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L'OPERA:

Layered Operations Practicing Embodiment, Reflection, and Analysis in the Performative Paradigm

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Overture

In my position as a teaching assistant while pursuing my doctorate in inter-disciplinary studies, I co-taught classes on Children's Literature for four semesters. Each semester provided the opportunity for me to instruct 20-25 preservice teachers (PSTs). The college classes met in a local elementary school each week. I co-taught with my advisor, and the PSTs in turn taught those same lessons to the elementary students. The educational goal was to explore a variety of ways to teach literacy. In my role as co-instructor, my responsibility was to demonstrate how integrating the arts in teacher lesson plans could help deepen student comprehension. Each semester, the arts-integrated portion of the class synthesized different arts and literacy practices to enhance students' ability to read.

In one class, I showed how to use symbols on Bogolanfini (African mud cloth) to help children explore visual metaphor in a story about slavery. During the study of a story involving Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement in another class, I showed how to use blues songs to incorporate main ideas and supporting details through the chorus and verses while writing song lyrics. In yet another class, I showed how students reading a story about a mouse with delusions of grandeur could be taught to use gesture and sound effects by creating Reader's Theater pieces to highlight various themes in the story. In the following article, I present an interdisciplinary arts-based inquiry, an inquiry I undertook as part of the work for my PhD, focused on the instruction I offered my PST students in the integration of dance/movement with literacy practices. In this class, we based our movement explorations on the reading of an eco-mystery (an environmentally based mystery).[1]

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1   The detailed process exploring dance and literacy instruction upon which this article is based can be found in "Who Really Killed Cock Robin: Aesthetic Meaning-Making in Preservice Teacher Training" (Upshaw, 2018).

Introduction

Some of my earliest memories involve music. My grandmother sang as she worked around the house, her voice a low, soothing alto. My mother's voice is a high, light soprano, now thinning with age. Neither of them played an instrument, but mama decided early on that I would. I started piano lessons in kindergarten and, as soon as I knew enough, I began playing hymns for church. In fourth grade, I took guitar lessons, and eventually ended up playing alto saxophone in the band. The pivotal point in my music career, actually in my life, came when I began voice lessons in the seventh grade.

My first songs, from those lessons, came from what is affectionately known as "The Singer's Bible," The 24 Italian Songs and Arias. *I sat at the piano trying to correctly pronounce the words, playing through the notes in the melody, tapping out the rhythms, and visualizing myself on stage with crowds of people applauding. From seventh grade through a master's degree in voice performance, this interaction with text, sound, and visual spectacle was a cornerstone of my life. Research has now taken me where the personal meets the public* (Gerard, 2017)*, and so the story begins.*

OPERA is

. . . a lush, extravagant feast for the senses. For the majority of the American populace, it only brings to mind wealthy white people in jewels and tuxedos sitting in the dark, stiffly watching a fat lady in a horned helmet singing extremely loudly in a language they don't understand. However, for me, opera is an experience shared in such a multifaceted way that I am almost overwhelmed with its power. This sensual, emotional expression of narrative through layers of music, text, movement, and visual spectacle has challenged me to use my personal experiences in this interdisciplinary art form as a way of learning more during the research process I am describing in this article, as well as a way of engaging the audience reading about my research more deeply than a more academic and less art-full article can do.

The work that has yielded this article can be characterized in multiple ways. It is qualitative research (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Goodall, 2000) in its acknowledgement of the researcher's context. It is arts-based research (Leavy, 2014) in its use of textual, musical, kinesthetic, and visual methods. It is quadrangulation (Denzin, 1970; McKernan, 2013) in both its capture of data and the methodological analysis of such data through the use of four arts-based research methods. It represents practice as research, also known as PAR (R. Nelson, 2013; Oikarinen-Jabai, 2003), because it centers on my practice as an artist in order to inform my practice as a researcher. It reflects sensory ethnography (Hurdley & Dicks, 2011; Pink, 2015) as it centers knowing through practice, experience, and perception (Pink, 2015, p. xi) for me as researcher,

the research participants, my advisor on the research process, and the reading audience. It is a decidedly interdisciplinary process that involves *L*ayering *O*perations *P*racticing *E*mbodiment, *R*eflection, and *A*nalysis. It is L'OPERA.

Opera, in its traditional construct, focuses on the singing of stories. However, when deconstructed, its individual components can be used to provide a quadrangulated (Barragan, et al., 2016; McKernan, 2013) four-part arts-based analysis of data. After collecting data on my student teachers' responses to arts-integrated lesson planning in which I had instructed them (see the Overture to this article above), I used the process I have labeled L'OPERA to further investigate the data and the narrative of the research project itself by applying research practices from drama, music, movement, and the visual arts (Bresler, 2005; Eisner, 2004; Leavy, 2014). Each art form embodies narrative in its own right (Haseman, 2006; Leavy, 2014; Nelson, 2013). I knew each would make its own unique contribution to my research narrative (Leavy, 2014; Upshaw, 2018). As an arts-based researcher, I knew that in this case, as in opera itself, the one undeniable strength of viewing opera as a research tool is the intrinsic way that each art form is naturally present in the traditional production of opera. The separate contributions of each artistic component could be pulled together to enhance the overarching story, engaging the senses as a way of assisting the audience reading this article to experience the metanarrative. The acronym L'OPERA is an apt metaphor for the braiding of individual strands of arts-based practices in both the research that is the basis of this article and in the article itself.

