introduction of appropriate activities (in this case. becoming children splashing in puddles) can provide the inspiration for novel and fresh approaches like the poem that a student wrote which follows.

"did you ever wish there were real-live time
machines
the kind that have glimmering knobs
and luminous switches
and magical beams
the kind that could take you back
back to the days
when time didn't matter
and peanut brittle did
when teddy bears ruled the world
and fisher-price knights rode forth
on rocking horses
and puddles were oceans
whatever happened to puddles
deep pools of innocence
soft pools of mud
squishy, soggy, cold, rippled
I can make islands in the puddles
I'm a little yellow god
black splatters up my pants
sidewalk spray down my socks
I laughed so hard

after the rain
I prayed for the storm
wished for the torrent
and danced in my yellow Christopher Robin boots
I splashed all the girls
and I smooshed all the worms
and I laughed so hard
they don't make laughs like that anymore
puddle laughs"

Warm-ups that transform adults into children have an energizing and spontaneous effect on the participants. In this 'puddle' exercise, the students splashed in the rain, played interactive games and were encouraged to have FUN. However, group dynamics varied somewhat in such exercises. Therefore, in the fictional family project I sometimes accelerated the interactive process; at other times I slowed it down by intervention or what Spolin (1963) calls "side coaching" (392). This type of approach was also used in other exercises. It was especially useful when students had difficulties focusing on their particular activity.

II. Character Preparation - Visualization

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Close your eyes. Inhale and exhale deeply. Haaaa, Yaaaa, Laaaa, Maaaa, Mmmmm.

Think about your childhood - of an event or an incident

that you wished could have been different - either because of the way you reacted to it - or because one of your family members did not react in the way you would have wished. Recall the exact circumstances - the sounds, smells, colors, textures.

Now think about your fictional family character's past, and recall an incident when you wished you or your fictional family member would have responded differently.

This incident may have been a turning point in your life. It may have altered your perceptions, your attitudes, your motivations and behavior. Recall the circumstances in every detail.]

I often used dramatic techniques to stimulate creative writing, especially poetry. This linking of acting with writing was continued when working with fictional families. To assist students in creating original texts, I initiated a variety of sensory stimuli.

III. Creative Writing

[Sit up, get paper and pencil, and describe the incident in a few poetic sentences.]

A student described the experience:

"close your eyes
and it's dark
and there's memory on the edge

even on the edge of fiction
and I can see little Snake
he was only an Oliver back then
what a slouch
what a shock of hair
what a big, pink, chewy wad of gum
what demanding exuberance
what exploding vitality
what hate, even then, for Mommy
is this when it all began?
and I sit up
and write
I write about little Snake before he was Snake
about little me in another world
another life"

V. Reading

[Join the circle on the floor, and read your written work.]

VI. Assignment

[For next class prepare a performance piece from your creative piece. If you wish, you may pair up with someone else whose work may have some similar element to yours.]

Scene 3. A Past Incident. Performance

I. Character Preparation

[Move around the room. Warm up your vocal chords. Haaaaaaa, yaaaaaaaa, laaaaaaaa, maaaaaaaa, mmmmmmm. Begin to move as your character would at the age he or she is in your performance piece. Go about your daily activities. When you have completed your daily activities, sit down ready for the performances to take place.]

II. Performances of Scene 3. Your Fictional Family Character: A Past Incident

(For a student's descriptions of various fictional family characters' performances and what their past incidents revealed about their present personalities, see Gold, 1991).

Religious and cultural backgrounds chosen by the fictional families offered students opportunities to enact, view and subsequently discuss family processes in a sociocultural context. A black North American student whose fictional family character, was of "mixed-race", presented a scene when her character (Zola) was five years old. In the scene she and her six-year-old Caucasian brother (Bryce) were first confronted with racism. An older boy began to taunt Bryce for playing with a "nigger". Bryce, who had never heard the term, beat up the boy and reassured his

sister.

The student subsequently explained in her journal that she wished to demonstrate to the predominantly White drama class, that it was only at this point that Zola "became Black" indicating, she stressed, that people are not born with racism. Throughout the year, Zola and Bryce squabbled in a variety of scenes, but, as the student pointed out, none of these arguments were racial in origin, but rather differences in opinion common to any brother or sister in any culture.

In fact, class members mentioned that they enjoyed the bickering between Zola and Bryce because it reminded them of their own brothers and sisters. The student playing Zola remarked that her "familiarization strategy has been influential".

It was obvious in class discussions that students enjoyed Zola as an individual. "Her character is neither stereotypically negative nor stereotypically comical"; she was simply a young woman who exhibited a free spirit and enjoyed life. She was not perfect. She was sometimes self-centred and spoiled. While she had the ability to adapt to settings all over the world, she never ignored the fact that she was a Black woman.

In subsequent scenes, Zola travelled to Africa to search for her heritage. Members of the audience were able to identify with this search because they were aware of the fact that many adopted or illegitimate children wished to

trace their natural parentage and culture.

Developing awareness of actors' own personal attitudes and prejudices serves to help them understand the psyches of the characters they portray (Hodgson and Richards, 1966; Shurtleff, 1978; Stanislavski, 1961; Strasberg, 1987).

Scene 4. The Fictional Family Faces a Crisis

(Your Characters at their Worst)

Objectives: To provoke actors to play the extremes of their fictional family characters; to heighten the concept of conflicting objectives between the fictional family members; to build dramatic tension.

A student who was playing a "meek" fictional family character expressed boredom with the role. After much discussion and resistance, she reluctantly agreed to try a scene in which her character would be provoked and would react in an uncharacteristic manner.

The scene took place in a supermarket. Her character had been under stress due to problems with her live-in boyfriend and her teen-age son. Exhausted from a stressful working day, she was shopping for groceries during which she witnessed a scene between a mother and child. The mother was abusing the child. Her character leaped into action and slapped that woman across the face.

Although it was a 'stage' slap, it had a chilling impact on both the audience and the characters in the scene. A character from an outside fictional family who was playing a psychologist, intervened and suggested that these people needed help. The student discovered that her character was, in fact, able to display anger, and this discovery renewed interest in her role.

Students often mentioned aspects of unexpected self-discovery through the playing of their fictional family characters' 'worst' behavior.

> "Our family, the Telfords, depicted the disintegration of a "picture book" family christmas into ashes of selfishness. By showing our worst character traits we encouraged others to criticize us.
>
> Afterwards, when we analyzed our motivation, I discovered that I had projected a lot of my own feelings about my stepmother onto my stage stepmother, Claudia. I also discovered that it was not completely my own attitudes I was exploring, but I was also acting out my sister's attitudes. I have spent years watching my sister target our stepmother with her hostility and have always thought it unfair. Because Annabel, my character, shares my real sister's attitudes, I am discovering possible motivations for the anger and understand my sister's behaviour better...

> I am using the stage as a place to learn about myself and my family, to help interact more positively with others."

Shurtleff (1978) stresses the importance of actors' discoveries.

> "Acting is a whole series of discoveries. The discoveries may be about the other character, or about oneself, or about someone who is offstage, or about the situation now or the situation as it existed ten years ago and how that affects the now. The more discoveries you make in a scene...- the more interesting your scene will be" (58).

I. Character Preparation A - Visualization

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Lie down. Close your eyes. Inhale, exhale deeply. Haaaaa, Yaaaaa, Laaaaa, Maaaaa, Mmmmmm. Think of your real-life family, of the crises it has faced, of your own strengths and weaknesses and of the strengths and weaknesses of the other family members.

Recall particular incidents or crisis events, WHO was there, WHEN it took place, WHY it happened, WHERE it was, WHAT people were doing.

Recall the surroundings - the smells, sounds, colors, textures, tastes.

Now think of your fictional family - of the crises it

has faced, of your fictional family character's strengths and weaknesses.

Perhaps there is a family holiday or celebration about to take place. Dwell on your hopes for a warm, pleasant holiday or celebration together.]

At this point, students stated that they were beginning to see the relationship between their own personal experiences and memories and those of their characters more clearly. They were discovering that recalling aspects of their past stimulated ideas and offered a starting point for the action that will occur on stage.

II. Character Preparation B - Physicalization

[When you are ready, get up and move as your fictional family character moves. As your fictional family character, how do you hold your head? Is your back straight or curved? Shoulders back or forward? Do you swing your arms? Do you take large, bouncing strides or short, mincing steps?

How do you move when you are happy? Sad? Angry?

Perform one of your character's daily activities. Decide WHERE you are, WHO else is there, WHAT you wish to accomplish, WHEN it takes places, what mood you are in, and with WHAT SPEED or TEMPO it needs to be carried out.

When you have completed the activity, join your family group to prepare a holiday or celebration scene in which

everything goes wrong and the celebration develops into a disaster or crisis situation. Show each member reacting selfishly - the family at its worst.]

III. Performances of Scene 4. The Fictional Family Crisis (For an example of fictional family members' differing perspectives of the same scene, see Gold, 1991).

Earlier I mentioned that students often had difficulty establishing and maintaining their objectives while playing a scene. One fictional family included a daughter (Aslyn) who was emotionally disturbed and was placed, from time to time, in a psychiatric hospital. In this particular scene, the father brought the daughter home for a visit and intimated to his other children that this daughter, their step-sister, might be returning home to stay. Sonia, his other daughter, was visibly upset. But the actress playing the role of Sonia was having difficulty maintaining her objective and therefore the scene lacked dramatic tension.

I asked her first to articulate her character's intention. Sonia wanted her step-sister to go back to the institution. I suggested that her fictional family replay the scene with one stipulation. In this re-enactment she was not permitted to say anything except, "I want you to go back to the hospital." No matter what anyone else said to her, those were the only words that she was allowed to say. This technique is one which I used frequently when students were

having problems sustaining their objectives. The scene was replayed. The emotion built, and the results were obvious. The scene became alive and dynamic and held everyone's interest.

In place of words like objective or motivation, Shurtleff uses the acting term, "'What are you fighting for?'" He states that he prefers this terminology because he believes that the word fight inspires actors to "find the strongest, most positive goal possible". And he argues that this focus need not impede the scene's balance if the emphasis is on relationships.

> "How, then do you achieve balance if everyone is in there pitching hard for what he's fighting for? Through relationship. Through the give and take of relationship, through consideration of the other characters in the scene, through your sensitivity to their reaction to what you fight for, through an increased awareness of the others and how you affect them and how they affect you: a heightening of the awarenesses you have in life toward other people" (30).

An additional and unexpected result of the exercise was subsequently described by Sylvia, the student playing Sonia which involved a heightened awareness of how to relate to her "real" mother. She said that she had always had a communication problem with her mother, who talked

incessantly so that she could never get a word in edgewise to present her own views. This situation was a source of constant distress to her. She therefore decided to try this "'theatre" strategy. When her mother began her 'monologue', Sylvia listened for a few moments, then began to articulate her objective. "Mother, I want you to listen to me." She repeated it over and over until her mother stopped dead in her tracks and LISTENED. The student stressed in her journal that this technique represented an important breakthrough in their relationship.

The identifying and stating of objectives in theatre is parallel to the use of assertiveness training in behavior therapy. Thus Herbert Fensterheim and Jean Baer, (1975) leaders in the field of assertiveness training, instruct their clients to use phrases beginning with "I want you to..." in order to insure direct communication with another person.

