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*University of Central Florida*

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DEVELOPING THE INDIVIDUAL TO STRENGTHEN THE WHOLE: 
THE APPLICATION OF VIEWPOINTS TRAINING TO IMPACT THE SOCIAL 
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF ACTORS IN A HIGH SCHOOL ENSEMBLE

by

ELIZABETH GEORGIA BRENDEL HORN
B.F.A. Brenau University, 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre for Young Audiences in the Department of Theatre in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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This research explores the application of Viewpoints and Composition training with a cast of high school students to measure changes in the social cognitive development (SCD) of individuals and the collective group. The research centers on the writing of Michael F. Mascolo and Deborah Margolis, which takes a coactive approach to the relationship between one’s social cognitive development and how it is manifested in his or her actions within a social group. Using this framework, the researcher assesses the personality types within the cast and analyzes how utilizing Viewpoints training creates shifts within these personalities. The researcher approaches this study from both a theoretical standpoint as a student during a two-week intensive training course for adults with SITI Company, and a practical standpoint in the direction of a fully mounted production with high school actors. The objective of the research is to propose a method to implement advanced Viewpoints training within a high school ensemble in order to cultivate ensemble and ultimately aid the social cognitive development of the individual actors.
This work is dedicated to the countless educators who informed my path and who inspire me as an educator every day, including: Renee Denney, for seeing my desire to be challenged; James B. Hammond, for introducing me to Viewpoints; Gay Hammond, for giving me fire; and Megan Alrutz, for challenging me in even the most day to day of conversations.
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In the creation of theatre, whose hand holds the spark of imagination? I recall one of my more terrifying moments as a young actress, during my first professional production. Clutching my script to steady my hands, I walked out on stage and delivered my few lines with full gusto. To my surprise, the director tensed up with wide eyes that desperately asked the questions: *What are you doing? And why aren’t you doing anything?*

I watched as my fellow performers moved about the space, generating their blocking with sheer ease. How did they know where to go, what to do, how to deliver their lines? The humility stung, knowing that my six-line part caused this director so much agony.

At this moment, I realized: I was not an actor. There was nothing active about me. I merely executed a series of motions and expressions painstakingly choreographed by my previous directors. Perhaps that explained why I, as many actors, craved the performances but dreaded the rehearsals. I spent rehearsals as nothing more than a hollow vessel, awaiting someone else’s brain to dictate my character’s every moment of life. The wait was draining.

I wanted to create – I simply did not know how. As I progressed in my undergraduate training, I discovered tools and techniques that allowed me to uncover and build upon the creativity I always had brewing inside me. In this training, I found a technique that spoke to me the most clearly: Viewpoints and Composition (or simply Viewpoints), developed by Mary Overlie of the Judson Church Theater scene and popularized by Anne Bogart of SITI Company and Tina Landau of Steppenwolf Theatre Company. The technique gave me specific, yet
limitless, ways to explore my body and voice to generate blocking, build character, and stretch my imagination.

As I felt myself developing as an artist, I felt myself growing as an individual as well. As someone who resides comfortably inside my own mind, Viewpoints pushed me to connect with my fellow actors through its ensemble- and improvisation-based exercises. I developed a more acute awareness for their actions, and in turn, their needs, both on and off stage.

My journey veered down several paths within the realm of theatre, and landed, at least for now, on teaching high school theatre. As I navigate through my first year of teaching, I am overwhelmed by the immense responsibility I feel to these adolescents in their development, as both artists and human beings. Looking back at my own development, I question if I can facilitate for my high school students the level of artistic and social development I experienced in my undergraduate training. And could Viewpoints, a technique developed for adult performers, play a part in it?

My research explores the application of Viewpoints technique within a high school theatre cast and its impact on the social cognitive development (SCD) of the individual students and the ensemble as a whole. Using the writings of social cognitive theorists Michael F. Mascolo and Deborah Margolis as a framework, I will explore the application of Viewpoints with this age and the ways its application shapes how the group members communicate and collaborate with one another. In turn, I will explore how my conclusions inform my own perspective as a theatre director and how they may inform my work as a high school theatre educator. My research will ask: How can Viewpoints and Composition technique with high school theatre performers aid their social cognitive development to strengthen their sense of ensemble?
To explore this question, I will ask how Viewpoints training shifts when focusing specifically on social cognitive development. How does Viewpoints shift when focusing specifically with high school actors? What is the value of this focus on social cognitive development in theatre, and does Viewpoints address that value? And how do these findings shape my role directing high school students?

**Methodology**

To examine Viewpoints technique through the lens of social cognitive development, I will look to the research of theorists Michael F. Mascolo and Deborah Margolis. These theorists analyze adolescents with a two-part focus on cognition and action, or how cognition manifests itself in one’s social behavior. Mascolo and Margolis break down the elements of an environment to explore how one’s actions are a direct response to what surrounds him or her. The terms to define environment used by Mascolo and Margolis can translate to theatre terms: individual (actor); persons (ensemble members); sociocultural context (the rehearsal process as a whole); objects (the text of the play and space surrounding the actors); and meditational means (training techniques; in this case, Viewpoints). My research will explore how Viewpoints exercises may enhance cognitive and social development by encouraging creative play and exploration between each of these elements. I will ask: how may Viewpoints exercises shift one’s awareness of each of these environmental elements as outlined by Mascolo and Margolis? (289)

Additionally, Mascolo and Margolis define the characteristics of three types of adolescents: popular, aggressive-rejected, and withdrawn-rejected (291). I am interested in
exploring how ensemble-driven Viewpoints might blur these lines to strengthen the social
cognitive development of the individual adolescents and the group. To analyze this, I will ask:
how do these personality types inform one’s social cognitive development, according to Mascolo
and Margolis? What is the value of each of these personality types within a cast (or what is the
value of blurring the lines between them), and how may Viewpoints allow these different
personality types to better socially relate to one another within a cast?

Using this theoretical framework, I will research writings on current applications of
Viewpoints and Composition with groups of adult artists (as my research uncovered no previous
writings on Viewpoints with adolescents) to analyze their collaborative process. I will then
further research social cognitive development theory using the two-part focus on how one’s
social actions are interrelated with his or her cognitive development to gain a deeper
understanding of Mascolo and Margolis’ theories.

Additionally, I will attend a Viewpoints professional training program, led by artists from
SITI Company. During this two-week program, I will journal about the process used in the
training and how it impacted the sense of ensemble among the program participants; how this
process compares to my past work with high school students; ideas on applying or adapting this
practice with high school students; and how I think doing so will relate to the social cognitive
development of a cast based on the research of Mascolo and Margolis.

Finally, I will apply Viewpoints training during the rehearsal process of a high school
production and will cross-analyze my findings with the hypotheses made during the two-week
SITI intensive. From these sources, I will draw a conclusion on ways in which to apply
Viewpoints and Composition training to focus on the social cognitive development of high school actors and casts.

**Purpose of Study**

This research serves to fill a current gap in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA). A considerable and growing amount of writing about Viewpoints and Composition exists, and in my conversations with TYA practitioners many speak of the application of the training with youth. However, I found no writing specific to the use of Viewpoints with youth. In addition, while much current writing about Viewpoints (regardless of the age group with which it is applied) speaks generally about the ensemble-based nature of Viewpoints, I found no evidence of research pertaining specifically to the SCD of an ensemble or an individual within an ensemble.

Furthermore, the nature of this research serves two current struggles I find in the field of TYA. First, the lack of (or written documentation of) application of formalized theatre techniques with youth. Many theatre techniques developed for or generally used by adults may still pertain to work with youth if adapted to fit their particular needs and skill sets, and this research will serve as one example of doing so. Second, within the field there is a constant dialogue about the pull between the process and the product of work with youth. Viewpoints and Composition offers collaborative, process-based means through which to achieve an artistically dynamic end product. I hope by outlining ways in which Viewpoints may enhance the social cognitive development of a group and cultivate a healthy process, I may offer an example of applying advanced theatre techniques to support both process and product.
Additionally, this research will inform my own work as a high school theatre director by reflecting on my previous directing work and exploring how the knowledge I gain will shape my future work. At the present, I see myself as a director who strongly desires a more actor-centered process, but find myself trapped by traditional director-driven techniques. I tend to focus on process when working in the classroom or when working with younger youth, but as soon as I shift to productions with adolescents I find myself giving the adolescents very little freedom to generate blocking, explore character, and build ensemble. In a recent production of *Little Shop of Horrors* I directed with a large ensemble, I reluctantly admit that by the show’s close, I still did not know each actor’s name. I realized I do not currently value the ensemble as a whole as much as I would like. I anticipate that by experiencing the collaborative nature of Viewpoints first-hand in the intensive training program, using the training to reflect on my past and future work directing adolescents, and defining ways to alter Viewpoints to cater to the social cognitive development of high school students, I will discover ways to establish a more actor-centered process as a director.

**Challenges with Study**

The research documented in this paper presents some gaps and challenges, both in the nature of the methodology and through my personal experience. First, the majority of available information on social cognitive development theory focuses on young children and preadolescents. While some writing about adolescents exists, much of my research analyzes writings focusing on younger youth. Thus, my research uses the writing that focuses on children and preadolescents to project how these studies may relate to adolescents. I base this projection
largely on my experiences with and understanding of adolescents, which admittedly may cause
my research to generalize, stereotype, or falsely assume how adolescents would compare to the
other studies.

Second, within my research, it became difficult to distinguish between an individual’s
social cognitive development, the SCD of the group, and the sense of ensemble within the group.
The SCD of an individual or group is more easily analyzed; one can point to the language used
by a group, a group’s ability to compromise, and how a group handles stress. Many studies
regarding SCD provide tangible scales to quantify the development of an individual’s social
cognitive development, and one could easily apply these same measurements when looking at a
whole group. An ensemble, on the other hand, cannot be quantified – how an ensemble comes
together is frequently enigmatic. Whereas I consider a group any collection of people, an
ensemble must develop over time, and sometimes does not come to fruition. When I speak of
ensemble, I speak of a group’s unique and special bond – a group that not only works well
together, but seems to intuitively understand one another. While I strive toward this goal, I
oftentimes fall short, even when working with the most talented or trained individuals. I have
worked with strong individuals who never came together cohesively as an ensemble, and I have
worked with less talented or experienced actors who grew together in a profound and
unrepeatable way.

While this is a study of the social cognitive development of a group, I frequently found
myself reflecting on the overall sense of ensemble in order to gauge my perception of the
effectiveness of the Viewpoints training. I question if there is an interrelationship between the
two. Is it possible to have a group of individuals with advanced SCD, but a weak sense of
ensemble, or vise versa? How do the two affect one another? Because of this, the term “ensemble” is frequently used within the research to define the sense of cohesion felt by the group; while this may or may not directly relate to social cognitive development, I operate from the impression that the two interconnect.

During the two-week SITI Company intensive training, I attempted to approach Viewpoints training with new eyes, considering the training for the first time through the lens of social cognitive development theory. With the terminology and perspective gained through researching SCD theory, I assessed and predicted how a high school individual might respond to the training, although this is admittedly a projection at best. This presents a third challenge: the limitations placed on my research with adolescents. Even with the application of Viewpoints as director of a high school production following the two-week SITI intensive, limitations within my boundaries of research kept me from gathering information on the development of the adolescents through scales or interviews. Thus, even by facilitating Viewpoints with high school students, my account of the process is based solely on my two-part focus: my personal reflection as an “adolescent” actor during the two-week SITI intensive, and my observations as director of a high school cast.

Finally, although this paper focuses on Viewpoints and Composition training, the two-week SITI intensive focused both on Viewpoints and Suzuki training. SITI Company trains all of its company members in both techniques, since the two juxtapose one another and offer drastically different physical and mental training. Suzuki incorporates strict, rigorous, isolated movement comparative to martial arts training. A typical snapshot of Suzuki training might show a group of actors stomping, speaking in unison, and completing elaborate fight-like motions.
choreographed to the minutest degree, all executed with disciplined focus under the close watch of the facilitator. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Viewpoint’s open-ended improvisational framework might look more like play, with actors moving about with uninhibited spontaneity.

The two-week intensive approached the techniques separately, dedicating ninety minutes a day to Suzuki and three hours a day to Viewpoints. My initial disinterest in Suzuki training made me reluctant to even consider it as a portion of this research. However, perhaps because SITI uses each technique as a tool to teach actors about its opposite, I found myself constantly reflecting on the Suzuki training in my journaling. I questioned how Suzuki shaped my understanding of Viewpoints, and if the Suzuki training also had any effect on my personal social cognitive development or that of the group. Therefore, the emphasis on my research remains on the application of Viewpoints training, but I will occasionally direct my focus to the Suzuki training, as it frequently allowed me to look at Viewpoints from a varied perspective.

**Expectations**

Through this study, I expect to draw strong correlations between Viewpoints training and the social cognitive development of a high school theatre cast. Specifically, I hope to offer evidence on how the training will strengthen the SCD of the individual and the group in a way that will enhance the overall sense of ensemble. In addition, this study will draw parallels between Viewpoints training and an individual’s relationship to each of the elements of the sociocultural context described by Mascolo and Margolis to illustrate how Viewpoints can heighten one’s awareness of each of those elements to enhance their social cognitive development.
I do not expect Viewpoints training to fully change or neutralize an individual’s personality tendency as outlined by Mascolo and Margolis; rather, I expect to provide evidence on how each of these personality types can use Viewpoints training to better relate to one another and to strengthen the working relationship in a group containing each of these types.

Finally, I expect to outline a new plan for implementing Viewpoints and Composition training within my own work directing high school students. Through the application of this plan, I will propose ways that a director can alter Viewpoints to accommodate the age group and to focus specifically on the social cognitive development of the cast to create a collaborative, actor-centered rehearsal process.
CHAPTER TWO: SOCIAL COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THEATRE

In order to justify applying any particular technique in my work with a high school ensemble, I first asked what I value in an ensemble, what I hope to achieve with the ensembles that I direct, and where I currently feel my work falls short of these values and goals. My values include an ensemble that is cohesive, collaborative, and respectful. When working with my current high school actors, I find myself returning again and again to the idea of a “culture of respect.” I hope to help high school actors develop an awareness of what it means to respect all involved parties, including themselves, and what it means to really operate from the understanding that this respect is a part of our theatre program’s culture – an intrinsic part of all we do.

I meet this goal in many of the ways I address the actors, and the ways in which I expect them to address one another. Management policies in place, such as punctuality and a “no yelling” rule, work to create an environment that generates respect. However, while I work to respect each individual as a human, what I find missing is the respect that I show toward the artist: a two-way, circular communication between the actor and the director. Even subtle choices I make as a director reflect this; for example, as I block a scene I move around the space, and subconsciously make slight vocal or physical shifts to embody whatever character I am blocking. By doing this, I send the signal to these impressionable actors to follow my instinct and do as I do.

I currently feel stuck in this place that is counterintuitive to my image of an ideal director: rather than allowing the actors to work as co-contributors to the art, I operate from a more
dictatorial position. Inevitably, even though I begin a production with the determination to try to work less rigidly, I become rigid and controlling due to any number of reasons: time constraints, the actors’ levels of training and technique, or the nagging fear my reputation is on the line if the final product is not perfect.

Looking at these tendencies brings me once again back to my theatre roots. I first became involved as a high school student; because of the emphasis on exploring extracurricular activities and finding one’s specialty placed on high school students, it seems as though this is the age when many theatre artists discover this craft. During my high school education I worked in a director-centered arena. Despite that director’s passion and best intentions, she seemed to fall victim to the obstacles that too often plague high school theatre educators – a strict schedule, multiple levels of actor abilities – all the same realities that now constrict me as a director.

Because the nature of my high school training, I entered the college and professional theatre setting completely caught off guard when directors suddenly expected me to co-create. I found comfort in a director telling me specifically what to do and realized my high school training developed me into an eager-to-please, yet uninventive, performer. The journey to become an actor who makes choices, rather than one who waits for others to make choices for me, continues today.

Considering my upbringing as a theatre artist, I now realize why I find it so imperative that high school theatre educators train collaborators, not followers, and artists, not actors. Even for high school theatre students who may not consider a career in theatre arts, they may spend upwards of thirty hours a week in drama rehearsals or related activities, making drama one of the most influential aspects of their high school career. As their educator, it is my responsibility to
help them develop the tools needed to communicate and collaborate with others. Still, I seem to know these things in theory, yet find myself tending toward the instincts of my upbringing whenever I feel afraid, doubtful, or without control.

Looking again at the ever-present pull between product and process, I realize that my high school training was by no means bad, just perhaps product-oriented. When I look at my role as a high school educator and director as process-oriented – teaching not only basic theatre skills, but also social, communicative, and life skills – my perspective of the purpose of a cast shifts. I see direct parallels between everything I hope to instill in individual actors and how the cast members work and interact with one another. More importantly than a cast’s aptitude or training, I value an ensemble that operates from a place of trust, openness, and respect.

**Collaborating with Cognitive Awareness**

I approach theatre from a primarily intellectual standpoint, believing that every action or emotion first starts in a cognitive place. This is by no means the ideology of every theatre artist (and actually is counterintuitive to the visceral and physical emphasis of Viewpoints training, which I will explore in later chapters). Yet I currently operate from this personal belief not only as an artist, but also as a human being, since I agree in Oscar Wilde’s sentiment that “life imitates art.” This personal belief led me to look at Viewpoints and the development of an individual or group through cognitive theory: the study of how humans think.

Through my research, one central idea within cognitive development spoke to my understanding of theatre collaboration. Emotional intelligence (EI) aligns with a word that surfaces constantly in my theatre conversations: empathy. EI studies not only the way one is
capable of identifying and assessing their own emotions, but also the emotions of other individuals and groups of people. Empathy describes the intellectual ability of an individual to understand and actually feel the same emotions as another. Theatre strives for empathy from its audience members to create an emotionally invested experience – if I sympathize with a character, I feel for him or her but remain distanced; if I empathize with a character, I feel what he or she feels, and thus invest more in the theatrical experience. While theatre artists generally focus on the empathy felt by the audience for a character, should members of a theatre ensemble not also learn to feel empathy? Do ensemble members not serve as audience members for one another? Furthermore, how could increased empathy, or EI, among cast members enhance their ability to communicate and collaborate respectfully?

