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## Mas' Making and Pedagogy: Imagined Possibilities

Janice B. Fournillier

Georgia State University, [jfournillier@gsu.edu](mailto:jfournillier@gsu.edu)

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## Mas' Making and Pedagogy: Imagined Possibilities

### Abstract

In this article I draw on an ethnographic case study that examined mas makers perceptions of the learning/teaching practices at work in the production of costumes for Trinidad and Tobagos annual Carnival celebrations. During the 2005 Carnival season I spent four months in the field, my country of birth, and collected data through participant observation, still photographs, and informal and semi-formal autobiographical interviews. I used Spradleys (1979, 1980) domain and componential analysis and Goodenoughs (1971) propriospect in my description, analysis, and interpretation of the data resources. In this article, I apply the notion of performance art pedagogy to these findings. In so doing, I explore imagined possibilities and implications for the institutionalized educational system that Caribbean scholars claim are in an era of re-conceptualization. I challenge fellow educators to reconsider what counts as learning and what learning counts (Green & Luke, 2006), in our efforts to provide education for all.

### Keywords

Ethnography, Performance Art Pedagogy, Learning/Teaching Practices, and Carnival

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## **Mas' Making and Pedagogy: Imagined Possibilities**

**Janice B. Fournillier**

Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia

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*In this article I draw on an ethnographic case study that examined mas' makers' perceptions of the learning/teaching practices at work in the production of costumes for Trinidad and Tobago's annual Carnival celebrations. During the 2005 Carnival season I spent four months in the field, my country of birth, and collected data through participant observation, still photographs, and informal and semi-formal autobiographical interviews. I used Spradley's (1979, 1980) domain and componential analysis and Goodenough's (1971) propriospect in my description, analysis, and interpretation of the data resources. In this article, I apply the notion of performance art pedagogy to these findings. In so doing, I explore imagined possibilities and implications for the institutionalized educational system that Caribbean scholars claim are in an era of re-conceptualization. I challenge fellow educators to reconsider what counts as learning and what learning counts (Green & Luke, 2006), in our efforts to provide education for all. Key Words: Ethnography, Performance Art Pedagogy, Learning/Teaching Practices, and Carnival*

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### **Introduction**

Obviously in the grand scheme of things, having not done any real art since my exams, I felt like an absolute novice and this was never clearer than when Minshall<sup>1</sup> came into the camp to do a demonstration on how he wanted something to be crafted. He was demanding, he was obnoxious, he was lovable, he was comical, he was egotistical, he was bossy, he was unforgiving, he was charming, he was loving, he was un-pleasable, he was genius. It was very easy to love and hate Minshall all in the same breath. However you felt about him, being in the presence of his work would change you forever. It was a different way of looking at things that changed your perception of reality and opened your eyes to a different world than the one you had seen before. (Ms. Mommy,<sup>2</sup> personal communication, March 22, 2004)

I begin with Ms. Mommy's critical reflection on her experiences in the mas' camp as a sample of the qualitative evidence I used in my evaluation of the activities in the

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<sup>1</sup> Fetterman (1989) suggested the use of actor instead of the anthropological term informant because of its association with work conducted in colonial settings specifically African nations formerly within the British Empire (p. 140). However for me the persons in the study became the actors because they too played a role via their narratives in my staging of this performance text. Indeed they are much more than objects, subjects, or participants.

<sup>2</sup> The music created especially for Carnival and which is associated with the festival.

mas' camp. This response exemplified for me a ritual that might not be so common in traditional classrooms, but which contributed to the actor's<sup>3</sup> learning experience. Her perceptions of the experience were important to my critical understanding and exploration of the mas' camp space. I construed narratives like these as indicators of the students/artists' learning experiences because of my acceptance of the view that there was a relationship between cognition and perception (see Neisser, 1976).

This narrative suggested that there was more to this “unholy trinity of mas (masquerade and dance), calypso<sup>4</sup>, and pan (steelband)” (Ho, 2000, p. 3) that made up Trinidad Carnival. (see Figure 1 & 2). Should we as educators focus on what was known instead of what was not known (Wolcott, 1994)? My intent was to explore the perceptions of members of the community of mas' makers. In so doing, I chose to look to the possible contributions that Carnival mas' art could make to the educational sector.

*Figure 1.* Pan: Trinidad steelband.



<sup>3</sup> Fetterman (1989) suggested the use of actor instead of the anthropological term informant because of its association with work conducted in colonial settings specifically African nations formerly within the British Empire (p. 140). However for me the persons in the study became the actors because they too played a role via their narratives in my staging of this performance text. Indeed they are much more than objects, subjects, or participants.

<sup>4</sup> The music created especially for Carnival and which is associated with the festival.

Figure 2. Playing mas' on stage in a carnival band.



Scholars (Eisner, 2002, 2004; Efland, 2004; Greene, 1995, 2001; Siegesmund, 2004) were making claims about the value of arts in education. This pushed me to reconsider Carnival mas' art with which I was familiar from a distance (not being a mas' maker/artist myself). My major experience was as a Trinidadian masquerader, participant in the performance on Carnival days and an apprentice who assisted her grandmother in adding finishing touches to her costume. As a scholar with an interest in education and learning in non-school context, I viewed this as an opportunity to turn on its head the notion of "Carnival mentality." It is a notion that refers to Trinidadians<sup>5</sup> as persons whose major interest is partying and enjoying themselves (see Liverpool, 1990).