Bandler, Grinder and Satir (1976) apply similar techniques to family therapy. According to these authors, family therapists should continually assist clients to "identify their wants" in an effort to initiate effective communication between family members. When individual family members come to understand what, specifically, they want for themselves and for their families, change can occur within the family dynamic.

IV. Scene 5. Inner Monologues

Objectives: To provoke actors to probe deeply their fictional family characters' emotions, needs and wants; to help fictional family members gain insight which should lead to more profound group interaction; to encourage "sincerity of emotions"; to coax actors to feel the reality of their fictional family characters' inner lives. A student described the inner monologues:

> "There was no physical movement, or outward action but the energy inside was very intense. The words flowed rhythmically, emanating almost from the subconscious."

[Stay seated in position on stage, and each in turn present an inner monologue. Address it to one or more of your fictional family members without looking at them. Begin your monologue with that person's name.]

These inner monologues not only continued the monologue performance work, they required actors to probe more deeply their fictional family characters' emotions, needs and wants. In articulating their fictional family characters' thoughts and inner feelings, they were often able to expand their communication styles and add further dimensions to the interfamilial relationships.

Addressing fictional family members without looking at them was designed to aid concentration; deeper concentration

helped actors to focus on their characters' emotional needs. The fictional family member(s) who were addressed often stated that they gained insight not only into the psyche of the fictional family character who was delivering the monologue, but also into their own fictional family characters. This combined insight often encouraged deeper and more meaningful future group interaction.

In fact, it was possible for all fictional family members to gain fresh perceptions from each monologue. Since actors were using their own experiential resources to develop their characters, they felt that their discoveries here were important to both their characters and to themselves as actors.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, I employed the inner monologue whenever it seemed appropriate immediately following, or as an intervention during, a particular scene.

Some students let their fictional family characters take on relationship problems which they themselves had in 'real life'. The relationship between self and role (actor and character) was a common theme in journals. For example, a student entry reads:

> "The Telfords all smiled through clenched teeth as they gave each other the wrong presents, painfully aware that they didn't know each other but unable to accept it. At least Annabel Telford is able to express what she is feeling, because Annabel

said all the things I wanted to and never could.

I'm also learning about Annabel and what she thinks and why. I'm really starting to look at her as a person, as someone who I care about and someone who could be my FRIEND. She's not me, though she has many similar problems... It takes real strength to bare your soul, but you can benefit."

My Monologue:

To Jess: You're the only one I like in this family - why aren't you giving me support? Don't you remember how it used to be with Mom? How can you think it can be Christmas without her? I don't understand you either sometimes."

V. Scene 6. Re-enactment: The Fictional Family Pulls Together: (Your Characters at their Best)

Objectives: To encourage change in the characters' attitudes towards one another; to reveal to actors the difficulty of making scenes where conflicts are quickly resolved as interesting and dynamic as unresolved conflict scenes.

"The perfect Thanksgiving dinner that we depicted was fun; it's too bad our family couldn't actually be like that."

Fictional families were asked to re-enact their crisis scene so that it could end on a positive note. They were told that in this replay, the situation was to remain the same; it was the characters' attitudes to one another which had to change. I hoped that these changes in attitude would come about as a result of the insight acquired from listening to each others' inner monologues.

This experience was designed to help students understand the extreme importance of attitude both as actors on stage and as individuals coping with real-life situations. For example, one student who was playing a young girl whose mother had died, asked me how she could possibly end the scene positively without bringing her fictional family mother back to life. When I suggested she leave her mother in the grave but change her attitude to the loss of her mother, she brightened up and re-enacted the scene. This time she changed her character's objective from - I want my mother back - to I'm going to help my family make this dinner a joyous occasion.

Scene 7. The Fictional Family Ten Years Ago

(from students' original scripts or outlines)

"An actor must always feel that he has the past of his role behind him like the train of a costume he carries along" (Stanislavski, 1961, 16).

Objectives: To make history an experienced reality in

order to elucidate the present situation; to live a past event together with the members of their fictional families; to provide students with an opportunity to collaborate in script development and playwriting.

> "It was exciting to see how quickly the scenarios were born. Everybody was well enough acquainted with their characters to immediately decide where they were ten years ago and how they felt at that time."

As described in Chapter Three, in order to fully explore their fictional family characters' inner lives, students were exposed to scenes which took place, not only in the present, but in the past and future. Enacting parts of their fictional family characters' lives which took place before the present, as well as scenes which depicted their future lives were designed to help the students to explore and develop multidimensional characters. It was hypothesized that the more they continued to explore their characters, the more these images would serve to enrich the fictional lives of the roles they played.

Students were required to develop scripts for the presentation of their fictional families ten years ago. They were allowed to collaborate in any way they wished. For example, sometimes a group wished to initially develop its ideas as a team, then delegate one member to write the script based on the group concept. Another fictional family

may have wished to delegate each person to write a particular segment of the text, then meet to unify and refine it. A third may have decided to work in teams of two.

Throughout the year each fictional family generally varied its approaches in an effort to offer each member an opportunity to take on more responsibility, and/or to equitably divide the work load. There were particular students who were especially interested in script writing. These students often enjoyed the opportunity to write more elaborate scripts, and were especially interested in receiving feedback from the audience.

In the fictional family technique, scriptwriting was used as a device to facilitate character creation. In addition, it was designed to introduce and familiarize students with another theatre discipline, and to extend their experience in artistic team collaboration.

I. Intentions

The following exercise, based on Klein's designs for actors, was intended to assist actors to search for their character's conscious and/or subconcious motivations. Understanding character motivation is intended to illuminate, for the actors, the underlying meanings of their characters' words. This perception of subtext should facilitate the creation of rich, multifaceted characters. Stanislavski said, "The value of words is not in the words themselves but in the subtext contained in them." (qtd in

Moore, 1984, 70).

[Visualize a person you love or have loved in the past. Think the words "I love you". Think about the motivation behind these words. What do you want from the other person? How do you want to make that person feel? What do you want that person to do in response to your words?

First think the intention, then whisper the words. Keep repeating the phrase. Gradually let your voice grow stronger until you project it straight to the other person.

Now change the words to "I like you". Keep your intention in mind. Keep repeating the phrase.

Change the phrase back to "I love you". Know your intention.

You may repeat either phrase and change the person you are visualizing as often as you wish. Each time articulate your intention silently before projecting the words.]

Some students found it very difficult to articulate the words, "I love you." To assist them in overcoming this barrier, I often used the following approach. On a given cue, students were asked to articulate the phrase "I love you" and to keep repeating it. This was not an exercise in choral speech. There was no attempt to to aim at unison. As in most of the group warm-ups and character preparations, students were working individually. However, the sounds of other voices mingled with their own offered security.

Second, I asked them to alter the words from "I love

you" to "I like you" to help those students who were still encountering difficulty, to explore a less emotional phrase. When they returned to the original words, they generally found them less difficult to say. This ability to express emotions will be useful in their theatre work.

The exercise was repeated. This time they were asked to become their fictional family characters and to visualize their characters' images of people they love or have loved in the past. The taking on of their fictional family character roles allowed them to transfer or adapt the context of the emotional phrases for use in their own imaginary scenarios.

II. Character Preparation A Visualization

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Lie down. Close your eyes. Inhale and exhale deeply, Haaaa Yaaaa Laaaa Maaaa Mmmmmm.

Think about your past. Recall where you lived, what your house or houses looked like, what the street looked like. Who were your friends? What school or schools did you attend?

Who were your teachers? What were the streets like on your way to school? Were there parks? Trees? Factories? Was it quiet with a few cars? Or was it noisy, with a lot of cars and trucks?

Recall who was home when you returned from school. Was the house quiet, noisy? What were the colors, sounds,

smells, tastes, textures of that particular house - of your particular room? WHAT DID YOU WANT?

Now focus on the scene you are about to perform. WHERE does it take place, WHY does it happen, WHO is present, WHEN is it taking place, WHAT is the incident about? What took place IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING this event?

Visualize the people involved in the scene. What are they wearing? What are they doing? Recall as many details as you can about the environment. Include the sounds, smells, tastes and textures. What do you WANT in this scene?]

III. Character Preparation B Physicalization

[When you are ready, get up. Move as your fictional famuily character moves. Now begin to move as your fictional family character moved ten years ago. Go about your character's daily activities of ten years ago.

Act the scene which takes place IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING the scene which you have prepared for today. When you have completed your scene, sit down. Remain in character. Keep stating your objective in your mind. I want...]

IV. Performances of The Fictional Family Ten Years Ago

A student observed:

"The family scenes today were so intriguing not to mention extremely entertaining. They flowed, they were quick, and each scene was as good as the

next. My attention was never before so captured. Maybe it was the magic tied up with the fact that most of us were acting like children again. One scene I particularly remember is when Steven and Alexandra Normal kept telling their little brother, Zack, `Mom is really Santa Claus. She is the one who gives you presents. Santa Claus doesn't exist.' Zack, in tears, says, `Then Rudolph doesn't exist either?' Steven said so matter-of-factly, just as a little kid would, `oh, yeah, Rudolph exists, but not Santa Claus.' I almost died."

Since many fictional families were stepfamilies, some members did not know their present families ten years ago. In these cases, it was suggested that they select other class members to represent the characters they required for their scenes.

These improvisations allowed them to interact with the characters they had created in their imaginations. And it gave the selected class members opportunities to play an assortment of fresh roles.

Scenes in the past gave the fictional family members an opportunity to enact specific fictional family events. Each event added further dimensions to the lives of the characters. There were no limits given as to how many of these scenes could be played. Although I suggested that this

scene take place ten years ago, this was, of course, flexible. Often students prefered to present scenes which took place eight years ago or twelve years ago, because they felt that particular incidents could only have occurred in that chosen time frame.

Students were also encouraged to initiate their own scenes when they felt there may have been issues in their fictional family characters' lives which remained unresolved, or because they wished to share with the audience, or with outside fictional families, an important family event. Sometimes they performed these self-initiated past scenes as a family group, or more often, their presentations included just one or two other fictional family members. Other times, they also included members from outside fictional families.

Shurtleff stresses the importance of actors' knowledge of their characters' past experiences in order to help actors to make "specific choices" which affect what he calls "the moment before" each scene begins (48).

Enactment of past scenes often offered valuable insights to the audience members as well. The dramatizations provided the spectators with an opportunity to catch glimpses of important events and issues in the lives of the other fictional families. They were then able to link the fictional family characters' present behavioral patterns and personalities with past experiences.

For example, the past scenes enacted by a character

with her parents who paid no attention to her, seemed to explain why she so desperately wants a close family relationship with her two stepdaughters in the present.

During post-performance discussion, the actors articulated insights gained from their experience on stage. And the members of the audience stated their observations. Subsequent reflections were noted in their journals.

Benedetti (1981) examines four levels of characterization classified by theatre theorist, Oscar Brockett: a) physical, b) social, c) psychological and d) moral. Benedetti states:

> "Our personality develops largely through our interaction with the environment. As infants our physical exploration of our world is a major factor in our development: as we grow older, our relationships with our parents and eventually with larger social groups shape us, as do the customs, taboos, and value systems of our culture" (232).

Fictional Family Houses

Presentations and Display of Fictional Family House Designs, Maquettes, Sketches and Collages.