Anne Bogart’s book of essays entitled And Then: You Act provides an anecdote for how such empathy within a group of actors could grow the ensemble as a whole. Actress Gisela Cardenas accounted a moment during a master class led by director Ariane Mnouchkine of the experimental French theatre company Le Théâtre du Soleil. The class was so full that the Cardenas spent many days on the bleachers, watching a small group of actors work, which led her to often feel disengaged in the class. As told by Bogart:

One day, as the actors struggled in a scene with unsatisfactory results, the work on stage ground to a halt. Frustrated and tense, an exasperated Mnouchkine finally turned to the 200 participants on the bleachers and implored, “You must wish with every muscle in your bodies that these actors succeed.” Cardenas described the long hours spent wishing for the success of the actors as physically and emotionally exhausting. It is this sort of empathy that is rarely present in any rehearsal process,
regardless of the age of the participants. In particular, high school performers gravitate toward
texting, socializing, or sleeping when they are not being used in rehearsal, which can cause the
actors on stage to lose focus. The intensity and attention described by Cardenas depict an
environment that I desire to develop with a high school cast. (55)

The Survival Instinct Within Theatre

While the emotional intelligence component of cognitive theory lends itself to this study,
I sought a more specific focus on the interactive elements of an ensemble. Social cognitive
development theory surfaced as lending itself most directly to the assessment of my work with a
high school cast through Viewpoints training. The theory stems from the works of theorists Jean
Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget’s cognitive development theory breaks down the cognitive
developmental stages of an individual from birth to adulthood, considering from age 11 and up
the time during which “formal operations,” or abstract thinking, may occur. In opposition to the
idea that one’s cognitive development is essentially shaped by his or her age, Vygotsky’s
Sociocultural Theory of Development offers the perspective of how one’s culture and social
interactions, or “dialogues,” can shape the ways in which he or she thinks. These converse
theories serve as prime contributors to social cognitive development theory. SCD studies how
one’s perception of him or herself as an individual within a social network contributes to the
development of his or her cognitive awareness and growth.

With goals to develop an ensemble that communicates well and has respect for
individuals both as humans and artists, how may SCD theory serve as a litmus test for the
successfulness of Viewpoints training? How is SCD present within the theatre process?
There is something inherently ritualistic and old world about theatre. Whereas today one may survive artificially in society with minimal human interaction through the use of technology, theatre requires something more. Even within a one-person show, human connection takes place between the performer and designers, directors, and at the very least audience members. This idea of theatre as a return to the most ritualistic and basic forms of human connection parallels research shown about the interconnectedness of cooperation and natural selection, according to child development psychologist Willard W. Hartup (215). Hartup cites studies showing that those living in rural or hunter/gatherer communities best develop the cooperative and problem solving skills necessary for survival (215). Though perhaps a humorous analogy, this can equate to the skills necessary to survive the strenuous and high-stress environment often found within theatre. Too often I have witnessed the individual incapable of collaboration dwindle in this environment, and many directors seek collaborative skills above pure talent when casting a show for that reason.

So why then would this research focus specifically on social cognitive development theory, rather than the broader scope of cognitive theory? Do the skills necessary to solve problems and work together not come from the mind? If an individual possesses the ability to think through a problem, yet does not possess the social awareness to turn thought into action, the thinking is in vain. The concepts within SCD theory take problem solving beyond cognition and into action, and frequently focus on how one problem solves based on the actions that he or she intuits from individuals, posits professor of psychology Mary Gauvain (139).

The concept of actors learning and making choices based on their fellow cast members appeals to me as a tool for developing performance techniques, problem solving abilities, and
community. Whether due to self-consciousness or self-absorption, I find too many adolescent theatre artists that are so focused on improving themselves that they forget to develop based on those around them. I desire to help these individuals broaden their perspective so that they may begin making choices not just for themselves, but for the good of the entire group, which will ultimately still help them advance individually. Vygotsky terms this idea as “activity theory,” which relies on three conditions: “1 – behavior is goal-directed and practical, 2 – development is a product of social and cultural history, and 3 – cognition is a socially mediated process” (Gauvain 48). These conditions translate into the nature of theatre and my goals as a theatre artist: 1 – the practical application of creating live theatre art, 2 – establishing a “culture of respect,” and 3 – learning to communicate effectively with one another in the theatre process, and making decisions based on the needs of the whole cast.

Assessing a High School Cast through a SCD Lens

Studying the concepts behind social cognitive development theory raises the question: Why focus on applying this work specifically to high school ensembles? Why not youth ensembles, or adult? The thoughts within SCD theory could surely apply to any ensemble looking to enhance how they communicate and move through the production process. However, my desire to apply this study with high school students grows not only from my passion for working with this age group, but also from my desire to help individuals in the formative years of adolescence discover the tools necessary for communicating. A test done analyzing emotional intelligence in preadolescents that I believe also applies to adolescents states, “EI in adults is a predictor of life success. … As such, the assessment of EI in preadolescents is of great
importance to try to identify those at risk of the consequences of having low EI” (Williams et al 319-20). Similarly, the potential lies in social cognitive development theory to serve as a vocabulary for me, as a high school director, to gauge the collaborative successes and opportunities for growth in the adolescents with whom I work in order to help them enhance their social cognition as they develop into adults.

In addition, much of the impetus for selecting social cognitive development theory in this research grows from my perception of adolescents as socially hungry individuals. Socially belonging and fitting in within a group of individuals becomes a dominant focus during these years; thus, I find it essential that my research with high school actors also puts their social interactions at the forefront of my thesis.

Research in social cognitive development suggests that an adolescent’s instinct to fit in and make friends may actually be a primary connector to their cognitive development. In the book *The Company They Keep*, Hartup suggests a three-way connection between friendship, collaboration, and cognitive development (223). However, this research separates friendship from acceptance, noting when seeking *acceptance* one looks at the overall perception of a group, and in *friendship* one looks at that individual friend’s perception (which may override the perception of the group) (Bukowski et al 367). This research brings up an interesting distinction: am I striving for friendship or acceptance with my cast? When discerning between the two, how does that develop or shift how I conduct the rehearsal process? Friendship seems like something stronger than acceptance, but is it too idealistic to expect in an entire cast?

Regardless of whether striving for friendship or acceptance, adolescents seek such bonds during these formative years. By developing a director-centered environment, I place the impetus
on myself and neglect the instinct and desire of my high school actors to focus on interactions with their own peers. In all theatre, not just theatre with adolescents, the differences between an ensemble- and a director-centered environment can greatly alter the outcome of the overall production. Director-centered work does not encourage the cast to create or problem-solve, which I believe ultimately leads to mechanical, uninventive performers and a less involved and meaningful experience for the adolescents. Hartup states:

Conflicts with adults, according to the [notions of peer interaction], are resolved via conformity rather than cooperation because adults always [assumedly] have greater power and knowledge about the world than the child does. Peer interaction is uniquely relevant to cognitive development because it forces the child to coordinate his or her views with those of the companion (i.e., to restructure his or her own views) rather than to conform to them. (219)

However, Hartup alludes to the fact that “peer interaction” is also not without conflict – his writing glides over the fact that in order to “restructure his or her own views” the adolescent is compromising, which might create tensions in the process. This point illuminates some of the reasons I fear ensemble-centered work. Instead of having one person make decisions, I relinquish decision-making to a group, which can feel tedious and frequently causes conflict.

When I think back to the process-centered informal performances I facilitated as a teaching artist, inevitably someone felt hurt or wronged because he or she thought differently than the group. For example, during a summer camp where students devised and created short films, one group member constantly tried to maneuver the process so that her character was always the center of attention, even if it did not align with the story. This frustrated the group,
but it also frustrated her, because she had not reached a level of advancement to understand the need to make everyone in the group feel important. However, with a facilitator’s awareness of such conflicts, these moments can help students develop social awareness without sacrificing the art of the final product. In this instance, the girl’s fellow group members became aware that they needed to listen to her ideas and incorporate some of them, making her feel like an equal player in the group without giving in to all of her desires. She learned that just like she wanted to stand out, her fellow group members also wanted moments of recognition, and it was their job to make sure everyone in the group felt important to the film. Ultimately, the group worked much harder on collaborating and on finding creative ways to integrate every group member into the film because of this conflict, leading to a richer conclusion than simply conforming to the ideas of an adult director.

This idea is again supported in a study analyzing effective collaboration strategies in a group writing exercise with youth. The research showed, “agemates, for example, use generative strategies as well as reflective ones during collaborative writing (including disagreeing about story content) and also take turns in ‘master/apprentice’ roles” (Hartup 221). Not only does this support the idea of healthy conflict, but it also brings up the notion of shifting in and out of roles. This supports my hypothesis that developing an awareness of social cognitive development will not neutralize all of the personality types within the cast; rather, the awareness will help people develop an understanding of how to work with different personality types, which may mean stepping into roles they might not normally fulfill.

In my first year as a high school teacher, the necessity of time management has allowed me to realize the value in allowing adolescents to work in groups in various aspects of the drama
club. With the non-performance aspects of the club (such as fundraisers, special events, and parties), I am more likely to surrender control, and unintentionally this gave me a glimpse into the power of peer-led collaboration. For example, when designing posters for fundraisers or special events, I quickly realized that leaving the task fully to the students’ imaginations led to thorough, well thought-out designs: students brought in photographers, incorporated photo editing programs, and designed multiple drafts of posters in order to create the perfect design. Conversely, prescribing the details of a poster led to a bare minimum of the requirements. While part of me realizes the value of creating scenarios where adolescents must conform, conflict, and create together, when dealing with the actual theatre production I thrive on controlling every element. Finding ways to release some of that control to the adolescents may actually create a stronger final product and benefit their social and cognitive development, and this motivates me to seek ways to foster that collaboration.

In alignment with peer-to-peer relationships comes the idea of intersubjectivity, a cognitive theory term related to empathy. However, the term is distinctly different, for the inter of intersubjectivity means an individual is able to respond to a given situation subjectively but from multiple angles. In addition, the term suggests a balance between subjectivity (personal response) and objectivity (unbiased response).

For example, a psychologist might need to develop intersubjectivity when dealing with clients. A psychologist must identify with the feelings of a client in order to gain an understanding of his or her perspective, acknowledge his or her own feelings in order to bring a sense of humanity and personal response to the client, and look at the entire picture objectively.
in order to assess the situation without bias. Thus, the psychologist looks at the situation with
dual subjectivity (his or her own perception as well as that of the client) as well as objectivity.

To return to many theatre artists’ goal of receiving empathy from an audience, a group of
individuals capable of empathizing with one another can ultimately achieve intersubjectivity.
Empathizing with one another may bring a negative connotation, for it suggests losing sight of
oneself in feeling the same things as another individual (the Other). However, intersubjectivity is
the capability of understanding how one is similar in thoughts and emotions and can
simultaneously differ in thoughts and emotions. Two individuals or a group of individuals may
be capable of empathizing with the Other, but through achieving intersubjectivity the individuals
can maintain an awareness of the Self. Achieving intersubjectivity can allow one to actually
better understand the Self through a deepened understanding of the Other.

The capability for intersubjectivity in a cast returns to the idea of age and likeness of the
members of the ensemble. Lois M. Tamir, doctor of developmental psychology and author of
Communication and the Aging Process, states:

According to [philosopher] Habermas, pure intersubjectivity between
communication occurs when the relationship is symmetric. The play for power
does not interfere. The relationship is mutual, reciprocal, equal. Intersubjectivity
in communication is possible when individuals acknowledge and understand one
another and know and understand their own selves. (4)

This suggests that, while I can strive toward intersubjectivity with my actors, this understanding
can be better achieved among the actors. My energies would be best spent finding ways to help
ensemble members look toward each other instead of me. This thought pangs me, for as I explore
my new role as a theatre educator I grapple with the realization that I am not supposed to be one with my students. With a strong background in performance, I am accustomed to feeling like a part of the ensemble, but my positioning shifted when I became an educator and director. When originally beginning this research, I thought my ultimate goal was to create a unified ensemble, which included myself. I now question if I, as the adult, should actually remain a separate entity from the ensemble, while finding ways to help them develop intersubjectivity to reach cohesiveness among them.

My research on social cognitive development theory shifted my initial understanding of the ensemble I hope to achieve. Originally, I envisioned myself in this ensemble, and now I see myself as still separate from it. My role shifts now to giving adolescents the tools with which to create and then enabling them to create with one another, and to develop their social awareness and intersubjectivity. The following passage in Bogart’s *And Then: You Act* epitomizes how SCD theory parallels my goals within building a theatre ensemble. The atmosphere that is described speaks not only of the actor-centered environment I hope to achieve, but also the empathy and awareness of others and self that one may find through an understanding of social cognitive development theory:

Actors can contribute the gift of their attention to one another in rehearsal. This multiple attention magnifies the intensity of every action on the stage. When each individual in the room is mutually caught up in the moment-to-moment struggles and discoveries, leaps of daring and risk are more likely to happen. An atmosphere charged with hope, support, and attention is a pressurized and rarified
atmosphere in which discoveries are more apt to occur. The shared bond of
attention and mutual respect is a useful elixir in the creative process. (55)

Bogart’s methodology sheds light on the ability of an actor-centered ensemble to enhance
the social cognitive development of an adolescent. The parallels between the vocabulary in both
social cognitive development theory and Bogart’s writings suggest how Viewpoints training
could address the dual artistic and social foci I seek as a director.
CHAPTER THREE: THE COACTIVE SYSTEMS APPROACH OF MASCOLO AND MARGOLIS: NARROWING THE LENS

With the broad scope of social cognitive development theory, I chose to focus my analysis of Viewpoints through one particular study of SCD theory. The 2005 work of co-authors Michael F. Mascolo and Deborah Margolis, entitled “Social Cognition as a Mediator of Adolescent Development: A Coactive Systems Approach,” spoke directly to the needs of high school students. When the authors speak of a “coactive systems approach,” they refer to the idea that one cannot analyze cognition and social action separately from one another, which they consider a pitfall to traditional applications of SCD theory (Mascolo and Margolis 289). Their research looks at the connection between the two: how one’s level of cognition impacts his or her actions when socially interacting with others. For example, when dealing with conflict, an adolescent might respond differently based on the social ranking of the other party. Mascolo and Margolis research how an understanding of the other party manifests itself in the physical and social actions of the individual – such as furrowing his or her brow in conflict if the individual feels equal to the other party, or looking away if the individual feels lesser than (298).

In Chapter Two I express my personal opinion of the inherent cognition behind all theatre art – I believe the work of the actors and its perception by the audience both begin in a mental place. However, the intellectual preparation of an actor is lost if it does not manifest itself physically, just as an individual’s well-intended ideas on how to communicate and problem-solve with group members are lost if the individual does not act on these ideas. Therefore, the coactive systems approach spoke not only to my beliefs about collaboration, but also to my current understanding of theatre arts. The following chapter investigates how the work of
Mascolo and Margolis applies to the analysis of a high school theatre cast and to my goals as the director.

Personality Types Defined by Mascolo and Margolis

Within their research, Mascolo and Margolis categorize adolescents into three sectors (based on the research of theorists Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker): popular, aggressive-rejected, and withdrawn-rejected. However, at the admittance of Mascolo and Margolis, this study does not acknowledge additional constructs of individuals, particularly individuals that are socially withdrawn but are not rejected by their peers. (Mascolo and Margolis 291-292)

While perhaps not conclusive in its categorization, this study raises questions about how these different personality types operate within a theatre ensemble. Can each of these individuals work in a theatre performance ensemble? Is an individual always one of these personality types, or does he or she shift based on the circumstances – such as changes in the makeup of the ensemble or the nature of the rehearsal process?

According to Mascolo and Margolis’ descriptions of each of these personality types, popular individuals are the most capable of empathy, for they possess the ability to understand the feelings and actions of others, or an “attunement to peer relations” (291). In addition, the theorists define popular individuals as the most capable of pursuing their goals while maintaining friendships and positive relationships with other individuals (291). Conversely, rejected-aggressive individuals become hostile toward others when pursuing their goals, while rejected-withdrawn individuals do not possess the assertiveness necessary to achieve goals, so instead yield to the goals of others (Mascolo and Margolis 291). Anne Bogart speaks of healthy conflict
among an ensemble in pursuit of a better final product, or goal (Bigelow Dixon and Smith 11). If only one individual makes all of the decisions, or if group members are not held responsible for questioning and challenging the decisions and ideas of others, nothing is forcing the group to search beyond the first (often easier and least creative) answer. So, based on these ideas, a rejected-withdrawn individual may not possess the fortitude to share his or her own ideas or to challenge the ideas of others. A rejected-aggressive individual would certainly speak up, although with hostility, which might work against the idea of healthy conflict.

Looking at these ideas of empathy and achieving goals, the following questions arise: can one not argue that popular individuals are the most fit for theatre arts? What are the ways in which rejected-aggressive or rejected-withdrawn individuals might better develop the skill of empathy? How can these individuals work to pursue their goals with the assertiveness lacking in rejected-withdrawn individuals and the sensitivity lacking in rejected-aggressive individuals? What are the benefits in attempting to shape each individual of a theatre ensemble into a popular individual, and what are the benefits in an ensemble with intermingling personality types? What are the possibilities for me to develop an ensemble with an awareness and sensitivity to these different personality types in order to achieve the healthiest environment possible for the social cognitive development of each individual?

Breaking Apart the Whole: Defining the Elements of the Sociocultural Environment

In addition to defining these particular personality types within individuals, Mascolo and Margolis use key terms to define the environment and elements surrounding a group of individuals. Enveloping these elements is the socio-cultural context – the environment in which
the group exists. Within the socio-cultural context exist persons (both the individual and others), actions, objects (both physical and psychological), and meditational means (cultural tools established by to convey ideas and meaning, such as language and gesture) (Mascolo and Margolis 289). According to Mascolo and Margolis, “human action is the emergent product of coactive relations among elements of the system rather than the outcome of particular elements considered separately” (289; emphasis theirs).

This suggests that I cannot analyze the ensemble, or the social cognitive development of an individual within the ensemble, without taking into account all of the components of the ensemble as well as the rehearsal process as a whole. Within the exploration of SCD and Viewpoints technique, Mascolo and Margolis’ terms could translate into these components: both the individual actor and ensemble members (persons); the text of the play and the physical space of the theatre (objects); the Viewpoints training exercises and vocabulary (meditational means); and finally the entirety of the rehearsal process (sociocultural context). As the director, maintaining an awareness of how each element affects and impacts the others will allow me to better understand the development of the ensemble and the value of the application of Viewpoints.