In this article I will briefly discuss Garoian's (1999) "performance art pedagogy" that perked my interest in viewing Carnival mas' making differently. Then, I will provide an overview of the socio-cultural-historical contexts of Carnival mas' art. I will also describe the research methodology that grounded the ethnographic study (Fournillier, 2005) on which I draw for this article. I will discuss the findings that came out of my analysis of Ms. Mommy's and Kendall's<sup>6</sup> interview data in terms of my interpretation of Garoian's performance art pedagogy.

### **Performance Art Pedagogy**

Viewing teaching as performance and looking at the interplay between performative and pedagogy are issues that many scholars inside and outside of performance studies have grappled with over the years. (e.g., Dawe, 1984; Pineau, 1994,

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<sup>5</sup> Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, the twin island Caribbean state are commonly referred to as Trinidadians but sometimes Trinbagonians.

<sup>6</sup> Kendall De Peaza is another actor in the study, He requested that I use his name and not a pseudonym and so I honored his request.

2002, 2004). Prendergast (2008) explored in much more detail the metaphor of teacher as performer, and unpacked the various uses that educational researchers have made of performance theories. She cautioned those of us who applied the metaphor to remember that “it is a very slippery, ephemeral, and contested term that intentionally poses as many, if not more questions than it answers when asked to serve a master other than its own” (p. 2). I was also very aware that like Pineau (1994, p. 4) suggested performance’s association with the arts that are often situated “at the margins of every day life and academic discourse,” accounted for the construct being considered problematic as a theoretical frame.

Nevertheless, it is Garoian’s (1999) model of performance art pedagogy which captured my attention. It was founded on three attributes of cultural production: performance, performativity, and performance art. One of the basic assumptions of the model is that teaching and mas’ making, like so many other activities, is performance. Garoian did much more than use performance as a metaphor for instructional communication. He presented performance in the educational context as representing “the teacher’s pedagogy, the students’ interaction with that pedagogy, and their mutual involvement in school” (p. 8). Garoian adopted a poststructural approach to education that challenged and resisted the classical views of teaching and learning and its valuing of strategies other than those that are “academically determined.” Garoian moved pedagogy beyond its official boundaries, made it extensive in space and time, and allowed for application of the model to events like Trinidad Carnival that scholars inside and outside of performance theory (see Schechner & Riggio, 1998; Turner, 1983a, 1983b) have theorized as performance and performance art.

Like Turner, I was interested in the workings before the actual two day celebration, the in-between. “Turner prized the working, the doing, the experiential exhilaration of being in” (Schechner & Riggio, 1988, p. 8). Moreover, the actors’ narratives about the interactions that take place in the in-between time facilitated analysis of the performative dimensions of the discourses that take place between students/artists and teachers/artists. Phelan (1993, p. 167) reminded me that “being is formed (and made temporarily visible) in that suspended in-between.” If, therefore, I needed to understand how the students/artists were being formed, I needed to look to the in-between that I experienced via the actors’ narratives. These experiences, like those of Garoian (1999), were coming out of an event and activities associated with our local performance art and dealt with students/artists/mas’ makers whose narratives suggested that they were learning and be-coming differently within this space. However, the socio-cultural-historical context within which the mas’ camps were situated, were also important to an understanding of why I felt the need to explore their experiences.



Figure 3. In between time: MtheMaking the queen's costume.



### Socio-Cultural-Historical Contexts

Caribbean Carnival is a festival that, in spite of its historical traditions, ambiguities, and associations with contestation and resistance to hegemonic formation, is viewed as a contributor to post-colonial nation building (Ho, 2000). It is a cultural symbol and an event that some scholars claim cannot be owned. Holquist (1990, p. 90) characterized it as “one source of” resistance to the ‘egoism of the West’ that Bakhtin denounced.” Scholars from various disciplines that include education, economics, cultural anthropology, history, performance studies, ritual, theatre drama, and dance (Ahye, 1991; Brererton, 1981; Burgess-Massey, 2001, 2002; De Verteuil, 1984; Girvan, 2002; Hill, 1972; Ho & Nurse, 2005; Juneja, 1988; Liverpool, 1990, 2001; Nurse, 1999; Riggio, 1998; Schechner & Riggio, 1998; Scher, 2002, 2003; van Koningsbruggen, 1997) have made Caribbean Carnival the focus of their studies. It is these varying discourses, I argue, that have contributed to the varying definitions of Carnival and its role in the development of the nation. As Kholi (1999, p. 324) asserts, “Not only does language and discourse produce *subjects*, but also produces *culture* and *nation*.” Although the teaching and learning practices in the mas’ camp have not been the focus of many scholars in education, a few have begun to view it as making a valuable contribution to curriculum development (see Burgess-Macey, 2001, 2002; Liverpool, 1990). My research adds to the discourse and pronounces that mas’ making can make a contribution to our understanding of the role that mas’ art can make to our understanding of pedagogy.

The discourse of the historians makes a pronouncement that is widely accepted. They make a direct link between the history of Trinidad Carnival and the country’s history. Pearse (1988) claims that an understanding of 19th century Trinidad Carnival provides some insight into the nature of the society at that time. Local scholars and

historians (e.g., Brereton, 1981; De Verteuil, 1984; Hill 1972; Liverpool, 1998, 2001; Pearse, 1988) have fully documented the issues of race, class and color divisions in the society and the social and historical aspects of the festival. Of importance to this study are the narratives of how the attitudes towards the festival were born in the early pre-1865 period when the colonial nobility, Whites, and persons of color were the ones who were free to celebrate. The elite celebration in which the Whites and free persons of color either paraded the streets mimicking the slave population, or went from house to house celebrating, was no longer the domain of the upper class after the historic emancipation of the slaves.