Objectives: To assist students to visualize their fictional families' surroundings; to encourage them to identify details of their fictional family characters' rooms and to historify and

particularize the objects in these rooms.

> "We [Forbes family] all had such a fantastic time creating our home. The strange part about it, however, was that we kept appearing in character as we threw out ideas. When we gave Julia a small, sandwiched room with no balcony, her character came right out! "I don't want a small room! Why do Angela and Doug get the rooms with the balconies?"

I. Character Preparation A Visualization

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Lie down. Close your eyes. Inhale and exhale deeply. Haaaaa, Yaaaaa, Laaaaa, Maaaaa, Mmmmmm.

Visualize your real family's house. See the layout, the furnishings in each room. Recall the sounds in each part of the house, the smells, tastes. Imagine how each item in the house feels when you touch it. What is your relationship with each article in the house - the books, the art work, the furniture?

Now begin to visualize your fictional family character's house. See the layout, the furnishings and accessories in each room. What does the ambience - look like, feel like, smell like, sound like.

What is your relationship to each article in the house? Recall when you first saw it, bought it, touched it.]

According to Stanislavski (1961), the ambiance of the

characters' lives reflect the spirit of those characters. Hagen (1960) advises actors to give particular qualities to the objects with which they are surrounded in order to create real characters.

The house-building exercise was based on these character-creation concepts. It was designed to help students to become familiar with their houses in order to concretize for them their characters' reality.

II. Character Preparation B Physicalization

[When you feel ready, get up, establish your character's movements, then move about your fictional family character's house. Walk into every room. Feel the size, shape of the house, and of each room. Look at, touch, perhaps even smell and taste the various articles in each room. Listen to the sound of the house, and the sounds coming from outside the house.]

III. Presentation

[Join your fictional family. In character, present your house design, sketches, collages and/or maquettes to the larger group or to a fictional character. Each character, describe your own room. Be prepared to answer the group's questions and requests for more details.]

Some students perceived one aspect of "house building" as an exercise in wish fulfilment. As they worked together

to design their homes, each person's background, past experiences, relationships, and expectations contributed to the evolving identity of the fictional family. Some reported that it represented an opportunity to construct an ideal family, an ideal life style.

Social issues often emerged from these presentations. For example, in one house presentation, a fictional family character named Zak dominated the presentation by showing off "his" house and presenting his "wife's" room. Isabella, his wife immediately took exception to being referred to as "wife", and the audience became involved in a discussion pertaining to leadership, independence and possessiveness in gender roles. In future scenes, Isabella re-evaluated her role as "housewife", decided she could do more with her life, and eventually ended up running the family business.

Benedetti (1981) in discussing social traits of textual characters, states that:

> "...since the dramatic personality evolves under the influence of experience and interaction with other characters, it is also true that we find our own characterization primarily by relating to the events, circumstances, personalities, and actions of others provided within the world of the play" (238).

Scene 8. Cross Family Conflicts: Your Fictional Family Character at Ten Years of Age: in pairs

> "The present deprived of a past and future is like a middle without beginning or end, one chapter of a book, accidentally torn out and read. The past and the dreams of the future make up the present" (Stanislavski, 1961, 16).

Objectives: To provide further insight into your character's past; to interact with a member of an outside fictional family; to reveal an unsuspected or undeveloped aspect of your fictional family character's personality; to continue the concept of conflicting objectives.

> "Today it was as if I [Molly Rosenberg] had been invited to see the family characters' home movies taken a long time ago when I didn't know them. I was "charmed" by what my friends were like when they were young."

I mentioned earlier that the sequence of fictional family scenes does not have to be rigid. The interaction of the fictional family characters from outside families can be introduced earlier. In fact sometimes students initiated inclusion of members from outside fictional families in earlier improvisations. However, I did find that, as a rule,

students liked to feel more solid in their own fictional family characters' identities before interacting with the other families.

I. Intentions at Ten Years of Age

[Find a partner. Label yourselves A and B. You are both ten years old. Together create a situation e.g. playing in the school yard. A creates an intention. B responds to that intention. Know WHO you are, WHERE you are, WHAT your relationship is to the other person, and HOW you want to make the other person feel. Keep changing your intentions in order to obtain varied responses from your partner. Use sound and movement only. Reverse roles.]

These warm-up exercises using intentions are designed to assist actors to focus on simple objectives. Like the physical games described in Scene 2, the actors are concentrated on 'winning'.

Commencing the improvisations without dialogue was aimed to aid concentration because the students were not distracted by worrying about what to say next. In these warm ups as in those described in other fictional family scenes, the whole class was working simultaneously. Therefore they were not tempted to "perform" for spectators. This aspect also aided their concentration.

Cohen (1978) call these types of exercises "removing the audience". He uses these exercises when working on scripts to make actors aware of "performance tricks". He

advocates such exercises for self-evaluation purposes. He states:

> "Exercises, such as the one above, [removing the audience] are far better than criticism in showing us, both as participants and observers, the tremendous difference between interacting and performing, the tremendous theatricality of interacting without performance 'tricks', and the huge unwanted baggage of poorly developed, immature 'performance techniques' we have picked up unconsciously, and which we automatically thrust between ourselves and our most effective performance ability" (25).

Many other books (Benedetti, 1981; Klein, 1975) also deal with the kinds of preparation actors should make in order to develop their scripted characters; several offer lists of questions actors must ask themselves. Fields, in the January 1987 issue of Dramatics, sets down a comprehensive "fifty-eight character analysis outline" for directors and actors to follow when developing a new character. In the fictional family technique, students were given a list of character questions (see Appendix C) when they were developing their characters the responses to which they could alter, modify or augment as they learned more about their characters. During visualization exercises, they were induced to focus on responses to character questions

related to the impending scene.

II. Character Preparation A Visualization

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Lie down. Close your eyes. Inhale, exhale. Breathe deeply through your diaphragm. Haaaa, yaaaa, laaaa, maaaa, mmmmmm.

Think back to your childhood - when you were ten years old. Recall what you were like. Were you shy? Why? Outgoing? Why? Did you want to please others? Whom and why? Whom did you love? Why? Whom did you hate? Why? What did you love to do? What did you hate to do? What were you afraid of? Why? Of whom were you afraid? Why? What was your relationship with your family? To whom did you feel closest? Why? To whom did you feel most distant? Why? What did you want to be when you grew up?

Now think about your fictional family character. Become your fictional family character. Ask yourself the same questions. Am I shy? Why? Gregarious? Whom and what do I Like? Why? Whom and what do I hate? Why? Whom and what do I love? Why? What is my relationship to my family? To whom do I feel closest? To whom do I feel most distant? Why? What and whom am I afraid of? Why? What do I want now? What do I want to be when I grow up?]

The phrasing of character questions in the first person is advocated by actor-training theorists. Klein (1975) directs actors to ask the above questions of themselves in order to "merge" their own identities with their characters'

identities in order to "Become the child of your character the child of yourself" (163).

III. Character Preparation B Physicalization

[When you are ready, get up. Move around the room as your fictional family character at age ten. Go about your daily activities. Begin in the morning and end at night. Decide on an intention for each situation you encounter. Now act out the scene IMMEDIATELTY PRECEDING the one you will present today. When you have completed your scene, sit down and wait for the performances to begin.]

Students enacted their fictional family characters' daily activities. As in the other character preparation warm-ups, the enactment was performed by all the students simultaneously with each person working individually. Some fictional family characters interacted if they wished. Moving through their characters' daily activities was designed to help actors in the following ways: First, to give them a sense of their characters' existence and continuity apart from the scenes that they formally presented; Second, to help them to obtain a sense of their characters' physical rhythms and movements; third, to give them an opportunity to move in the space and thereby to assign to that space areas of identification for their characters.

IV. Performances of Cross-Families at Ten Years of Age

In these cross-family scenes, students were continuing their work in conflict situations. They were beginning to recognize both in their own acting and in the performances of others, what scenes worked well and why. They noted that when actors gave their fictional family characters clear, and what Ball (1984) calls "actable" objectives and maintained these objectives throughout the scene, a conflict situation was established and the resulting product was dramatically interesting. A student expressed this learning in her journal:

> "The scenes that worked the best were very clear examples of how necessary it is for the characters to have definable, conflicting objectives to create good drama. The scene that Cathy/Chloe Harrington and Christina/Avigayle Taylor did where the two little girls are fighting over a glass of paint in art class, was short, concise, and tight - and therefore one of the most successful scenes in dramatic terms."

Enacting childhood events with child members of outside fictional families aimed to provide students with further opportunities to discover and share facets of their characters' personalities. For example, until this scene, a student, playing the role of Claudia, had focused her fictional family character's past scenes principally on

Claudia's relationship with her parents. She had shown their neglect of her, and her loneliness which she constantly blamed on this neglect.

In a scene with another ten-year-old child, she was forced to examine her behavior with other children. She subsequently came to understand that her present possessiveness with her stepchildren had existed in her character's personality even as a child.

It was inevitable that the fictional family characters found themselves paired up with other fictional family characters from different historical eras, and therefore totally different backgrounds and experiences. This interaction offered opportunity for a wide variety of possible scenarios.

For example, when the young gypsy, Franz Nevsky teamed up with Marc Desjardins from a 1980s French-Canadian family, the actors stated that they found it challenging to find some interest that two boys from such different backgrounds might have in common. Franz Nevsky, who was uneducated, brought up to steal for a living, and travelled in a caravan, perceived the citified Marc Desjardins to be an 'uptight little arriviste' whose spirit for adventure had been partially stifled by his parents. The students therefore created a scene in which Franz appears outside of Marc's school and cajoles him into going to the forest with him ostensibly to climb a tree to see a bird's nest. Once there, he attempts to steal his school bag, but Marc manages

to retrieve it and escape.

Apart from the challenge of creating the improvisation, the performance also revealed to the actors how well their characters had been established. The moment Marc left his school bag unattended, the audience immediately sensed Franz's motives. This type of response is felt by actors and validates their fictional family roles.

Scene 9. Your Fictional Family: Ten years in the Future

Before presenting their future scenes, students were asked to write their fictional family characters' hopes and dreams for the future.

Objectives: To promote further levels of understanding of yourself, your character, and of your intricate real, and fictional family relationships.

From a student's journal:

> "What a total role reversal for me - my character - from being relatively independent and self-assured to near collapse and vulnerability with the prospect of losing Henry. I guess I love him more than I thought."

I. Intentions - In Pairs

[Find a partner. Label yourselves A and B. A creates

a situation and decides on an intention. B responds to that intention. Know WHO you are, WHERE you are, WHAT your relationship is to the other person, and HOW you want to make the other person feel. Keep changing your intentions in order to obtain varied responses from your partner. Reverse roles.]

Many acting teachers (Adler, 1990; Benedetti, 1981; Cohen, 1978; Klein, 1975) suggest the feeding of ideas to students. This type of stimulation may be necessary with certain groups. In the present study, I left ideas for warm-up improvisation situations up to the students themselves feeding them only when they were 'stuck'. They rarely failed to come up with a diversity of interesting, often intriguing situations.

In the above exercise the whole group was working simultaneously, but each pair was working on its own.

Cohen (1978) points out the value of focusing on intentions.