While each of these elements exist within a traditional rehearsal environment, pointing out the parallels between Mascolo and Margolis’ definition of meditational means – the tools or language that allow communication within a particular social culture – and the ideology behind Viewpoints training seems essential to understanding a study of the two. Mascolo and Margolis state, “… in development, to acquire facility with language is to gain access to cultural meanings shared by a linguistic community” (290). In other words, an agility of the meditational means
used by a culture (be it spoken language, body language, unspoken cultural codes, traditions, or rituals) gives one the tools necessary to navigate through, and succeed within, a socio-cultural construct. This idea parallels the emphasis on vocabulary in Viewpoints training. By developing the language of Viewpoints, an individual can develop the meditational means necessary to succeed within the sociocultural context of the rehearsal process. Not only is it necessary that group members understand and utilize the spoken Viewpoints vocabulary (including tempo, duration, repetition, *et cetera*, which I will define and explore in Chapter Four), but it is equally necessary that group members fully explore each of these vocabularies. One must not only understand how to point to the usage and quality of duration (or any Viewpoint) by other ensemble members, but one must also have experienced duration for his or herself, attempting to fully explore extremities (extreme shortness of duration or extreme length of duration) through Viewpoints exercises.

Additionally, Mascolo and Margolis speak about “the development of dominating interaction strategies.” Dominance carries negative connotations, but the authors acknowledge that both dominance and submission create challenges; a dominant individual may not make decisions based on collaboration and the feelings of others, while a submissive individual may cater to the wishes of others to please or make friends. Within their research, they recognize that any individual, whether considered popular or rejected, is capable of acting dominant at times. When faced with different social compositions, an adolescent may slide along a “dominating-submissive continuum;” for example, a typically dominant individual may become less so when encountering a more popular individual. (Mascolo and Margolis 296)
This idea brought forward strong parallels within Viewpoints training. Many of the exercises in Viewpoints training support the idea of not being able to discern who in the exercise is the leader or the follower. For example, exercises involve running in a circle and completing tasks such as stopping, starting, or changing direction, without being able to identify one group member who initiated the movement. This challenge pushes all group members to fall in the medium along this continuum. Other exercises, such as gridwork (where actors move along an infinite number of imaginary horizontal and vertical lines) and all exercises that focus on kinesthetic response, promote an individual’s choosing when he or she moves independently (dominating his or her own decisions), and when the individual allows others to influence his or her movement (in effect submitting to other group members). In that sense, the Viewpoints exercises support this idea of moving along that dominating-submissive continuum. In the former exercises, dominating individuals are challenged to become more submissive in order to blend in with the group, and submissive individuals are given a scenario where they may discretely dominate the actions of their group by initiating movement. The latter exercises challenge one to move freely along that continuum, self-evaluating one’s tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses.

Mascolo and Margolis suggest an individual may shift along the dominating-submissive continuum based on his or her current environment and circumstances, a notion that Viewpoints seems to support in exercises that challenge an individual to push past his or her own tendencies. While Mascolo and Margolis acknowledge this when looking at dominating interaction techniques, the theorists do not acknowledge the potential for fluid change of personality type when looking at whether an individual is popular, rejected-aggressive, or rejected-withdrawn. Is
there a possibility to slide along a continuum with those definitions as well? As a director, am I looking to enable people to shift along a continuum, or am I searching to create an ensemble that compliments the characteristics that each individual already possesses?

As I investigate my own experience as a group member in the SITI training intensive, I hope to use my own experience, combined with my perception of high school students, to analyze how a high school student might move through the same training techniques in a cast. Using the theories of Mascolo and Margolis, I will better be able to place myself within the group by focusing on how I am interacting with the other elements of the socio-cultural context, and how I am defined within the group as popular, rejected-aggressive or -withdrawn, as well as where I am placed on the dominating-submissive continuum. Through this, I hope to gain a better understanding of monitoring the personality types and tendencies of the high school cast members I direct in order to apply Viewpoints to help facilitate their growth and development.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE BENEFIT OF CONFLICT: APPLYING VIEWPOINTS TO SOCIAL COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Throughout my performance background, I have encountered Viewpoints and Composition in multiple arenas, though always with surface-level results. These experiences tantalized my interest in the technique, although the results left something to be desired. I felt my directors and facilitators reading from Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* and striving to make sense out of the directions, feeling frustrated that the results were not as liberating or as collaborative as perhaps they hoped due to the reputation of the much-anticipated technique. So to, did I, as both a performer and a director/teacher, earnestly hope for success when applying Viewpoints technique. The potential for this technique to explode my previous conceptions of what it means to create and collaborate intrigued me, but achieving this seemed out of reach.

It is largely this impetus that drew me to further studies with the technique. What had been lacking in the application of this technique in my studies as a performer that fell short of my expectations of creative collaboration and a sense of ensemble?

The purpose of this chapter is to offer my current understandings of Viewpoints technique, based both on written research as well as my experience with the technique. I will then investigate aspects of Viewpoints training that work with or against research regarding social cognitive development theory.

**Defining Viewpoints and Composition**
Viewpoints originally developed with choreographer Mary Overlie in the Judson Church Theater scene of the 1970s. Since its inception, directors and theatre artists Anne Bogart and Tina Landau expanded upon and popularized the technique with the SITI Company. Today, Bogart and Landau define Viewpoints and Composition as a “philosophy translated into a technique” (7).

Overlie’s creation of the technique originally began with the exploration of six elements, which she called Viewpoints: space, shape, time, emotion, movement, and story. Through Bogart’s work with Overlie and later with SITI Company, these elements evolved into the modern Viewpoints of Time: tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, and repetition; Space: shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography; and Voice: pitch, dynamic, acceleration/deceleration, silence, and timbre.

Thus, the philosophy behind Viewpoints is the notion that these Viewpoints exist and interact around us, among us, and within us at all times. Overlie, Bogart, and Landau simply provided a vocabulary through which to define, communicate about, and create with these preexisting elements.

If we already experience all of these Viewpoints at any given moment, then the technique becomes the conscious exploration of these naturally present Viewpoints. An ensemble achieves this through a series of exercises, as mapped out in Bogart and Landau’s The Viewpoints Book. In the first series, ensemble members complete exercises to develop their ability to focus on the ensemble as a whole, rather than each member focusing on his or herself. Exercises such as sun salutations, which must be completed in unison, serve to grow the ensemble in this manner. In the second series, the ensemble is introduced to the individual Viewpoints and led through
exercises that focus specifically on one or more of the Viewpoints. In an exercise exploring tempo, for example, ensemble members may create a movement and then repeat the movement over and over, exploring it through different tempos ranging from hyper speed to as slow as humanly possible. Of course, as each individual Viewpoint is introduced, it becomes difficult to ignore the other Viewpoints (for example, the aforementioned exercise could also includes gesture, shape, repetition, and duration). However, these exercises provide the vocabulary of the training and offer the ensemble members room to play with the breadth of each Viewpoint in a purely process-based sense.

Finally, the third series of exercises, referred to as “Composition,” use the Viewpoints vocabulary to create work that researches what Landau and Bogart call the “Play-World” (literally, the world of the play), generates blocking, or develops original work. These exercises take a more comprehensive look at one or multiple Viewpoints, asking ensemble members to create solo or group performance pieces. For example, a small group may create a movement piece as research for a production that incorporates three lines of text, a piece of music inspired by the production, two found objects, and the use of shape. These ambiguous instructions are intended to propel ensemble members to a place of heightened creativity, which then feeds into the development of the final product.

How this philosophy and technique may translate into the final production varies; contrary to common misconceptions, Viewpoints is not an aesthetic. While the exploration of Viewpoints and the development of Composition pieces may open the perspective of a performer to more unique, abstract forms of expression, the training may speak more subtly as well. Since the philosophy states that Viewpoints exist in everything and everywhere, an awareness of
Viewpoints may enhance a performer’s ability to contribute creatively to even the most realistic of productions.

So what does such an anomaly of a theatre training technique look like? More specifically, what does it feel like to the artist? To the audience? Perhaps Scott T. Cummings best articulates the overall quality of Anne Bogart’s incarnation of Viewpoints in his account of a museum installation built by Bogart herself. As a contribution in the Exit Art Gallery entitled “Show People: Downtown Directors and the Play of Time,” Cummings describes the installation in *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company*:

Before entering, a visitor faced the following list of instructions stenciled on the wall:

Leave belongings on the hooks provided.

Enter with an awareness of what is already under way. Listen and be attentive with your whole body.

Do not speak.

Relax and soften the eyes so that you are not directly looking at any one person or thing in the room.

Sustain a distinct closeness or distance from other people and architectural elements.

Be patient.

What happens?

Upon entering, the room revealed itself as a proverbial empty space. (36)

I imagine that a person with no knowledge of Viewpoints might find these instructions and this room confusing. How do I listen with my whole body? What does it mean to “soften the eyes”? What does “distinct closeness or distance” look like? Were I to encounter this installation,
I would enter the room mystified, fully anticipating something magically theatrical. Most likely, I would leave the space bewildered and disappointed that all I saw was a blank space with other equally bemused patrons. However, I would enter and leave the space fully activated and alive – aware of every minute sensation of the experience in me and around me.

With this installation, Bogart successfully conveyed the confusion that often exists in studying Viewpoints – that elements so basic and ever-present can feel so ambiguous and difficult to grasp. Like the installation, Viewpoints encourages individuals to develop a hypersensitive awareness of themselves, others, and the space around them, even when that hypersensitivity comes from the ambiguity of the task.

This awareness feeds not only the individual as an artist, but also develops the individual as a human being as well, since as Bogart and Landau suggest, rather than the world mirroring Viewpoints, Viewpoints merely mirrors the world (210). This focus on developing the artist and the human being inspired me to couple this philosophy and technique with social cognitive development theory in order to align my application of Viewpoints with the social developments I seek to focus on as a director. My research draws four through lines visible in both Viewpoints and SCD theory: collaboration, vocabulary, conflict, and developing an individual’s awareness of the others and the outer world. The following section expands on these ideas.

The Relationship of Viewpoints and Social Cognitive Development Theory

Interestingly, the focus of Viewpoints and the technique for applying them in training varies greatly among facilitators, even within the SITI Company (Chapter Six will explore how the SITI facilitators with whom I studied approached Viewpoints from a different angle than I
expected based on the writings of Bogart and Landau). Since the most well-known and utilized approach is that in *The Viewpoints Book*, I will use the ideas presented by Bogart and Landau to explore the relationship between Viewpoints and Mascolo and Margolis’ studies.

The strongest through line to surface is collaboration; collaboration rests at the essence of Viewpoints, and Mascolo and Margolis’ writing analyzes how adolescents interact and/or collaborate. As addressed in Chapter Three, the sociocultural context defined by Mascolo and Margolis parallels the rehearsal environment in which one might apply Viewpoints, and each element holds equal importance in the success of the collaboration. The elements break down into the following components: the performers (or in the research of Mascolo and Margolis, persons); the text of the play and the physical space of the theatre or rehearsal hall (objects); the Viewpoints training exercises and vocabulary (meditational means – the tools with which members of a culture communicate with one another); and the entirety of the rehearsal or production process (sociocultural context). Including the rehearsal process in the sociocultural context is essential when analyzing the social cognitive development of a group, for it is within this rehearsal environment, not just during performances, where Bogart sees the richest opportunities for an ensemble to grow and develop. She questions:

What is a rehearsal? When does the art start? Does art happen only with an audience present? Is rehearsal a place and time to practice moves or is it a site of collaborative conception? … I believe that it is possible for art to occur in the rehearsal room. A director can bring an intensity of gaze that forces the actors to create in the present moment. (Bogart, “Act” 37)
Bogart suggests the focus on the collaboration found within this rehearsal process can contribute to the artistic successfulness of the final product. Her depiction of a focused rehearsal process causes me to recall images of stagnant rehearsals for productions I directed – rehearsals where a focus on memorization and perfection caused actors to become lackluster and disengaged. I always perceived the purpose of the director’s “gaze” as motivating actors to try hard, but I never saw its ability to spawn innovation. I am now realizing in my own work how often I play the director I disdained to act with, the director where I felt my sole purpose was his or her approval. Most recently, I remounted a production in preparation for a competition, and quickly realized I had mentally moved on to my current production and only wanted to get the competition piece back to its previous state. My own lack of focus and the actors’ lack of creative stimulation resulted in sloppy, unenthusiastic, monotonous runs of the piece. When I realized how my own mentality was an injustice to my actors, I devised creative tasks to layer new elements into the production – new blocking, incorporating new props – little devises that caused the actors to be alert and present. By engaging myself in finding new tasks and challenges for the actors, I became more alive in the process and revitalized the actors’ sense of creative purpose. I now further understand my mission in this study as not just shifting my focus to the actors, but shifting my understanding of the entire collaborative rehearsal process.

A second parallel that surfaced is the notion of vocabulary: the development and utilization of vocabulary to better allow individuals to communicate and connect with one another. Mascolo and Margolis present this idea as meditational tools, stating, “between persons, interpersonal communication is mediated through the use of cultural tools, most notably signs and symbols” (290). The idea of accessibility of vocabulary frequently arises in additional social
cognitive development studies and writings. Tamir defines “adjacency pairs” within communication as two utterances that are intended to go together (35). For example, if one individual states “Guess what?” the other individual is expected to respond with “What?” In this way, Tamir suggests that the essence of one person’s communication is void if not considered within the context of the entirety of the conversation, stating, “the idea that each communication can be ‘magically’ modified by the accompanying communication illustrates that the meaning of the chain of dialogue is continuously transformed” (39).

As a meditational means for a cast, Viewpoints provides a clear vocabulary. Each Viewpoint contains a definition and an infinite number of measurable degrees of that Viewpoint. By providing a cast with that vocabulary, the cast gains a shorthand of sorts through which they can communicate and create.

As Viewpoints exist in life, perhaps each individual already possesses an awareness of one or more of the Viewpoints. I am naturally drawn toward tempo; whether due to a background in music or something innate, I seek text and movement with drastic shifts and contrasts in tempo. However, were I to possess only this focus, I would miss the opportunity to create in the realms of the other Viewpoints, and I might find myself less able to communicate with ensemble members that tend toward other Viewpoints. In the realm of social cognitive development theory, this is the equivalent of an individual not understanding how to respond with the socially expected adjacency pair, stunting their ability to complete even the simplest communicative exchanges. Thus, where language becomes a meditational mean for the SCD of individuals, I posit that the vocabulary presented in Viewpoints will offer a cohesive social tool through which all ensemble members can communicate and contribute to the process.
The third relationship presented is the perspective of conflict. Conflict is something perhaps not directly addressed within Viewpoints training, but discussed within the scholarly writings of Bogart. She once stated:

In the theatre, we often presume that collaboration means agreement. I believe that too much agreement creates productions with no vitality, no dialectic, no truth. Unreflected agreement deadens the energy in a rehearsal. I do not believe that collaboration means mechanically doing what the director dictates. Without resistance there is no fire. (Bigelow Dixon and Smith 11)

The application of Viewpoints training can support this argument by giving each ensemble member the meditational means to communicate and create, and then providing them with the opportunity to truly utilize those tools by working as co-creators. Of course, merely training an ensemble through Viewpoints does not necessarily create healthy conflict unless the director is willing to truly allow those different voices to be heard; if rather, as Bogart suggests, the ensemble still subjects itself to “unreflected agreement.”

This notion of healthy and vital conflict seems to rub against some of the ideas put forth by Mascolo and Margolis. Returning, for example, to the idea of the dominating-submissive continuum, the theorists suggest that all individuals are capable of becoming one or the other based on the given circumstances. However, the form of healthy conflict supported by Bogart suggests that two or more individuals must be willing to work through a scenario where all parties operate from a dominant standpoint, thus stirring the conflict that ultimately leads to the highest level of creativity.
In addition, the different personality types (popular, rejected-aggressive, and rejected-withdrawn) outlined by Mascolo and Margolis suggest that popular adolescents have the most advanced social cognition. However, some of the qualities that they map out as “popular,” particularly an “easy temperament,” seem to avoid conflict rather than pursue it (291). This raises questions regarding the art created by an ensemble with advanced social cognitive development; would the ensemble be healthy, but the art suffer? Is an ensemble full of popular individuals the solution to a socially and cognitively healthy ensemble? Bogart states, “our awareness of the differences between things around us touches upon the source of our terror. It is more comfortable to feel similarities, yet we need to accept the terror of differences in order to create vital art. The terrible truth is that no two people are alike, no two snowflakes are alike, no two moments are alike” (Bigelow Dixon and Smith 11). This seems to suggest that it is not whether or not two individuals are similar, but whether they can create art from healthy conflict surrounding their differences. Is it possible then to have an ensemble both rich artistically and socially? Can individuals pursue conflict in a way that is not damaging to the whole?

This tension frightens me; the concept that I may need to be willing to let multiple ensemble members dominate the situation, and push submissive individuals to dominate in order to create healthy conflict, challenges the degree to which I currently feel willing to relinquish control. Considering that doing so may go against the principles set out by Mascolo and Margolis, and thus damage the social cognitive development of the individual or ensemble, makes me further analyze where my values lie. Am I willing to risk this in order to try to create an ensemble with healthy conflict in their collaborations? Can I address conflict with adolescents in a way that will help them understand the value of it? And does Mascolo and Margolis’ theory
hold true, or can conflict actually enhance the social cognitive development of an individual by making him or her aware of the reality and necessity of conflict in the world?

The final through line that surfaced for me is one’s awareness of his or her entire environment. As previously mentioned, individuals who study Viewpoints report seeing the individual Viewpoints surface everywhere in life: while waiting tables, watching the nature channel, and so on (Bogart and Landau 280). For example, one might notice the repetition and tempo in the sound of falling rain, or the topography of the paths made by multiple servers in a packed restaurant. One becomes familiar with the natural tendencies in different Viewpoints of each individual he or she interacts with – for example, as a child I gauged my mother’s bottled-up tension by the duration of her sighs.

Mascolo and Margolis, when defining the sociocultural context and its individual elements, state:

A coactive systems conception maintains that action and experience is the coactive product of relations among evolving elements of the system. As such, human action is the emergent product of coactive relations among elements of the system rather than the outcome of particular elements considered separately. (289; emphasis theirs)

In essence, we do not exist in isolation. As a child, I would hear my mother’s prolonged sighs and would respond with the awareness to stop talking! I might turn up the car radio as to avoid my mother’s stress, but then she would respond to my loud pop music by turning the channel to National Public Radio, only to respond with heavier sighs to the harsh realities of news reports. In this familiar child/parent anecdote, the ideas of Mascolo and Margolis go beyond the
awareness suggested by Bogart and Landau. More than being aware, we responded with actions to the observations we made of the elements within our sociocultural context. With Viewpoints training to develop increased awareness of each of these elements, an actor can then better assess or manage how he or she acts in response to the messages received by each of the elements.