According to Errol Hill (1972), in his description of the post-emancipation Carnival, “Suddenly a new class of over 22,000 free men was created, allied to the free coloureds by racial ancestry, [yet] separated from them by the stigma of recent serfdom” (p. 9). The ex-slaves took to the streets and in an attempt to make Carnival into a festival that they could call their own. The former masters were unhappy and constantly criticized the behavior of the Blacks, and threatened to pass laws that would inhibit the involvement of the Black lower class members of the society in the celebrations. During the period 1847-1857, Pearse (1988) found that Carnival became regarded as increasingly disreputable. He said, “The use of Carnival as a means of ridicule and derision of the pretentious emerges, and demand grows amongst the dominant town group for its abolition” (p. 27). The slaves were no longer forced to celebrate behind closed doors. The elite balls had given way to the Carnival of the underclass. However, it is interesting to note that this Carnival of the underclass has evolved into one that not only embraces all classes and races, but is now believed to have increasingly become “owned” by the burgeoning upper and middle classes of the socially stratified society. However, this change has not influenced the attitude of those in the educational sectors to the 21<sup>st</sup> century festival that I briefly describe in the following section of the paper.

### **Trinidad and Tobago’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century Carnival**

Carnival is a festival that people in many parts of the world celebrate in different forms and an activity that Bakhtin & Iswolsky (1968) popularized with his theory of the carnivalesque. Trinidad Carnival is not just a two day celebration. It is a season that goes through a specific cycle, which begins with one carnival and ends with the next. Carnival Monday and Tuesday, the two days preceding the Christian Lenten Ash Wednesday, are the two days officially assigned for the street parade. These days are the culmination of months of festivity, planning, and preparation.

This festival has a form that is unique. Hill (1972), one of the earliest academic chroniclers of the festival, argued that Trinidad Carnival went through its own metamorphosis, which made it “essentially a local product in form, content, and inner significance” (p. 5). Burke (1997, p. 151) supported this argument and emphasized that the festival was “transposed or “translated” in some sense of being adapted to the local conditions”. Carnival is therefore, I argue, one product that we can claim as local and on which we should be drawing in our quest to find alternative ways of viewing learning. It has arguably been identified as a national festival that politicians in the 1950s and 1960s used to bring together the diverse population to create the imagined nation (Anderson, 1991 McCree (1999), in his survey research report, supported the argument that the



festival has a national character. McCree (p. 135) found that “the majority level of involvement in Carnival (mas’), across all race/ethnic groups indicates that this festival does assume a national character.” Given the enormity of the participation, the socio-cultural-historical roots of the festival, and its acceptance as performance art, I can find no better event and activities with which to apply Garoian’s (1999) model of performance art pedagogy.

### Carnival Mas’ Art

To talk about Trinidad Carnival is to talk about mas’ or masquerade and the carnival bands that parade the streets. A carnival band (distinct from a music band) is a group of *mas’* players (masqueraders) from a few dozen to several thousands. Bands are often under the direction of one person called the bandleader, or a group or committee like Peter Minshall and Callaloo Company, who design the costumes and oversee the production and the final performance on the official Carnival days. Each mas’ band has its unique character, but there are some similarities in the process of forming a band (see Alleyne-Dettmers, 1993, p. 188). Trinidadian mas’ designers, like Minshall and Callaloo Company, Stephen Lee Heung, Wayne Berkeley, Brian McFarlane, the late George Bailey, and Harold Saldenah, the think tanks of the mas’ bands, design the costumes around particular traditional, mythical, historical, creative, or imaginative themes. The ideas for the designs come from numerous sources: natural environment, flora and fauna of the country; mythology and folklore; creative fantasy; and history. The ideas are made flesh in the form of drawings that are then placed on display at the band launchings.

Figure 4. School carnival mas’ band display.



Masqueraders make a “down payment” that is usually a percentage of the final cost of the costumes, and await the final product that they collect a few days before Carnival Monday and Tuesday. The production of the costumes is the next stage in the process of the making of a mas’ band. The mas’ makers take the designs and work their magic to create the costumes. These various mas’ makers (wire benders, seamstresses, decorators) gather daily in the mas’ camp, the mas’ headquarters of the bands, to produce costumes for all the potential masqueraders. Some of the mas’ makers are seasoned workers who are paid sums of money for the jobs. Other volunteers, who enjoy the social life in the camp, are sometimes given a costume for their participation in the mas’ making activities. These men and women build the costumes that cost between \$200 TT and \$10,000 TT, depending on the type of design and the role the masquerader plays in the band. The mas’ makers spend more time building the costumes for the Kings and Queens of the mas’ bands. These individual costumes are normally very elaborate and much larger than those of the other members of the mas’ band.

*Figure 5.* Carnival queen costume: The final product on stage.