> "When we analyze a character, as a psychiatrist might, it is customary to explore his past to find motivating and determining influences. The actor does this as part of his homework in characterization...But at the moment of performance, the actor rarely thinks of the character's past and never concentrates on it. ...This is perhaps the greatest difference between analyzing a character and playing a character: the

actor must think from the character's viewpoint, not from his own. He must look actively into the future, not retrospectively and meditatively into the past. Even Hamlet's famous retrospective meditations are culled up as the bases for what should (or might) become his future actions" (32).

II. Character Preparation (Visualization and Physicalization)

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Lie down. Close your eyes. Inhale, exhale, breathe deeply through your diaphragm. Haaaa, yaaaa, laaa, maaaa, Mmmmmm.

Become your fictional family character at age 18. Ask yourself - What do I WANT most in life? HOW will I achieve these desires? What is my RELATIONSHIP to my family - parents, brothers, sisters, others? WHO are my best friends? Whom do I LOVE?

About whom do I daydream? WHY? Visualize your character at age 18. Step into it.

When you are ready, get up. Go about your daily activities. Know what you want to accomplish in each situation. End at night in bed.

Lying in bed, become your fictional family character at 28 years of age. Ask What do I WANT? HOW will I achieve my hopes and dreams? What is my relationship to my family? To my friends? WHO are my best friends? Whom do I love? HOW have I changed in the last ten years?

When you are ready, get up. Go about your daily activities. End in bed at night.

Imagine your own life ten years from now. Contemplate your hopes and dreams for the future.

Imagine your fictional family character's life ten years from now. Contemplate your fictional family character's hopes and dreams for the future.

Become your fictional family character ten years from your fictional family character's present age.

When you are ready, get up. Move as your fictional family character ten years in the future. Go about your daily activities. Know what you want to accomplish in each situation. When you have completed your activities, join your fictional family.]

Imagining and enacting situations in the fictional family characters' future lives, was aimed to promote further levels of understanding of the actors themselves, their characters and of the intricate, real and fictional family relationships. This understanding could lead to the envisaging of a whole new set of possibilities and ideas for overcoming obstacles which should encourage change within the situation. The development of an unrestrained imagination, in other words, the ability to fantasize, can motivate actors to break new ground artistically, and to be innovative and creative in their theatre work.

Blatner (1973) describes the "future projection

technique" used with adolescents in psychodrama whereby they can enact their lives five years in the future. Through future projection, Blatner finds that the protagonists can gain a more realistic approach to their lives, and can discover that they can, in fact, achieve some successes based on their own work.

In the the fictional family approach, students constantly enacted their past, present and future lives in an attempt to fill in what Stanislavski refers to as the "missing pieces" of their characters' lives. In a textual context, these are the pieces of the characters' lives which comprise the total person, but are not written into the actual dialogue of the play.

Blatner, in describing psychodramatic approaches, calls these enactments "surplus reality", in which "the dimensions of alternative past, present and future events which are a 'reality' in our imagination" are played.

Some students saw the future projection exercise as an opportunity to resolve fictional family issues and as a result fulfil their characters' dreams. Sometimes these dreams involved leaving their families and pursuing their own careers and lifestyles.

Sometimes fictional family members chose to present separate scenes either because of conflicting schedules or because their working methods and the types of scenes they wished to present differed. For example, in one fictional family, three members worked quickly and spontaneously, and

wished to present a "fun" scene, whereas one member wished to follow a creative process that was more introspective, reflective and serious. In addition, she liked to incorporate her movement and dance skills into her theatre work. In this instance, therefore, she developed her own scenario and presented it as a performance piece. The two presentations served as examples for the audience of contrasting dramatic styles.

Scene 10. Your Fictional Family Character's Secret Creates Family Conflict

Objectives: To evoke spontaneous responses from the fictional family members through the element of surprise; to advance the plot.

> "A funny thing happened to Molly Rosenberg today. I hadn't pictured her in a relationship at this point in time, although I had planned to introduce the topic shortly (in the form of a secret). However, one of the students asked (with tongue in cheek) whether Molly had a boyfriend. I suddenly felt indignant for all the seniors (who, younger people don't believe are sexually active) and I very quickly invented a man for her. Atta girl, Molly."

When the secrets were exposed on stage spontaneous responses from actor/characters were facilitated. The actors were asked to reveal their secrets to the person(s) in their fictional families from whom they expected confrontation. This enactment of confrontation between fictional family members continued the idea of exploring family conflicts.

I. Warm Up with Masks

In introductory sessions, before fictional family was initiated, the students were led through exercises where they responded intuitively to the sounds of words. During all sessions dealing with the fictional family, they moved as their fictional family character exploring its physical movements and rhythms.

When participating in mask-movement exercises, students wore neutral half masks in assorted colors. Work with masks was used to add an additional element of focus in expressive body work; with the face covered students were required to use their bodies clearly and economically in order to effectively and strikingly convey the message.

This experience of using the body as an effective communication tool trains the actor to weed out unnecessary, distracting qualities which inhibit and prevent sincere and credible characterization. Mask work is considered to be a valid character creation technique (Appel, 1982; Harrop and Epstein, 1982; Johnstone, 1983; Klein, 1975). In their endorsement of this methodology, Harrop and Epstein state:

> "Work with the neutral mask has a general validity in the training of actors...It emphasizes the expressiveness of the whole body by removing the expressiveness of the face..." (38).

During the mask work (as in the character preparation movement exercises) the whole class was working at the same time, but each student worked individually.

[I will call out some words, statements or phrases. Act immediately without thinking, then refine your movement. Use your whole body. Clarify a beginning, middle and end. Make a physical statement. Aim for clarity, and economy.

First respond as yourself and make your statement. Next, respond as your fictional family character and make your fictional family character's statement.
Hello. Yes. No. Please. My toe itches. I dare you. I like you. Goodbye. Who are you? Don't touch me. Hold me. I'm in pain. I'm bored. I'm in love. Alone. You are so tall. I am so small. Go away.]

These exercises based on Appel (1982) could extend mask characterization work by having students make masks for their fictional family characters. After they have placed the mask on their faces, actors would begin to observe their characters in the mirror, then gradually move away from it, turn their backs to it, and speak and move as the character inspired by the mask. This technique could be used to

supplement the external rhythms, postures, and mannerisms developed from previous exercises. Or, one might start with the making of the mask earlier on.

Harrop and Epstein, in their book, Acting With Style (1982) describe how character masks used in the above fashion can be useful for a variety of performance styles such as Comedy of Manners, Farce and Absurdist Theatre. For studying Brechtian Theatre, they suggest that actors can discover the character's "gestus" which not only includes body rhythms and energy centres but also the character's attitude and point of view.

Some students had difficulty giving their characters movements and gestures different from their own. These students, in particular could likely be helped by the mask characterization technique. Students often expressed the physical freedom that the masks provided. For example, a student described her mask experience.

> "Warm up with masks: I enjoyed it, it is like having a wall around you, as if nobody could see you or spy on you. It made me feel less vulnerable.
>
> The mask is independent
>
> needs nothing
>
> wants no one
>
> puts on airs, so as not to care
>
> Beneath the mask lies the truth
>
> The isolation and quiet desperation

That no one knows

Chloe always wears a mask with her family. This is because she does not feel comfortable with them. In fact, she feels entirely alienated from them. She feels that they are far too ignorant to ever understand her. Chloe finds no comfort at home either intellectually or emotionally. Chloe often plays alone so as not to feel the pain of isolation.

Chloe needs to find intellectual stimulation and emotional support from someone outside her family. I want to have Chloe do some scenes alone."

Students frequently expressed the need to initiate fictional family character monologues. These self-generated scenes appeared to assist them to discover and develop additional facets to their characters, and to share these formerly unseen character traits with the audience.

For example, a student playing a sixteen-year old in a 1920s family felt that her character was constantly being suppressed in scenes with her fictional family due to the perception of adolescent girls of that generation.

She therefore created a scene in which she stole out of her house, met a boyfriend, and received her first kiss. Members of the audience lauded the student's imaginative performance as well as the emergence, in the character, of

a lively, independent spirit hitherto unsuspected and unseen. Away from her fictional family, on stage solo, the actress and the fictional character were simultaneously acknowledged and recognized.

II. Character Preparation

[Move around the room as your fictional family character. Notice in your walk the idiosyncratic motion of your character. Aggressive strides? Swinging? Bouncing? Shuffling?

Focus on the scene you are about to perform. What does your character want? What obstacle is in your path? What will you do to achieve your objective? Act out the scene in movement. Exaggerate your gestures, actions and reactions.]

III. Performances - Your Fictional Family Character's Secret

The variety of secrets not only created dramatic conflict scenes but also presented a host of social issues which included such topics as aging, gender, cultural diversity, sexual abuse and family disintegration. An example of both aging and gender issues is contained in the following student's secret. Erica/Molly Rosenberg:

> "Promise never to tell? Here it is (my secret)! Molly Rosenberg put an ad in the companion's column of the Gazette.

Lois and the kids don't know. I'm not really sure that they'd understand. Anyway, what they don't know won't hurt them. I lied in the ad. I said I was 60. Well, I don't look seventy-two, and I was afraid that no one would answer a seventy-two-year-old's ad. It wasn't such a bad idea because I met someone who is what the kids call a HUNK. Sixty-five years old and doesn't look a day over sixty.

Agnes met him. She approves. I'm not sure why, but somehow I can't bring him home to Lois and the kids. But we go to his house. Do I have to say more? Arthur would die if he knew. Oh God. What did I just say? P.S. He's not Jewish."

[TRADITIONAL, attractive widow, 60, healthy, slim, athletic, has many interests. If you're clean cut, honest, intelligent, romantic secure, a conversationalist, high standards, morals, values, would love to hear from you. 55-65, serious only. Recent photo. P.O. Box 2164.]

A second example dealt with the topic of sexual abuse. A student whose character was not yet able to confide in her fictional family presented her scene in monologue. The knowledge of her secret explained to the audience the reasons why Win, in the present, is such an angry, alienated

and hostile girl. She subsequently was able to disclose her secret to her fictional family.

Scene 11. Cross-Family Conflicts: in pairs

> "By moving forward along physical lines we find ourselves constantly in new and different situations, moods, imaginative surroundings, and the externals of production. The actor comes into contact with new people and shares their life...His path is so well built that he cannot be led astray." (Stanislavski, 1936, 139).

Objectives: To heighten awareness of the fictional family character's multiple dimensions; to continue acquisition of experience in conflict situations; to encourage students to create and maintain connections and interactions with members of outside families.

The behavior of characters outside of their fictional families was often markedly different from their communication styles at home. This phenomenon gave actors further opportunities to explore the possibly suppressed or stifled dimensions of their characters' personalities. As one student remarked in her journal:

> "I really liked the scenes because I wanted to

see people outside their families. It gives a whole new light on who they are. I know a lot of people that are completely different in their house than they are outside."

I. Warm Up Group Contact

(For description of this exercise designed to heighten concentration and sensory awareness, see Gold, 1991.)

II. Subtext Say One Thing and Mean Another

(For description of exercise which is a continuation ofthe subtext exercises, see Gold, 1991.)

Actors' knowledge of subtext is crucial in portraying their characters' attitudes to people, to objects and to ideas. This knowledge will affect their vocal delivery, their gestures and their actions (Ball, 1984; Benedetti, 1981; Cohen, 1978; Stanislavski, 1961).