However, while Mascolo and Margolis’ construct acknowledges the relationship between these elements, their research pays little attention to the thoughts and feelings of the individual. Rather, their work projects such thoughts and feelings by analyzing the outward physical (muscular) response of the individual (for example, recounting an interaction between two individuals and analyzing an individual’s gaze, facial expression, and vocal pitch) (298). This approach uses the individual as a tool to analyze the relationship between two things (in this case, the individual and the other). Yet this study neglects an individual’s personal assessment of his or her own thoughts and emotions during this exchange.

Whereas Mascolo and Margolis seem to look only at the larger environment and the relationship of elements within it, Viewpoints offers something slightly different. While Viewpoints training develops one’s ability to look more keenly at the environment and the other individuals within it, it also promotes one’s ability to look within. Some exercises, for example, promote the play between choosing when one acts based on the choices of others, or when one acts purely based on his or her own preference, thoughts, and ideas. In addition, the way in which one facilitates Viewpoints may encourage individuals to both take in the room in its entirety as well as focusing on their own personal experience (my journaling from the intensive training, explored in later chapters, elaborates further on this). Thus, Viewpoints may offer a
more multi-faceted focus on the larger environment, the relationships of the elements within it, in addition to the inner-workings of the individual.

The parallels presented in these two theories – the use of vocabulary as a meditational tool and one’s overall awareness to his or her environment – further suggest how a facilitator’s awareness of social cognitive development theory may impact how he or she presents Viewpoints to an ensemble. With the former parallel, I would stress to my cast members the importance of utilizing the individual Viewpoints as the means through which to verbally articulate ideas. With the latter, I would utilize Viewpoints exercises to help individuals develop a hypersensitivity to the sociocultural environment surrounding them, yet would encourage more self-reflection on how one fits into that environment than Mascolo and Margolis promote in their study.

However, the tensions created between these two theories provide far more fodder for my study. While I initially thought that an ideal ensemble consisted of all “popular” individuals, the characteristics of popular individuals outlined by Mascolo and Margolis do not lend themselves to the healthy and necessary conflict outlined by Bogart. Both parties possess drastically different perspectives on healthy conflict and collaboration, which cause shifts in my goals as a facilitator. Rather than attempting to morph ensemble members into popular individuals, I should embrace their current state and realize that the variety among the cast feeds the productivity of the cast as a whole. Through this variety, conflict may arise, but rather than seeking conformity, I should strive to develop a way to use that conflict to develop the art of the piece as well as the development of the ensemble and the individual.
With these parallels and tensions, the true onus rests on the facilitator of the training. Even Bogart and Landau offer their experiences to artists, students, and critics as a means to a beginning rather than an end, believing through a personal investment in Viewpoints one can discover his or her own process and beliefs (x). Therefore, it appears my personal success in this research rests not on if I can discern whether or not Viewpoints and social cognitive development theory can coexist, but more so how I allow my understanding of SCD theory to inform my facilitation of Viewpoints training. In the following chapter I offer a personal reflection on my experience during the intensive two-week SITI Viewpoints training. My research will chronicle how I responded to the training in relationship to my personal beliefs as an artist and educator and my gathered research on social cognitive development theory.
CHAPTER FIVE: TEACHER AS STUDENT: A PROJECTED PERCEPTION

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges presented in this study is the hypothetical standpoint from which much of it operates. As an adult and educator, my experience within the Viewpoints and Suzuki training led by SITI Company allowed me to project how the application of Viewpoints might translate with a high school ensemble. During this training, I placed myself in the role of the student and attempted to gauge how high school students would respond to the training based on my own understanding of this age group through experience and research. Following this training, I applied Viewpoints with an ensemble of high school students to explore how the application of this theory related to my predictions, which I will explore in Chapter Seven.

This said, I attempted to approach the study without stereotyping or assuming how high school students would react. Rather, I merely allowed myself to experience the training from the perspective of the student, looking at my own understandings and reactions to the presented course. By doing this through my acquired knowledge of Mascolo and Margolis’ writings, and through understanding that everything I experience as a student may apply to my teachings, I used my experience as a student to draw parallels between the training and how I could use it in my own teaching. This chapter outlines some of the key ideas that surfaced through my experience as a student during the two-week intensive training program.

The Opposite Approach: Suzuki as a Comparative Measure
First, I must offer brief attention to the Suzuki training in the program. This training weighed equally in the focus of the course, but I initially held little interest in it. I did minimal research in the technique prior to the course, because what I did find disinterested me and felt irrelevant to my study. The physically restrictive, ultra-disciplined, militant approach to exploring movement and voice frightened me. However, even by the first day of training I became aware that SITI Company paired these two forms of training together for a reason. With Suzuki’s demanding, strict exercises attributed to martial arts, and the significantly looser structure of Viewpoints, which at times looks like a throwback to the happenings of the 1960s, a student training solely in only one of the two techniques could easily find themselves lacking either discipline or creativity, respectively. In reflecting on how the two forms of training could balance one another, I questioned, “why I see one (Viewpoints) as more applicable to a high school ensemble than the other (Suzuki). I think I need to search for a personal link between the two, as SITI clearly has found a way that the two offer a unique balance within their own work” (3 Aug. 2009).

Because of this, I did not ignore this Suzuki training in my journal, nor will I ignore it in this paper. Rather, referencing and reflecting on the Suzuki training provided me a tool with which I could measure my experiences and feelings during the Viewpoints training.

**Looking Inward to See Outward: Focus on the Individual**

On the first day of training I walked in with preconceived notions of Viewpoints training based on Bogart and Landau’s writings and my limited previous experiences with the technique. One huge difference between my understanding of the technique and its presentation in our class
immediately struck me, and initially upset me: our facilitators chose to frame the course with a focus on the individual. In my journaling of my experience, I stated, “… it caught me off guard because I previously thought of Viewpoints as an ensemble-based technique (though still applicable and beneficial to the individual)” (3 Aug. 2009).

I felt so surprised and disappointed by this focus that I initially feared the validity of my research questions. How could training that focused on improving the individual give me any fodder in my search for ways to develop a high school ensemble? However, the explanation of the facilitators as well as my experiences with the training soon clarified the purpose of this internal focus and helped me place it in perspective with the writings of Mascolo and Margolis.

Our two facilitators explained that they felt as though directors and teachers generally devote too much time to focusing on the entire ensemble, which tends to lead to two things: one, group members become so dependent on and hungry for that connection with the ensemble that they forget to think and act independently, and they forget to look within to gauge the quality of their work; and two, it becomes too easy for one group member to get lost, and too difficult to discern where each individual is in their personal growth and progress.

However, the facilitators did not intend for us to focus solely on ourselves. Rather, the facilitators frequently encouraged us to shift from focusing on ourselves (moving independently), focusing on others (allowing others to inspire movement), focusing on inhuman objects or space (moving based off of environment or space), and simply observing. Reflecting on my experience with these multiple points of focus, I stated:

We worked individually, but as we continued working, we began playing with shifting focus from internal to focusing on the group. As we worked in this
manner, I was able to work entirely on my own but at times became aware of the movements of others or the fact that my own movement was being observed.

With this, our facilitator brought up the idea of the dichotomy between the individual and influence: in order to allow the ensemble to influence one’s movement, one must first have an understanding of his or herself. The facilitator had us observe a scene: the audience area where all of our personal items were strewn. He then removed a water bottle and suggested that the scene is still complete without the water bottle, the water bottle is complete without the scene, and they are both complete when you combine them. To further his idea, I must argue that the scene still shifts while the water bottle is not there. The scene is capable of functioning on its own and serving its purpose, yet it is different without the presence of the water bottle. However, this idea of the water bottle knowing what it is and what purpose it serves on its own before entering a scene really intrigues me. Perhaps, as an educator and director, I have been so focused on cultivating an ensemble I have not given enough attention to the individual in order to allow that ensemble to ultimately come to fruition. (3 Aug. 2009)

This realization about myself as an educator and director brought forth many questions about the validity of my facilitator’s points. Had I, in fact, neglected the individual in my pursuit of the ensemble? How would encouraging my actors to focus inward also strengthen their ability to focus outward on the whole group? Were my original notions, that Viewpoints would work to create a socially and cognitively advanced ensemble, totally off base and unrealistic? How does this happen for the whole group if the work does not first promote it for the individual?
In one class, I discovered just how much we naturally limit ourselves as independent thinkers by instinctually looking to other humans for guidance. In one exercise the facilitators allowed us to focus on anything except another human being. I observed:

This choice comes from [the facilitator’s] belief that if we are given the freedom to look anywhere (as we had been), we will automatically look to other human beings. In looking at other humans, we will look at them for ideas on what to do, what not to do, or for acceptance. What I experienced when I was not allowed to look at other humans was that I was still (perhaps even more acutely) aware of their choices, but I also felt more compelled to make my own choices and to work instinctively. I did not feel any less connected to them; I just felt a more profound connection. (5 Aug. 2009)

This exercise brought to light how dependent we are on other human beings for support and guidance. Telling students to not look to other human beings for support and inspiration is the same as telling the average person to not say “like” or “um” as they speak; taking away the option makes one aware of how much he or she uses it as a crutch. The realization that I can still connect with other individuals while making choices independent of them broadened my perspective of ensemble-based work. I can create with an awareness of others, yet choose to create from an inspiration I find within myself. In doing so (and as long as I maintain an awareness of the whole group and retain the ability to choose for them to influence me), I can develop into a stronger, more creative, and more independent ensemble member.

In another exercise, we received instruction to work independently through singing and dancing. Introducing these two variables instantly put me in a self-conscious and vulnerable
place, which made me want to look to my other classmates for support. However, the facilitator purposefully chose to begin the exercise with us working independently, and then to step by step provide options for us to work off the influence of others. Through experiencing the entire spectrum from working independently to working off the inspiration of others, I noted:

… We were pushed to work without group members first. Because of that, when we began using our singing and dancing on the grid [allowing others to influence us], it became very welcoming to dance with another, to dance in reflection or response to him or her, or to otherwise engage other members of the group. Had we skipped the first portion, I think we never would have gotten to experience that vulnerability that comes from having to sing or dance singularly and, therefore, the strength that comes from following through with it. I truly appreciated the ability to lean on other group members – to pull from their creativity, to use them in a moment when I felt lost – but only because I first experienced feeling isolated and on my own. Through this, I continue to realize that the ensemble is only strong if each individual is strong and vise versa. Using Viewpoints with merely a focus on the entire ensemble creates the potential for even one group member to fall by the wayside. A dual focus on both the individual and the ensemble makes the collective stronger than its parts, which is ultimately the goal. (6 Aug. 2009)

The intensive continued to take this path, guiding us to work more and more in solitude even as we began to feel increasingly connected as a group. This continued to push me through one of my personal challenges – instinctually looking to group members for guidance.
Surprisingly, working independently did not diminish the connection I felt with my peers. Rather, I understood the sheer vulnerability that they felt in their own independent work, and I became more and more determined to support and encourage their efforts. In one instance, the facilitator asked us to create solo pieces that incorporated all of the Viewpoints of Time, Space, and Voice. The tension in the room instantly thickened; what was previously a free exploration of technique and theory suddenly became a measured and rehearsed application, which felt like a finite performance. However, when we performed these solos, we soon realized the objective behind this exercise. Following is my account:

… We presented these solos in small groups, so that about five of us were performing our solos simultaneously. We discovered that through having this time on our own to intensely focus on ourselves, we created pieces that still had a similar life to them and that drew many similarities. Finding these commonalities brought forth a suggestion from our facilitator: perhaps as human beings, we are more similar in our instincts than we realize, and perhaps there is something to gain from working independently rather than trying to force group work. There is something so profound in that that makes me rethink the entire way that I approach an ensemble. Perhaps I do need to give more value to individual work, and then draw parallels based on that work when looking at the whole group. Doing so would certainly ensure that each individual carried a voice in the end result. (12 Aug. 2009)

I experienced similar moments that challenged my philosophies about individual work and group work in the Suzuki training, which I did not expect due to the isolated nature of
Suzuki. Since the general format of the training consists of students working in isolation while
the facilitator monitors and guides them, very little room exists for peer-led teaching or
critiquing, two concepts that I highly value as an educator. This shifted during one class, when
we received the rare opportunity to observe and then offer critiques and suggestions to one
another. I observed:

My first instinct was, ‘Aha! Peer-led teaching! Finally – something that I feel will
truly grow the ensemble!’ I think this is true; through giving one another
feedback, we learn to communicate, accept criticism, and realize that we must
help each other grow to strengthen our whole. … However, immediately
following this, our facilitator announced that the purpose of doing this was to help
us find some of the things that we needed to focus on, but ultimately we should
‘always pretend that that critical eye is there.’ It’s the same idea as not practicing
Suzuki in front of a mirror: you want to develop that internal mirror by constantly
addressing points of the technique and questioning whether or not you are doing it
correctly. (7 Aug. 2009)

The ideas presented by the facilitator once again promoted individual work and thinking
in a way that I never truly valued as a facilitator. How often do we as artists rely on a mirror,
video camera, or feedback of directors, teachers, peers, or even audience members to determine
our own value of our work? And how often do I, as the director or teacher, give notes to actors
before I challenge them to note themselves? How do these actions degrade the “critical eye” of
the performer and devalue his or her sense of self? An individual’s perception of self largely
Shifting along the Dominating-Submissive Continuum in Viewpoints Training

The notion of working independently, off the influence of others, or within a large group relates to Mascolo and Margolis’ description of the dominating-submissive continuum. Their work suggests that no individual is solely dominant or solely submissive, but rather shifts along that continuum based on various situations and the individual’s relationship to the other individuals with which he or she interacts. Through this training experience, I managed to pinpoint where I consider myself to most naturally fall along this continuum. In an exercise that consisted of either moving completely independently or moving in unity with a group, I reflected:

I experienced the sudden solitude and paranoia in acting totally alone, and I experienced the fear of “messing up” and leading my group astray when we moved as a group. … Focusing on this essence brought up some really interesting connections when thinking about the power dynamics found in a social group. For example, I feel as though I am frequently a submissive individual. Because of that, when we were forced to work independently I discovered that by letting others influence me in past exercises I was in effect submitting to them. That made allowing others to influence me a crutch in my work. In the same way, an aggressive individual might feel frustrated when moving together as a whole group by their inability to control the movement of the group, and therefore their
own movement. Because this exercise isolated these instances and asked each of us to play with the differences, I was able to pinpoint my fears and safeties within Viewpoints and therefore gained a better understanding of where I fit into the group and where I have the most opportunity for growth and exploration. (10 Aug. 2009)

Through these exercises I defined my personal comfort-zone along that continuum, realizing that I tend toward looking to other people for guidance, making myself one of the more submissive individuals in the group. Because I defined my natural tendencies, I began noticing particular moments where I felt a subtle shift in my positioning. Frequently changing the composition of the people with whom I worked and how I fit within the group caused me to constantly change my perception of my position within the group. I observed:

For example, I would begin working by myself, and then one other person would join me. As the initiator of the movement, I would feel dominant over that one person. However, if a third, stronger individual would join us, or if suddenly our focus would shift to a different part of the room, I would instantly feel submissive. I slid up and down this scale not only based on the choices of others, but also based on my own instincts and desires. If I realized I felt too disconnected from the rest of the group, I would submit to someone else by letting them inspire my choices. If I felt bored, I would take the initiative to start something new and exciting for myself, thereby taking a dominant role. Through this, I felt strongly connected to the group because there were no real leaders or
followers, although a snapshot would reveal submissive and dominant individuals within that given moment. (10 Aug. 2009)

As both Anne Bogart and our facilitators suggest, Viewpoints are ever-present in life, so the training draws countless parallels to life. Similarly, the relationship between this training and the dominating-submissive continuum suggested by Mascolo and Margolis draws parallels to life. In life, an individual finds solace in one position along the continuum. However, one tends to rise to the occasion when life demands a shift to another position; a submissive mother may reveal surprising dominance when faced the threatened safety of her child. So, too, did I respond by shifting and adapting along the continuum to fulfill the objectives given by my facilitators, which allowed me to play an ever-morphing role within the development of our ensemble.

While Mascolo and Margolis state that one may occasionally stray from their usual position along the dominating-submissive continuum, their writing on the different personality types (popular, aggressive-rejected, and submissive-rejected) suggests no way in which an individual may shift from popular to rejected or vise versa in a given moment. In this manner, the authors seemingly contradict themselves, insinuating that some aspects of a personality might shift while others remain unyielding. However, this perspective of the theorists contradicts my personal experiences in the intensive training. During the two weeks of the course, I experienced multiple occasions where I felt myself shifting within these constructs, and identified key moments where I felt other group members shift as well.
Mascolo and Margolis’ Personality Types Within Viewpoints Training

During the Viewpoints training, I observed that the constant attention to shifting points of focus not only impacted the role I played along the dominating-submissive continuum, but also whether I felt popular, rejected-withdrawn, or rejected-aggressive. This surprised me, as I view myself as rejected-withdrawn in most social situations. Yet several points emphasized by the training encouraged individuals to shift in and out of the personality types outlined by Mascolo and Margolis, such as: ignoring the misconception of “right or wrong,” allowing others to influence you and therefore acknowledging that you influence others, choosing your level of involvement, and learning through observation.

Much of the emphasis behind Viewpoints training involves learning to trust one’s instinct as a human and as a performer. With this comes an assumed acceptance from the facilitator; how could a facilitator possibly tell a student that his or her instinct is “wrong”? With this acceptance of another’s instincts, I suggest that this feeling empowers rejected-withdrawn or -aggressive individuals. Ideally, this places everyone in the status of a popular individual, for the facilitators and the group accept whatever is presented. However, this standpoint I reached early in my research became problematized when I considered the shaping of any sort of final product. Although the two-week intensive did not work toward a final product, a marked shift occurred when the facilitator began commenting on moments he deemed successful as well as individuals’ opportunities for growth. This caused a notable shift in the dynamic of the class. While this shift went against my theories, I realized:

At some point, I believe that we as artists do need to be able to pinpoint and articulate what we feel is successful and what is not. In the past, I felt that
directors and facilitators [with whom I worked] were too loose with their use of Viewpoints; they accepted so much that the students were not able to fine-tune their critical eye, their body, and their craft. The end result generally lacked cohesion due to the facilitator’s indecisiveness. However, at what point does the shift from trying anything to narrowing our choices and pointing at “right and wrong” choices occur? And how can it happen in a way that is sensitive to the development of the ensemble? How can you tell people that they will never be wrong, and then make observations (as harmless and as subjective as they may be) and not expect them to begin trying to shape their work into a “right”? (14 Aug. 2009)

Thus, the opportunity for rejected individuals to feel accepted, or popular, is highly possible in the idealistic application of Viewpoints as a technique that knows no “right or wrong.” Yet this concept is inherently problematic in the shift from training to developing a final product. The challenge for the facilitator becomes presenting the material in a way that will encourage students or actors to create as if there were no right or wrong, yet to shift and shape their work to create a cohesive and satisfactory final product without spoiling that uninhibited creation.