### **Carnival Mas’ Art as Popular Culture**

Carnival, like many other popular cultural art forms (for example hip hop) continues to struggle to find its place in institutionalized educational contexts. However, the work of scholars like Dimitriadis (2001) and Pardue (2004) points to ways in which hip-hop has been used as either “lived curriculum” or as a form of education. Pardue’s ethnographic study focused on Brazil’s experiments with hip hop as a form of education. According to Pardue, this experiment was to some extent successful because “in a practical sense, education refers to the cultivation of citizenship practices and vocational development, respectively” (p. 422). Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival mas’ art, although valued by the politicians as an economic asset and the tourist board as an exotic feature of

the country, has played a minimal role in educational circles. Altbach (1995) reminded me that colonial and possible neo-colonial educational policies were generally elitist. Although the situations were not all the same in every colonial country, Altbach argued that “most colonial powers, when they concentrated on education at all, stressed humanistic studies, fluency in the language of the metropolitan country, and the skills necessary for secondary positions in the bureaucracy” (p. 453). Little wonder therefore that the idea of using the festival more formally in the education sector has been paid lip service.

One possible reason is that Carnival falls into the category of popular/low culture (Lent, 1990) as distinct from high culture. Dolby (2003) attributed this attitude to popular culture to Mathew Arnold’s (1869) definition of culture as “the best that has been thought and said in the world” (p. viii). Dolby said,

This definition combined with Arnold’s pronounced beliefs that British aristocracy and middle class were not only superior but also further along the evolutionary path, led to a valorization of so-called high culture as opposed to the culture of the common or working class. (p. 260)

Additionally, Eisner (2004, p. 1) warned, “The idea that education has something to learn from the arts cuts against the grain of our traditional beliefs about how to improve educational practice.” Popular art forms, like Carnival mas’ making, continue to be ascribed differently because of their historical roots (see Brereton, 1981; De Verteuil, 1984; Liverpool, 2001) and their locations on the edges of society. This art form has helped us according to Critchlow, an artist, educator in the local community “to do what we do” (Personal communication, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005). SoSociety’s positioning of it on the edges has contributed to the attitudes of policy makers in the educational sector. Hence, these creative ideas have not been used in the development of other aspects of the society, like architectural designs of buildings. One can understand, therefore, that to make a ritual of rebellion part of an educational curriculum or give pride of place to it in the understanding of the practices of a people would demand an appreciation and desire for an emancipatory education (Freire, 1993; Giroux, 1983).

*Figure 6.* Working at the edges: A mas’ camp.



### Education and Carnival Mas' Art

There have been mixed reactions to the various roles the art form could play in the institutionalized educational system. In 1964, the government of the newly independent nation state introduced Carnival into the schools, in a deliberate attempt to nationalize the curriculum and to develop knowledge and pride in an important aspect of the national culture. This resulted in the schools involvement in Carnival activities especially designed for schools. The schools' involvement has decreased and individual private mas' makers have made children's carnival a thriving enterprise and taken it out of the hands of the institutionalized educational sector. Lewis (1989) claimed that the shortcomings associated with the festival prevent Carnival from playing an integral role in the education sector. One shortcoming associated with the festival is the high incidence of what moralists in our community refer to as promiscuity and sexually explicit behavior. The negativities associated with the festival, in terms of the immorality and lasciviousness according to Lewis, prevented the acceptance of the festival as a contributor to the education sector.

Liverpool (1990) advanced the view that because of the very nature of the festival there was a need to incorporate it in the educational system. Liverpool, in a monograph, *Culture and Education*, argued,

Most of the cultural traits, our attitudes, our unique behavior and penchant for fête are all contained in carnival; as such, we should use such a festival as an appropriate and relevant material towards the development of educated citizens of our country. (p. 82)

In spite of the negativity associated with the festival, Liverpool pointed in his study to the various ways that Carnival can be incorporated in the secondary school curriculum.

Harvey (1983) another distinguished Caribbean educator and scholar, in a major conference on Carnival and its social and economic impact, suggested that, "the question is not so much does Carnival have a role to play in education, but *what* role does Carnival play in education?" Harvey, in her reflections on the topic, *Carnival as an instrument of education*, examined the informal and formal ways in which Carnival can be a part of the education process. Harvey admitted, "we don't want to hear it said that we have a carnival mentality" (p. 235). However, Harvey continued, "what is it about that mentality that we are rejecting? Can we by reflecting on carnival give our students that opportunity to also reflect and to better understand our "mentality," our cultural identity?" (p. 235). Harvey was suggesting at that time that there were inherent possibilities in this festival of which educators needed to be mindful. On the other hand, educators in London, where there is a large immigrant population, experimented with the inclusion of Carnival arts into the curriculum. Burgess-Macey (2001), a London educator, found that there was an "empowering effect" when teachers introduced the art form in the schools.



Figure 7. Children's carnival mas' band.



Trinidad and Tobago, in attempting to deal with the problems that the educational system faces, recognizes the importance of the nonschool sectors. Trinidad and Tobago adopted remedial programs like the World Bank funded project, Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), and more recently proposed a National Open School System of Trinidad and Tobago (NOSSTT). The Ministry of Education claims that NOSSTT has the potential of “de-institutionalizing learning by distributing it more equitably and taking learning to the learner-at home, in communities, and in the work place” (Trinidad and Tobago, 2006a p. 2). The Ministry’s Conceptual Framework for the National Open School System of Trinidad and Tobago indicates an interest in: non formal learning, life-long learning, and continuing education (Trinidad and Tobago, 2006b). My concern however is that non-formal refers to the level of formality in the system and context, and the kinds of interactions, but that the goal of academic achievements and formal certification continues to take precedence over learning opportunities like those Ms. Mommy described in the opening narrative and which I found to be the experience of many of the participants in the ethnographic study (Fournillier, 2005). How can educators begin to do this in a field that Eisner (2004, p. 1) stated, “has predicated its practices on a platform of scientifically grounded knowledge, at least as an aspiration”? How can the practices associated with designing, making, producing, and presenting costumes for Trinidad Carnival mas’, one of the world’s stunning accomplishments, inform how we as educators re-conceptualize our learned pedagogical assumptions? It is against this background that I designed the ethnographic study on which I draw for this article.