[Find a partner. Choose a phrase that you have used, overheard or someone has said to you. e.g. I don't wish to talk about this - or - If you feel that way, I think you should leave.

Decide WHO you are, WHERE you are, WHO the other character is in relation to you, WHAT you want to make the other person feel. Change your intentions. Reverse roles. Experiment with other phrases.]

III. Character Preparation A

[Move around the room as your fictional family character. Act out a variety of situations in which you find yourself. e.g. in school, at a party, at work, at your graduation.]

IV. Character Preparation B

[Team up with a member of an outside fictional family. You can be meeting for the first time, or you may already know each other. You may wish to work with someone with whom you seldom work. Establish the relationship. Establish strong objectives. Establish a conflict situation. Reveal some aspect of your fictional family character hitherto unknown to us.]

I considered it important to keep encouraging students to work with with a variety of people in the class. Some students developed the idea that they should be working only with their own fictional families, others became so comfortable within the confines of their own fictional families, that they did not wish to make the effort to interact with new people. The cross-family scenes were not meant to be an end in themselves, but to encourage students to initiate scenes with members of outside fictional families. This interaction provided them with the experience of both student interaction and of character interaction.

A variety of locations were presented. Some actors

whose fictional family characters had been in abusive situations placed them in group or private therapy sessions where they could find mutual support.

Other actors who played much older characters had an opportunity to gain insight into that age group's concerns and personal issues. For example, a student who had created a modern, fun-loving type of woman, who related especially well to her teen-age grandaughter, displayed a hidden aspect of her character when meeting a grandmother from another fictional family in a shopping mall. Because she was interacting with a comtemporary who was also a stranger, she eventually allowed herself to release, to a degree, her usual facade of youth and vigor. Similarly, the other grandmother, under this grandmother's influence was able to "let her hair down". The scene, which had emphasized the clashing personalities of the two women at the outset, gradually became less volatile as the two women resolved their differences over drinks.

Sometimes students revealed in their journals that they had modelled older characters on their own grandparents. In these cases, they reported that the portrayals offered them practical and emotional insights into their elders' behavior. Since each acting class contained students from diverse family backgrounds, personal perceptions of family relationships varied. This variety of perspectives was evident in post-performance discussions.

Often, a relationship or bond developed between two

characters in a cross-family scene out of needs unfulfilled by their own fictional families. For example, one fictional family character playing a teacher who had a profound need to be a mother was drawn to her student who subconsciously longed for a surrogate to replace her deceased mother.

Cross-family scenes provided students with opportunities to explore additional facets of their fictional family characters' psyches and to identify and define these characters as individuals. These facets of their characters' personalities were subsequently integrated into their character conceptualizations.

In the cross-family scenes at ten years of age (see Scene 8) an improvisation between two children of different historical eras was described. The cross-family scenes as adults offered equal challenge for inventive scenarios.

A student whose fictional family character, Albert, was a young scientist living in 1965, took this opportunity to combine the cross-family improvisation with his fictional family character's secret. In his spare time, Albert, unbeknownst to his family, had invented a time machine.

The scene opens with Albert working on the machine. Suddenly, he cries out, "I'm getting someone, I think I've got something!" Then Martha, a fictional character from a 1925 fictional family somersaults onto the playing area. She can only stay 10 minutes, she announces, because her molecular structure will break down after that point.

With a sense of urgency, they discuss war, economics

and science. She is amazed, she cannot believe what she is hearing. Jet planes, the women's movement, people on the moon. When her time is up, she leaves, but she lets Albert know that she returns to her generation with a vision for a brighter future for women. An appropriate theme, since the improvisation was presented on International Women's Day.

Scene 12. Fictional Family Group Encounter

Objectives: To offer the fictional family characters an opportunity to listen to, and interact with, other fictional families who also have communication problems; to enable the actors to develop new choices in communication style for their characters in future fictional family scenes; to give actors the opportunity to maintain their fictional family roles throughout an entire session.

> "The therapy began. Claudia listened carefully. That's what she wanted to do: listen. Little by little she discovered that she wasn't the only one on earth who had problems. All the strangers who were in this room were hurt, sad, frustrated. Then she realized she wasn't alone anymore. These strangers became more friendly and the weight of her sadness lighter."

Students entered the room as their fictional family

characters and immediately sat in a circle ready for the session to begin. There was absolute quiet. After a few moments, I, as leader, opened the group encounter session. I suggested that they have all come here because they have communication problems with members of their fictional families and that their presence indicates that they hope to change and improve these relationships (Bandler et al, 1976).

I told them that everything said here should be considered confidential. My role as "therapist" was non-confrontational. I intervened as little as possible, and the tone of the intervention, whether in question or statement form, was gentle, supportive and/or neutral.

All four fictional families were simultaneously involved in the session. Therefore, if any fictional family members wished to make a confidential statement to the outside families, their family was requested to "freeze" during those specific moments. This "behind the back" technique borrowed from psychodrama allows fictional family members to uninterruptedly and freely express their feelings about other family members; it additionally gives input to those family members who are 'physically' absent.

Fictional Family members commenced with a statement which expressed their objectives. They stated what it is they want, need and hope for themselves and their fictional families. They attempted to articulate what they want to change in order to achieve the desired state of coming to

understand and trust one another. This technique ties in with family therapy strategies where families are assisted in finding new possibilities for communication so that they can function more effectively (Bandler, et al, 1976).

During closure of the session, the actors were requested to relinguish their fictional family roles and relate to the experience from the actor's perspective.

A student who had participated in family therapy with her "real" family compared that experience to the fictional family therapy session.

> "Today we did the family therapy session. Since I have really been to family therapy, I'd like to say that it was pretty realistic. A family does not go into therapy because they have wonderful things to say about each other. Family therapy sessions are hard, and there is a lot of yelling and everyone's feelings get hurt. It isn't until the therapy has been going on for a while, until it is working, that the family members begin complimenting each other and being helpful."

Students often expressed their fictional family characters' initial reluctance to attend a therapy group. They subsequently described and evaluated what took place at the session and eventually formed positive conclusions, if not from the perspective of their characters, then from the

actor's perspective.

It should be noted that the intensity of emotions expressed in the group encounter did not lead to loss of control. Students were playing their fictional family roles and expressing their feelings in the context of these roles. They were constantly aware of the theatrical impact created by the dialogue. They were so familiar with all the fictional family characters, that the emotional interchange, the release of hostility and anger, as well as the letting down of barriers to show sensitivity, love and tenderness were identified with the characters themselves and with the proficiency of the actors.

Scene 13. Your Fictional Family Character's Dream or Nightmare

Objectives: To provoke, from the students, imaginative, innovative, often surrealistic depictions of their fictional family character's inner life; to assist them to express their fictional family characters' unconscious state through theatrical imagery. As one student remarked in her journal:

> "In a dream, anything is possible - all the limits, constraints imposed by the real world suddenly vanish and all that is left is up to the imagination and whatever it produces. The scenes

reflected this freedom."

I. Warm Up Mask Movement-Expression

Working with masks immediately preceding the introduction of the fictional family characters' dream sequences was designed to suggest to the students the idea of incorporating masks into their performances of their dreams. The often illogical, fragmented, surreal nature of dreams adapts itself to the abstract, representational quality of masks. Also, as discussed in scene 10, the covering of the face with a mask can release inhibitions, free the body and allow it to move in more flexible, innovative ways. The following mask exercises are based on Appel (1982).

[I will call out some statements. Act immediately without reflection. Refine your movement. Use your whole body. Define a beginning, middle and end. Make a physical statement. Aim for clarity and economy. First, respond instinctively and make a statement as yourself. Next respond instinctively and make a statement as your fictional family character.]

Examples: [I want to fly. I want to fly but I have no wings. I want to float like a balloon. I want to float like a balloon but I am too heavy. I want to jump over the moon. I want to jump over the moon but my legs are too short.]

To help actors into a creative state which will stimulate their subconscious thoughts (Stanislavski, 1961), they were given a relaxation warm-up designed to foster the creative state and assist them in forming the kinds of images which fit their fictional family characters.

II. Character Preparation

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Lie down. Inhale, exhale through your diaphragm. Haaaaa Yaaaaaa Laaaa Maaaaa Mmmmmm. Become your fictional family character. Go to sleep and dream your fictional family character's dream.]

III. Improvisation Preparation

[Join your family. Relate your dreams to one another. The fictional family may select one dream to perform, or incorporate aspects of several members' dreams.]

IV. Performances of Fictional Family Characters' Dreams

A student described her fictional family character's dream:

"LAURIE'S DREAM
awake they don't wear masks
naked cruelty
naked hate
that's the way they really are
blow off the veils of phony kindness

and
"get out of my room"
"what the hell do you want"
"we don't want you here"
little girl fear
timid shivers
and the strongest desire is to curl up into a cold marble ball
and fade away
into the sky

scream
and the masks are on
she's awake
but they wear nightmares
on their features
and comfort her
from behind silk walls"

Input from the mask-movement warm-up was apparent in many of the performances. For example, the Taylor-Jordan family who presented Laurie's dream, reversed the traditional application of masks in dreams. They donned masks during the sequence in which they were awake, and removed them for the dream sequence. Through this original approach, they intentionally introduced the theme of

'appearance versus reality, of truth versus lies'. And they deliberately raised questions both for themselves and for the audience, such as - Does Laurie's dream show the real Taylor-Jordans - their deep-seated emotions and resentments? Is their kindness toward her just a superficial act?' Or does Laurie tend to distort reality and thereby sees her stepfamily from a neurotic or paranoid perspective?

The Cranstons, in an equally effective scene, made use of the traditional approach to masks. The family is seated cozily around a table playing monopoly. All are wearing masks. As the dice continues to roll, it becomes evident that these people are not the bickering Cranstons to whom we have become accustomed. These Cranstons are overly polite, sweet, considerate to one another, and play the game amicably and fairly.

Also, they move and speak with exaggerated slowness. Toward the end of the scene, when they suddenly rip off their masks, their voices and gestures increase noticeably in speed, volume and intensity. And the old, familiar Cranstons are revealed.

Scene 14. Fictional Family Final Scene (in your chosen and researched performance style)

Objectives: To offer actors the opportunity of resolving their fictional family character's personal and/or

social issues; to share an "ending" with the larger group; to further students' research of performance style.

I. Character Preparation A Visualization

[Find a comfortable space on the floor. Close your eyes. Think of your fictional family character - past, present and future. Recall all the experiences you presented here.

Think of your fictional family, of your relationships with the other fictional families.

Think about what your character learned, what insights may have been gained - by your character.

Think of what was learned, what insights may have been gained - by you, as an actor, playing that character. Visualize how your character looks, the image he or she projects.

Visualize how your character moves. See him or her moving in a variety of situations.]

II. Character Preparation B Physicalization

[When you feel ready, get up and move as your character. Exaggerate your fictional family character's movements and gestures. Freeze.

Move normally. Notice the difference. Move again as your fictional character. Act out the scene IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING the scene you are about to present. When you have enacted the complete preceding scene, join your fictional

family group in readiness for the scene you will present today.]

III. Performances of Fictional Family Final Scene

The approach to closure and presentation of the fictional family final scene varied with each group. Some fictional families focused on resolving their characters' personal issues. They wished to leave their characters and their families on a positive note. Others opted for what they considered to be a more "realistic" approach. They allowed their characters to go off in different directions.