While the notion of no “right or wrong” is perhaps romanticized in Viewpoints training, other concepts emphasized by the facilitators successfully encouraged play between different personality types outlined by Mascolo and Margolis. For example, the facilitators’ focus on shifting where we received our inspiration (from ourselves or from others) made me simultaneously focus on myself and also realize how much I focused on others. When I focused
on others, I empowered them; in turn, I realized others inevitably focused on me, which felt empowering. I reflected:

Because there is no sense of taking turns in Viewpoints, I had no way of knowing whether or not I was inspiring the movement in others. However, when I realized that I potentially had the power to do so, it grew my confidence and made me feel like part of the ensemble. In addition, I initially felt myself drawn toward the dominant personalities in the rooms – the facilitators and experienced people, or the “popular” individuals. However, because I was asked to constantly shift my focus to different individuals, objects, or space in the room, I was pushed to take in everyone and everything. (4 Aug. 2009)

Through this constantly shifting focus, I felt a part of the creative process for the popular individuals, and I also made a point to draw inspiration from the more withdrawn individuals in the ensemble. I realized that my ability to create based on others does not lessen when I look to withdrawn individuals for inspiration; rather, they may offer a different perspective. Shifting focus seemed to successfully unify the members of the group regardless of their personality types. Mascolo and Margolis state popular individuals possess the highest cognitive control and are the most capable of pursuing their goals while maintaining positive relationships with their peers (291). In this sense, every ensemble member did morph into a popular individual, for we each worked independently to achieve our own personal goals – to explore our capabilities within this theatre technique. By unknowingly influencing one another, even the most withdrawn individuals helped the other ensemble members achieve their goals, which ultimately allowed the ensemble to develop and nurture positive relationships.
The facilitators provided yet another, subtler, option for focus: to serve as an observer at any moment during an exercise. The typical theatre student, eager to prove his or her ability through participation, might instinctually avoid this option. However, when pushed to spend time in this area, I soon discovered its merit not only for the learning process, but also for allowing students to experience different personality types. Following an experience where I felt motivated to stay at the sidelines for a lengthy period (which would generally cause me to reprimand myself for my unwillingness to participate), I wrote:

... Our training spends so much time focusing on the value of observation that I hope it would empower those individuals that generally spend more time in the audience. I certainly felt empowered today, and did not feel chained to my choice at all. Had the instinct struck or had I felt like I was getting too complacent in the audience, I believe I would have gone on stage. Regardless, I think during the tender years of adolescents, so many get intimidated or overwhelmed by the aggressive tendencies of a stereotypical theatre setting. While I would certainly encourage all of the cast members to find time both on the stage and in the audience, I believe that the focus on the power of the audience would bring significant growth and development to the more withdrawn high school cast members. (7 Aug. 2009)

This opportunity to observe may provide comfort to withdrawn individuals, while pushing other individuals to perceive things from a withdrawn perspective. Simultaneously, anyone on stage is then put into the role of “teacher,” allowing the individuals in the audience to learn from their actions. The facilitators took this approach in both Viewpoints and Suzuki
training, encouraging individuals to remain constantly aware of their position as either learner or teacher. Through this, my facilitators observed that individuals experience what they considered the three necessary components of learning: imitating, repeating, and teaching. In relation to the personality types outlined by Mascolo and Margolis, I observed, “… in general, the popular adolescents would fall under the role of teacher (imitatee), while the withdrawn adolescents would serve as observers (imitators). The technique of having participants switch roles between the two would seem to blur that separation” (3 Aug. 2009).

This simple idea struck me. I long ago recognized the value of asking students to step into teacher roles as an opportunity to develop their leadership skills. However, some students do not respond well to this overwhelming amount of responsibility and attention. How powerful it is to simply use observation to allow ensemble members to learn from one another. In addition, how empowering it becomes to recognize that the most gifted individual can learn from the shyest, least experienced, or least talented individual. I recognize now in my own performance career the moments where I took note of the performance of an individual, and in that moment observed something I did not want to do in my own practice. I chose to do the opposite, which allowed me to learn from that individual nonetheless. Given the opportunity to focus on nothing more than observing, individuals will naturally take note of the positives and negatives in what they observe, and will compare and apply that to their own work. It then becomes the responsibility of the facilitator to give students the opportunity to observe, point at the value of learning through observation, and provide students with the Viewpoints vocabulary necessary to take inventory of these observations.
To return briefly to Suzuki training, I observed how Suzuki training seems to be a joining of all three personality types. This realization came at a time when I doubted any of Suzuki’s ability to contribute to the social cognitive development of a group. How could a technique, which feels so isolated, contribute to how one works with a group? However, I grew to appreciate the ways Suzuki training conditioned a student, not just physically but also mentally. Through that mental preparation, one could develop as a balanced individual, possessing components of each personality type. During a discussion led by the facilitators that explored the lack of humility in American culture and its importance in Suzuki training, I noted:

… The idea that you are bound to fail at Suzuki but must strive for perfection would mean that you are living in a constant state of humility, because it will be humiliating to fail every time. That humility is a completely open and vulnerable place, but we are then asked to perform Suzuki as though we are already perfect and to hide or mask that humility. … This makes me think about the different personality types that Mascolo and Margolis outline in their research. The idea of failing and being humiliated all the time strikes me as a rejected-withdrawn characteristic. However, the determination to strive for perfection and the stubbornness that literally manifests itself in the physicality of the lower body in Suzuki training reminds me of a rejected-aggressive individual. While this is happening, the ideal is to remain completely relaxed and calm in the upper body and to give an overall sense of ease, which is similar to a popular individual. It is almost as though in a “perfect” Suzuki ensemble these three characteristics would meet each other, come to terms, and learn to live harmoniously (while
simultaneously always creating conflict). The notion of how that could take place in an individual and in an ensemble seems like it could create a wonderful sense of balance. (12 Aug. 2009)

Where Mascolo and Margolis operate from the assumption that individuals possess predominantly one of these personality types, both Viewpoints and Suzuki training encourage one to spend time experiencing the personality tendencies less natural to him or her. An aggressive individual is encouraged to let others influence his or her movement in Viewpoints training, a submissive individual strives to appear strong and confident in Suzuki training, and a popular individual is challenged to sit as an observer and learn from others. Simultaneously, individuals continually move along dominating-submissive continuum by shifting where they draw their inspiration for movement – either independently or from others.

My observations during this training contradicted my preconceived expectations based on the written research I conducted on Viewpoints training. Where I expected the facilitators to focus on the ensemble as a whole, I grew the most when challenged to create as an individual, which in turn enabled me to best contribute to the whole group. When my facilitators coupled this with group work, I grew as an individual while simultaneously gaining an appreciation for and understanding of my fellow ensemble members. This highlights an interesting conundrum: how do you separate the technique practiced from the motives or beliefs of the facilitator? Did my response to the training become largely informed by the particular choices made by the facilitators of the intensive? And how do I then take my knowledge of the training, assess my own goals and the needs of the ensemble, and then present the material in a way that best addresses these issues? The following chapter continues my reflection on the intensive-two week
training through analyzing the ways in which the facilitators applied the training, and how I may in turn apply the training with a high school cast.
CHAPTER SIX: THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

As an educator, I considered it my duty to not only observe how Viewpoints impacted my own social cognitive development and that of the group during the two-week SITI intensive, but also to analyze the presentation of Viewpoints from our facilitators. Since rarely will two facilitators take the same approach to teaching something, I became fascinated with comparing the two facilitators to one another, as well as comparing their teachings to my interpretation of Bogart and Landau’s writing. This chapter details my observations on the facilitators’ teaching, how the choices they made may have influenced the social cognitive development of the group, and how I may in turn apply Viewpoints training as an educator and director.

Open to Interpretation: Viewpoints and the Facilitator

Initially, the realization that the facilitators strayed from the steps outlined by Bogart and Landau, and even verbally refuted them, alarmed and upset me. Had I not paid to attend a course taught by the followers of Bogart and Landau, who trained with them, created with them, and therefore followed their theories? However, I soon realized my naivety, for were Bogart and Landau to strictly structure the teachings of their company members, they would negate the conflict and individuality that their own writings promote. Regardless, I did not predict the ways in which facilitator interpretation and influence would potentially muddy my research. In one journal entry, I reflected:

… This leaves me questioning just how much of an impact the facilitator has on how Viewpoints is presented to the class and how it thus impacts the social
cognitive development of the group. I find myself frustrated on how to even really dissect how this ever changing, openly imperfect, and open to interpretation technique impacts the social cognitive development of an individual. Is it purely up to the facilitator to decide how much of the focus of the training is on those elements? (5 Aug. 2009)

This realization, though frustrating and discouraging for my study, empowers me as a facilitator. Because I operate from the understanding that Viewpoints training is ever-changing and malleable, I possess the ability to step away from any writings on the training and to choose my own points of emphasis.

However, while I may adapt the training to suit the needs of the cast with which I work, the opportunity to both read about and experience firsthand Viewpoints training as developed and perceived by other facilitators only enhanced my ability to apply this training at my own discretion. The choices made by my facilitators directly informed the ways in which I applied Viewpoints as a director and educator. Among the many choices made by the facilitators, their utilization of student feedback, pointing out specific choices, and providing structure to open Viewpoints exercises all provided me with a clearer perspective on my personal utilization of Viewpoints with a high school cast.

Peer Feedback: A Delicate Balance

The facilitators in this course provided very little opportunity for peer-led feedback. As mentioned in Chapter Five, I believe this grew from their desire that the individual learn to work not based on feedback, but on the individual’s own “critical eye.” While I understand the
impetus behind this, I also see merit in facilitating peer-led feedback for training both the individual receiving the feedback and the one giving it. During one of the rare opportunities when we offered one another feedback on our performance in Suzuki training, I noticed:

… [I felt] the most alive and connected I have felt during this entire process. It was such a shift from the rest of our Suzuki (and Viewpoints) training, where we all worked in a very clear-cut student position. All of a sudden, I began noticing all of the million things wrong with my own work, and felt too humble and flawed to dare to give another student feedback. At the same time, I realized how much she was aching for the feedback, and I felt very motivated to give her specific, constructive comments. (7 Aug. 2009)

In this moment in Suzuki training, the class seemed to respond with a sense of relief, at finally conversing with one another, acknowledging our shortcomings, and hearing from an individual other than the facilitator. The feedback that we gave one another was all constructive, and my partner and I cushioned each of our criticisms with comments such as “I struggle with this, too.” With such a challenging technique that forced us to work so individually, the opportunity to share with one another our own vulnerabilities and insecurities helped withdrawn or unconfident individuals (like myself) see the bigger picture of the sociocultural context. I continued to still look at myself critically, but also took in the challenges of the other persons and gained an understanding of the complexity of Suzuki – the meditational mean. The surge of energy that we felt at being able to help one another and receive help made me yearn for increased opportunities for peer feedback.
The course then continued with very little opportunity for peer feedback, until almost the end of the course when the facilitator suddenly turned to the students during the Viewpoints portion of the class. He asked us to critique one another using the Viewpoints vocabulary, stating that Mary Overlie’s original intention was to create a vocabulary for artists to dialogue about one another’s work. Since the facilitators did not set up the class in the first week to promote peer feedback and criticism, the room fell silent. The discomfort was palpable, for we had not worked on developing our meditational tool through which to communicate our comments. The few comments made did not actually utilize the Viewpoints language; rather comments felt unconstructive and based in what the students did or did not like, without clear explanations as to why. Since the sociocultural environment was never conditioned to give and receive feedback, I realized we did not trust one another to receive our feedback without hurt feelings. I grappled with this moment, for I felt capable of creating freely in the first week of the course, yet in that freedom I had not developed the tools necessary to give or receive feedback. When questioning if the solution is to introduce feedback early on, I realized:

... Such feedback too early in the process would have really hindered the sense of free play, so I understand why our facilitator waited to introduce it. Yet since this idea of group dialogue is such a quintessential component to the development of Viewpoints training, I think it would be a shame to not incorporate it in training at all. For the health of the ensemble, it seems like an important component to introduce with deep thought and care. (13 Aug. 2009)

This challenge leaves me feeling torn about how to introduce the concept of peer feedback during the training process, although it seems like an essential tool to developing the
progression of the ensemble. Feedback given just from facilitators will cause ensemble members to perform in the way they think will please the facilitator, rather than analyzing that feedback and utilizing it how the ensemble member deems best. Receiving peer feedback can vary the perspective and offer an individual a more multi-layered understanding of him or herself as an artist. Furthermore, any feedback given by an ensemble member is providing that member the opportunity to serve in the teacher (or “popular”) role and to develop their ability to use the Viewpoints vocabulary as a meditational tool. In this instance, I feel as though the facilitators waited too long to introduce feedback and did so in an abrupt manner. However, I remain uncertain about how to approach this delicate conundrum within my own facilitations in order to promote healthy, constructive peer feedback.

Facilitator Feedback: Maintaining a Sense of No Right or Wrong

An equally confusing dilemma, which I also wrestled with in Chapter Five, is the concept of “no right or wrong.” How do facilitators help guide students and offer feedback while still promoting an environment of uninhibited exploration? During the most negative moment I experienced in the training, and perhaps a moment that will continue to shape my ideologies as an educator for years to come, the facilitator suddenly turned to me and announced one of my weaknesses as a performer in front of the entire group. In this moment:

I felt like I had been told that I was wrong, and this feeling made me feel very socially withdrawn. I chose not to participate for the remainder of class because I was second-guessing all of my previous choices and was sure that if I did go up, it would be in a preconceived attempt to negate his comment. (13 Aug. 2009)
However, because of this negative experience, I reflected:

How do you shape [Viewpoints]? The notion of just letting people play or giving broad, generic notes concerns me that a cast would end up disconnected and unaware of how their work is translating to the audience. However, our facilitator sharing these individual notes made me feel judged about the quality of my work, which made me contribute less to the group. When looking at how one is developing as an individual within a cast, how do you let that self-awareness develop while still allowing for exploration and freedom within the work? (13 Aug. 2009)

I cannot blame the facilitator for my negative response, for I do not know the solution to this challenge. Had he set up the training so that he (or others) pointed out weaknesses earlier in the process, would the collective have made less progress due to inhibitions and fear of receiving criticism? Or would it make us each stronger, more self-aware contributors to the group?

**Structuring a Seemingly Unstructured Technique**

While some of the choices made by the facilitators seemed to work against my personal goals as a facilitator and director, many of their choices will inform my ideologies in a positive way. Most notably, the facilitators made an effort to provide structure to Viewpoints training, which can often feel vague and without structure. During many of the initial exercises, their emphasis on free exploration caused me to feel lost and confused. However, once the group established the basic knowledge and tools, the facilitators guided us to explore Viewpoints in more structured exercises. In one of these instances:
We saw two open scenes, one that focused on presenting a minimalist scene where choices were as small as possible, and a second with bold, loud, "maximalist" choices. … As a performer in the minimalist scene, I absolutely felt more connected to the other group members than I had in previous open scene exercises. We all knew that we were working toward a common goal, and we had to intensely pay attention to one another because we were all trying to figure out what a minimalist open Viewpoints scene looked like. Because of that, we found a great deal of repetition and subtlety in our scene, and we all worked together while staying true to our own personalities. From the response of the audience, our scene had a lot of life to it and showed great kinesthetic awareness of one another. … The “maximalist” scene, while a very different beast, was a similar situation and a hugely successful scene. Because of this, I question what dangers there might be to only practicing open scenes without any shape or form. … I think there is validity to letting an ensemble experience total freedom and to use the vocabulary of Viewpoints to explore that freedom. However, for the purpose of developing an ensemble and an awareness of one another, it seems that offering structure within the open Viewpoints is the most conducive. Through the minimalistic structure, I found the confidence to really collaborate and play with my fellow group members… (11 Aug. 2009)

Upon reflection, I realize the success I think the class experienced in improvising minimalist and “maximalist” scenes addresses the negativities experienced in the previous moments my journal outlined. I felt successful as a performer because I had a jumping-off point
to base my performance on, but still had enough opportunity to freely play within the structure of the exercise. The class seemed to feel successful when we participated in exercises that focused us as a group. How could the facilitators then shape these exercises to address the needs of the group (or even individuals within the group), rather than directly criticizing a scene or individual (which, despite their efforts to constructively form criticism, might be ill received)? For example, if a group is getting too scattered and too over-the-top with their choices, perhaps you guide the group to perform a minimalist scene, which would encourage them to simplify their choices and to be more attuned with one another. I propose that making this choice as a facilitator could guide the ensemble in a way that would then provide ample opportunity to point out successes. Thus, the facilitator could still shape the choices made by the ensemble without making negative points or drawing attention to weaknesses, which tend to cause ensemble members to withdraw.

Response as an Educator and Director

As an educator and director, I find myself excited to move forward and, as Bogart and Landau would support, continue to shape Viewpoints to fit my own needs and ideas. I left the two-week intensive training feeling liberated by my ability to do this, but unsure of what this states for my research. After my final course, I reflected:

… I have many questions about whether I could have facilitated this work differently to yield a different result. Would I focus more on individual and group devising, to encourage individuals to get to a place where they were solidifying their decisions at an earlier stage in the training? Would I begin encouraging students to make observations using the Viewpoints vocabulary earlier in the
process, so that peer-led feedback would be the accepted and understood norm?

However, would doing so short-change students of the opportunity to merely play with the vocabulary to discover what it means? (14 Aug. 2009)

Because this training raised so many valuable questions about the application of Viewpoints technique, I entered my next directing opportunity with high school actors unsure of how I would alter their experience from my own training. Would facilitating this technique differently than it was presented during the two-week intensive yield different results? Based on how differently the facilitators approached the technique than Bogart and Landau in *The Viewpoints Book*, I realized just how essential the facilitator is to shaping the experience of an ensemble. In my final reflection on the two-week intensive, I stated:

I am quite certain that the focus of the training and its value for the social cognitive development of a group is dependent on the attitude, techniques, and choices of the facilitator more than it is the nature of the training itself. The two facilitators I worked with are infinitely unique and fascinating human beings. Because of that and because of the nature of education in general, who they are and how they think greatly impacted my experience within this course and my understanding of the techniques. (14 Aug. 2009)

I now understand that I, as the facilitator, possess the tremendous and overwhelming power to shape the experiences of my students. I cannot simply facilitate Viewpoints and expect social and cognitive growth for the individuals in the ensemble. Rather, my own awareness of the developing social cognition of high school ensemble members can inform the choices that I make as a facilitator or director. A correlation between social cognitive development theory and
Viewpoints is not inherent in the application of the theatre technique, but I can incorporate my understanding of SCD theory and allow it to influence how I facilitate Viewpoints with high school actors. This greatly changes my objective within this study, from applying Viewpoints and monitoring the results to explicitly manipulating Viewpoints to best address my goals as a facilitator.