## Research Design and Methods

My ethnographic study focused on selected members of the mas' making community in Trinidad whom I came in contact with through a networking process. The following research question guided the study: How do members of the community of mas' makers learn to make mas'? As a former teacher at all levels (elementary, secondary, and postsecondary) of the Trinidad and Tobago educational system, I was familiar with the stratified formal educational system. I adopted the lyrics of calypso music in my literature classes at secondary level and encouraged students to see the value of the literary art form. As an avid mas' player, I encouraged dialogue on the art form and exposed students to experts in the community who shared their experiences. At the same time, I was an outsider to the Carnival mas' camp community. I used my insider status and the social/cultural capital I gained from being a former teacher in the formal school system to begin my networking. It is through this network that I was able to gain access to the mas' camps and to identify members of the community whom I was advised would be "good" for the study. I later learned that this meant that the persons were involved for many years and had been known in the community for their craft. I finally focused on four different mas' camp spaces. I made decisions based on the recommendations of members of the community who assisted me in gaining access. Snow balling or network sampling allowed me to select participants for the study.

I worked as either a full participant or a participant observer throughout the four months (November 2004 to February 2005) that I spent in the mas' camps. I made the decision to participate based on the needs of the individual mas' camps. I staggered the times and days I visited the camps based on the camp schedule and the times I noticed most of the work was taking place. In some instances I was invited to come to assist when it was crunch time. I observed, took photographs, and worked on learning to make the costumes while I developed a relationship with persons whom I interviewed or who connected me to others whom I interviewed.

## Data Analysis

The data were stored in Atlas-ti, qualitative data analysis software, which served as a data base. I performed different types of breaking up and synthesizing of the data: domain analysis, componential analysis, and a content analysis of selected cases using propriospect as a heuristic device. To take a different look at the data and get closer to members' identification of the settings, the activities, and the practices, I used Spradley's (1979, 1980) domain and componential analysis. The goal of domain analysis as Spradley (1980) stated is two-fold. "First you are trying to identify cultural categories; second you want to gain an overview of the cultural scene you are studying" (pp. 96-97). This method of analysis allowed me to draw out from the data cultural meanings that sometimes remained tacit and had to be inferred from what the members said and did during the interviews or observations. I used the domain analysis worksheets to create visuals that represented the relationship among categories of data. I began to link visual images to the categories. For example, I looked at the different kinds of camps and made comparison between the spaces and the kinds of mas' making activities that were taking place in them. It is this process that facilitated my appreciation of camps like the ones in



which Ms. Mommy and Kendall worked in as spaces that could help in the re-contextualization of learning/teaching practices.

I experimented with componential analysis, which Spradley (1979) suggested “enables you to take all the contrasts you have discovered, organize them in a systematic fashion, identify missing contrasts, and represent the components of meaning for any contrast set” (p. 172). I used it instead to contrast the various activities of the selected members of the community and to enable me to identify the overlap in the various practices and the similarities and differences among members of the group.

Finally, using Goodenough’s (1971) concept of *propriospect* as a heuristic device to explore the data, I was able to discover the individual skills, attitudes, and understandings that the various members brought to the community. I analyzed how these overlapped and combined to create the community of practice. In so doing I found that an individual functioned differently in the group from the way he/she functioned when performing other skills in his/her every day life. For example, a member may be a government officer during the day and a volunteer decorator in the evening. However, he brought to the camp some cultural knowledge from this other space and combined it with the specific knowledge that he got from the members who were more expert at making mas’. His organizational or management knowledge worked to create more efficiency in the production of the costumes. He was an expert at organization but his limited competency in the art of decorating made him a learner. The individual *propriospects* therefore contributed to the cultural pool that was an integral aspect of the community. Henstrand (1993, p. 95) suggests that “*propriospect* provided a way to analyze the operating of culture of individuals without being overly evaluative.” Analyzing the data using *propriospect* as the heuristic device took me away from my personal biases and offered me the opportunity to look at what the various participants were bringing to the pool and the meanings they were making of the practices. On the basis of this analysis, I found that Kendall, who described himself as a wire bender-mas’ maker and who was employed as a tutor at the University’s School of Festival Arts, turned the idea of a “Carnival mentality” on its head and demonstrated the kinds of imagined possibilities that art educators claim when making the case for arts in education. Having translated these findings using performance art pedagogy as a tool, I was able to explore the implications for institutionalized learning.

### **Awakening to the Imagined Possibilities (IP)**

Most teachers hope to have a relationship with their students that could possibly lead to the opening of their eyes to a “different world than the one you had seen before” that Ms. Mommy described in the opening citation. Unfortunately the traditional notions and learned assumptions of pedagogy<sup>7</sup> the restrictions placed on the kinds of teachers we are supposed to be, the kinds of knowledge (s) that are valued, and spaces constructed as “schools,” often restrain us. I must admit that I arrived at these interpretations of the

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<sup>7</sup> Lusted’s interpretation of pedagogy as: “the transformation of the consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies – the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge they produce out of the interactions” (Lusted, 1986, p. 3) crystallized my understanding and interpretation of Garoian (1999) notion of performance as pedagogy.

educational system based on my 28 years of experiences as a teacher and my construction of the system that came out of a postcolonial historical context.