At times, the research narratives communicated by the individual strands are heard/seen separately, and at times all together. Sometimes the researcher's, participants', and advisor's voices compete to be heard, and sometimes their silences speak for them. (In practice as research, stillness and silence are also active parts of the creative process.) In the beginning of the research project, the advisor's solo voice and actions are the most pronounced. Slowly, as the researcher learns enough to contribute to the composition and presentation, the academic performance becomes a duet of sorts. Often it is an antiphony of sounds and actions going back and forth until the ideas harmonize and lead to an acceptable resolution. Sometimes there is a resolution even if there is no harmony between the parts. The addition of the research participants' voices, as in any multi-bodied endeavor, can also cause dissonance until balance is found. Often, too, the most profound truths of a narrative, including a research narrative, seem to be found not in the telling, but in the listening, or in this case, the reading of this article by the audience.

It is my hope that readers will come to understand that the naturally layered practices of the interdisciplinary research process that I call L'OPERA, an acronymic reference to Layering Operations Practicing Embodiment, Reflection, and Analysis focused on text, music, dance and visual spectacle, can, and indeed should, hold a special place in the related worlds of qualitative

research, arts-based reearch (ABR), practice as research (PAR), and sensory ethnography. As throughout this article I describe aesthetic approaches to inquiry-based work with journal entries, field notes, and classroom observations (Upshaw, 2018), I hope to demonstrate that the layering and depth of sensory information can be an important addition to the performative paradigms of research practice.

Here, then, this L'OPERA begins with specific questions from the researcher (me), research participants (my PSTs), and my advisor. These questions were quoted directly from journal entries of the PSTs, meeting notes between the researcher and the advisor, and field notes and classroom observations from the researcher's journal. *Layer 1—Text* uses found poetry to distill understanding of what questions the researcher, participants, and advisor find particularly important. *Layer 2—Music* builds on the rhythm of the found poems to initiate a musical inquiry. *Layer 3—Dance* moves further into an abstraction of the research questions as the researcher dances an embodiment of the inquiry process. Finally, *Layer 4—Visual Spectacle* explores visual spectacle through the consideration of the primary physical research space, and how that physical space impacts personal teaching practices.

Layer 1—Text

At the age of 11, I began interpreting the words of long dead poets by rolling words over my tongue in languages I didn't speak. The sounds cascading over my ears were at times fluid, and at other times guttural. The English translation below the original language held the only clues to the meaning I was supposed to make plain as I sang. In hindsight, it seems absolutely ridiculous to expect an 11-year-old to make meaning of ideas to which she'd yet to be introduced, to understand romatic love she had yet to feel, or to paint a word picture of sights she had not seen. In my late 20s, I worked with world-renowned opera diva Martina Arroyo. It was she who insisted that I do word for word translations of all my foreign language songs. She spoke of nuances in word choices that I might miss when relying on a translation that I had not personally done. One opera aria (song) can last as long as 20 minutes. The opera itself, in special cases, can last up to four hours or more. To do a word for word translation of just your role takes hours upon hours of painstaking work. Some of the words are obsolete. You cannot look up verb forms. It was tedious even though I had taken at least a semester each of French, German, and Italian. It was tedious, but it made me careful in choosing words to express precisely what a song meant in my own language.

Poems are rhythmic entities (Lerdahl, 2001) that can be sung, chanted, whispered, or shouted to evoke embodied responses (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009). Poetic inquiry can be used to examine the identity, relationship, and community between the researcher and participants (Leggo, 2008;

Prendergast, 2014). Poems can also be used to uncover, discover, and report findings (Brady, 2009). There are multiple terms for the use of poetry in research: *poetic inquiry* (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009; Prendergast, 2009), *research poems* (Prendergast, 2006), *poetic narratives* (Rickets, 2011), *ethnopoetics* (Bloommaert, 2006), *poetic portraits* (Hill, 2005), and *performative autoethnographic poetry* (Pelias, 2016) are only a few. In the case of my research, I use the general term *poetic inquiry*, for simplicity's sake, to describe the process of distilling meaning from my own journals as researcher and the journals of the preservice teachers.

Found poems are one way of making meaning in the poetic inquiry process. Words and phrases from an original text are selected and arranged into a poetic form (Burdick, 2011; Lahman & Richard, 2014; Pate, 2014). In this study of my work, the original texts for the found poems were pedagogical questions that arose during consideration of my researcher's point of view, the points of view of the student participants in the work, and that of my advisor. The questions were collected from memos, field notes, journal entries, and video-taped classroom discussions to provide the basis for the first step in my poetic inquiry process.

Researcher's Questions

- How can I get them (PSTs) past their fear?
- How can I get them to see the possibilities?
- How can I facilitate more arts-driven processing from them?
- How are they answering their own questions?
- What kinds of connections need to be made?
- What's the happy medium between observation and application?
- Why are they so resistant?

Preservice Teachers' Questions

- How will my students (grade schoolers) interpret the text?
- How does movement help students better understand the text?
- Why is dancing viewed as important to literacy?
- How can we transition from game to learning?
- How is this applicable in a real classroom?
- How do you as the teacher help the students who do not visualize the text see art and create ideas from the text?
- Will all types of students benefit from thinking in this unique way?