Often students expressed the closeness that has resulted from their fictional family experiences.

> "I have to admit that this is one family that I will sorely miss. How many people can claim the feeling of closeness, if they have not grown together as we have done this year. Family units have awakened my eyes to the close bonding of friendship, and brings back an infamous quote: `Blood is thicker than water'. ...I feel closest to Ben, [Ovie] and I admit it is probably due to our close ties as [fictional family] twins. Strange how fiction can easily become reality."

From time to time, a student left the university during the term. Fictional family members, faced with this situation, often created scenes dealing with that missing

person's 'death'. Angela Vivaldi, daughter:

> "My family concluded on a sad note with the funeral of Carmen, my father. The family enters a chapel to pay last respects. I enter late, appropriate for my character, and with a sense of giving in this one time to come to church.
>
> We all approach the coffin - Nona, as the mother, goes first and prays; Catalina can't face the death and quickly turns away to go to her grandmother; Guiseppe is grave and serious; as Angel, I appropriately put some bright flowers on the casket; and Jackie, his wife goes last and can't leave until her brother-in-law has to lead her away.
>
> For once, my sister and I embrace and there is a closeness between us. It is unfortunate that it takes a death to draw us closer together and make us appreciate each other more, but I also believe there always existed an underlying love between those characters that conflicted, that was just never shown..."

(For sample texts see Gold, 1991)

The Jordan-Taylor family depicted a scene which takes place at the brink of nuclear annhilation. Their selected style was Theatre of Cruelty, a form of theatre created by the French director, Antonin Artaud. Artaud, who spent nine

years in lunatic asylums, insisted that presentations be performed in an atmosphere of "creative cruel anguish" so that the spectators be inflicted with a sense of "complete emotional suffering" (Flanner in Greene, 1970, 10).

This suffering was aimed to produce spiritual healing. Artaud's work is thought to have had an important seminal influence on the French avant-garde stage, on its directors, and principally, on its writers, such as absurdist writer, Samuel Beckett.

In addition to enacting the fictional family final scenes, students completed the autobiographies which they had been writing all year. In them, they described and evaluated their fictional family character's development, and they brought the story line or scenario to their chosen ending. Here is one excerpt from Erica/Molly Rosenberg's journal:

> "Today I thought about what will happen to Molly Rosenberg after June 30th. If I no longer use my body as a medium for her existence, will she cease to exist? Will she disappear along with Paul, Lisa, Leonard, Janet and Lois? Will the Mitchell-Rosenberg house in North Hatley become just a photo cut from the pages of Better Homes and Gardens? And what about her Russian ancestors? Do we forget those too? After all, they are only names dreamed up to enhance a fictional family tree.

What I am really trying to say is, now that Molly has been created, now that I have acted out her habits, her likes and her loves, can she just be put aside and forgotten? I don't think so. She seems to have taken on a life of her own and in just six weeks, she has taught me things about myself that I had forty-eight years to figure out, but didn't.

Molly has accepted her religious identity and has espoused to anyone who would listen, what she believes in. She has made the Yiddish term "Bubby" a familiar word with very positive connotations.

I wonder - As Laurent [Paul] and Alison [Lisa] get older, will Bubby ever cross their minds? Will Paul remember that I always gave him extra spending money and drove him to Scouts, when his mother wasn't able to? Will he forgive me for having a boyfriend, when he was too intense to find a friend that he could share his life with? Will Lisa forgive me for trying to force her to decide what her religious beliefs were? Will she remember that I went off to Europe alone, even though I was a little afraid? And Lois, dear Lois, will she remember that no matter what she and the children did, I loved them and supported them? I hope that they remember.

Wouldn't it be fun if I could meet the people in "my family" ten years from now, and they said, "Hi Molly" or "Hi Bubby". I hope so, because the world needs more Molly Rosenbergs. I admire her. She has become my mentor and I would hate to lose her."

Influence of Brechtian Style on Fictional Family Character Development

Midway through the term, I began to work with students on Brechtian style. A list of topics (see Appendix C) related to Brechtian theories was circulated. Students were asked to select the research topic which interested them. They were then expected to write short papers on this selected topic for class presentations. Presentations were followed by group discussion.

Some of Brecht's plays were introduced as required reading. A selection was subsequently made and the particular play was explored through reading and class presentation.

Having developed the fictional family characters using Stanislavski's inner technique - playing the personal, emotional response of the character to a particular situation, the students were now exposed to Brecht's idea of 'truthful' performances - where the actor is himself and

presents a character upon whom he passes comment, and where emotion must be communicated through a recognizable action.

Students reported that the informal seminar on elements of Brechtian theatre offered them an idea of his background and theories which contributed to their attempt in understanding his approach. It is important to note that many students at first resisted his ideas because they found his alienation approach unappealing after having been exposed to Stanislavski's emphasis on inner technique. For some students, It took several sessions for them to grudgingly acknowledge that Brechtian theatre could be effective and interesting.

For example, at the outset some appeared to underestimate the importance of Brechtian acting, because the exposure to character 'types' and 'gestus' led them to believe that the characters in Brechtian theatre are little more than sterotypes. With the gradual work on character, through Brechtian texts, and most particularly the application of Brechtian theory to their fictional family characters, they eventuallly began to understand the detailed work in character building which Brecht demands. Because they had already constructed their fictional family characters in a detailed and systematic way, they were now augmenting these characters' external features. They were, in addition, distancing themselves from what they had already constructed so that they could be in a position to critically observe their fictional family characters'

traits.

In Brechtian theatre, the character's wants and objectives are interwoven with the sociopolitical issue of the story line or plot. For example, when Michael Hamburger, dramaturge and directer of Deutsches Theatre in East Berlin workshopped a group of my students in scenes from The Caucasian Chalk Circle, he advised my student who was playing Grusha in the final courtroom scene, that although she was in love with Simon, she could not afford to pay any attention to him in this scene because her main objective was to convince the judge that she must keep the child. (The judge was deciding whether the child should go to his 'natural' mother who had abandoned him or to the 'adoptive' mother who had nurtured him.)

Grusha's focus, Hamburger advised, had to be entirely on that issue i.e. Brecht's theme of ownership. Brecht, in this play, makes the point that an object (property) belongs to that person (country) who will serve it best. Only when Grusha wins her case and is declared the 'true' mother, can she turn to her beloved and rejoice with him.

Before initiating the next scenes, several sessions of Epic Theatre improvisations based on Harrop and Epstein (1982) were conducted (for detailed descriptions of exercises, see Gold, 1991). The objectives of these exercises were to help actors to: a) approach epic acting; b) develop physical characterization; c) create character gestus; d) develop ensemble relationships for Epic acting in

order to create scenic gestus; and d) explore the rhythms and energies of characters with specific socioeconomic functions in a modern political structure. A student described his response to a month of Brechtian exposure.

"F E B R U A R Y

If there was one particularly unique word that could successfully summarize the month's activities, that word would be...

B R E C H T

no, not as in the shampoo (that's Breck, anyway)

but as in Bertolt

reactionist communist

radical poet, playwright, director

using factory clothes off a factory man in a factory scene

the REAL THING

plus alienation effect...

make 'em think, make 'em think, make 'em think

in a cold and calculating

anti-Aristotelian

way

actors should ACT not BE

wrongo Stanislavski!

masks and make-up

placards

and a social conscience

and all of East Berlin before it was East Hollywood...

Threepenny Opera

Elephant Calf

Caucasian Chalk Circle...

FREEZE F R E E Z E F R E E Z E

each time

like an icicle, like a dagger, like a pop whistle, like a piercing siren, like a death, like a void, like a winter...

and that's your character gestus

- the gestures, and facial expressions, and mannerisms, and attitudes, and ways of movement THAT COMPOSE A CHARACTER

THAT CONSTITUTE A TYPE

and if the audience can discern you

you have a legitimate right to feel in

B R E C H S T A S Y

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA - a dumb journal joke."

Brechtian Texts

Concurrently with the Brechtian exercises and games, and subsequent to the class discussion, students read the various plays by Brecht recommended on their reading list. A particular short play or excerpt from a full-length play was selected for exploration and presentation. Since many of Brecht's plays are episodic in structure, each scene lends itself to this type of class work.

Students were also asked to write biographies of their textual characters. This character description in the third person distances actors from their characters and allows them to view their characters from a critical perspective.

Scene 15. Fictional Family Sculpture: group

I. [Divide into fictional family groups. Form a sculpture which represents your family dynamic. Present it.

The audience will observe, examine and offer comments.

II. Each fictional family member - create a sculpture which represents your fictional family from your character's perspective

a) as it is (actual)

b) how you would like it to be (ideal)

III. Each fictional family - create a sculpture which

represents your family's social issue.]

Each family formed a sculpture which demonstrated the family relationships and the position and perspective of each member within the family unit. The audience observed the formation of this sculpture and studied its final presentation. During evaluation, the audience members were asked whether they thought the sculpture truly represented the family dynamic. Suggestions were made, and rearrrangements took place until both actors and audience were comfortable with the final product. A student expressed his response to the fictional family sculpture exercise:

> "It is very interesting to watch and give ideas, as well as being re-arranged...I look forward to more opportunities to hear how others experience my character, how he is coming across. Our family has grown very close, oddly enough! As if we've been together for ages."

The fictional families once again formed sculptures - this time the formation symbolized a socioeconomic theme relevant to their particular family. For example, the wealthy Forbes family presented themselves in the form of a money tree.

In the Brechtian context, these sculpture formations forced the fictional families to define and express their social issues and exhibit the attitude of each member to

these particular social or sociopolitical issues. Students graphically described their fictional family sculptures and the perceptions they gained from the experience:

"Making a statue of our family meant that we had to define our relationships within the family. Nick is a little bit separate from the family. Dave and I (Ellen) basically stand in the centre as a dividing line between the two groups of children. Denise stands close to me as a bit of support. Laura hangs on to Dave but peeks around him to stare at Nick. Tanya is on her knees at Nick's feet.

I think the most significant thing is that Dave had trouble showing affection to Ellen. He said to Laura afterwards that he had discovered something, but he wouldn't tell me what it was."

The student playing Dave:

"Our fictional family sculpture was a good idea. It accentuated the different relations within the family. Doing this I realized that, as Dave, I can't stand Denise. Hmmm, I wonder if and when this sentiment will surface?"

Scene 16. The Fictional Family: Brechtian style

from students' original written scripts

For Objectives of this scene, see Chapter Three.)

In creating Brechtian fictional family scenes, each family having selected an appropriate socioeconomic theme, met between sessions to develop, write and rehearse its scenes.

Presentations were Brechtian in style and flavour. Alienation techniques - masks, signs, symbols, chalkboard slogans, ballads, limericks, narrators - were incorporated in the performances.

I. Silent Scream

[Lie down on the floor. Close your eyes. Without making a sound, scream with your head.

Scream with your face. Scream with your neck. Scream with your shoulders. Scream with your back. Scream with your chest. Scream with your stomach. Scream with your knees. Scream with your feet. Scream with your whole body.

This time, scream with your whole body and vocalize your scream.]

II. Character Preparation

[Move around the room as your fictional family character. Notice how your character holds his or her head,

neck, body. Freeze in your character's gestus. Move again and freeze.