Indeed Trinidad and Tobago, like many of the Caribbean countries, was once colonies of Spain, France, and England who informed, formed, and influenced the educational system. The teachers were working in the formal educational system that was failing to meet the needs of a large percentage of the population. I knew from experience, the continuing media coverage of the academic failures in the exit exams, and the increase in the levels of violence in the schools, that it continued to be a struggle. There was therefore the desperate cry among scholars like Lochan and Best (2003) for a new breed of teachers. Ms. Mommy's narrative described a kind of teacher that was not likely to be found in the classrooms in institutionalized learning spaces.

The designer/teacher in this non-school context, a Carnival mas' camp, could possibly be described according to McLaren (1987) as "teacher-as-liminal-servant" who functions as "a convener of customs and a cultural provocateur, yet she (or he) transcends both roles" (p. 81). This type of teacher embodied an attitude that allowed him/her "not merely [to] *present* knowledge to students [but to] transform the consciousness of students by allowing them to embody or incarnate knowledge." (McLaren, 1993) Minshall became a teacher/designer/artist par excellence, with multiple identities that were clearly visible to Ms. Mommy, the novice<sup>8</sup>/learner who embodied the knowledge gained from her experience. Ms. Mommy described her learning experiences in the Carnival mas' camp.

I learned to create my own patterns on plain fabric using sponging techniques, batik, tie dye, dry leaves and anything else handy. I learned to bend wire from some of carnival's aficionados in the field. I learned about different types of fabric and how far you could push a fiberglass rod before it snapped. I learned about the weight of fibre glass, cocoyea and fabrics and what that meant to a costume. I learned about managing a creation process so the masqueraders don't want to kill you come Carnival Monday. I learned that white could be a stunning statement and that history and meaning should inform all art if you really wanted to create something that would last. I learned so much that made me able to start my own business doing events and hand crafted specialty items that used every available resource from nature because Callaloo taught me that objects are not what they seem and if you dream big there will always be a way to achieve your vision if you look at things with a view to what they can be or can do rather than what they seem to be. (Ms. Mommy, personal communication, March 22, 2004)

Having recognized how she was being constructed, the student/artist set out to practice and learned the art of mas' making. She learned by doing, in a setting that gave her space to do so. Not only did she learn to create the artifacts, but she learned about the needs of her clientele and the audience. In addition, she learned how to be critical of her own work, to be reflexive, and to become a "good citizen" who could make oneself

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<sup>8</sup> This description comes close to Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation and the apprentice/novice's process of learning and be-coming a part of the community of practice.

employable. Ms. Mommy's engagement in the many activities associated with mas' making resulted in not only practical knowledge, but also what Vygotsky (1978) termed high-level cognitive functioning. She began to philosophize: "There is always a way to achieve your vision if you look at things with a view" (Ms. Mommy, personal communication, March 22, 2004). Learning to make mas' was not simply allowing her to understand how the activity was done, but Ms. Mommy imagined possibilities way beyond the mas' making process. Her narrative was evidence of Eisner's (2002) claim that the arts could make excellent contributions to our understanding and practice of education. I realized that Eisner's (1998) definition of education as a process of re-making resonated with Ms. Mommy's experiences in this art workshop. She wrote,

When I first came to Callaloo, Todd<sup>9</sup> had looked at my portfolio and said he was interested in my concepts, that I had a great conceptual mind but he wasn't all that impressed with my execution. I would like to think that I took that comment in stride. My portfolio was mainly painting and I never considered myself a fabulous painter. I was a craftsperson really and when I mixed materials or did just a drawing, things came out better than when I tried to just paint it... but practice makes perfect and I had only discovered acrylics in the last year or so...who knows. (Ms. Mommy, personal communication, March 22, 2004)

"I would like to think I took that comment in stride." This was Ms. Mommy's response to the statement "you have a great conceptual mind" pushed Ms. Mommy. This space was not one that would inhibit Ms. Mommy's critique or this discourse or inhibit her change in identity. The novice learner brought with her some cultural and academic knowledge(s) and practices that the mas' making community challenged but accepted. She had a great "conceptual mind" and so there was something that she brought with her that would be used and developed. Her identity however was not fixed and there were practices put in place to allow for agency and creative production. By the end of the narrative, the student visualized herself as becoming an expert. Ms. Mommy wrote,

To my amazement, the year Minshall did "Red"<sup>10</sup> he asked many young designers to submit sketches of how we saw Red translating into mas' He explained a bit of his vision and left us to take it from there. I submitted head piece ideas, cut out outfits, dresses, leg pieces, boots, all sorts of odd shaped things that came to mind. Again, the sketching was weak. I really needed to practice that more, but the ideas were apparently sound enough for me to recognise quite a few of them in the designs of the band that I later helped to produce. (Personal communication, Monday, March 22, 2004)

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<sup>9</sup> Todd is the manager of the mas' camp. He was the person with whom I too communicated when I tried to gain access to the mas' camp. The mas' camp is both a formal and an informal space. See Appendix 1 for my representation of the organization of one of the camps in which I worked.

<sup>10</sup> The title of the masquerade production.