Advisor's Questions

- What do university students need to know in order to do what you are asking?
- How do we encourage university students to actively engage in the

learning experience themselves?
- How can we use the available classroom and hallway space effectvely for small groups?
- Should we introduce topics to the whole group and then split them up, or start with small groups?
- How do we encourage university students to speak up in group situations without taking over the groups?
- How do we encourage university students to allow the elementary students to have the experience we want them to have without providing so much structure and instruction that they are basically telling them what to do?

The next step in creating found poems is to analyze the relevant texts and select words and phrases of importance or impact.

Researcher's Questions

- How can I get them (PSTs) past their <u>fear</u>?
- How can I get them to <u>see</u> the <u>possibilities</u>?
- How can I facilitate more arts-driven processing from them?
- How are they <u>answering their own questions</u>?
- What kinds of <u>connections</u> need to be made?
- What's the happy <u>medium</u> between observation and application?
- Why are they so resistant?

Preservice Teachers' Questions

- How will my <u>students</u> (grade schoolers) <u>interpret</u> the <u>text</u>?
- How does <u>movement</u> help students <u>better understand</u> the text?
- Why is dancing viewed as important to <u>literacy</u>?
- How can we <u>transition</u> from game to <u>learning</u>?
- How is this <u>applicable</u> in a real classroom?
- How do you as the <u>teacher help the students</u> who do not visualize the text, <u>see</u> art, and <u>create ideas</u> from the text?
- Will all types of students <u>benefit</u> from thinking in this <u>unique</u> way?

Advisor's Questions

- What do <u>university students need to know</u> in order to do what you are asking?
- How do we encourage university students to <u>actively engage</u> in the learning experience <u>themselves</u>?
- How can we use the available classroom and hallway <u>space effectvely</u> for small groups?

- Should we introduce topics to the whole group and then split them up, or start with small groups?
- How do we encourage university students to <u>speak up</u> in group situations <u>without taking over</u> the groups?
- How do we encourage university students to <u>allow</u> the elemntary students to have the <u>experience</u> we want them to have <u>without</u> providing <u>so much structure</u> and instruction that they are basically telling them what to do?

The final step is to take these key words/phrases and arrange them, in this case not only to express metaphoric ideas, but also to best establish rhythmic musicality (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009; Butler-Kisber, 2010) for representation later in song form (an aim that is specific to this particular researcher's process).

Researcher's Poem

Version 1	Version 2
See possibilities past fear Resistant Connections Answering their own questions Arts-driven happy medium	Can I help them see possibilities past their fear? Resistant to connections, they refuse to hear Struggling against knowing, against answering their own questions Arts-driven happy medium integrated lessons

Preservice Teachers' Poem

Version 1	Version 2
Students' movement interprets text Teacher helps the students better understand Create unique ideas, literacy transitions to applicable learning See benefit	Students' movement interprets text Unbound and eager to know what comes next Teacher helps the students better understand How the arts bring learning to hand Create unique ideas literacy transitions to applicable learning Arts integration creates educational yearning See benefit

Advisor's Poem

Version 1	Version 2
Uni students need to know (How to) actively engage themselves Use space effectively Speak up without taking over Allow experience without so much structure	Uni students need to know How to actively engage themselves and so To use space effectively Speak up without taking over collectively Allow experience without so much structure Breeding a higher order thinking culture

Poetic Understanding: I have invested years in the interdisciplinary practice of teaching the arts in non-arts classrooms. That makes the subject of arts integration a very passionate and also a very personal one for me. That passion seems to have blinded me to the very real fear that the preservice teachers were experiencing. I didn't realize that I was taking their fearful reluctance to participate in the arts activities as a rejection of me personally. The poetic inquiry of this phase of my L'OPERA research process helped me realize how shallow my thinking was in comparison to my advisor's depth of vision. My focus was directed toward my students' participation, or lack thereof, in a particular activity, whereas her questions indicated concerns that would impact their teaching overall.

Layer 2—Music

I don't want to tell my advisor that I think I'm crazy. The voices in my head ask questions, half formulate answers, and wake me in the middle of the night trying to hold a conversation with me. The participants who resist participating and their never-ending questions about why this is important irritate me. I don't understand why they don't make the connections between multimodal teaching opportunities and what they've learned about multiple intelligences. My mind snaps out sarcastic responses that I can never voice while I read their journal responses. Why won't they even try to figure things out themselves? They seem so complacently all knowing. Then, there are the questions my advisor asks. Where does she come up with them? How can she be so calm when it feels as if the participants' questions are ripping away at everything that I am? I don't want to think about how to encourage them to participate in their own learning. It's theirs! They should own it. I'm struggling with how to break it down so they can understand it . . . even when they don't want to do so. Her questions make me dig deeper, but I still don't have answers yet.

I thought I knew what I was doing. After all, I've been teaching arts integration to teachers for years. Truthfully, I thought I knew the answers before they asked the questions. I realize now how little I know, and how much more I could have been doing for those in my workshops. Constantly, these thoughts are in my head. I talk out loud to the articles I'm reading. I talk in my head to the participants' journals. I wonder how I can state things more clearly in class. I stare blankly at my advisor and scream internally as she asks me one more thing that I didn't realize I didn't

know. No. I don't want to tell my advisor that I think I'm crazy, but I have to tell her
that I am crazy, or I have to find a way to control the noise in my head.