Act out the scene immediately preceding the scene you will be performing today.]

III. Performances of Fictional Family: Brechtian Style

A student described a sample scene:

> "The Greek family's scene was typical, as Remembrance Day was only two days ago. The strength of their scene was their choice of poetry. Brecht would have approved of that image of war being less of "glory and honor" and more of élite manipulation of the mass soldier."

A second student entry reads:

> "Once again our class was exposed to social issues through the 'epic' theatre of Bertolt Brecht. The families that we have cultivated have had their biggest challenge yet; to force their audience to think about a social issue. The three families that presented their scene today were effective in using Brecht's techniques to alert the audience of social malaise...
>
> The Forbes family, true to their characters, showed how money (as personified by Julia and Greg) can corrupt and lead to superficiality. They used Brechtian techniques such as including the

audience and having characters stand at different levels to represent their position in the family...

A standing ovation for the "granny" Jones family...Their Brechtian techniques were powerful in illustrating the plight of the aged and those caring for the elderly in society.

A special praise for Becky and her character gestus of "crying with her hands"; her actions removed me from her character and focused my thoughts on her relationships with her granny.

Tracey's poetry also deserves mention as effectively presenting the dichotomy of a grandmother who wants to die but continues to upset and dominate everyone while she is alive."

Brecht's actors were required to distance themselves from their roles so that they could present their characters' socio-political points of view. This separation of thought and emotion, and its influence on her character's communication behavior is reflected in the student's quote which follows:

"The character itself (Ellen) didn't change very much at all, what changed was the way the character expressed herself...In a normal situation, my character is subdued and has trouble expressing herself... Brechtian style my character

was able to say things and to therefore express her emotions. When she was worried, she said so. When she thought Nick was being unfair, she said so."

In spite of Brecht's attempts to create critically-engaged audiences, it is reported that spectators often related emotionally to his principal characters' crises situations.

It is interesting to note, therefore, some of the fictional families' achievements in this area as recorded in students' quotes below:

"The award for the best all round improvisation and performance goes to the Wazawski family. I liked the fact that it involved a "real" family issue. I enjoyed the fact that they used poetry and that Adamo got up from his death bed to address the audience.

This is the type of scene that might have tugged at my heart strings if it was done using the "Stanislavski Method". Instead, I was forced to examine a social issue and therefore I couldn't concentrate on being sad."

"This had to be the most amazing class of the year... The Falcones cleverly devised a comical parody from The Chalk Circle, where the innocent

victims are replaced by the corrupt vultures.

Vincenzo [the Mafia boss] is the poor Michael child. Roxanne, Rosa and Nick [his family] are the lawyers at the trial. The overpowering judge is Elizabeth [his wife]...

The question implied allows the viewer to reflect about the cruel fates of those who are always victimized by their purity. Alas the world will remain forever enclosed by the evil that surrounds us."

"The Nevskys [gypsy family] used interaction with the audience better than any of us. Josephine told us a story as if we were her children. We gathered round and listened. As she related the events of the strange man from Paris coming to claim Max as his son, the family characters played out the story in the background.

A clever alienation technique was used every once in a while; Ernest (Franz) would correct her in her story and then return to his role. Also, Josephine would leave us at times to join in the action behind her. (I must compliment Claude who transferred family boundaries and effectively played the strange man from Paris.)

The dilemma of the story was money. Should Max go to Paris and become rich and educated, or

should he stay with his Gypsy family and continue to struggle? He agonized over the situation through a dream in which Franz urged him to stay and Lana urged him to leave for Paris.

We, as the audience, were told to split up into camps depending on who we wanted to triumph."

A student playing the daughter in a particular fictional family left the university in mid-term. Her fictional family opened their scene with a funeral procession. The entire class was asked to leave the room. After a couple of minutes, we were ushered in as mourners in the procession, then seated. A student gave her version of the performance:

"The most intense scene goes to the Desjardins family. They played out an extremely moving funeral scene, [Arielle, the 16-year-old daughter's suicide] using the silent tears technique and holding faithfully to their character gesti which demonstrated tragedy; and they used comedy through the use of signs held up by the corpse (Kerri).

The signs tended to be very cynical and left us wondering whether to laugh or cry. We found out that questionable activities between the Father and the daughter had been going on as Kerri lifted a sign upon which was written 'INCEST'.

Their social statement seemed to be the lack of communication between members in families leading to the destruction of the family.

At the end, Marc simply sat down in the audience, turned to us and asked: 'So what do you think?'

This left us wondering whether to clap or not. The interaction with the audience was so smooth that we could not tell when the piece was over."

Rebecca/Laurie Taylor:

"Our family's ideas had to do with the corruption of television. No communication, blank faces, masks for no thoughts or action, Dallas and oil wells, decadence and elegant dresses sailing in the air and whispering 'Share the fantasy. Chanel NO. 5.'

I think that what connected me most to this idea was the paper I just finished on the exploitation of women in advertising. The disgusting portrayal of women in society is demoralizing and exploitive. It was a very emotional paper for me to write. I am so surprised at how people act and think. I mean, to use a ten-year old and make her look sexy in an advertisment is so awful, especially in a day when there is child molestation. It scares me, what people will

do for money.

We were speaking to Capitalists and showing them the 'evil of their ways'. It fit into our family (Taylor-Jordans) because we always seem to pass each other over, unable to connect. Nobody understands what someone else thinks or feels, it is all a self-centered existence of individual thoughts and emotions. We are trying to pull together as a family, but it's very hard. Everyone seems self-absorbed and self-centered.

Bea, Snake and I (Laurie) were representing the television and its evil mask of having something to offer, when it is really decadent exploitation."

The Harrington family presented the same topic as the Taylor-Jordans but with a different approach and perspective. They had made a videocassette recording of themselves playing the roles of broadcasters, and they watched this recording on TV as part of their play.

While both fictional families centred their presentations around TV as a corrupting influence, their emphasis differed. The Taylor-Jordans blamed TV for the dissolution of social conscience, whereas the Harringtons related TV's destruction of the family unit to the dysfunction of their particular family. A student graphically described the Taylor-Jordan's performance:

"Emily and Avigayle as mother and daughter were sitting in chairs directly opposite one another, and behind them were Bea, Snake and Laurie, ambiguously dressed in black as they were to act out all of the different characters and people on T.V. - they were, in fact, the television set.

As they sang their capitalist jingles and recited their mindless 'Dynasty-style' lines, Emily, the mother, who was wearing a sign saying 'Capitalism Corrupts Society', was growing more entranced with the set, while Avigayle, who wore a 'Communist' sign, grew increasingly disgusted. She obviously represented the Brechtian, socially conscious point of view, and the scene was directed at an audience of people like the character the mother was playing."

Still another student described her own fictional family's Brechtian scene:

"Our scene consisted of 'Starshine" running away to the reserve to find her real mom...

We had a 'changing of the mothers' to show the audience that we were in fact actors playing a part. I really enjoyed playing the two mothers because it gave me a chance to portray the differences between the two, both for the audience and for myself. I made a special effort to play

each character as much to the extreme as their character would let them. Another Brechtian element we used was me accusing the audience of 'stealing my babies and leaving liquor bottles in their cradles'.

The audience was the white world unaware of the native plight."

Influence of Absurdist Style on Fictional Family Character Development

Performance style moved from Brecht to Theatre of the Absurd and the plays of Samuel Beckett. As in their introduction to Brechtian theatre, students were given a list of research topics (see Appendix C) which they subsequently presented. Similarly, students were required to read Beckett's short plays and to select the play which they wished to explore and eventually perform. A variety of his radio, TV and stage plays were listed. Some of these plays are monologues, some are two-or-more character plays. This variety in cast numbers gave students opportunities to work alone or in groups.

In addition, it introduced the actors to Beckett's lesser- produced work, offered them a choice of working in media other than stage, and enabled them to present a

complete work in the allotted time.

As noted in Chapter Three, the shift of emphasis from Stanislavski to Brecht to Beckett is a shift from psychological awareness to sociopolitical awareness to existential awareness which forced the actors to approach their characters through self-probing in relation to universal themes.

In the Stanislavski aproach to acting, actors search for subtext - the underlying meaning, the psychological implications of the character's words. Brecht's actors are concerned with the actual text - the sociopolitical message that underscores the entire work. Beckett's actors work with "supratext" - where the actor responds on the surface to a particular question, but the delivery communicates a broader, existential meaning (Harrop and Epstein, 1982, 208).

As in the approach to Brecht's Epic theatre, students were exposed to several sessions of exercises adapted from Harrop and Epstein (1982). These exercises aim to help students achieve intense concentration through alternating movement-stillness activity, a sense of the void and endless time, and to fuel their imaginations through the use of poetic, cryptic dialogue. I also incorporated mask work inspired by Appel's (1982) mask characterization exercises (for descriptions of exercises, and Beckett text performances, see Gold, 1991).

Scene 18. The Fictional Family: Absurdist Style

From students' written scripts.

(for Objectives of Scene 18, see Chapter Three.)

I. Dominant - Submissive Character Types

[Move around the room as your fictional family character. As you pass by the other family characters, say hello with your eyes only. Some of you will hold the eye contacts, the others will break away, then turn and look back.

II. Now imagine the fictional family scene you are about to present today. Think about what your character wants in the scene. What are the obstacles to your character's objective? What will your character do to overcome these obstacles?

Play out these actions in mime.]

III. Performances of The Fictional Family: Absurdist Style

A student described her writing objectives:

> "In my script I wanted to combine techniques we learned throughout the year - movement, tableaux, and focus for the scene with Beckett devices - play on words, simultaneous monologues as opposed to conversation, and themes that reveal

the absurdity of human character and existence."

A second student described her fictional family's performance.

> "We had decided to have our Absurdist family scene take place at the dinner table, with a particularly stultifying conversation going on - redundant, repetitive, exclusionary. People would be pursuing trains of thought no one else was following, interrupting, no one answering anyone. 'Please pass the butter' could be repeated to the point of tedium but it wouldn't be tedious. It would show a family stuck in a rut, unable to transcend old ways of doing things because they didn't even care to examine the rut they were in, of not listening not communicating.
>
> The script had supermarket descriptions, weird food, redundant conversation, no one listening, a grisly death by starvation, a starving family who can't get enough to eat, some bored argument. The overriding thing was each individual's act of eating, which was more like devouring.
>
> We tried to give the audience the impression we were devouring them, each and every one, by staring at them and eating frantically. We asked the audience and each other for salt. We were devouring ourselves, our world, by obsession with

ourselves and our desires, to the exclusion of all else, so it had the effect of negating all the individuals in our world.

The theme was well supported by the script's imagery and the general flow of conversation."

A class member in the audience observed the above scene:

"The Lawes family began with a dinner scene in which they sat on stools that surrounded the rest of the class in a circle. They made disgusting pigs of themselves in their zeal for food, which proves to be the most bizarre kind. Eventually it became obvious as they looked down at us devilishly that we were the meal and our Professor was the dessert."

The Vivaldi family included two members of another fictional family in their script.

"The Vivaldi family did Waiting for Carmen which was interesting. They had plenty of 'absurd' elements which I enjoyed. Taylor Lawrence and her son, Jacob stopped by at the Vivaldi's so that Taylor could drop him off. Only Taylor never left. She stayed and waited for Carmen as well.