Beyond shaping my research, this realization will alter the ways in which I view myself as a facilitator and how I apply techniques with my students. No given technique can be expected to yield specific results with any given facilitator. Instead, it is the duty of the facilitator to understand the reasons that led him or her to the utilization of the technique and to explore the ways he or she may alter or adjust that technique to best serve his or her objectives. This realization shifts my entire perspective on the responsibilities behind serving as a facilitator, and encourages me to more deeply understand the difference between learning from a human being as opposed to learning from a book.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE APPLICATION OF VIEWPOINTS WITH A HIGH SCHOOL CAST

The two-week SITI intensive offered me a new perspective on Viewpoints and its relationship to social cognitive development theory, but I could only hypothesize on how a high school student would respond to this technique. However, I then received the opportunity to test the application of Viewpoints as a facilitator and director while focusing on the social cognitive development of an individual and the overall growth of the ensemble. I applied the training with a group of high school actors during a fully mounted production in order to test my projected responses to the two-week intensive. The theatre, production, and ensemble members will remain unnamed. Due to the sensitivity of conducting this research, many elements went largely undocumented; to maintain their privacy and to maintain the artistic focus of the production, tests and interviews were not conducted with the ensemble members.

Over a four-week period, I rehearsed an ensemble-driven piece of theatre with a group of fourteen actors between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. The piece incorporated abstract movement, choral speak, and actors playing multiple characters. To enable the actors to develop this movement, to develop a strong sense of ensemble, and to differentiate between their multiple characters, I introduced the actors to Viewpoints training and theory.

Four weeks of afternoon rehearsals was a very condensed period with these high school actors, who came to the process with a wide scope of experience and understanding of theatre. Where in the past I may have bypassed the focus on Viewpoints training due to these time constraints, I knew that incorporating formal training would be imperative to the development of this show. While ideally we would have devoted even more time to training, we integrated
Viewpoints into the auditions, focused on it heavily during the first few rehearsals, and then used it occasionally for exercises, warm-ups, and as a vocabulary for feedback throughout the process. The following chapter explores my account of how the ensemble utilized Viewpoints, how it shaped the ensemble, and how these observations impact my research on the social cognitive development of a high school actor.

**Viewpoints in the Audition Process**

Because the production relied heavily on abstract movement, I sought actors who were comfortable creating collaboratively and using their bodies and imaginations. The callbacks consisted of several exercises to evaluate how the actors worked independently and in groups. First, actors worked independently but simultaneously. I explained the differences between behavioral (concrete) and expressive (abstract) gesture, and asked each actor to create different gestures exploring how the character he or she auditioned for might respond to different emotions. The actors then picked one gesture and explored it at different tempos, which allowed me to see if an actor was capable of controlling his or her body enough to differentiate each separate tempo, and if he or she connected different tempos with shifts in emotion.

The actors then moved in small groups on a grid, where I was able to see an actor’s kinesthetic awareness of the fellow performers. Each actor introduced one line of dialogue from a memorized monologue from the play, which brought another element into the grid to which actors could respond.

Finally, the actors created individual pieces that contained at least one behavioral gesture, one expressive gesture, and one line of dialogue repeated three times. During this moment, I
really challenged the actors to create independently. Some actors intuitively found variety within the three repetitions of text, and some actors used the prompt as a starting off point and incorporated additional movement, while other performers showed their fears by only completing the bare minimum of the prompt.

Through this audition process, I observed how the actors worked independently, how they worked in a large group, and how they worked as creators. When I asked actors for feedback on the audition process, some of them expressed that it felt “weird” or “different,” but they also expressed excitement in feeling like they were playing during what is generally a very tense circumstance. Rather than feeling like they were scrutinized during the audition process, they were engaged creatively and walked away from the audition with tools to use in future acting endeavors to develop character and generate blocking. The environment felt positive and focused during the audition.

I did not realize the impact of introducing Viewpoints during the audition process until I reflected on the social cognitive development of the members of the ensemble and the development of the ensemble as a whole. Truthfully, I think more so than Viewpoints shaping the ensemble during the rehearsal process, using Viewpoints during auditions helped me gain a much greater understanding of the personality types than traditional audition structure allows. Many individuals who came to the first round of auditions with polished and impressive monologues seemed withdrawn or aggressive during the callbacks. The withdrawn individuals seemed to solely focus internally, or relied heavily on other people to inform their own choices. The aggressive individuals refused to use the exercises as purely exercises, and rather performed the exercises in an attempt to impress me.
Mascolo and Margolis would label the actors that stood out to me during callbacks as “popular” individuals. These individuals embraced the challenges presented to them during the Viewpoints training, and worked in a way that was not obtrusive or showy, but that displayed a confidence and enthusiasm about the work at hand. Regardless of whether or not I saw them developing what one might consider the most “entertaining” work, I became captivated with these individuals because of their sensitivity to the different Viewpoints presented to them. They took the training seriously, acknowledging that the “weird” moments were also the moments in which they felt the most vulnerable. Most importantly, they possessed the intersubjectivity to realize that they all felt vulnerable, and thus supported the fellow actors auditioning beside them.

Reflecting on this audition experience, I instinctually cast ensemble members based on personality type over talent. Each cast member shared the descriptions of popular as outlined by Mascolo and Margolis: an easy temperament, the ability to set and attain personal goals while maintaining friendships, and sensitivity to the feelings of the other ensemble members (291). This brings up an interesting point regarding casting and personality types. Did I fear casting rejected-aggressive or -withdrawn individuals? How would incorporating them into the rehearsal process have shifted the overall experience and my study? This presents challenges within the process versus product debate – perhaps, if looking at the overall process, I may have cast individuals that needed the most social and cognitive growth. However, when focused on the product of the production, I subconsciously cast the group of actors that I saw as the most conducive to a strong product because I knew their personalities would lend themselves to a smoother, more manageable rehearsal period.
Looking at my experience, I complicated my study by choosing to cast these popular individuals. While variety in personalities still existed among the cast, no individual was fully rejected-aggressive or rejected-withdrawn, although one individual did stand out as more withdrawn than his cast members. I cast this actor because I needed his physique to play particular roles, and I felt confident that I could help him develop the social and acting skills needed to thrive in this production. Interestingly, when I felt as though I needed him for the production, I overlooked his personality tendencies. As the rehearsal process began, he became increasingly more withdrawn until he dropped out of the production. The actor I replaced him with would qualify as a popular individual, and at several points the other actors commented on how the new actor made the cast feel complete.

Because I did not have a prolonged opportunity to work with the original withdrawn actor, I do not have a clear perception on how I would move through the rehearsal process to accommodate the growth of rejected-aggressive or -withdrawn actors. However, I believe integrating Viewpoints so heavily into the audition process was paramount in piecing together a group of individuals capable of becoming one of the most intuitive, sensitive ensembles with which I have ever worked. While the auditions were not responsible for teaching or developing these values, the auditions allowed me to quickly see which individuals were ready to be challenged by this advanced technique. Using Viewpoints during auditions ultimately benefitted my efforts to use Viewpoints during rehearsals by helping me identify ensemble members prepared for this advanced level of social interaction and co-creation.
Viewpoints in the Rehearsal Process

Because the actors within this ensemble came to the experience with a wide variety of acting experience, I focused on utilizing Viewpoints toward basic actor training. Basic warm-ups such as sun salutations, moving on the grid, or jogging in a circle helped the actors mentally attune themselves to one another and build focus. In one of the actors’ favorite exercises, “Tag Shape,” an actor would step into the circle and create a frozen image using his or her body. A second and third actor would add to this frozen image, and then actors would take turns fluidly coming in or out of the image so that no more than three actors were in the center, allowing the shape to constantly shift and take on new forms (Bogart and Landau 58). This exercise gave the actors a free, yet structured, way to explore different Viewpoints, including shape, gesture, and spatial relationship. The actors responded well to this exercise because it allowed them to work in a group while still making clear individual choices, and seeing the different shapes provided just as much creative stimulation for the observers as building the shapes did for the performers.

While Tag Shape and other exercises focused on the whole group, I integrated certain activities to focus on the individual. These exercises focused on making specific physical choices to convey character and emotion. One exercise, which Bogart and Landau outline in The Viewpoints Book, requires the actor to create various portraits, or frozen poses, to express different aspects of his or her character: something the character fears, loves, fantasizes about, et cetera (172). This exercise aided the ensemble in developing the backstory of the characters and making specific expressive or behavioral gestures to convey their characters.

In direct response to my experiences during the two-week intensive, I worked to promote an environment of reflection and response. In the aforementioned activity, we watched each
actor’s series of portraits and then responded with phrases about what it made us think. For example, an actor might respond to another actor’s portraits by saying, “It made me think about how lonely love can be.” This method of reflection and response encouraged the other actors to think about one another’s work and provide feedback to the actor on how his or her portraits were received, while doing so in a way that preserved the expression of the actor by remaining uncritical. Similarly, in an extension of Tag Shapes, the observing actors would offer titles to the images they observed. This offered another low impact way for the observing actors to contribute and offer responses to the work created by the other actors without defining “right” or “wrong” choices.

With these basic exercises, the actors developed the Viewpoints vocabulary, which then brought the training into our work with the text. The nature of this particular text did not lend itself to being blocked by one person. The actors needed to experiment with it and feel the movement in their bodies. Therefore, I frequently sent a small group of actors away to work through a particular section of text. I would send them alone or with additional ensemble members to serve as critical eyes. This technique supported Hartup’s notion that adolescents benefit more greatly through peer interaction than through interactions with adults, which often leads to conformity (219). The ensemble members were propelled to a place of higher creativity by working off one another’s ideas, and by the ownership they felt in creating the movement themselves.

The movement created during these explorations often remained experimental and fluid. For example, in a sequence where two actors morphed into birds, I asked the actors to return with three physical images of what these animals might look like. In another example and one of
the most delicate moments to block in the production, two actors had to develop abstract movement that symbolized making love three nights in a row. In this instance, I sent the actors out with a peer director and the task to “find three ways to touch each other without touching each other.”

When the actors returned with their tasks, we were then able to work on shaping their ideas into cohesive blocking. I would again return to the Viewpoints vocabulary in this part of the process by giving actors specific notes on how to further develop this movement. Rather than telling the actors specifics, I would challenge them to find an opportunity for repetition, reconsider a shape, or find moments to vary the tempo. In the bird example, I encouraged the actors to explore tempo in order to find variety between the transformation process and the celebration of becoming birds. In the example with the two characters making love, I coached the actors to incorporate repetition, which they did by finding one gesture to mirror with each other and repeat three times (one time for each night). This process acknowledged and accepted the work of the actors, and further engaged the actors to incorporate these specific tasks.

Defining Personality Types and Characteristics within the Cast

Even though applying Viewpoints to the audition process helped select a group of high school actors who largely displayed a high caliber of social cognitive development, variety inevitably existed among the group. Specifically, certain ensemble members tended to be more dominant and others more submissive. While Mascolo and Margolis recognize sliding along the dominating-submissive continuum, every individual has a place where he or she lives the most
comfortably. While a lot of strong personalities existed within the cast for this production, there were clearly some individuals that were more dominant and some that were more submissive.

As this process progressed, I realized that I did not seek to balance each individual in the cast as I originally predicted. Looking back, I realize that an ensemble full of neutral individuals would lack tension, and vigor; where is the conflict Bogart insists is healthy if no one tries to dominate? And how are decisions ever made? Rather than trying to neutralize the ensemble, I merely tried to find opportunities for each extreme to feel its opposite. For example, the dominant individuals in the cast were forced to submit in order for the entire cast to succeed in the sun salutations, where the objective of the actors is to move in unison with no clear leaders or followers. And when I asked one of the most submissive actors to create a movement piece on her own, I challenged her to dominate that moment with her own creativity and decisiveness. In this way, I acknowledged where each ensemble member naturally resided along that continuum, and then pushed them to also live momentarily in the opposite, just as the facilitators pushed the participants in the two-week training intensive. As a result, the individuals in the cast appeared invigorated and engaged because they were being challenged. In addition, because I was analyzing their personality types on an individual basis, I was not pushing any actors to too great an extreme, so the actors also appeared comfortable and confident within their roles.

The most essential way in which the research of Mascolo and Margolis emerged was in helping me identify the natural tendencies of each of the actors. This understanding helped me to group actors together in a way that would prove the most productive – for example, in the abstract movement made by the actors playing character making love to one another, I recognized that the two actors were both submissive. Because of this realization, I grouped them
with a more dominant peer, which enabled them to make decisions and also put them under an intense critical eye. In one large fight scene, the actor whose character instigated the fight tended toward the dominant side of the spectrum. He naturally became the leader for that group, but because all of the actors in the scene contributed to the blocking they still felt valuable to the process.

Considering the Sociocultural Environment

In addition to defining the different personality tendencies within the ensemble, I used the research of Mascolo and Margolis to evaluate how the ensemble responded to the sociocultural environment due to the Viewpoints training. As addressed in Chapter One, the research of Mascolo and Margolis explores how an individual responds to and is aware of the following elements: the individual; persons; sociocultural context; objects; and meditational means. I equate these elements in the following theatre terms, respectively: the actor; ensemble members; the ensemble as a whole; the text of the play and the space surrounding the actors; and the Viewpoints training. At the start of my research, I asked how or if Viewpoints could help performers develop a more acute awareness of these individual components.

By analyzing the different ways in which I incorporated Viewpoints training, parallels surface regarding how each type of Viewpoints exercise was applied to look at each of these different elements of the sociocultural context. To begin, the exercise of creating a solo piece for auditions forced each ensemble member to focus on him or herself. In contrast, encouraging ensemble members to spend time both as performers and as observers, and asking observers to offer responses (the titles or the “It made me think” statements) in response to performers helped
the actors focus on the other ensemble members. Finally, exercises such as the sun salutations
and moving in circles challenged actors to focus both on themselves as individuals and also to
focus on the ensemble as a whole. Through this, individuals realized their value and worth as a
contributor to the whole ensemble, and an appreciation for both the parts and the whole
developed among the cast.

In addition, I previously struggled with high school actors who did not give emphasis to
the text itself; actors developed character choices or blocking that were not informed by or went
explicitly against the text. In this particular production, the cast as a whole valued the script in a
way unlike any previous show I directed. I believe this drew from my focus as a director to
developing Viewpoints exercises that aligned with the text. From the very beginning during
auditions, actors explored movement fused together with the text in the solo movement pieces
where they were asked to repeat a piece of text three times. Actors explored gesture and shape
using the characters from the text as an inspiration, as in the piece where they created multiple
portraits for one specific character. Thus, when it came time to create movement for the
production, the actors had been conditioned to look to the text for inspiration. For example, in
one scene an actor embodied hunger. While the character of hunger only spoke a few words, a
narrator went into great detail about hunger’s physical qualities and mannerisms. The actor
instinctively looked to the narration to inform her movement, and developed nuances down to
her spine and fingertips that brought the brief appearance of this character to full life.

Similarly, the ensemble placed great impetus on the additional “objects” – the set, props,
and space surrounding the production. This production incorporated a large body of water the
actors moved in and around, making it a particularly integral component of the show. Because of
this, the actors had no choice but to be acutely sensitive to the space around them; their safety
and wellbeing depended on it! However, the exercises they experienced through Viewpoints also
assisted with this, for all of the Viewpoints exercises work on focus and sensory awareness. With
this heightened awareness, actors could respond to the fluid (pun intended) shift in their
surroundings at a moment’s notice.

The meditational means, the Viewpoints training itself, earned a great amount of focus
from the ensemble. The technique became revered by the ensemble due to the ritualistic aspects
of Viewpoints training (such as the soft focus, the sun salutations, moving in unison, or standing
in circles). The actors expressed appreciation in learning such an advanced and challenging
technique, and saw the technique as an opportunity to develop their skills. The Viewpoints
became the glue that held together the ensemble’s awareness of all of the other components of
the sociocultural environment.

**Realizations and Challenges**

Through this experience, I realized the value of Viewpoints in helping shape an
ensemble. Whether or not the Viewpoints training developed the social cognitive development
of each individual ensemble member remains unseen, as this growth occurs over a lengthened
period of time. However, since I applied Viewpoints technique in the audition, I successfully
selected a group of actors that already operated from a place of advanced social cognition for
their age by observing their responses to the Viewpoints training and how they worked both
individually and in the group. Thus, it appears that Viewpoints has the ability to help a director
identify the personality tendencies of an individual actor to determine their placement within an ensemble.

Additionally, I experienced how time saving Viewpoints became in the long run, which I bring up due to the resistance by many high school educators to incorporate technique into a rehearsal process due to time constraints and various levels of experience among the cast. While I felt those same tensions, I became determined to at least occasionally incorporate Viewpoints due to my commitment to offering basic acting training to the ensemble members. Viewpoints became the perfect tool with which to challenge the experienced ensemble members and initiate discussions about movement and character choices with novice performers. Ultimately, those exercises and discussions led to stronger choices by the performers. In addition, emphasizing the technique in the forefront enabled the actors to independently generate blocking as the rehearsal period progressed. While I worked with the actors to shape movement after they created it by giving them notes about the utilization of Viewpoints, this technique saved time (and also gave the actors ownership in the work). I recall past productions where I turned to actors to create their own blocking in an effort to help them co-create. Remembering how paralyzed the actors were in these instances, I realized that I did not first give them the tools with which to perform these creative tasks.

While I did successfully incorporate Viewpoints at the beginning and throughout the process, I wish I could have incorporated even more. As the process progressed, the focus turned to making sure we were on track for the performances, and the technique and training was tossed to the wayside. Although the actors got the basic tools needed to develop characters and generate blocking from this, a continued emphasis on Viewpoints could have helped the actors to continue
building as an ensemble and to further develop their heightened sensory awareness. However, at what point do such exercises actually inhibit a cast from moving forward in the process? Perhaps this dance between process-based technique and moving toward product will always exist.

I also encountered some challenges when trying to discern where individuals fit within the different personality types defined by Mascolo and Margolis. While the auditions helped me clarify this, some exercises used in the rehearsal process muddied my picture of each ensemble member. I approached the process as a fusion of what I learned from The Viewpoints Book, my previous training, and what I learned during the two-week intensive. What my instructors asserted appeared true: it occasionally became difficult to discern an individual’s strengths and weaknesses when looking at the whole ensemble. Perhaps with time and more experience I could further develop an eye that could assess each group member on an individual basis. And perhaps different productions that do not call for such a sense of ensemble could utilize exercises that focus more on the individual. In the future I plan to incorporate more individualized movement and creation in order to better gauge the progression of each individual cast member.