Music, the next part of my L'OPERA research process (inquiry, analysis, representation), is a late entrant to the world of arts-based research (Dogatan-Dack, 2015), and in many ways it is still an underrepresented one (Bresler, 2005; Pink, 2015). This could be considered another example of music's tendency to lag behind trends and ideologies embraced by other art forms at a much faster pace (Dogatan-Dack, 2015). This slow-moving acceptance of new things by those involved in music contributes to the dearth of information about music as a research method when compared to other arts-based research methods. (The use of the word "method" here is not to be confused with its use in traditional music teaching and application of instrumental practices.) This lag in the adoption of anything new has also hampered the creation of music's own *practice as research* criteria and tenets, thereby often requiring practitioners of the genre to rely on parameters used by other arts-based practitioners whose research methods are not specifically designed for musical idiosyncrasies (Dogatan-Dack, 2015).

According to 20th century composer Edgard Varese (n.d.), what is music if not organized sounds? This idea of music being the organization of chaotic sounds is the starting place for my version of music practice as research. I can take the unorganized noise of the voices in my head as well as the ongoing chatter from PSTs who are the participants in my research and my advisor and make them into music. The first thing this idea does is lead to more questions that rattle around in my head, adding to the chaos. How do I thus compose? Is composition or notation of that composition what I want to focus on? I don't want the music to be simply an accompaniment. How can I make it an integral part of the L'OPERA inquiry and representation process?

First, I play with this idea (Blain, 2013; Haseman, 2006; Smith & Dean, 2009) of using composition as research and making music from noise. As an opera singer, I almost never deal with music without some type of text, so I begin with the poems I found or created (Burdick, 2011; Lahman & Richard, 2014; Pate, 2014) from the researcher, participant, and advisor questions listed in the earlier section of this article. Of course, I need to consider how music and text intertwine and what some common points of analysis and understanding are. Stephen Brown's work (2000) suggests that music and language share foundational properties, although in language we move from phonemes to words to phrases, while in music we move from pitches to motifs to phrases. While I can certainly understand that progression, I do not at first see how it can help me shape music from noise.

As I continue to play with this idea, it comes to me that music and language are both created by sound. A series of stressed and unstressed (strong

and weak or accented and unaccented) beats is what makes up rhythm in music. Patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables also create the rhythmic pattern of poetry. These patterns, as well as the duration of those patterns, form a foundation in both genres (Fant et al., 1991), and will provide the connector needed for this musical exploration. I'll use what I know of marking stressed and unstressed syllables in a poetic text. I will group corresponding lines from each of the poems I have found together to indicate how they run as a polyvocalic sound in my head.

In this first attempt to put words to music, I think of each word as representing a musical beat. The stressed and unstressed symbols represent how that beat is divided. I have not accounted for rests (pauses) or the uneven number of beats that throw off the symmetry of the pattern in a European musical system. I also have not accounted for odd numbers of syllables within beats, although that is not as difficult. My executive decision is not to have traditionally formatted musical measures (divisions of musical phrases). The advisor's questions provide some semblance of structure. The researcher and participant questions indicate that the participants have yet to fully accept arts integration as valuable, although there is enough compliance to structure to reflect the teaching and learning process.

As I proceed, I realize that it is not enough to continue the cerebral process of transforming noise to music; I must embody this process in some way. To my way of thinking there is no musical instrument more representative of rhythm than the drum. There is also no instrument more representative of polyrhythms than an African drum. I choose to use a djembe because I own one. The djembe is a type of African hand drum that sounds three distinct core registers when struck: bass, tone, and slap. I use the bass and tone to indicate stressed and unstressed syllables. This connection of African drums and language is not new. The Talking Drums of the Akan people in Ghana are well known for their mimicry of the tonal language of that people (Ong, 1977). However, my project is not an attempt to actually recreate the sounds of language; rather it is an attempt to offer another entry point into my experience and my results for the audience that reads about my research. This process aligns itself naturally with Winter's work (Winter, 2014) with Senegalese drumming techniques. He documents that Senegalese drummers often improvise and recite texts they feel reflect the meaning of the rhythms as they are drumming (p. 644).

At this point, furthering the process is very simple. I use my right hand to play the stressed syllables in the bass register of the djembe (represented by the bolded **R** in the chart below), and my left hand to play the unstressed syllables in the tone register (represented by L). After I make these somewhat arbitrary decisions, the rest of the process is a matter of practice: Aesthetic choices help turn the work of research into a work of art. I follow up by recording each line of the poetry and drumming separately, then editing the resulting

rhythmic lines into one musical composition. Below is a notational chart of the process revealing as much of the process in textual form as possible.

Poetry/Drumming

Line 1 Poetry/Drumming

	L	L L **R** L L	L	L
Researcher	See	Pos/si/bi/li/ties	Past	Fear

	R L	**R** L	R L L	**R**
Participants	Stu/dents'	Move/ment	In/ter/pret	Text

	L L	**R** L	**R** L	**R**
Advisor	U/ni	Stu/dents	Need/ to	know

Line 2 Poetry/Drumming

	L **R** L	L **R** L			
Researcher	Re/sis/tant/	Con/nec/tions			

	R L	**R** L	**R** L	**R** L	L L **R**
Participants	Tea/cher	Helps/ the	Stu/dent	Bet/ter	Un/der/stand

	L L	**R** L L	**R** L	**R** **R**	
Advisor	How/ to	Ac/tive/ly	En/gage	Them/selves	