Carmen's boots were on stage, and eventually Guido, Carmen's brother, put them on. Symbolic. Taylor and Jacob never left, the original purpose

of their visit forgotten.

Characterization for the family was well done in the Absurdist setting...Angel [his daughter] waited for Carmen thinking only of herself. Nona [his mother] would wait until she died for him to come. Guido [his brother] thought of it in terms of personal gain if Carmen should not arrive. Jackie, [his wife], worried about her husband, yet was resigned and patient."

Another student described the same family scene:

"Vivaldis: A good take-off of Waiting for Godot with the Beckettian elements of repetition, talk but no action, emphasis on words and the absurdist theme of waiting and waiting and waiting.

Some parts of the scene were particularly effective as when Nona said that she heard something and all the characters reacted together in the same manner at the same time by looking up and around.

Aside from these moments, the lack of physical action in the scene is also a trademark of Beckett's. The scene effectilvely conveyed the pointlessness and futility of the characters waiting for someone who would never come."

"The Lawrence-Chamblis family staged a dream of

Jacob's, where Jacob meets all his family members, and asks them questions, like 'What will I do when I grow up?' and 'Why are you talking like that?' They answer, not even listening to him, wrapped up in their own thoughts, their own perception of reality.

Donna: 'I never had a doll', she mourns over and over again.

Bernard: 'Traditionally, the male is the dominant figure in the household.

Taylor: 'You never had a father.' Arlette 'Fantasies, fantasies' she says, in reply to Jacob's question about her acting. 'How come you're always pretending you're something you're not?'

Each line the family character delivered provided insight into their characters. Bernard's tradition, Donna's careerism, Fawn's peace-loving nature, Arlette's acting ambitions. And poor Jacob was bounced from one to the other, not receiving any help or answers to his questions. Even his mother was so wrapped up in regretting the fact that she hadn't given Jacob a father, she couldn't pay any attention to him."

"The Barnett Family Beckett scene: members of the family chant phony phrases of love, while

Bryce sits apart from them with his back to them. Each time they chimed he screamed out a phrase that opposed what they had been chanting. It was an exercise in isolationism and it worked very well, absurdly pointing out the hypocrisy in their family life. Their gestures and blocking proved to be most effective."

Appendix B

THE FICTIONAL FAMILY AND WRITTEN TEXTS

Based on the results of the fictional family technique in my introductory acting classes, I applied the technique to written texts with the following goals: a) to promote and advance the actor's characterization process; b) to facilitate and ultimately create richer, multifaceted characters; and c) to engender stronger, dynamic performances.

Three separate projects which applied the fictional family technique to written texts were carried out. The first project applied the technique in a classroom situation to a collective creation based on Masters' Spoon River Anthology. The second project used the technique in a rehearsal situation of Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, a full-length play; and the third project applied the technique to three texts in different acting styles: Wilde's The Importance of Being Ernest (Comedy of Manners); Euripides The Trojan Women adapted by Spensley (Greek Theatre); and Chekhov's The Three Sisters (Classical Naturalism).

The following evaluation methods were used: students' journals in which they described their experiential process, evaluated their own performances and those of their peers, and my observations as their acting teacher of their process and performance. For the last two projects questionnaires were administered. There was no attempt to explore the

difference in responses between those students who had been exposed to the fictional family technique in my introductory classes with those students who had not been exposed to it. However, as might be expected, the students who already knew the technique were quickly able to adapt it to the textual material.

Conclusions drawn from these three studies include:

Project 1. Spoon River Anthology.

a) The acting out of the fictional family characters' life events, both in their own improvised scenes and in the imaginative improvisations of others, was considered by all the students to be an essential factor in promoting their character development. A student expressed how a cross-fictional family improvisation promoted understanding of her character.

> "...that's what I find helpful about being in other people's scenes - the fact that I am 'reacting' rather than acting. It adds a different perspective and leads me into otherwise unknown territory in my character development. In this scene [of Julia Miller's] I learned that 'Karen' [Kessler] is a very affectionate woman despite her idle insensitive gossiping at times. She has a fond regard for Julia..."

b) The five students reported that acquired knowledge of

their characters' psyches through the fictional family work resulted in richer, more highly developed characters and c) more dynamic performances. A representative excerpt reads:

> "We all agree that we really knew our characters well. We all went through a significant process: each of us clearly probed our character's life using our imagination and creativity to find his/her truth and reality. We all made our parts 'our own' and there is a great deal of satisfaction knowing that. It is an extra bonus to hear that the audience could sense our love for our characters and for Spoon River."

The students described the environment as "supportive", conducive to increasing self-confidence and building "real" characters and "truthful" performances. A student described her progress:

> "From a nervous, unconfident, vulnerable, alone, scared to live, unstable, confused, scared to share, knot in my stomach girl...I have gained a new closeness, safety, comfort, laughter, warmth, independence...and most of all, life-long friends and new found hope in myself and others."

And a third student expressed his new understanding of character opposites:

> "....I see elements of both the positive and

negative of the fictional characters I represented within me. This helps me to grasp a better understanding of what and who I am. This self-discovery through character representation is in a sense the greatest aspect of the art of the actor."

Project 2. The Ectasy of Rita Joe

a) Students reported in their journals specifically how various fictional family scenes in different time frames quickly helped them to develop insight into their scripted characters. For example, the actor playing the school teacher wrote:

"The scene with my parents [who are not in the text] provided the added insights into the preoccupations I struggle with, and fear, most of my life - not having my feelings considered, being brushed over by people and not being given any attention."

b) Subsequent to a series of scenes which dealt with the death of Rita Joe's mother, the actors involved stressed their increased understanding of the subtext which they stated enriched their characterization and accelerated their character relationships.

c) Since the journals did not continue subsequent to the

production of the play, there is no documentation from this source regarding their performance. However, from my observations and the observations of the play's director, and faculty members, the student actors' performances were of unusually high calibre for a university production.

From the actors' perspectives as indicated by their responses to the questionnaires, six (out of eight) students reported satisfaction with their performances; two reported that they were "very satisfied" with their performances. In accelerating character relationships, three gave "considerable" ratings, four gave "somewhat" ratings and one said "not at all".

3. Project 3. Three Performance Styles

At the outset of each style, the students expressed concern about whether they could succeed in finding the inner lives of their characters in such unfamiliar time periods. For example, when Rebecca took on the role of Lady Bracknell, she was apprehensive of dealing with such a "foreign" personality. She acknowledged the fact in principle that Lady Bracknell "does exist as part of me", but she expressed anxiety about being able to find that part of herself. She asked, "how do I dig that up?" The answer, she later stated, came in the form of the fictional family technique. Subsequent to experiencing (through improvisation) a series of events in her character's fictional family life, she reported, "I'm beginning to find

the Lady B in myself."

When asked to perform two minutes in the lives of the characters, Nick attributed the ease in which the exercise was accomplished by all the students to the fictional family technique which, he said, had facilitated their knowledge of the characters and their characters' relationships to one another. He stated, "We have the fictional families to thank for...the growth of our characters."

Subsequent to performing a cyclical depiction of Cassandra's life, Rebecca reported that each stage revealed to her some hitherto unknown aspects of her Greek character's life to which she could now relate. And following a scene with her sister, Polyxena, she expressed her new understanding of the ramifications of Cassandra's visionary powers.

After improvising specific fictional family scenes, students continually stated that they felt deeper understandings of their characters. For example, after playing past events in the Prozorov family setting, Michael wrote, "we began to forge ties and feel each other out - our relationships, bonds, and emotional reactions to each other".

Rebecca endorsed the fictional family technique as applied to Chekhov with her comment, "It is not all in my head, intellectualized on plastic. We are really doing and living it and bringing breathing into these people." The following comment by Nick expresses his support of the

technique. "It is fascinating to watch relationships grow through the fictional family improvisations." Michael wrote that his improvisation of a past event with his father fostered insight into a seldom-seen aspect of Andrei - "a daring, active, determined, strong Andrei too even if it was long ago".

And Nick, subsequent to playing biographic scenes in the role of Vladimir Prozorov, noted an additional attribute of the fictional family improvisations. He discussed the creation of images of particular characters who have had important influences on the textual characters, but who do not exist in the actual text of the play, such as the parents of the Prozorov family. He stated that these characters, such as the father, had become a part of the students' understanding of their characters' history and thus their characters. "Hurrah for the Fictional Family! I myself enjoy playing the father immensely."

Following their class performance of The Importance of Being Earnest, critiques in students' journals clearly demonstrate their perceived success with their characters. They wrote comments such as "we all LOOK like our characters - we ARE the characters"; "a series of wonderful scenes"; "it was just great to see and have watched the development of the characters".

Conclusion

Further study is needed to determine the efficacy of

the fictional family technique to accelerate and foster the characterization process, enhance character interaction and engender dynamic performances with a variety of styles. This project suggests that the fictional family technique can accomplish these goals with all three styles. However, with Greek theatre, the technique may have been less successful for a number of reasons such as students' initial skepticism in approaching archetypal figures through this methodology and the lack of sufficient time to work with the actual text. The short period of time when the students were working with fictional family improvisations was evidently productive and satisfying. The students learned that archetypal characters must first live as real people.

Appendix C

FICTIONAL FAMILY PROJECT MATERIALS

Fictional Family Character Questions

What was my childhood like?

What were my parents like?

What were my friends like?

Who were my parents?

Who were my grandparents?

Do I feel lonely?

Am I a social person?

What are my ambitions?

What is my state of health?

Whom do I like? Whom do I dislike?

What sorts of people do I like or dislike?

What do I like about myself?

What do I dislike about myself?

What makes me sad?

What makes me happy?

What is my physique?

How do I think other people view me?

How does this differ from the view I have of myself?

How do I deal with conflict?

What is my centre i.e. the most sensitive, expressive part of my body?

With which part of my body do I lead when I move?

What physical and vocal mannerisms do I have?

What were some significant past incidents in my life?

Who in my fictional family had the greatest influence on my life?

Stanislavski: Research Topics

1. Character objectives
2. Biography
3. Subconcious
4. Emotion Memory
5. Sense Memory
6. Super-Objective
7. Physical Embodiment
8. Tempo-Rhythm in Movement
9. Subtext
10. Concentration of Attention
11. Given Circumstances
12. 'Magic If'
13. The Inner Creative State
14. Diction and Singing
15. Tempo-Rhythm in Speech
16. Passive and Active Imagining
17. Ethics for the Theatre
18. Through line of Action
19. Units and Beats
20. Method of Physical Actions

Stanislavski and Naturalism: Suggested Reading

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Bertolt Brecht: Research Topics

1. Autobiography/ Background..... personal
2. Autobiography/ Background.....aesthetic
3. Autobiography/Background.....political
4. Alienation Effect
5. Brecht's Epic Theatre
   a) Purposes
   b) Form
6. Sets
7. Costumes
8. Props
9. Music and Song
10. Language in The Caucasian Chalk Circle
11. Epic Acting - Performance Demands
12. Recurring Themes
13. Didacticism
14. Irony
15. Brecht's Communism
16. Oriental Influences
17. Brecht and Stanislavski - a Comparison
18. Brecht's Dramatic Legacy
19. Characterization of Grusha in The Caucasian Chalk Circle
20. The Actor's Function in Epic Theatre

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