However, the main challenge presented with this study is not the application of the technique itself, but subjectively measuring the effectiveness of the technique. How am I to determine whether Viewpoints assisted the development of this strong ensemble, or whether it was simply luck that everything fell together? Was it a matter of casting? (How would this application have changed if I did not incorporate Viewpoints into the audition, so that perhaps some of the ensemble members did not naturally tend toward it – or if the withdrawn actor that I originally cast remained in the production?) Or was it my emphasis, as the director, on the importance of ensemble – regardless of what technique or theory I utilized? Finally, as an artist
and scholar, how do I responsibly measure the social cognitive development of an individual or the growth of an ensemble without sacrificing the artistic focus of a piece? In this particular instance I opted to focus on the art itself, and because of that my assessment of the application of Viewpoints is solely based on personal account. Does this negate my research?

While the measurability of my practical experience remains uncertain, I will carry with this research a new perspective on the application of Viewpoints training within my work as a director. This practical experience reinforced that through my focus as a facilitator, I possess the ability to focus Viewpoints training toward developing the overall ensemble, although enhancing one member’s social cognitive development may require more time and individualized training.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

In this research, I sought to analyze how applying Viewpoints and Composition technique with a cast of high school theatre performers could affect the development of their social cognition and sense of ensemble. After conducting the research, I realize a few key elements that challenge the very formation of my guiding question.

First, I realize how convoluted my research became when looking at the social cognitive development of an individual, the SCD of an entire group, and the more ambiguous sense of ensemble. Because I did not formally assess each individual within the cast at the beginning and end of the production using scales, surveys, or interviews, measuring any concrete shifts in social cognitive development proved challenging.

Through gaining knowledge in SCD theory, I now question if scales or surveys would even have done this study justice. We as humans shift subtly from moment to moment, just as Mascolo and Margolis suggest sliding back and forth along the dominating-submissive continuum. Any permanent shifts in one’s cognitive development would occur slowly over a prolonged period of time, and I believe attempting to measure these shifts over a four-week period would lead to skewed results.

In this way, my research has only begun. I am fortunate that I worked with high school actors that I see almost daily, for I can continue to informally assess their more subtle moment to moment shifts along the continuum, as well as any broader shifts they may experience over time. While Mascolo and Margolis see some personality components as absolute, my experience challenges that notion. I believe that humans, especially during their formative years, are constantly shifting, and I am not interested in (nor am I qualified to) diagnosing my students. I
will continue to use my knowledge of Mascolo and Margolis to assess the current needs of my actors, but monitoring their needs over time may uncover new truths to my study.

In order to make this research pertinent to a four-week production period, I shifted my research to focus more on how I as a facilitator used my gathered knowledge in social cognitive development theory to assess actors’ current levels of development, and how I adjusted the application of Viewpoints to fit their personality types. I further complicated this research, however, by introducing Viewpoint training into the callback process for the production I directed. When I facilitated individual and group Viewpoints exercises, it quickly became clear to me which actors Mascolo and Margolis would define as “popular.” With the desire to build the strongest cast possible, I instinctively created a cast of predominantly “popular” actors. Were I to allow the focus of the research to outweigh the focus on the production, perhaps I would have purposefully cast more variety in personality types. However, even among a cast of popular individuals, variations existed among individuals in the cast and even from moment to moment, which still allowed me to gather information on how to address those subtle shifts along the continuum.

During the two-week SITI training where I experienced the role of the student, I observed that my own personality type (withdrawn-rejected and submissive) responded negatively to direct feedback from the facilitator. When the facilitator pinpointed my tendency to look to other actors for guidance, I felt exposed and self-conscious. In response to this I made specific choices as a director, such as encouraging low-contact forms of peer response (for example, responding to an actor’s performance with “it made me think” statements) to allow actors to hear responses to their work without exposing their individual personality tendencies. As a student, I also
noticed that I felt the most successful, and thus the most “popular,” when the facilitator gave us a specific way to focus an open Viewpoints exercise by instructing us to make minimalistic choices. Because the meditational means of Viewpoints can feel so broad and ambiguous, that simple piece of focus helped guide the group of performers in the same direction, which encouraged us to connect with one another. I used this successful experience to inform my choices as a director by giving the actors specific instructions to focus the choreographic blocking they created. For example, when I gave the actors in the transforming into birds scene the task to find variety in tempo, they felt successful with the blocking they had already created, and were engaged in the process by being given a specific task to complete.

Whether because I assembled a cast of predominantly popular individuals, or because I applied Viewpoints in a way that addressed each individual’s needs and made each individual feel successful, the cast of actors developed a profound sense of ensemble. The immeasurability of the amorphous idea of ensemble makes it difficult to know which elements of the process enabled this success, but I did achieve my initial goal as the director. Again, I remain puzzled on how, or if, one can differentiate between the social cognitive development of a group and the sense of ensemble. Ultimately I believe the most I could hope for in one production would be for the actors to experience a strong ensemble in the hope that such an experience would give them a clear picture of effective collaboration, which would aid in their long-term social cognitive development.

Regarding the application of Viewpoints, this realization gave me a better understanding of the impact a facilitator has on the presentation of a technique. I posit that perhaps any facilitator who hopes to focus on the social cognitive development of an individual or the overall
sense of ensemble could cater any technique or methodology to address that. Within the high school cast I directed, we focused on Viewpoints training in order to strengthen the ensemble; the application of this technique yielded positive results for creating cohesion and collaboration within the group. In order to produce these results, I had to shift my thinking and realize that Viewpoints did not possess an inherent ability to create an ensemble. Rather, the power to cultivate ensemble exists within me, but I need to assess my own goals as a facilitator and how I can shape Viewpoints in order to activate it.

My research also questioned the value of focusing on social cognitive development in theatre, and how and if Viewpoints addressed SCD. Again, my experience both as a student and a facilitator points me toward the director and/or facilitator. The value of focusing on SCD rests in the facilitator identifying where each ensemble member falls along the dominating-submissive continuum and what personality type (popular, rejected-aggressive, rejected-withdrawn) he or she most possesses. Once identified, the facilitator may place the ensemble member in scenarios that will challenge him or her to shift along the continuum and to experience the roles of other personality types. As I have mentioned before, even within the high school cast of predominantly popular individuals, some individuals tended to be more dominant or more submissive. Specific Viewpoints exercises demand that actors move in and out of their comfort zones, such as Tag Shape, which encourages individuals to constantly shift in and out of role as actor or observer, and sun salutations, which challenges actors to move in unison without a clear leader or follower. Helping each ensemble member shift along the continuum did not change his or her tendencies, but helped him or her gain a new perspective of their fellow ensemble members, developing an awareness of others.
During the two-week intensive training, I saw this idea realized. When our facilitators challenged ensemble members to constantly shift focus, it worked to enhance each individual’s social awareness: while an ensemble member may have still found comfort in their natural tendencies, whether working independently or off the influence of others, this challenge pushed him or her to experience the opposite. Thus, everyone slid along the dominating-submissive continuum, as he or she influenced others (dominated), allowed others to influence him or her (submitted), or worked independently. Furthermore, the focus on taking time to observe and allow the participating ensembles to teach through performing also created a role reversal: popular individuals were encouraged to withdraw (observer), while withdrawn individuals gained confidence from serving as the popular individual (performer and teacher).

Viewpoints also naturally addresses the elements of a sociocultural environment as defined by Mascolo and Margolis. Within Viewpoints each of these elements are addressed: exercises focus on the individual, fellow ensemble members, and the ensemble as a whole. The exercises also encourage ensemble members to develop an awareness of what Mascolo and Margolis define as “objects,” or the space and the text. For example, exercises incorporating the architecture or topography of a room consider the space, and exercises that incorporate text from the play or explore character development give focus to the text. Finally, the ritualistic nature of the Viewpoints exercises encourages the ensemble to pay careful consideration to the meditational means, or the Viewpoints training itself. Developing an acute hypersensitivity of all of these elements through Viewpoints training encourages ensemble members to look at the whole, and I believe that this all-encompassing perspective will ultimately strengthen the self. Using Viewpoints exercises I saw the high school ensemble with which I worked gain an
understanding and appreciation of the bigger picture, which shaped them into more generous ensemble members and performers.

My research also questioned ways in which focusing on social cognitive development and Viewpoints shifted when working with high school ensemble members. The research I found, coupled with my personal experiences, support how adolescents long for peer interaction and approval, making this age essential for focusing equally on social cognitive skills as well as theatre techniques. Thus, the shift came in stepping back and giving the ensemble members equal weight and value, a great challenge due to my director-centered tendencies. However, through doing this, the ensemble members developed a stronger bond, and I gained mutual respect with them, which then allowed me to work with them to shape their work, rather than forcing them to conform to my demands. With Viewpoints, I only changed the technique slightly in order to focus on social cognitive development theory and to cater to their varied levels of theatre experience. While I simplified the technique, the ensemble members also became engaged in Viewpoints because they knew it was an advanced technique. High school students tend to thrive on things labeled as adult or mature, and the ensemble seemed motivated by knowing the intensity of this technique, so I only changed it by shifting how I facilitated the format of their peer responses and focusing on one Viewpoint or objective at a time.

Additionally, my research initially asked how the practical experience would inform my future work with high school actors. If anything, this served as confirmation that adolescents can handle this advanced theory and are motivated by the complexity of it. As a training technique, it actually worked to level the playing field for the actors, since the steps of Viewpoints are relatively simple but also allow advanced performers to challenge themselves. It became a
successful tool for me to accommodate actors by pushing advanced performers and simply encouraging novice performers to participate and explore. Because of the versatility of this technique, all of the cast members gained enough understanding so individuals or small groups of cast members could work to generate blocking. When actors created some of the most intricate and challenging blocking independently, Viewpoints then became a useful tool to offer feedback on the blocking. I only had to say, “Look at the repetition here,” and the ensemble members understood it.

I see great value in high school educators and directors possessing an awareness and understanding of social cognitive development theory. As I explored this from a student perspective, I gained invaluable insight about myself by determining where I fit into Mascolo and Margolis’ research and then identifying moments when I shifted because of my Viewpoints training. Realizing that I tend to be submissive, but then seeing moments where I became the dominant creator in a group of individuals, and evaluating the liberation or sense of discomfort I felt because of that shift, gave me a new perspective of myself. Because of the SITI intensive training, I was able to better assess where the actors I directed fell along the dominating-submissive continuum and the different personality types. Once I defined the actors’ comfort areas, it became merely a matter of finding ways in which to challenge them to live outside of their comforts.

I will continue to utilize Viewpoints and Composition training in my work as a director and educator, and look forward to finding ways to structure Viewpoints training so that adolescents can develop as both artists and individuals. Placing myself in the role of the student during the training motivated me to reflect back on my own traits as a high school theatre student
– scared, uncertain, and unsure of how to contribute to the art. I realize how much I owe it to the young actors with whom I work to help them grow socially and to help them develop into co-contributing artists.
APPENDIX: JOURNAL
3 Aug. 2009

While I’m not sure how the focus will shift throughout this course, the main thing that surprised me today was the emphasis on the individual. It manifested itself in several key ways during our class, and it caught me off guard because I previously thought of Viewpoints as an ensemble-based technique (though still applicable and beneficial to the individual).

I should also interject here that I am interested to see how Suzuki and Viewpoints inform one another, and how they also inform my study. My research up until now has focused primarily on Viewpoints and social cognitive development. This causes me to question why I see one (Viewpoints) as more applicable to a high school ensemble than the other (Suzuki). I think I need to search for a personal link between the two, as SITI has clearly found a way that the two offer a unique balance within their own work. So the reflections that I am providing here touch on moments that were experienced in either the Suzuki portion or the Viewpoints portion of the workshop.

When we were working on the Suzuki training, our facilitator asked for half of the group to take a seat and observe. This concept of learning through observing is something I have seen reflected in this training as well as in writings on Viewpoints. He then stated that there are three components that must be present for successful learning: imitation, repetition, and teaching. Thus, the half of the class that is observing is learning how to imitate those that perform successfully (or to pinpoint wrong movements and not imitate them), while the half of the class that is performing is teaching through doing so.

This notion struck me when thinking about the different roles that adolescents play as according to Mascolo and Margolis. It seems as though in general, the popular adolescents would
fall under the role of teacher (imitatee), while the withdrawn adolescents would serve as observers (imitators). The technique of having participants switch roles between the two would seem to blur that separation. To further that, the concept of learning from those that succeed as well as those that fail could empower the withdrawn. My facilitator kept emphasizing failing over and over within Suzuki and never getting it right, but focusing on that struggle toward success. Because of that, the withdrawn would feel empowered to embrace that failure not only as a means of growth, but also as a vital teaching tool for the other group members.

While I was expecting the Suzuki portion to be a little more isolated, I was not expecting the Viewpoints portion to be as much. The slant that our facilitator took really shifted my focus when considering social cognitive development within my research. I think I was looking more so at the social cognitive development of the ensemble as a whole, and had not yet considered how the social cognitive development of the individual could shift his or her role within an ensemble.

We worked individually, but as we continued working, we began playing with shifting focus from internal to focusing on the group. As we worked in this manner, I was able to work entirely on my own but at times became aware of the movements of others or the fact that my own movement was being observed. With this, our facilitator brought up the idea of the dichotomy between the individual and influence: in order to allow the ensemble to influence one’s movement, one must first have an understanding of his or herself. The facilitator had us observe a scene: the audience area where all of our personal items were strewn. He then removed a water bottle and suggested that the scene is still complete without the water bottle, the water bottle is complete without the scene, and they are both complete when you combine them. To
further his idea, I must argue that the scene still shifts while the water bottle is not there. The scene is capable of functioning on its own and serving its purpose, yet it is different without the presence of the water bottle. However, this idea of the water bottle knowing what it is and what purpose it serves on its own before entering a scene really intrigues me. Perhaps, as an educator and director, I have been so focused on cultivating an ensemble I have not given enough attention to the individual in order to allow that ensemble to ultimately come to fruition.

4 Aug. 2009

Personally, I felt this immense sense of empowerment when Viewpoints shifted to working on the grid. We worked on exploring negative and positive space on the grid, which made me hyper sensitive to where other members of the ensemble were or were not. Because the location of these ensemble members was effecting my movement, I began wondering how frequently I was effecting their movement.

Because there is no sense of taking turns in Viewpoints, I had no way of knowing whether or not I was inspiring the movement in others. However, when I realized that I potentially had the power to do so, it grew my confidence and made me feel like part of the ensemble. In addition, I initially felt myself drawn toward the dominant personalities in the rooms – the facilitators and experienced people, or the “popular” individuals. However, because I was asked to constantly shift my focus to different individuals, objects, or space in the room, I was pushed to take in everyone and everything. This coupled with constantly being invited to sit down to observe and allow others to teach me put everyone else in the studio in a powerful position, which in turn made me realize my own position of power.
Perhaps it is for this reason – that no one person leads the most or has the most influence – that I feel as though our group is already building into an ensemble. I consider this a fascinating phenomenon, especially considering my past emphasis on ensemble building games and techniques. In these exercises, we have been asked to work individually. We have not been given much time to learn names or to talk to each other. However, I feel more comfortable moving, connecting, and creating with these people than perhaps I have with any other ensemble. I think that this grows out of this shared leadership and influence, and may also be due to the choice within structure that we experience. Since we are given so many options (choosing one of many ways to move within the grid, for example) we can focus on how to cater those options to push and challenge ourselves. Because of that, I am able to explore in my own way and since there is no wrong choice, I feel comfortable doing so.

However, this idea of choice within structure does raise some concerns for me in working with a high school ensemble. I wonder if there are ways that so many choices can more easily allow withdrawn actors to remain withdrawn. For example, the option to sit down in the audience and observe may become a safety net for actors. In addition, the ability to shift my focus to any person or object may make it easy for me to avoid eye contact with any individuals. This presents some challenges that I think are eliminated with more structured drama exercises – for example, a creative drama game where the objective requires you to touch or make eye contact with someone. While this is a concern, I have observed ways that the facilitator has combated this very concern, such as requiring everyone to be on stage or in the audience a certain number of times. I think with enough awareness, the facilitator can make such measures
as need be, but it may be beneficial to combine these activities with more structured ones when working with a novice group of theatre makers.

5 Aug. 2009

Today something very significant jumped out at me during our Viewpoints training: our facilitator made a comment that seemed to contradict Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s *The Viewpoints Book*. While I don’t recall the specific comment, I realized how many choices this facilitator made that varied from my interpretation of the book.

Somewhat tangentially, one of these choices specifically impacts the ways in which our ensemble is developing socially and cognitively. As my journal reflects, this facilitator dedicates a lot of attention to the idea of focus. What are we focusing on? Is our focus internal, something near, something far, or something infinite? This focus is not just a sensorial shift, but also can dictate whether we make choices independently or based on the influence of others. This varies from the idea of “soft focus” in *The Viewpoints Book*, where Landau and Bogart emphasize not focusing on one particular thing in order to be able to better take in the whole. Rather, our facilitator is encouraging us to play with soft or hard focus, internal or external focus, and varying degrees in between. As I mentioned in an earlier entry, this freedom concerned me because I worry about what will happen if high school ensemble members do not have to make eye contact in these exercises (although I also felt this concern when just dealing with the idea of soft focus). However, today our facilitator shifted this so that we could focus on anything except another human being. This choice comes from his belief that if we are given the freedom to look anywhere (as we had been), we will automatically look to other human beings. In looking at
other humans, we will look at them for ideas on what to do, what not to do, or for acceptance. What I experienced when I was not allowed to look at other humans was that I was still (perhaps even more acutely) aware of their choices, but I also felt more compelled to make my own choices and to work instinctively. I did not feel any less connected to them; I just felt a more profound connection.

Back to the idea of varying from the instructions in *The Viewpoints Book*, I am very intrigued by this. Bogart and Landau do not consider their book definitive; in fact, they encourage testing the possibilities. However, these are company members that work alongside Bogart and Landau regularly, and I was expecting them to teach it more according to the book. I am not sure if Bogart and Landau’s way is changing, or perhaps if these facilitators are allowing their own views to guide their choices within the course. Regardless, this leaves me questioning just how much of an impact the facilitator has on how Viewpoints is presented to the class and how it thus impacts the social cognitive development of the group. I find myself frustrated on how to even really dissect how this ever changing, openly imperfect, and open to interpretation technique impacts the social cognitive development of an individual. Is it purely up to the facilitator to decide how much of the focus of the training is on those elements?