Line 3 Poetry/Drumming

	R L L	L	**R**	L L	
Researcher	An/swe/ring	Their	Own	Ques/tions	

	R L L **R**	L L **R** L L L	L **R** L L	**R** L L L	**R** L
Participants	Cre/ate u/ nique	I/deas li/te/ra/cy	Tran/si/tions/ to	Ap/pli/ca/ ble	Learn/ ing

	L	L	L **R** L L
Advisor	Use	Space	Ef/fec/tive/ly

Line 4 Poetry/Drumming

	R	**R** L	L **R**	**R** L L
Researcher	Arts	Dri/ven	Hap/py	Me/di/um

	R	**R** L L
Participants	See	Be/ne/fit

	R	L	L **R**	**R** L	**R** L
Advisor	Speak	Up	With/out	Ta/king	o/ver

Line 5 Poetry/Drumming

	L **R**	L **R** L L	L **R**	L L	**R** L
Advisor	Al/low	Ex/pe/ri/ence	With/out	So much	Struc/ture

The sound of the drum resonates through my body, mind, and soul. The rhythm evokes more questions, but this time the questions I hear have order.

Musical Understanding

There is a rhythm to my interdisciplinary research process driving me toward my goal. Driven and single-minded within the flow of completing the dissertation, I forgot to accommodate the separate rhythms of my student participants and my advisor. They also had driving rhythms that could have better complemented my own if I'd understood my position as leader better. It was up to me to set a tempo that could accommodate us all. By misreading the participants' fear of the unknown as a rejection of me personally, I missed many opportunities to teach them better and learn better myself.

The rhythm of my research has been difficult to master, but once I feel the flow of it under my hands, understanding comes swiftly. However, sometimes, the rhythm can lull me into a false sense of security. I think I know where I am going, and my attention wavers. It's at that exact moment that the next stressed or unstressed beat surprises me (a question from my advisor or a complaint from a participant) and causes me to miss something. I am no longer in the flow of the rhythm. Sometimes, it's clear where my mistake

lies, and it is an easy move back to the flow. Sometimes, the loss of the rhythm forces me to a complete stop. Sometimes, I can never recapture the rhythm, and I have to start over.

Layer 3—Dance

I sit here, listening to the silence before the first drumbeat sounds. I feel my breath, deliberately slowing it and controlling it with purpose. Letting go of the tension in my shoulders, eyes closed as I type blindly, I wait. There it is. Finally, I hear—no feel—my heartbeat. In other writings, I've shared stories of my intersectionalities: woman, poor, Black, educated, daughter, caregiver, no longer a wife, and never a mother. These storylines center in various parts of my body, but they all are connected by the beat of my heart. That beat. The drum calls me back. It calls me back through a life in the Western arts. It calls me back through a childhood of barely understood Africanisms transformed into southern truths. The sound of the drum calls my heart back to a knowing in my body, knowing through my body, knowing with my body. The drum calls, and my body's response is knowledge on display. My body knows things.

Body

Feet flat on the floor represents the connection to Mother Earth. Even when I'm jumping, the goal is to return to Mother as soon as possible. Knees bent, back flat, body low to the ground, again to stay close to Mother . . . where it is safe. Back arching repeatedly, feet slide in a three-step pattern, palms up, hands gliding outward from the center through each three-step pattern. Shoulders roll and head turns side-to-side following the dominant foot in the pattern. Right foot slides forward, holding weight on bent knee, left foot lifts to 90° angle from the floor, arms fly back like wings, hands flexed with palms turned out, head and eyes straight forward. Left foot goes down slightly ahead of the right with both knees bent, hands cupped return to chest, head looks over left shoulder in a movement reminiscent of Sankofa, the Adinkra symbol for "return and get it." Repeat.

The body responds to the polyrhythmic call of the drum with polycentric movements. Polycentric movements, as part of an African dance aesthetic, involve one body, multiple parts with individualized moves, using a variety of energy levels across space through time (Hanna, 1978, 1997; Welsh Asante, 2001; Nelson, 2013). Unlike European dance aesthetics, which promote movement arising only from one central core, African movement may begin from any body part, and multiple centers of movement may operate simultaneously and in harmony (Gottschild, 2001; Welsh Asante, 2001).

Energy

Feet flat on the floor . . . my weight pressing down into *the connection to Mother Earth. Even when I'm jumping* powerfully**,** *the goal is to return to Mother as soon as possible. Knees bent* loosely, *flat back* suspended in preparation*, body curved* low *to the ground, again to stay close to Mother . . . where it is safe. Back arching* sharply *repeatedly, feet sliding* weighted *in a three-step pattern, palms up, hands gliding* smoothly *outward from the center through each three-step pattern. Shoulders roll* sensuously *and head turns* snake-like *side-to-side following the dominant foot in the pattern.*