Minshall, the artist/designer, was a teacher who allowed the students to “take it from there,” participate in the creation of the ideas, and make them flesh. This non-traditional, non-school context and art workshop that Ms. Mommy described became the kind of Carnival mas’ camp<sup>11</sup> I began to associate with experiences on which educators in the institutionalized learning systems could draw as we explored and challenged our learned pedagogical assumptions.

These great learning experiences were mixed with Ms. Mommy’s critique of both learning spaces. The content of her utterances was an indication that in spite of the inscription on her body and the strength of the teacher/artists, the space did not silence her and her sense of agency was secure. The pedagogy afforded an understanding and appreciation for reflexivity that we would do well to encourage in our students/artists. Ms. Mommy stated,

To my mind, where both Callaloo and the formal art education failed the most, would be in telling any young artist that what they were doing is wrong. Art is too relative to be wrong. Picasso was wrong. Van Gogh was wrong. Frankly... wrong can work really well so long as you have a sound reason for creating the way you are creating.

Where Callaloo goes right, that schools never go is in showing a young artist how to create first with a reason, rather than simply creating for assignment sake. (Personal communication, March 22, 2004)

This actor hit the mark in this comment that critiques both the formal institutionalized system and the mas’ camp. It demonstrated that the narratives shared were not created just to make a good impression, but that she was indeed critically reflective. My own experience in the mas’ camp, observation and interaction with other mas’ makers who worked in the same camp as Ms. Mommy, supported the claims she made. I turn the lens to Kendall, another actor in the study mainly because of his work in a similar mas’ camp space and the similarities and differences in terms of their construction of selves as mas’ makers and students/learners.

### **Kendall: Student/Artist/Mas’ Maker**

Kendall was much more advanced in age than Ms. Mommy and worked in a number of mas’ camps before arriving at Callaloo Company. In addition, his “real art work” (Ms. Mommy, personal communication, March 22, 2004) was always mas’ making. Unlike Ms. Mommy he began mas’ making as a young boy at home.

As a little boy I would come home, I have a little wire to make a little bicycle and a little man out of wire. My grandmother used to say, “What you doing there only with a set of wire all over the place?” So I with my

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<sup>11</sup> There are various types of mas’ camps and they do not all conform to the standards or perform the same activities as those that Ms. Mommy described in her narrative. I am not therefore saying that they should all be similar but that the mas’ camps I am interested in exploring and to which I judge we can look to needs to be as close as possible to the one Ms. Mommy described.

uncle pliers, my father pliers all who have tools I used to take the pliers and always bending something. (Interview, December 11, 2004)

Thus his apprenticeship began. Kendall learned from observing, practicing, and modeling. It is these personal memories that Kendall drew on in his biographical interviews as he explored his learning/teaching practices. This “fearless boy” as Kendall described himself, would soon get his first opportunity to demonstrate the skills he gained from playing with the wire. De Peaza reflected,

I attended the Belmont Intermediate and there was a teacher he used to dance, what’s his name [Cyril St. Louis, I reminded him]. Yes, in his class, they wanted some flowers made for the dance. So I, children as usual, I never did it before and I sit down in the desk. I telling the children “I could make that”. And one of the students, I can’t remember which one, said: “Sir, De Peaza say he could make that”. So Cyril said, “I want to see you after”. He called me and he said, “De Peaza you could make that”? I said, “I never made that”. He said, “You said you could make it. You feel you could make it? I going to supply you with some wire and some cloth”. Well it had me confused because I never did it before. But I brave. It was a red velvet, I remember it good. We did the roses red and white. And we bent the petals a little rough because I am learning. (Interview, December 11, 2004)

Kendall, like many of the older men whom I interviewed and observed at work, gained the basic skills through observation, experimentation, and trial and error. His mas’ art work at his formal school was incidental and simply a response to a need of the dance teacher. However, he characterized it as “learning.” He would eventually move on to working in a mas’ camp where he gained insight from teacher/artist Minshall. It is here that he would come to understand mas’ making as an art and not just the putting together of wire.

Kendall continued to build on his experience and, in his interaction with his teacher/learner in the Callaloo mas’ camp, came to understand the learning process differently. Kendall described his experience of working with Minshall.

He has taught me the concept that he being the designer not only teaches me but learns from me and what he told me is that “Peaza I get into your head and you have to learn to get into my head.” And in the process of going with Minshall I get to understand Minshall just as Minshall get to understand me. On the phone he would say, “De Peaza I want so and so”. And just give me a measurement and an idea of what he wants. He would say, “You make a sample. Come, I doing a drawing”. And we will work. And sometimes when I reach in the camp he would say, “Just add here take off here”. (Interview, December 11, 2004)

Kendall wanted me to understand the kind of communication that existed between him and the teacher/designer/artist that allowed for learning. It was much more than giving

instruction. It was a process of getting into the other person's head. My uncertainty about the process prompted me to ask:

*Me:* How you get into his head? What is that process like?