6 Aug. 2009

As we continue our work, I begin to see more and more the vast differences between Suzuki and Viewpoints. While they are clearly two different beasts, when working with them in tandem they each inform one another. From the perspective of my research, I realize more and more that the ability to develop one’s social cognitive development through Suzuki is very
limited. Their cognitive development? Absolutely – this physical and mental training is developing my mind in exciting ways, pushing me to focus and to treat each moment on stage like it is life or death. Socially, I am learning to learn from others, to understand someone’s shortcomings, and to remain strong in a dominant environment (and yes, I do see the Suzuki facilitator as dominating, though not in a negative sense). Of course, these trainings ultimately strengthen the individual, which undoubtedly strengthens the ensemble. But, if not coupled with the opportunity for interaction that one finds in Viewpoints, I think Suzuki training could lose the potential for the growth and development of an ensemble.

Moving on to our Viewpoints training, today we reached a part in the training where I felt very scared and vulnerable. In addition to the basic gridwork we previously worked on (walking, standing, sitting, or kneeling) we added singing, dancing, and reciting text. These items, which are more open-ended and also more based in “talent,” made me feel very exposed. When looking at the development of the ensemble, I found it interesting to look at the path that the facilitator used. He began by having us sing our songs (any one song that each of us had previously selected) all on top of each other in a cacophony. This allowed each of us to place our focus entirely internally. We then shifted focus so that we were all still singing at once, but we were encouraged to pick different points of focus – still working independently but noticing and accepting the choices of other ensemble members. We then came in at random and sang a portion of our songs, only one of us singing at a time. This was the most vulnerable moment, because we were asked to lead, but did not know when it was our turn, how it would be accepted, or if we were doing it right. We took a similar path with freestyle dancing.
In this way, we were pushed to work without group members first. Because of that, when we began using our singing and dancing on the grid, it became very welcoming to dance with another, to dance in reflection or response to him or her, or to otherwise engage other members of the group. Had we skipped the first portion, I think we never would have gotten to experience that vulnerability that comes from having to sing or dance singularly and, therefore, the strength that comes from following through with it. I truly appreciated the ability to lean on other group members – to pull from their creativity, to use them in a moment when I felt lost – but only because I first experienced feeling isolated and on my own. Through this, I continue to realize that the ensemble is only strong if each individual is strong and vise versa. Using Viewpoints with merely a focus on the entire ensemble creates the potential for even one group member to fall by the wayside. A dual focus on both the individual and the ensemble makes the collective stronger than its parts, which is ultimately the goal.

7 Aug. 2009

During today’s Suzuki training, we partnered up and took turns performing the exercises and noting the performer. My first instinct was, “Aha! Peer-led teaching! Finally – something that I feel will truly grow the ensemble!” I think this is true; through giving one another feedback, we learn to communicate, accept criticism, and realize that we must help each other grow to strengthen our whole.

However, immediately following this, our facilitator announced that the purpose of doing this was to help us find some of the things that we needed to focus on, but ultimately we should “always pretend that that critical eye is there.” It’s the same idea as not practicing Suzuki in front
of a mirror: you want to develop that internal mirror by constantly addressing points of the technique and questioning whether or not you are doing it correctly.

This aspect once again brings me back to this idea of strengthening the individual to strengthen the ensemble. I recall times in the past when I have had a director or a teacher that may have given too much feedback. As much as I think we yearn for that as actors and students, I found myself turning off my internal mirror.

However, I will say from a social cognitive development perspective, the moment where I first shared feedback with the student that I was observing was perhaps the most alive and connected I have felt during this entire process. It was such a shift from the rest of our Suzuki (and Viewpoints) training, where we all worked in a very clear-cut student position. All of a sudden, I began noticing all of the million things wrong with my own work, and felt too humble and flawed to dare to give another student feedback. At the same time, I realized how much she was aching for the feedback, and I felt very motivated to give her specific, constructive comments. Thus, while this choice may have only been to prove a point and may not have been a conventional aspect of Suzuki training, it informed my training and my position within the ensemble in a really exciting way, bringing me back to this idea that it may be more so the choices of the facilitator than anything else.

During the Viewpoints training, I experienced something that hasn’t happened to me thus far this week. During a particular exercise, I did not want to get up. I don’t know what in particular made me not want to, but I just did not. In previous theatre training, I have beat myself up when feeling this way. I feel like I am not being a participatory student, I am unprepared, I don’t care about my craft, et cetera. However, today I felt just fine. I registered my desire to not
get up, questioned whether this came out of fear, uncertainty, or what, and realized that I frequently am on stage more than I am in the audience. So I decided that I was still actively participating by being an astute observer, and I spent the remainder of the exercise completely engaged and confident in my choice.

Ironically, at the end of the exercise, the facilitator commented on how we should all give attention to spending time in the audience, and should realize how much we can learn from it. I realized that frequently stereotypical theatre students are fighting for the opportunity to get up, to the point where they forget to learn through observation. At the risk of generalizing, our class is comprised of largely stereotypical theatre students. I realize that a high school ensemble might be comprised of many more introverted individuals. However, our training spends so much time focusing on the value of observation that I hope it would empower those individuals that generally spend more time in the audience. I certainly felt empowered today, and did not feel chained to my choice at all. Had the instinct struck or had I felt like I was getting too complacent in the audience, I believe I would have gone on stage. Regardless, I think during the tender years of adolescents, so many get intimidated or overwhelmed by the aggressive tendencies of a stereotypical theatre setting. While I would certainly encourage all of the cast members to find time both on the stage and in the audience, I believe that the focus on the power of the audience would bring significant growth and development to the more withdrawn high school cast members. I also think it is a piece of theatre in general (not just in the classroom or rehearsal process) that is oft forgotten.
I continue to slip and slide in my perception of Suzuki and what benefit it actually has to the ensemble, rather than merely being physical training. Today, we performed a complicated combination integrated with text, and then were paired up with individuals. We were asked to mirror one another performing this combination, making eye contact and focusing on the objective “to destroy the other.” Amusingly, this moment of trying to destroy my partner was a moment where I felt incredibly close to another classmate. While he and I worked to “destroy” each other, I also realized that I was teaching him, learning from him, giving him my energy, and taking energy from him. Additionally, focusing on destroying one another in this difficult exercise was so draining that I saw how each pair had a huge moment of release at the end of the exercise. Partners were not only shaking hands as a “truce,” they were hugging, laughing, and talking together. I found it so interesting – I think as a facilitator it is often my instinct that building ensemble means starting off with things that are going to make us hug, laugh, or talk. While I think such exercises have their merit, I think I have dedicated very little time to building ensemble through exercises that work on focus and discipline. Because this exercise was so challenging, we seemed to connect with each other through that. This idea is really shifting the way I think about developing ensemble.

As we continue to explore this idea of working independently or off the influence of someone or something else, I am continuing to see parallels between that and my research in social cognitive development. Today this was the main focus – we played openly in the space, alternating between working completely independently, working off the influence of one or more people or things, and being confined to moving together as a group. This created some pretty
visceral responses for me – I experienced the sudden solitude and paranoia in acting totally alone, and I experienced the fear of “messing up” and leading my group astray when we moved as a group.

Because of that, really focusing on this essence brought up some really interesting connections when thinking about the power dynamics found in a social group. For example, I feel as though I am frequently a submissive individual. Because of that, when we were forced to work independently I discovered that by letting others influence me in past exercises I was in effect submitting to them. That made allowing others to influence me a crutch in my work. In the same way, an aggressive individual might feel frustrated when moving together as a whole group by their inability to control the movement of the group, and therefore their own movement. Because this exercise isolated these instances and asked each of us to play with the differences, I was able to pinpoint my fears and safeties within Viewpoints and therefore gained a better understanding of where I fit into the group and where I have the most opportunity for growth and exploration.

However, while I was able to see where I best fit into the spectrum, I also experienced the “development of dominating interaction strategies” discussed by Mascolo and Margolis (296). Because we are getting away from less structured exercises (such as grid work) we are all having a lot of opportunity to work in different ways and interact with everyone in the group. Within that, I constantly feel myself shifting from dominant to submissive in any given instant. With today’s focus of shifting between working independently, with a small group, or as a whole, the body of people that my work focused on constantly shifted. For example, I would begin working by myself, and then one other person would join me. As the initiator of the movement, I would
feel dominant over that one person. However, if a third, stronger individual would join us, or if suddenly our focus would shift to a different part of the room, I would instantly feel submissive. I slid up and down this scale not only based on the choices of others, but also based on my own instincts and desires. If I realized I felt too disconnected from the rest of the group, I would submit to someone else by letting them inspire my choices. If I felt bored, I would take the initiative to start something new and exciting for myself, thereby taking a dominant role. Through this, I felt strongly connected to the group because there were no real leaders or followers, although a snapshot would reveal submissive and dominant individuals within that given moment.

11 Aug. 2009

One of the things that I love about working with one of our facilitators is that he frequently tries things that he’s never facilitated before. This leads for really exciting, fresh discoveries for the whole group. Today we worked with open improvisations, and I generally start to feel lost in those. Where with more structured exercises I find inspiration in focusing on more specific tasks, in open improvisations I start questioning my choices, not knowing what to do, and feel disconnected from the group.

However, our facilitator then completely shifted my mentality by giving the groups a specific focus. We saw two open scenes, one that focused on presenting a minimalist scene where choices were as small as possible, and a second with bold, loud, “maximalist” choices.

As a performer in the minimalist scene, I absolutely felt more connected to the other group members than I had in previous open scene exercises. We all knew that we were working toward a common goal, and we had to intensely pay attention to one another because we were all
trying to figure out what a minimalist open Viewpoints scene looked like. Because of that, we found a great deal of repetition and subtlety in our scene, and we all worked together while staying true to our own personalities. From the response of the audience, our scene had a lot of life to it and showed great kinesthetic awareness of one another.

The “maximalist” scene, while a very different beast, was a similar situation and a hugely successful scene. Because of this, I question what dangers there might be to only practicing open scenes without any shape or form. Yes, Viewpoints will be evident in all of them, but one may not find the strongest results through only working with the mentality that nothing he or she does is wrong. I think there is validity to letting an ensemble experience total freedom and to use the vocabulary of Viewpoints to explore that freedom. However, for the purpose of developing an ensemble and an awareness of one another, it seems that offering structure within the open Viewpoints is the most conducive. Through the minimalistic structure, I found the confidence to really collaborate and play with my fellow group members, but I also still had the freedom to explore that structure through my own interpretation. I think this discovery is key to how I will choose to use Viewpoints within a directing situation.

12 Aug. 2009

I again find myself juggling with this idea of Suzuki being such confined, independent movement, but still seeing how training in it impacts the group dynamic. Today, we experienced a bit of a shift in the technique, because while our previous exercises had been relatively stationary body positions, we now practiced crossing the floor. With this, our facilitator brought up an interesting point. Maintaining the sense of performance in these exercises now became
working together as a group to keep our timing, movement, and spacing precise. One could argue that Suzuki always challenges an ensemble to do this, but I think that we felt it more when moving through space. Not only could a misstep or improper spacing interfere with another person’s performance, but it also would cause us to really lose our cohesion as a whole. When my facilitator suggested this, I felt a dichotomy in me to constantly be looking inward through self-analysis, but also to look to the entire group as an ensemble of performers. I now see an energy wave of how my performance affects theirs and how their performance can affect mine.

I want to return to an idea that was brought up early in our Suzuki training that is only just now really surfacing for me. Our facilitator brought up the idea of humility in our training, and stated that our culture encourages us to ignore and dismiss our own humility. He encouraged us to rather allow ourselves to feel humiliated and to make that a part of our training, asking how it affects us physically, mentally, and emotionally, and how we can manage those responses. In this sense, the idea that you are bound to fail at Suzuki but must strive for perfection would mean that you are living in a constant state of humility, because it will be humiliating to fail every time. That humility is a completely open and vulnerable place, but we are then asked to perform Suzuki as though we are already perfect and to hide or mask that humility.

This makes me think about the different personality types that Mascolo and Margolis outline in their research. The idea of failing and being humiliated all the time strikes me as a rejected-withdrawn characteristic. However, the determination to strive for perfection and the stubbornness that literally manifests itself in the physicality of the lower body in Suzuki training reminds me of a rejected-aggressive individual. While this is happening, the ideal is to remain completely relaxed and calm in the upper body and to give an overall sense of ease, which is
similar to a popular individual. It is almost as though in a “perfect” Suzuki ensemble these three characteristics would meet each other, come to terms, and learn to live harmoniously (while simultaneously always creating conflict). The notion of how that could take place in an individual and in an ensemble seems like it could create a wonderful sense of balance.

Our Viewpoints training today threw a huge curveball at us. We each were required to create a solo piece that incorporated all of the Viewpoints in any way. After a week and a half of loosely structured group play, I felt a lot of anxiety coming from the group. However, a few points came out of this that really informed my study. First, when we spent time rehearsing for one another and therefore were presenting calculated thoughts for one another instead of totally improvised work, we all supported one another tremendously. This is in general a supportive group, but I think that the level of anxiety involved increased this even more. That makes me think about how Viewpoints tends to be lost as a tool for really rehearsing during the training process, and I think that exercises such as these (done as a solo or in a small group, but given time to rehearse and present), are equally important to the process.

Second, we presented these solos in small groups, so that about five of us were performing our solos simultaneously. We discovered that through having this time on our own to intensely focus on ourselves, we created pieces that still had a similar life to them and that drew many similarities. Finding these commonalities brought forth a suggestion from our facilitator: perhaps as human beings, we are more similar in our instincts than we realize, and perhaps there is something to gain from working independently rather than trying to force group work. There is something so profound in that that makes me rethink the entire way that I approach an ensemble. Perhaps I do need to give more value to individual work, and then draw parallels based on that...
work when looking at the whole group. Doing so would certainly ensure that each individual carried a voice in the end result.

13 Aug. 2009

There was an interesting shift that happened in the Viewpoints training of our workshop today, and one that I’ve been noticing over the past few days. It’s as though since we are approaching our last day, we are trying to pinpoint what is wrong and what is right. It seems counterintuitive to the facilitators’ previous emphasis within the Viewpoints training, where nothing is wrong or right, but I suppose that the individual artist has to use the training to develop a perspective where they can decide what does or does not work for them. However, this has made a drastic shift in my relationship to the training and to the ensemble.

Today, the facilitator pointed at me and articulated one of the things that I do when I am unsure of what to do. I look at the other people rather than focusing on my environment or my senses. This is not something that is wrong, but rather something he was making an observation on so that I can continue to find additional sources of inspiration rather than always looking at others, which is our instinct as humans. Something about him pointing this out made me feel really uncomfortable, although I am thankful to have that outside lens to make such observations. I felt like I had been told that I was wrong, and this feeling made me feel very socially withdrawn. I chose not to participate for the remainder of class because I was second-guessing all of my previous choices and was sure that if I did go up, it would be in a preconceived attempt to negate his comment.
While this definitely highlights a weakness on my part, it brings up an interesting thing that I am grappling with in Viewpoints. How do you shape it? The notion of just letting people play or giving broad, generic notes concerns me that a cast would end up disconnected and unaware of how their work is translating to the audience. However, our facilitator sharing these individual notes made me feel judged about the quality of my work, which made me contribute less to the group. When looking at how one is developing as an individual within a cast, how do you let that self-awareness develop while still allowing for exploration and freedom within the work?

Unfortunately, I think a possible opportunity to really massage that relationship was lost in this course. Today our facilitator started talking about Mary Overlie’s original intention for Viewpoints, which was to create a vocabulary for artists to talk about one another’s work. He attempted to do this today by asking for class feedback after our open improvisations. This could have been a really valuable tool, but the class had not previously been set up for this sort of an environment, so many people seemed unsure of what to say and when. Had the class started this sort of dialogue much earlier in the process, I think I would have felt more open to responses and would not have felt personally attacked when I received feedback from my facilitator. However, such feedback too early in the process would have really hindered the sense of free play, so I understand why our facilitator waited to introduce it. Yet since this idea of group dialogue is such a quintessential component to the development of Viewpoints training, I think it would be a shame to not incorporate it in training at all. For the health of the ensemble, it seems like an important component to introduce with deep thought and care.
I leave this course with mixed feelings about how Viewpoints (and Suzuki) training applies to my research, because I find myself unable to truly separate the facilitator from the training, especially with the ambiguous and morphing qualities of Viewpoints. I am quite certain that the focus of the training and its value for the social cognitive development of a group is dependent on the attitude, techniques, and choices of the facilitator more than it is the nature of the training itself. The two facilitators I worked with are infinitely unique and fascinating human beings. Because of that and because of the nature of education in general, who they are and how they think greatly impacted my experience within this course and my understanding of the techniques.

I can vouch that a clear shift happened between the beginning of the course and the end. Where Viewpoints training began with a very clear sense of “there is no right or wrong,” by the end of the course the facilitator was pointing to moments that he interpreted as successful as well as places where individuals showed room for growth. As I mentioned of my experience yesterday, when this was directed toward me I felt uncomfortable and distanced from the group. To me, this presents a difficult and perhaps unavoidable challenge within the training. At some point, I believe that we as artists do need to be able to pinpoint and articulate what we feel is successful and what is not. In the past, I felt that directors and facilitators were too loose with their use of Viewpoints; they accepted so much that the students were not able to fine-tune their critical eye, their body, and their craft. The end result generally lacked cohesion due to the facilitator’s indecisiveness. However, at what point does the shift from trying anything to narrowing our choices and pointing at “right and wrong” choices occur? And how can it happen
in a way that is sensitive to the development of the ensemble? How can you tell people that they will never be wrong, and then make observations (as harmless and as subjective as they may be) and not expect them to begin trying to shape their work into a “right”?

So, all of this being said, I leave Chicago feeling conflicted about how, and if, I would incorporate Viewpoints into my work with high school students. In this case, I have many questions about whether I could have facilitated this work differently to yield a different result. Would I focus more on individual and group devising, to encourage individuals to get to a place where they were solidifying their decisions at an earlier stage in the training? Would I begin encouraging students to make observations using the Viewpoints vocabulary earlier in the process, so that peer-led feedback would be the accepted and understood norm? However, would doing so short-change students of the opportunity to merely play with the vocabulary to discover what it means? I think one of the greatest challenges of being a facilitator is acknowledging that nothing you do will satisfy every single person, or will make every single person feel successful. As long as I am teaching, I hope that I continue turning to student opportunities to remind me of that fact.
LIST OF REFERENCES