Think of energy as the adverb of dance movement. The description brings the picture into clearer focus for those reading my work and can be used to provide metaphorical information for my audience. The energy used in a dance varies from dancer to dancer, and often is prescribed by the choreographer. In this case, the dancer and choreographer are one: me. I emphasize the *pressing down* quality of my initial footwork to indicate that I have reconnected to what grounds me (DeFrantz, 2011; Willette, 2012). The physical energy required to lift my overweight body off the ground demands power. If I am to create harmony and order from the noise and chaos, I must strive to move *powerfully* through that which holds me immobile both in the dance and in my research process. The *looseness* of bent knees prepares me for leaving the protectiveness of contact with the Earth and protects me from being overwhelmed by the force of my landing as I return. This looseness reflects the shifts in my interpretations as I move through qualitative data in search of the performative paradigm (Gore, 2006; Haseman, 2006). There is comfort in staying where it is safe. Dancing with both feet on the ground is much safer than leaping up and challenging the pull of gravity. However, there is even greater comfort in knowing that once we have found and recognized that safe place, we can always return. *Suspended in preparation* represents a waiting period, or a pause in the intake of information. I walk away from my analysis and come back. For me, there is a type of stillness before an understanding arrives even when I am not doing an artful inquiry. It reflects how my body and mind work together. Body curved *low* to the ground yet *arching sharply* indicates the impetus towards knowing that has no more patience for my need for safety. The *sensuous snake-like* movements acknowledge acceptance of a new normal (DeFrantz, 2004, 2011).

Space

Feet flat . . . weight pressing down . . . jump . . . back flat . . . body curved . . . low . . . back arched . . . feet slide . . . hands glide . . . shoulders roll . . . head snakes . . .

There's a problem with my spacing. Even as the drum rolls and my movements begin, I realize that I have not incorporated the physical space around me purposefully. My directions (forward, backward, diagonal, etc.), my body's levels of movement (higher, lower, central), and pathways (straight, curved, zig zag, etc.) through the physical space seem happenstance. I did not choose my directions or pathways with intent, nor did I choose steps that would provide a variety of levels throughout the movement. As I move through the physical space around me, I understand I did not consider how the space would, and did, influence my moves. This was also true of the research project. It never occurred to me to question or alter the physical space I and my preservice teachers were using in any way, or that doing so might be used to positively impact the participants' experiences.

Space and spatial awareness play an important role in the arts: dance (Chin, 1988; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010), poetry/text (Knowles, et al., 2012), music (Lissa, 1964), and visual art (Amheim, 1956). They can also be important parts of the interdisciplinary research process. The space around the body, and the objects within that space, impact how, where, and when the body can move. The methodological spaces through which I make meaning from my data have an additional impact on my academic work. As the lone performer in L'OPERA I relate not to other bodies, but rather to things found in the physical space around me, both real and imagined. Couches, chairs, hardwood floors, and walls characterize my actual space, but memories of my classroom's desk configuration and carpeting shape my movement as well. As the lone researcher, I am nonetheless in constant relationship, physically and metaphysically, with my participants and advisor. Their questions impact how, where, and when I move through the space of my dissertation.

Time

> Time. Timing. Temporality. Narrative Time. Sasa Time. Zamani Time. Embodied Time, Clock Time. Calendar Time. Duration. Which type of time provides an appropriate interrogation for this part of my work?

Clock time (Mishler, 2006) in the classroom was limited. Participants met once a week for two hours and forty-five minutes in a class focused specifically on how to teach Children's Literature. I was given forty-five minutes of that time each week to instruct them on arts integration practices for teaching that subject. At various stages during my instructional time, they had to complete a combination of the following activities: a) learn foundational information about using arts as a classroom instructional strategy; b) experience a prescribed arts learning experience based on the text they would later use with the elementary students; c) work in classroom groups to design their

approach; d) create an integrated lesson plan; and e) ask and answer questions related to their arts integration instructional practice.

After four forty-five minute sessions of direct instruction with me, the preservice teachers were expected to re-create these arts integration lessons with the grade school children they were working with. They facilitated discussions of assigned reading for thirty minutes, then led their small groups of students (usually four), into dance movement that would help them explore meaning and reach understanding. After returning to our college classroom, they rarely had more than fifteen minutes left to debrief and ask questions. Many of them used their journals to ask questions and circumvent the lack of time in the classroom for that process. Although the limits of time were taken into consideration during the planning stages for this class, embodied time (Lovgren, et al., 2010), or its lack, made the experience very different than what it looked like it would be on paper.

Body, Energy, Space, and Time (BEST), while known to me as an instructional strategy, was new to my practice in artistic inquiry. Nestled within the movement/dance layer of L'OPERA, the benefits of the kinesthetic intelligence evoked by this multimodal strategy became more apparent and led me into a deeper understanding of my work. The strategy confirmed that my body does indeed know things. It holds knowledge that until then had remained untapped.

Dance Understanding

My dance had no true resolution. It simply stopped because I ran out of time. My research reflected that lack of resolution as it ended with many unanswered questions that I did not, or could not, answer in the time allotted this project. I moved through the interdisciplinary practice of L'OPERA somewhat oblivious to the impact that those unanswered questions would have. *How did my body move through the classroom space? How did the physical space impact the preservice teachers' creative process?* As an artist, I might not have had time to complete the dance, but as a researcher I must now continue to investigate those unanswered questions and their potential impact on my growth as a scholar practicing and studying integrative arts.

Layer 4—Visual Spectacle

Entering the school building requires passing through two sets of locked doors. Passing through the second set, you're greeted with a changing display of children's artwork on the table in the medium-sized foyer. I turn left and enter another set of heavy doors. The floor begins to slant downward at a rather steep angle. Sounds become muted the further down you walk. By the end of the hallway, there is absolute silence. The teachers call this "the ghost hall" but try not to let the students

hear them say so. Only the classroom used by the preservice teachers is in use. The rest seem to be filled with extra desks.