*Kendall:* The process is something that... it is a process that people supposed to do with each other. Getting into one's head is getting to understand them. Not only to understand the happiness or the goodness in them but to understand how it is when they are in failure; to understand how they think. In the way, if something is wrong what direction they would head. It is something that is very hard to explain. But it is a form of psychology that we all...you don't have to go into a class to learn psychology we born with the concept of psychology and it happens that we suppose to sit down and understand. The problem is that we doesn't take the time to understand each other if we take our time and we sit down and understand each other we will understand if I do this way it is a problem some sort of ratification. (Interview, December 11, 2004)

Kendall's interpretation of his learning process and his interaction with Minshall, the teacher, provided additional evidence of effectiveness of the mas' camp as a pedagogical site and teaching as a performative act. Here is a teacher who serves as a catalyst that was able to call Kendall to become "an active participant in learning" (hooks, 1994, p. 11). However, I am aware that it is not always possible to perform similarly in the school contexts. As Heath (2000, p. 34) warned, "schools cannot offer the extensive time for practice and participation and build up of moral commitment and group discourse needed for students to develop all that employers, policy makers, and philosophers say will mark the future." Nevertheless, I still hold fast to the belief that our teacher educators will do well to dare to step out of the traditional ways of preparing teachers. Kendall, whom persons in the mas' camp began to view as an elder and who would go on to become a teacher in a formal context, began his work as a teacher in the mas' camp. Kendall described his first experience as teacher/artist/mas' maker.

What happens is that they start by for example, I have the forms to make and they don't have the technique of making the form. I say well, 6" x 9" and I want this cut square. It is a simple thing everybody could do. And eventually while I working I will give them a hands-on. Like see if you could bend this thing in a C for me ...in a semi-circle for me. And they do it. I say ok. You give me six semi-circles, you give me five flats and you give me...long ones. Ready to put together. Tighten the wire. I may have to come back and adjust but what is happening in that is a learning process. I am not only being assisted but I am teaching also and they are learning. (Interview, December 11, 2004)

There was evidence of both the traditional giving of directions and allowing students to follow the lead. But there was also a teacher-as-servant attitude that allowed for the kinds of discourse that allowed students to identify themselves differently and to value the



learning process. Kendall was critical of the dominant paradigm of the teacher as master and instead viewed himself as a learner and someone whose role it was “to open the valve.” Thus, when he assumed the identity of tutor/mas’ maker/artist in the formal university setting he described his experience.

Here I am only there to open that valve. I tell the students just as I am teaching you all I am learning. When the average professor or teacher leaves a class if they don’t learn anything is because they weren’t teaching. As illiterate as a student is you learn from the student. I don’t tell students that because there is that in them. Sometimes there is a blockage you have to try to understand look something is wrong. It doesn’t take a long talk and sometimes something happens. (Interview, December 11, 2004)

The art and craft practices that Kendall and Ms. Mommy learn from making Carnival mas’ art was important, but of greater importance was the value they began to place on the ways in which they were taught the art and how they came to know it.

Teaching in the mas’ camp was a performance and performative. There was the interaction between the students/artists and the pedagogy of the teacher/artist and it is out of that mutual interaction that learning resulted. The novice/artists/mas’ makers/learners were able to construct their identities based on what was said to them by the teacher/artist and subsequently what they did in and outside of the mas’ camp. Kendall and Ms. Mommy became critical citizens who were aware of the possibilities that existed beyond the mas’ camp. As artist/teacher/mas’ maker Kendall appreciated the importance of the mutual involvement of the teacher and the student in the learning process. Ms. Mommy would go on to become a business entrepreneur and a Master’s art student at a foreign university.

### **Lessons to be Learned**

The art and craft practices that Kendall and Ms. Mommy learned from making Carnival mas’ art were important. However of greater significance was the value they placed on the ways in which they were taught the art, how they came to know it, and the awareness of the various identities they embody. Teaching was a performance that allowed these two student/artists/mas’ makers to come to know themselves differently. There was a remaking of self and thus we could conclude that they were “educated” (Eisner, 1998). Although I found myself captured by Garoian’s (1999) notion of performance art pedagogy, I was not naïve in believing that what he could or can do in his USA based art education classroom was possible in a Carnival mas’ camp or a Trinidadian traditional art classroom. However, my intent was to appropriate the theory and the conceptual framework. Appropriation is not something new to Caribbean peoples. We have done it with the British game of cricket and we continue to do it with our Carnival festival. Yes, when we hear Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Jesu Joy of Man’s Desire* on Carnival Monday morning being played by the steel band, it becomes our own. And so my argument is that the thinking that frames performance art pedagogy was a useful tool for exploring the narratives and my experiences of the art of mas’ making. It

allowed me to understand the standards that govern the mas' making process using perspectival experiences of the mas' makers and the mentality that can develop in this in-between time.

We can conclude from these experiences that there is a need for a pedagogy that facilitates the development of teachers who are not afraid to take risks or to allow students space to experiment in and with curriculum that is forced to focus on the development of academic skills. Although this goal cannot be abandoned, I argue that the students' need to be given the space to develop their creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. There is need to remove the distinction and division between academic and creative. The questions then become, can this be done within the formal school curriculum and how are these imagined but dangerous possibilities to be played out? I agree that there are more questions than answers, but I argue that our teachers need to observe, experience, and experiment with changing attitudes towards teaching and learning, revisit what counts as knowledge, or sources of knowledge in the classroom and the kinds of situations that can be used to facilitate learning. The activities and practices in the mas' camps are those with which many of the students who are considered under performing or "at risk" are familiar. The lessons that teachers and teacher educators can learn from observing, working with, and alongside mas' makers can and should be translated individually and become sources of not only indigenous ways of knowing, but also an opportunity for doing and performing pedagogy at home.

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**Author Note**

Janice B Fournillier is affiliated with the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University. Her contact information is: P. O. Box 3977, Atlanta, GA, 30302-3977; Telephone: (404) 413-8262; Fax: (404) 413-8033; Mobile: (404) 308-1767; E-mail: [jfournillier@gsu.edu](mailto:jfournillier@gsu.edu)

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