Looking through the door to the classroom that we use, you see nothing special that draws attention or sparks curiosity. The classroom itself might be considered large if not for the desks and tables. Twenty desks are pulled together to form four table groupings in the middle of the room. Standing in the doorway and looking straight ahead you see medium-sized windows, but the primary light in the room comes from harsh overhead fluorescent lights. Underneath the windows stand an upright piano and a table with a computer and printer. Further to the right along the same wall is a small table with two chairs that I use when videotaping the class. The wall to the extreme right has a dry erase board covering most of the space. There are some book cover posters taped over the top and sides of the board.

The wall adjacent to the right side of the door is taken up with a long counter that my advisor and I use to manage handouts and supplies. There is a small closet that holds cleaning agents and butcher paper. The wall adjacent to the left side of the door holds a large SMART (electronic) board. It's connected to a computer and allows the professor to write on the "board" and save it like an MS Word document. It should also function as a video display for digital learning, but the internet connection has never worked consistently in this room, so it's never used for that.

One of the most difficult things to describe to anyone who has never been to the opera is the immense spectacle (Coeyman, 1990; McGeary, 1993; Pendle, 1971) framing the flow of voices interwoven with lush orchestral sounds. Pictures of major international opera houses (The Metropolitan Opera, The Sydney Opera, The Houston Grand Opera, etc.) confirm that the visual impact flows from the architectural design of the building through the staged set to the singers' costumes, makeup, and physical presence. The inquiry of this layer of my L'OPERA process reflects my opera-based understanding of the importance of visual impact; the related questions are two-fold: a) how can the physical space impact the learning process, and b) how can my own "larger than life" presence as teacher/performer impact that process, as well.

First, what is the narrative communicated by the visual spectacle of our classes (Campana, 2004; Theresa, 2012)? How does that location impact, positively or negatively, the learning process (Gallese & Lakoff, 2005; Hurdley & Dicks, 2011)? How does it impact the participants' creative thinking? Is it even important? The first thing to acknowledge about this particular space we use for our classes is that there is nothing outstanding about it. It looks similar to the many other classrooms that I have encountered throughout my work in elementary schools across this country. (That, in and of itself, poses a problem in hindsight. If I wanted the participants to understand that what I was teaching them—strategies with which integration of the arts might enhance their students' learning—could not be approached in the same way as traditional

instructional practices, perhaps their first clue should have been a difference in the physical space they inhabited during the project.)

The majority of research on the connection between physical space and learning achievement seeks to correlate environment and teacher/student attitudes toward teaching and learning (Higgins, et al., 2005; Lackney, 1994; Martin, 2002). The details in my classroom description overlap with what Barrett, Davies, Zhang, and Barrett (2017) call lighting, ownership, flexibility, and color. They list these elements as impactful. They have found that natural lighting, originality in the room's character, personalizable spaces, well-defined zones for specific learning activities, and the use of bright colors all have positive impacts to varying degrees on learning in reading, writing, and math. For the class that was the basis for this study and the classroom where I met with my PSTs, most of these elements were not within my control, and unfortunately it did not occur to me to make changes in the elements that were. For example, I could have set up the arts integration activities in one of the other empty classrooms complete with colorful materials and props that could have been used in the movement exercises.

The next area of interest regarding visual spectacle requires a much more intensely personal examination because the visual spectacle is me. While this particular element was directly under my control, it still did not occur to me that changes (Heyning, 2011) might be needed. Having started voice lessons at 11 years of age, I have always moved through the world as someone capable of holding people's attention without a microphone. Performing from such a young age, I have accustomed myself to people's critique of my voice, my speech, my clothes, my hair, and my weight. I have acclimated to other people's uneasiness around my comfort in the spotlight. I considered all these personal attributes a plus when I began my work as a Teaching Artist (Booth, 2013; Jaffe, et al., 2013). While teaching is often spoken about through metaphors of performance (Prendergast, 2008), I have always taken the idea quite literally. When I teach, I consider it a type of performance with students as my audience.

The ease that I feel presenting, teaching or performing in front of others is a direct contrast to the unease felt by the preservice teachers when they were asked to enact the arts integrated plans. They did not have the experience or confidence to be themselves, or know the selves that they wanted to present in their role as teacher (Heyning, 2011). The preservice teachers did not even "know their lines" for non-arts integrated teaching, and here I was asking them to incorporate physical movement, dance, as an instructional strategy. They thought I was asking them to copy my methods of integrating the arts into instruction, not figure out their own. They were also reluctant to make mistakes in front of their grade school students.

Visual Understanding

As a professional artist, I have learned that the audience should never be able to spot my mistakes, or even grasp the work going on behind the spot-lights. Performance should always seem effortless. As a teacher, however, I acknowledge that we learn from both our personal mistakes and those of others. Seeing me work through the craft of teaching, behind the scenes, mistakes and all, could have made my students less fearful of making their own mistakes. I should also have been more appreciative of the power of the physical environment to impact the learning process, and should have addressed that issue. I have a responsibility to take every opportunity, no matter how small, to make that impact positive.

Conclusion

I am an interdisciplinary researcher (Nelson, 2013; Riley, 2013) who has long integrated multiple arts in my academic work and has recently taught others how to do the same. In this article, I use a performative paradigm (Haseman, 2006) to provide a sensory exploration of data drawn from that recent teaching experience that I have called L'OPERA: Layering Operations Practicing Embodiment, Reflection, and Analysis. With L'OPERA, an interdisciplinary quadrangulated approach to this task (McKernan, 2013), I have shed light on the pros and cons of four separate practices of arts-based research methods. The study has provided academic support (Goodall, 2008; Leavy, 2014; Pelias, 2016; Riley, 2013) for my personal and intuitive knowings, allowing me to integrate all of my knowings into an interdisciplinary whole.

In *Layer 1—Text*, the found poems revealed similarities between me and the participants. We were frustrated. We were frustrated for different reasons, but the same emotion was the result. In the midst of the research process, I understood their resistance as a personal attack on my beliefs. I wanted them to question what others had told them, but their questions about, and even disagreements with, my own practices made me angry and hurt. In the later poetic inquiry of the L'OPERA process, I was able to claim a positive space as an insider/outsider (Blythe, et al., 2013; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) and see more clearly how my behavior added to rather than detracted from their frustrations. I wanted them to take ownership of their own learning but did not have time to carefully instruct them on how to do that. I wanted them to be invested enough in their own learning process to try to answer their own questions. I forgot that they are products of the very educational system that I believe the arts should be involved in changing. They did not have the skills or the confidence to wrestle with the information with which they had been provided in order to take responsibility for their own learning process.

Some participants had less difficulty than others with the idea of using dance in the classroom, and by the end of the arts integration experience, many had moved toward a better understanding of what I was trying to do. But I have to wonder how I could have better managed my own constraints in order to help them. What if I had chosen to answer their questions, rather than wait to see if they would answer them themselves? What if I had required them to share their questions with each other, and encouraged increased levels of peer mentoring (Cornu, 2005; Forbes, 2004)? How could my being more purposeful in my reflective practice (Schön, 1987) during the process have helped me to help them move closer to an ensemble of individuals working together to use arts to improve literacy practices among their own students?

In *Layer 2—Music*, I realized I should have gently reprimanded myself for my adversarial thoughts (Upshaw, 2016) revealed by the poetry. The L'OPERA process helped me see that building community with my participants and directly facilitating their increased participation in their own learning would have improved the experience for all. As a performance-based practitioner, I felt comfortable with the content that I shared with my participants; however, as a researcher I still did not have a complete grasp of the depth and breadth of the academic field of arts-based research. I could only provide evidence for my views from my 17 years of hands-on learning. As a new researcher I found myself moving back and forth between what I knew from my own experience, and what I could prove or document through others' theories and practices.

Layer 3—Dance reminded me not to stop. The only way to the other side is through, and the only way through is to keep moving. Throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process I was overwhelmed by the amount of information. Afraid that my skills were inadequate, afraid that my arts-based approach was too non-traditional to be accepted, afraid that I was taking on more than I could handle, afraid of so many things, I often felt paralyzed and incapable of doing anything. The use of polycentric dance motions reminded me that there does not have to be one center of information in order for understanding to occur. I was reminded that as easily as I am able to control the varied and specific movements in different parts of my body, I am able to control the varied and specific movements in my mind involving information from academic, personal, and professional intersections. That recognition of my own agency freed me from the paralysis of fear. Had I explored my data in this way during my teaching experience, instead of later during the L'OPERA process, I wonder if I could have shared something to help my participants move past their own fears? This should have been a partner dance, but I often treated it as a solo performance.

Layer 4—Visual Spectacle facilitated a reflection on who I am as a teacher and how that impacts the learning process around me. I have a very flamboyant style of teaching, and I am comfortable being labeled an extrovert. However, it has taken this L'OPERA process to allow me to see that while it

may be engaging and entertaining, my style of teaching can also become a barrier to learning for those would-be teachers less comfortable in the spotlight who don't want to emulate me.

Employing a visual lens on my work led to a closer examination of my instructional environment, as well. In most instances, I do not have my own place to teach. However, I came to realize that even as a visitor to spaces, I should find opportunities to somehow use aspects of my physical environment in order to set the stage for a creative learning practice. Doing so may be as simple as requesting to use an unoccupied classroom where desks can be moved or rearranged easily.

When people have lost one of their senses (sight, hearing, taste, etc.), the body finds ways to compensate for that lack of sensory information. Usually one or more of the remaining senses are strengthened in some way. The body of research, similar to the human body, requires input from multiple sources to provide a complete understanding. Practice-based teacher/scholars and participants in their work (and any advisor) are meant to experience the research process using the fullness of both body and mind, though often the process is skewed toward the information gathered with only the mind. The input from bodily knowledge often remains unacknowledged and is left out of the data collection and analysis processes altogether, thus providing a less than complete research picture.

As an arts-based teacher and educational researcher experienced in interdisciplinary studies, a field that does incorporate material of multiple kinds, personal and professional, academic and otherwise, I collected data in many different forms (videos, journals, field notes, memos, etc.) in order to best understand the process that I had initiated and pursued as a TA teaching PSTs how to integrate arts into lesson plans. I recognized that any one of the art-full investigations into my teaching and their responses to my teaching that I undertook would have been enough on its own to provide some semblance of sensorial insight into my research. However, L'OPERA, Layering Operations Practicing Embodiment, Reflection, and Analysis in each individual art form so as to create a quadrangulated whole has provided a much more complete picture of the research experience—and what I have learned from it—and one that might, in turn, help others to learn from it, as well.

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